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## THE PROCESSES OF DISCOVERY IN *TOM JONES*

The world of *Tom Jones* is a world in which there is much to be discovered. Those who are to thrive in it, characters, readers, and critics, must develop expertise in the processes of discovery—processes no less essential than satisfying, and of unsuspected thematic complexity.

The word 'discovery' itself stands in several hundred passages as a signal to the significance of the process. The reader who pauses whenever he encounters this word to reflect on its implications at that point in the novel will perceive complexities and relationships that he might not otherwise have noticed. This is curious, because "discovery" is not one of those ambiguous and susceptible abstractions, like "charity", "Christian", "love", "great", and "prudence", all of which Fielding manipulates so effectively in his works. It is a fairly precise term for several closely related processes, and yet it becomes one of the most significant words in the novel. Among the senses of the word which Fielding employs (most of which are labelled *Arch.* or *Obs.* in the *OED*) are: to disclose or expose to view anything covered up, hidden, or previously unknown; to divulge, reveal, or make known; to reveal the identity of, or betray; to manifest, exhibit, or display; to obtain sight or knowledge of for the first time; and to distinguish or discern. How can a word with these meanings take us to the heart of a novel as vast as *Tom Jones*? Simply because the process of discovery was essential to Fielding's ethos, critical to his morality, and invaluable to his aesthetic. If, then, we go beyond mere enumeration of the appearances of the word to examine selected and representative passages in which it figures, we can reconstruct the system of discovery which Fielding imposed on his characters and required of his readers.

Having done so, we will find ourself alerted to certain essential details and developments, and provided with more occasions for admiration.

The decisive statement of the centrality of the process of discovery occurs in the passage in which Fielding elaborates on the faculties requisite for those who would distinguish themselves in the new genre which he, as he well knew, was creating:

The first is genius, without a full vein of which no study, says Horace, can avail us. By genius I would understand that power, or rather those powers of the mind, which are capable of penetrating into all things within our reach and knowledge, and of distinguishing their essential differences. These are no other than invention and judgment; and they are both called by the collective name of genius, as they are of those gifts of nature which we bring with us into the world. Concerning each of which many seem to have fallen into very great errors; for by invention, I believe, is generally understood a creative faculty, which would indeed prove most romance writers to have the highest pretensions to it; whereas by invention is really meant no more (and so the word signifies) than *discovery*, or finding out; or to explain it at large, a quick and sagacious penetration into the true essence of all the objects of our contemplation. This, I think, can rarely exist without the concomitancy of judgment; for how we can be said to have *discovered* the true essence of two things, without discerning their difference, seems to me hard to conceive.<sup>1</sup>

Genius, in short, is the power of discovery. That Fielding had, and valued, this power himself is certain; he would hardly have singled it out as essential for success in his present enterprise if he thought himself without it. That Fielding expected it in his readers will be shown hereafter. That he provided numerous opportunities for his characters to test and develop this power is the main point of this paper.

I do not imply that Fielding was the first to realize the literary potential of the processes of discovery—every reader will supply works from every period and genre in which it is of some importance. But I know of no work in which the process is so nearly central, and so essential to every participant. Nor is the process quite the same in every age.

The passage just quoted, for example, wherein Fielding equates “invention” with “discovery”, reminds us that “*Inventio*” was the first of the five parts of the rhetorical process as envisioned by the classical rhetoricians, and that to some extent the whole novel and every work of art is a “discovery”. As “*anagnorisis*” (variously translated as “recognition” and “discovery”) “a change from ignorance to know-

ledge", it was one of the basic tenets of the *Poetics* (Chapter XI) and a prominent feature of Attic tragedy. Few comedies (if any) are without at least one major "discovery" scene, and even the early epics abound with them (Ulysses' scar being the best known).<sup>2</sup> There is a crucial scene in *Paradise Lost* where Ithuriel discovers Satan in the Garden of Eden:

Him thus intent Ithuriel with his Spear  
 Touch'd lightly; for no falsehood can endure  
 Touch of Celestial temper, but returns  
 Of force to its own likeness; up he starts  
 Discover'd and surpris'd. (IV, 810-14)

Powerful as these scenes are, the power is derived from external forces. Fate is the agent of discovery in Athens, and Divinity the agent in the Renaissance. Man is the victim in one, and the beneficiary in the other. The nineteenth century devoted itself to the quest romance, which precludes discovery, or surrendered its discoveries into the hands of professionals, like Sergeant Cuff, Inspector Bucket, and Sherlock Holmes. The modern age has, so far, contented itself with identity crises (self-recognition), and whodunits.

Only in the eighteenth century were conditions exactly right for a true novel of discovery. The individual had to cope with society, rather than the universe, as in the Renaissance, or the self, as now, and that society was sufficiently complex and duplicitous to challenge his powers without (always) overwhelming them. Norman Holland has suggested that disguise had become the prevailing mode of life in the period, and that Restoration dramatists were among the first to recognize and probe this development: "Seventeenth-century metaphysics separated appearance from nature; seventeenth-century political theorists separated the 'natural' man from the social man; and the Restoration writers of comedy cashed in. Both these ideas have enormous dramatic possibilities, and Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve realized them. Disguise, affectation, dissimulation, pretense, and hypocrisy on their stage grow from a sense of cosmic disguise."<sup>3</sup> The eighteenth century was the age of masquerades. George II loved them and had little difficulty encouraging his court to do likewise. The moralists of his age, for obvious and only partly political reasons, opposed them. Fielding himself, in an early and rather bad poem called *The Masquerade* (1728), had already spoken out against this consensual

obliteration of truth and nature. In Fielding's time, as never before or since, the process of discovery was rich with possibilities: dramatic, moral, psychological, sociological, rhetorical, and artistic. Man was the agent, the necessitation, the victim, and the beneficiary of the forces of discovery. In *Tom Jones* these possibilities become realities.

Let us look first at the distribution of the powers of discovery in varying intensities, and for various and usually conflicting purposes, among Fielding's characters. I begin with a review of some of the things which need to be discovered, and why, and move to the characters who do, or do not, discover them, and why. The much admired plot, for example, is a result of the arrangement whereby those who have something to hide are more diligent than some of those who have something to find, while others who have something to find find more than has been hidden, and those who do not have anything to hide play, by their imprudence, into the hands of those who do. That all that has been hidden can in the end be discovered, while all that has been discovered without being true is exposed, is one of the comforting assumptions of the eighteenth century—an assumption which pervaded its moral aesthetic and enriched its novels.

It is in connection with the book's single most important discovery that the word first appears: "A consultation was now entered into how to proceed in order to *discover* the mother" (I, 29/I.iv). Fielding works in the word again and again in connection with this search, and we begin to sense the difficulties that will ensue, some because there are those who make such discoveries necessary, and some because there are those who are convinced that they have made the discoveries. Thus "Mrs. Deborah had made a *discovery*, which, in its event, threatened at least to prove more fatal to poor Tommy than all the reasonings of the Captain" (I, 68/II.ii). Fielding maintains his neutrality here, and elsewhere, calling Deborah's misinformation only a "discovery", which, of course, it was, and neither affirming nor denying its validity. And yet, with all this elaborate neutrality, he elaborates on it, picking up the key word with deftness and precision: "Now, as this was a *discovery* of great consequence, it may be necessary to trace it from the fountain-head" (I, 68/II.ii). The fountain-head turns out to be in the breast of the discoverer, rather than in the nature of things. A similar complication arises, from the same fountain-head, with Tom's paternity: "and then acquainted the captain that she had at last

*discovered* the true father of the little bastard" (I, 80/II.5). These two erroneous discoveries are not replaced with correct ones until the end of the novel, when Jenny tells Allworthy: "Thus, sir, you have at last *discovered* your nephew" (II, 325/XVIII.vii). Not until that point has what is discovered developed close connections with what is true.

From among the many other discoveries that have to be made I single out two: Molly Seagrim's true character and Master Blifil's villainy. Molly's character is exposed in a scene that reminds us of Fielding's apprenticeship in the theatre, where, especially in farce and comedy, discovery scenes abound: "as Molly pronounced those last words . . . the wicked rug got loose from its fastening, and *discovered* everything hid behind it" (I, 226/V.v). Square, thus revealed and not a little discomfited, addresses Tom gravely and defensively: "Well, sir, I see you enjoy this mighty *discovery*, and, I dare swear, take great delight in the thoughts of exposing me". It is proof of Tom's good nature that he does enjoy the discovery, without any intention of turning it to his own purposes: "why dost thou think that I should desire to expose thee? I promise thee I was never better pleased with thee in my life; and unless thou hast a mind to *discover* it thyself, this affair may remain a profound secret for me" (I, 229-30/V.v). Tom's attitude toward this discovery, like his attitude toward everything else, is a healthy one. He has not tried deliberately to make it; having made it, he does not intend to use it selfishly. He accepts it, enjoys it, and, quite naturally, permits it to change his attitude toward Molly.

Tom's nonchalant attitude toward discovery will do for dealing with folly like Square's and unpracticed iniquity like Molly's. It will not do, however, when one has acquired an antagonist as vicious as Blifil. It is in writing of Blifil's discoveries, the ones he makes as well as the ones he necessitates, that Fielding's artistry with the word and the process is most apparent, and that the thematic possibilities begin to appear. Dowling, the lawyer, is the key to Blifil's activities, and it is instructive to watch Fielding's use of the word "discover" in connection with his carefully arranged appearances in the novel.<sup>4</sup> Fielding seems almost to be teasing the reader, as in the following passage, where Tom talks to Dowling about Blifil:

"I don't wonder", answered Jones, "that he should impose upon you in so short an acquaintance; for he hath the cunning of the devil himself, and you may live with him many years without *discovering*

him. I was bred up with him from my infancy, and we were hardly ever asunder; but it is very lately only that I have *discovered* half the villany which is in him. . . . it is lately, very lately, that I have found him capable of the basest and blackest designs; for, indeed, I have at last found out that he hath taken an advantage of the openness of my own temper, and hath concerted the deepest project, by a long train of wicked artifice, to work my ruin, which at last he hath effected" (II, 343/XII.x).

This passage, and indeed the whole scene, is rich with the precise (as opposed to suggestive) ambiguity and the dramatic irony which constitute so much of Fielding's genius, for Tom addresses this statement to the means whereby he could discover the *other* half of Blifil's villainy. Tom uses the expression figuratively, and does not suspect that there is another half, but is not Fielding being scrupulously fair, and still quite clever, with the reader? Tom's failure to probe launches him into the most dangerous circumstances, circumstances in which his indiscretion is very nearly too much for his good nature.

I turn now from some of the things that need discovering to an assessment of the abilities of those who will have to discover them, continuing with the character whose abilities are the most developed: Master Blifil. He is the best discoverer in the book, as well as the one who makes the most of the other characters' ineptitude in this respect. In the first place, he devotes himself not so much to the process of ascertaining as to that of revealing. Many of the things he discovers were never 'covered' in the first place, or were hidden in all innocence. Blifil manages his revelations in such a way that the things he uncovers seem far more sinister than they would have had they appeared by themselves. It is also worth noting that Blifil usually manages to work in the word 'obliged' in connection with his discoveries. Thus, when he calls attention to his acquisition of Tom's Bible, he necessitates "an inquiry, which obliged him to *discover* the whole matter" (I, 136/II.ix), and again when he tells Allworthy of Tom's behavior during his illness:

. . . but I am sorry I mentioned it, since it may now look like revenge, whereas, I thank heaven, no such motive ever entered my heart; and if you oblige me to *discover* it, I must be his petitioner to you for his forgiveness (I, 313/VI.x).

He repeats these tendentious protestations on the next page: "and now, sir, since I have unadvisedly dropped a hint of this matter, and your commands have obliged me to *discover* the whole, let me intercede with

you for him." Blifil, then, discovers, as he does everything else, out of malice and cupidity. He brings things to light to serve his own ends. One indication of this is his customary effort to time his discoveries: "In reality, Blifil had taken some pains to prevail with the parson, and to prevent the *discovery* at that time" (I, 315/VI.x). It is one of Fielding's fine ironies, and quite consistent with his moral system, that the character who excels in bringing to light the actions of others is equally adept at putting his own under cover.

Several other characters practise discovery in the sense of betraying the actions of others, although these do it more out of cupidity than malice. Honour, for example: "something . . . suggested itself to her, that by sacrificing Sophia and all her secrets to Mr. Western, she might probably make her fortune. Many considerations urged this *discovery*" (I, 362-63/VII.viii). Only an offense to her pride given her by Mrs. Western's maid keeps her from doing so. There is also the gypsy husband who engineers a con game of some antiquity, using his wife to lure the susceptible Partridge into a compromising situation in which he can then discover them:

they were *discovered* in a very improper manner by the husband of the gypsy, who, from jealousy it seems, had kept a watchful eye over his wife, and had dogged her to the place, where he found her in the arms of her gallant.

The phrase 'in a very improper manner' is positioned to render the manner of discovery as improper as the activity discovered, and the gypsy king sees through it all. He asks the husband "at what time he had *discovered* the criminals?" and rules: "If you had de love for your wife, you would have prevented dis matter, and not endeavor to make her de whore dat you might *discover* her" (III, 17-18/XII.xii). The discoverer is discovered, and by a man who combines penetration and judgment with a sense of fairness. These three discoverers, Blifil, Honour, and the Gypsy husband (the latter two to a much lesser extent), are what we might call "artful" discoverers, in that they manipulate revelations of the actions of others to serve their own ends. The Gypsy King, on the other hand, discovers through a combination of instinct and skill. No other character in the novel has quite his facility with all the processes of discovery.

One other character discovers the actions of others naturally, and without malice, though not without complication. Squire Western,

whose avocation has sharpened his instincts for discovery, is one of these. His discoveries employ the instincts, and sometimes the idiom, of the hunt: "and hearing the gun go off, he immediately made towards the place, and *discovered* poor Tom" (I, 110/III.ii). The Squire's instincts are not so keen when Tom comes after bigger game; he can find warm bodies, but he cannot sense the delicacies of feeling in them, once found. His own instincts enable him to descry lust in others (whether it is there or not) and put him onto the truth about Tom and Molly: "I smoke it: I smoke it. Tom is certainly the father of this bastard."<sup>5</sup> His instincts are of so little use in hunting down his fugitive daughter that one can hardly blame him from turning from that chase, so baffling and unfamiliar, to one in which he is more at home and better likely to succeed (XII.ii). As we might expect, it is not his instincts but his relatives that enable him, at last, to find his daughter: "we shall now proceed to show by what method the squire *discovered* where his daughter was."<sup>6</sup> Squire Western's final discovery is a troubling one. How, even with his instincts, can he have missed what has been unmistakable to everyone else from the beginning? How can we sympathize with him now? And why can he not find a more fatherly metaphor? "A rare kettle of fish I have *discovered* at last! Who the devil would be plagued with a daughter?" (II, 327/XVII. viii). It seems to me that Fielding is, once again, playing off the Squire's instincts against his insensitivity.

To these two sets of discoverers, the manipulative and the instinctual, a group must be added that means well, and is perhaps more troublesome because of it, the suspicious and self-confident. These characters are so convinced of their own sagacity and penetration that they are the last to realize that their mighty discoveries have been illusions—illusions of the kind we now call projections. Di Western offers a neat transition into this group, as she is contrasted so readily with her brother. She brings her sophisticated instinct for political intrigue to bear on the unsophisticated local situation, with much confidence in her success: "By means of this wonderful sagacity, Mrs. Western had now, as she thought, made a *discovery* of something in the mind of Sophia" (I, 275/VI.ii). Fielding's clever "as she thought" will remind us of the care with which he delivers the discoveries of all his characters. But the eye trained in the gazette is to be no more effective than the nose and ear exercised in the field, however unshakable her



self-confidence: "The judgment which can penetrate into the cabinets of princes, and *discover* the secret springs which move the great state wheels in all the political machines of Europe, must surely, with very little difficulty, find out what passes in the rude uninformed mind of a girl" (I, 277/VI.ii). Aunt Western does, it must be admitted, discover the passion, but she mistakes its object. She operates for some time on the assumption that Sophia is in love with Bilfil! This shrewd penetratress of the courts and cabinets of Europe was, we might recall, equally at a loss in the affairs of Harriet Fitzpatrick, by whom she was badly tricked.<sup>7</sup> As she tells her brother, "the deepest politicians, who see to the bottom, *discover* often a very different aspect of affairs from what swims on the surface" (II, 165/XV.vi). Not necessarily a true aspect, just a different one. Two other characters, as suspicious, as confident, and as troublesome in their discoveries are Deborah Wilkins and Thwackum. Driven by prudery and the concomitant sense of self-righteousness, Wilkins sets off to track down Tom's mother. She conducts her search not because the baby needs a mother, but because the baby is evidence that some bodies have been up to something, and need to be called to account. As we have seen, she conducts her search archly conscious of her high purpose and strong powers, bearing her towering head aloft and "filled with conceit of her own pre-eminence, and schemes to effect her intended *discovery*" (I, 32/I.vi). Thwackum, too, is vigorous in the pursuit of sexual malefactors: "Then I must tell you plainly . . . I am resolved to *discover* the wicked wretch."<sup>8</sup> Thwackum is sometimes so strenuous in his pursuit of viciousness that he, too, discovers it where there is none: "Had not my hand been withheld from due correction, I had scourged much of this diabolical spirit out of a boy, of whom from his infancy I *discovered* the devil had taken such entire possession:" (II, 309/ XVIII.iv). The reader need hardly be reminded that Thwackum overlooked the considerably more evident diabolism resident in Tom's half brother.

The single quality that makes these three discoverers so certain of themselves, so troublesome to others, and so wrong, is suspicion. It is an essential feature of Fielding's ethos of discovery that suspicion is always suspect. Fielding makes this explicit in a passage in which he shows Sophia to be free from it:

Of this [suspicion] there have always appeared to me to be two degrees. The first of these I choose to derive from the heart, as the extreme velocity of its

discernment seems to denote some previous inward impulse, and the rather as this superlative degree often forms its own objects; sees what is not, and always more than really exists. This is that quick-sighted penetration whose hawk's eyes no symptom of evil can escape; which observes not only upon the actions, but upon the words and looks of men; and, as it proceeds from the heart of the observer, so it dives into the heart of the observed, and there espies evil, as it were, in the first embryo; nay, sometimes before it can be said to be conceived. An admirable faculty, if it were infallible; but as this degree of perfection is not even claimed by more than one mortal being, so from the fallibility of such acute discernment have arisen many sad mischiefs and most grievous heartaches to innocence and virtue. I cannot help, therefore, regarding this vast quick-sightedness into evil as a vicious excess, and as a very pernicious evil in itself. (II, 296/XI.x)

The discoveries of Thwackum, Wilkins, and Di Western do receive a "previous inward impulse" in the breast of their originators and do form their own objects, thus contributing either mischief or evil to the circles into which they are dropped. Qualities not sufficient to produce malicious acts like Blifil's give impetus to the discernment of evil in others, whether there is evil there or not. Surely this is an early perception, and an eloquent exposition, of the psychological phenomenon we call projection.

This phenomenon of projection is extended and perverted by some philosophers, who, finding no trace of love or God or virtue within themselves, project this nonentity on the universe. Fielding conducts an "examination of that modern doctrine by which certain philosophers, among many other wonderful *discoveries*, pretend to have found out that there is no such passion [as love] in the human breast." There is, self-evidently, no such passion in the breast in question, but that is the only conclusion Fielding permits: "whereas the truth-finder, having raked out that jakes, his own mind, and being there capable of tracing no ray of divinity, nor anything virtuous or good, or lovely, or loving, very fairly, honestly, and logically concludes that no such things exist in the whole creation" (I, 270-71/VI.i).

The suspicious, then, are not good, nor, as we shall see, are the good suspicious. This is a fine arrangement as long as good men can confine their dealings to other good men, having nothing to hide being a constituent part of goodness. Only in connection with good characters does the word "discover" become reflexive. In Tom and Sophia qualities and emotions manifest themselves, or are naturally revealed by the characters in which they exist. Thus Tom "from his earliest years

*discovered* a propensity to many vices" (I, 107/III.ii). They are not very vicious, and Tom makes no effort to conceal them. As an example of a reflexive discovery, let us cite Tom's disdain during his final encounter with Blifil: "Jones could not so far check his disdain, but that it a little *discovered* itself in his countenance at this extreme servility" (III, 357/XVIII.xi). In contrast to this, compare the depths to which Tom has fallen in his dealings with the naughty and amorous Lady Bellaston; he has acquired something to hide: "he would not have ventured to blow the temper of Lady Bellaston into the flame of which he had reason to think it susceptible, and of which he feared the consequence might be a *discovery* to Sophia, which he dreaded," (III, 96/XIV.ii). Tom's having acquired something to hide is repeated in one of the nicest ambiguities in the book, as Tom offers to interrupt "the continuance of an intercourse which could not possibly escape long the notice of the world; and which, when *discovered*, must prove so fatal to your reputation" (III, 185/XV.ix).

Sophia's discoveries are, like Tom's early and innocent ones, either passions she discriminates in her own breast or charms that surface from her lovely person of their own accord; "But as there are no perfections of the mind which do not *discover* themselves in that perfect intimacy to which we intend to introduce our reader with this charming young creature, so it is needless to mention them here" (I, 148/IV.ii). So also with her physical perfections, which discover (here a perfectly modest synonym for display) themselves naturally, and repeatedly: "her cheeks were of the oval kind; and in her right she had a dimple, which the least smile *discovered*" (I, 147/IV.ii). Discoveries like these, which repeat themselves with every smile and throughout the course of intimacy, are the most agreeable and the most perfect of all. Compare Fanny Andrews on her wedding night: "She was soon undressed; for she had no jewels to deposit in their caskets, nor fine laces to fold with the nicest exactness. Undressing to her was properly *discovering*, not putting off ornaments; for as all her charms were the gifts of nature, she could divest herself of none."<sup>9</sup>

Sophia's emotions, like her perfections and her charms, appear naturally and of their own accord. Having appeared, they are neither hidden nor displayed. Her love for Tom establishes its essential goodness by discovering itself: "Her heart now at once *discovered* the great secret to her which it has been so long disclosing by little and

little" (I, 183/IV.x). It takes a while (two chapters) for her to do her part: "The reader will be pleased to recollect that a secret affection for Mr. Jones had insensibly stolen into the bosom of this young lady; that it had there grown to a pretty great height before she herself *discovered* it" (I, 192/IV.xii). Having discovered itself, her love then enables her to discover the complementary emotion which her charms have called forth in Tom: "She soon perceived these agitations of mind in Jones, and was at no loss to *discover* the cause, for indeed she recognized it in her own breast," and "she had not the least difficulty in *discovering* the true cause of his present behaviour" (I, 234-35/V.vi). So also with Sophia's goodness; her own enabled her to discover Tom's: "I once fancied, madam,...I had *discovered* great goodness of heart in Mr. Jones" (III, 350/XVIII.x). It is the main business of the novel to confirm this discovery.

These two characters whose discoveries are so often reflexive participate in one scene which is symbolic in a manner made familiar by modern film techniques. After Tom has acquired something to hide, he appears before Sophia at Lady Bellaston's, But he is so dissolute that she beholds only his reflected image:

Sophia, expecting to find no one in the room, came hastily in, and went directly to a glass which almost fronted her, without once looking towards the upper end of the room, where the statue of Jones now stood motionless. In this glass it was, after contemplating her own lovely face, that she first *discovered* the said statue; when, instantly turning about, she perceived the reality of the vision. (III, 80-81/XIII.xi)

One is reminded of the neat reprise in XVIII.xii: "If I am to judge...of the future by the past, my image will no more remain in your heart when I am out of your sight, than it will in this glass when I am out of the room."

So much for reflexive discoveries; Sophia is a wealthy girl and can (at least in Fielding's day) be permitted the luxury of leisurely discoveries of herself and her lover. Not so with the others in Fielding's world. As we have seen, even Tom develops something to hide, while Blifil has been concocting schemes and secrets since infancy. These discoveries do not make themselves, yet they must be made. But by whom, and how, if, as we have seen, the good are not suspicious, and the suspicious not good? If only the selfish, the suspicious, and the mistaken make discoveries, and if the good can make only the kinds that Sophia makes,

what is to keep Blifil and those like him from prevailing? Allworthy's innate goodness disenables him as a discoverer, yet as magistrate and the head of a household, there is much that he must know. How is the system ever to reach a state of equilibrium?

We see an early indication of Allworthy's crucial inability to discover in the ease with which Dr. Blifil imposes upon him: "these appeared to him no more than blemishes in a good character, which his goodness made him overlook, and his wisdom prevented him from *discovering* to the captain himself. Very different would have been his sentiments had he *discovered* the whole" (I, 96-97/II.vii). Allworthy has not a tincture of suspicion in his nature. This "impairment" seriously hampers his work as a magistrate, by making it unlikely that justice will be done. (While it is true that his lack of suspicion may prevent Allworthy from doing injustice, that same lack will enable others to get away with having done so.) In the following passage Fielding shows us that Allworthy expects those whom he is supposed to examine to do his work for him. Having nothing to hide himself, he does not know how to deal with those who do: "He likewise urged, as the principal motive to his inflexible severity against this man, that he had basely suffered Tom Jones to undergo so heavy a punishment for his sake, whereas he ought to have prevented it by making the *discovery* himself" (I, 121022/III.v). Clearly Black George "ought" to have made the discovery himself; just as clearly, there wasn't the least likelihood of his doing so. That is why England provided magistrates, and it may be why Fielding has so delicately adjusted the ambiguity of the pronouns. Black George had an ethical responsibility to make the discovery, but Allworthy had a civic one. Fielding and the reader both know that the act of discovery is too seldom reflexive. On the other hand, thanks to the omniscient narrator at whom we will look in a moment, we have more to go on than Allworthy did. This is the last time the word discover is used in connection with Allworthy (except for a fleeting hint that he might find out about Tom's continued visits to Molly, in V.v) until the last book, when the forces of goodness begin to prevail and events and identities are brought to light. Allworthy has delivered to him, the result of no effort of his own, the £500 with which he dismissed Tom into the world. He utters an exclamation of some significance: "The bank-bills were no sooner produced at Allworthy's desire than he blessed himself at the strangeness of the *discovery*."<sup>10</sup>

More information surfaces, and connections, at last, begin to be made: "Indeed, Mrs. Miller, I have made surprising *discoveries*, and you shall soon know them"; and "I have *discovered* the wretch for whom you have suffered all this cruel violence from your father to be a villain."<sup>11</sup> Allworthy is always surprised at the things he discovers, partly because they are surprising, especially to an innocent like him, and partly because he has neither tried nor expected to discover anything. As far as he knew, there was nothing to discover; he has looked very much like a man willing to remain a fool among knaves. Now that he has found that there are things to discover, he pursues them vigorously and discloses his results quickly, first to the Westerns, as above, and, finally, to Tom: "When Allworthy returned to his lodgings, he immediately carried Jones into his room, and then acquainted him with the whole matter [of Fellamar's plot], as well what he had heard from Mrs. Waters as what he had *discovered* from Mr. Dowling" (III, 353-54/XVIII.xi).

It is a long time from the moment when the consultation was first "entered into how to proceed in order to *discover* the mother" (I.iv) to the moment when Mrs. Waters can congratulate Allworthy: "Thus, sir, you have at last *discovered* your nephew" (III, 325/XVIII.vii). No reader would wish the time shortened, but we might stop to ponder how it is that the second discovery can have been made at all. As surprising that the discovery is made is the means by which this is done, for it is done not by vigilance but by inattentive goodness, the force of which eventually triumphs in the benign universe of *Tom Jones*. The system has reached a state of equilibrium.

There is only one way to account for the manifold discoveries which Allworthy makes at the end of a book throughout which he has demonstrated a thoroughgoing incapacity for this function: he operates in a (fictional) universe in which a vague but effective omniscience prefers virtue to vice while denying either one any lasting triumph over the other. But why do Allworthy's discoveries come later rather than sooner? It is true, as we have seen, that in the universe presided over by this deity, discovery is too often an active verb and too seldom a reflexive one, that too many people who have something to hide busy themselves with revealing the actions of others. One remedy is for omniscience to make discovery an agent in itself—an agent independent of the evil which it exposes and not wholly dependent on the goodness which it serves. This is a device not often employed by Fielding, who is

likelier to provide discovery with a human agent than a capital letter or an angel with a sword. The word almost becomes a personification in the following passage, where its threatening to do so adds one more irony to the passage: "An instance of this [that misfortunes seldom come single] may, I believe, be seen in those gentlemen who have the misfortune to have any of their rogueries detected; for here *discovery* seldom stops till the whole is come out" (I, 135/III.ix; the passage continues with Blifil's discovery of Tom's having sold his Bible). Blifil stops discovering, in the sense of revealing, when as much of the whole as suits his purpose has come to light. Discovery, however, "seldom stops till the whole is come out." That there is an arrangement whereby things that some characters wish might remain hidden do become known, without substantial effort on the part of those who come to know them, is a restatement of much of the plot. It is apparent in even so minor an incident as the disappearance of the £500 which Tom was given as he left Paradise Hall. Black George keeps that money on the assumption that he can do so safely: "the real distinction between the two actions did not lie in the different degrees of honor but of safety; for that the secreting of the £500 was a matter of very little hazard, whereas the detaining the sixteen guineas was liable to the utmost danger of *discovery*" (I, 327-28/VI. xiii). Black George has miscalculated the hazard:

Here an accident happened of a very extraordinary kind; one indeed of those strange chances whence very good and grave men have concluded that Providence often interposes in the *discovery* of the most secret villainy, in order to caution men from quitting the paths of honesty, however warily they tread in those of vice...

The bank-bills [which Black George had given to Mr. Nightingale to invest for him] were no sooner produced at Allworthy's desire than he blessed himself at the strangeness of the *discovery* (III, 301/XVIII.iii)

The use of the words "Providence often interposes", and "he blessed himself at the strangeness of the discovery" suggests that Black George had left out of his calculation two factors: first, a watchful and omniscient Providence, and, second, the availability of agents through which this Providence could work. The agents through which Providence effects its discoveries have one quality in common: goodness. This quality makes them slower in their task than the evil suspicion which prompts other discoveries (usually mistaken). But it is discoveries made by the hand of goodness that seldom stop till the whole has come

out, and prove to be true in the end. This is why Mrs. Miller is able to discover what Mrs. Wilkins could not: "And is this the dear good woman...to whom all this *discovery* is owing?" (III, 336/XVII.viii). In the same way, Allworthy's goodness makes him, although not until after Tom has suffered for his imprudence and high spirits, the logical agent for the many discoveries which have to be made.

The novel moves toward resolution with the assistance of Providence operating through its agents, those characters who have established their goodness. One might be able to show that for Fielding discovery in this sense was the most important contribution Providence makes to earthly human happiness. One can show that Providence was in a good position to make this contribution because one of its attributes is Omniscience:

This excellent method of conveying a falsehood with the heart only, without making the tongue guilty of an untruth, by the means of equivocation and imposture, hath quieted the conscience of many a notable deceiver; and yet, when we consider that it is Omniscience on which these endeavor to impose, it may possibly seem capable of affording only a very superficial comfort; and that this artful and refined distinction between communicating a lie, and telling one, is hardly worth the pains it costs them. (I, 356/VII.vi)

This arrangement adds weight and significance to Allworthy's exclamation: "Good Heaven! by what wonderful means is the blackest and deepest villainy sometimes *discovered!*" (III, 326/XVIII.vii). Allworthy has partly answered his own question ("Good Heaven"), while his own goodness establishes Allworthy himself as one of the "wonderful means". It is necessary to add to this a passage which supports both this reading and Tom's good nature. In the following passage Tom is identified with his uncle by his words and by the imposition which they admit:

Among other matters, Allworthy now acquainted Jones with the *discovery* which he had made concerning the £500 bank-notes...

"Good Heaven!" said Jones, "is it possible? I am shocked beyond measure at this news. (III, 357/XVIII.xi)

It is an indication that the inhabitants of the world of *Tom Jones* have coped successfully with the processes of discovery that, following this resolution, only two discoveries remain—one that does not need to be made, and one that probably cannot be. The first is the discovery of the marriage of Tom and Sophia: "To say truth, there was not a person



present made wiser by this *discovery*;" the second is Fielding's own: "for what happiness this world affords equal to the possession of such a woman as Sophia, I sincerely own I have never yet *discovered*" (III, 370/XVIIV.xii).

The passage wherein Fielding defines the genius necessary to novelists as "power of discovery" will have suggested that there is one more character in the novel who practises that art—the omniscient narrator. It must be added, quickly, that Fielding practises the art of discovery teasingly, and that his practice of it necessitates ours. For example, after recounting Bridget Allworthy's behaviour toward the foundling ("her orders were indeed so liberal, that, had it been a child of her own, she could not have exceeded them"), he anticipates those who will object to her extension of charity to a bastard. He continues with a "deep observation" on tacit obedience and grumbling, and apologizes for it:

As this is one of those deep observations which very few readers can be supposed capable of making themselves, I have thought proper to lend them my assistance; but this is a favor rarely to be expected in the course of my work. Indeed, I shall seldom or never so indulge him, unless in such instances as this, where nothing but the inspiration with which we writers are gifted can possibly enable any one to make the *discovery*. (I, 31/I.v)

That discovery is surely ironic, as many readers can perceive the condition he has discussed (though few could put it so effectively). But are we not, here and elsewhere, being teased with another discovery—the real relationship between the spinster and the infant? For Fielding has made another discovery, or at least given the reader an opportunity to do so (Tom was, after all, "a child of her own"). In any case, he uses the word several times in connection with Tom and Bridget, very much the same way that he used it in connection with Tom and Lawyer Dowling:

this disinclination which she had *discovered* to him when a child, by degrees abated....She was so desirous of often seeing him, and *discovered* such satisfaction and delight in his company. (I, 130/III.vi)

There are several other passages where Fielding's concern with the art of discovery is stated, and more in which it is demonstrated. After Allworthy's trial of Partridge, a trial during which the word discovery is tellingly avoided, we are told: "Whether he was innocent or not, will

perhaps appear hereafter; but if the historic muse hath entrusted me with any secrets, I will by no means be guilty of *discovering* them till she shall give me leave" (I, 89/II.vi). He affects the same scrupulosity in dealing with Blifil: "it would be an ill office in us to pay a visit to the inmost recesses of his mind, as some scandalous people search into the most secret affairs of their friends, and often pry into their closets and cupboards, only to *discover* their poverty and meanness to the world" (I, 150/IV.iii). Again, this nicety is a pose, and not a pose. If we attend to what Blifil lays before us on the table, we do not need to pry into his closets and cupboards. Fielding's capacity as discoverer is, then, that he can, but he won't, yet he does, if we do.

He can, because he has the genius (penetration plus judgment) he has prescribed for all novelists, and has had opportunities to exercise that genius. In elaborating one of his favorite analogies, the comparison between life and the stage, he suggests that work behind the scenes in the theatre (both the Haymarket and *Theatrum Mundi*) enables one better to make discoveries of this sort, while at the same time rendering these discoveries less vexing: "Those persons, indeed, who have passed any time behind the scenes of this great theatre, and are thoroughly acquainted not only with the several disguises which are there put on...may most probably have learned to understand the famous *nil admirari* of Horace, or, in the English phrase, to stare at nothing." The passage concludes with the observation that "the man of candor and of true understanding is never hasty to condemn" (I, 334-35/VII.i).

The various discoveries under discussion offer the reader of the novel many opportunities to exercise his candor and test his understanding. He is seldom invited to condemn, but there are many things for him to discover. If he has not the genius of discovery, or has it without exercising it, he will, like Allworthy, be imposed upon throughout the book. If, on the other hand, he indulges himself in suspicion, moving toward an external evil on the impulse of an internal one, he will find himself in the company of Di Western. The reader must discover, but with caution and care.

Nearly every page of the novel invites the reader to exercise his capacity for discovery. Sometimes these invitations are escalated into commands:

Bestir thyself, therefore, on this occasion; for, though we will always lend thee proper assistance in difficult places, as we do not, like some others,

expect thee to use the arts of divination to *discover* our meaning, yet we shall not indulge thy laziness where nothing but thy own attention is required; for thou art highly mistaken if thou dost imagine that we intended, when we began this great work, to leave thy sagacity nothing to do; or that, without sometimes exercising this talent, thou wilt be able to travel through our pages with any pleasure or profit to thyself. (II, 295/XI.ix—this imperative to bestir ourselves immediately precedes the passage on suspicion and fallibility quoted above.)

There is, to be sure, considerable irony in Fielding's account of the intervals in his chronicle: "Many notable *discoveries* will, I doubt not, be made by such [upper graduates in criticism], of the transactions which happened in the family of our worthy man, during all the years which we have thought proper to pass over" (I,106/III.i). This irony, however, is directed at those who have mistaken the nature of genius, and regard it as a creative, rather than a penetrating faculty. These are those readers who think themselves better "able to foretell the actions of men, in any circumstance, from their characters, than to judge of their characters from their actions. The former, I own, requires the greater penetration; but may be accomplished by true sagacity with no less certainty than the latter."<sup>12</sup> Readers who take these passages as instructions to discover nothing, or too much, will find themselves not Fielding's readers, but his targets. The reader is cautioned, again and again, from making too many discoveries, and from congratulating himself too much on the ones he does make (he has, after all, had some expert help):

...for the reader is greatly mistaken if he conceives that Thwackum appeared to Mr. Allworthy in the same light as he doth to him in this history; and he is as much deceived if he imagines that the most intimate acquaintance which he himself could have had with that divine would have informed him of those things which we, from our inspiration, are enabled to open and *discover*. Of readers who, from such conceits as these, condemn the wisdom or penetration of Mr. Allworthy, I shall not scruple to say that they make a very bad and ungrateful use of that knowledge which we have communicated to them. (I. 125/III.v)

On the other hand, a few lines later, the same reader is given the author's leave "to *discover*, if he can" answers, motives, causes, and connections. He also finds himself teased, again and again, by both the plot and the style, into a number of discoveries. For example, those who read the following sentence with attention will discover a good deal about the society, morals, profession, parents, and individuals

described in it (one of whom is Ensign Northerton): "There were likewise two ensigns, both very young fellows, one of whom had been bred under an attorney, and the other was son to the wife of a nobleman's butler" (II, 32/VIII.xii). The plot itself offers innumerable opportunities for discovery—and more become apparent on each rereading. The muff, lawyer Dowling, Jenny Jones, Bridget Allworthy, even the withheld identities of the latest arrivals at Upton, the lovely lady and her unlovely maid (X.iii-iv) require and reward the operations of this faculty.

A gratification to be added to that attendant to discovery itself is the knowledge that this has been done in such good company—the company of the genial host, who clearly enjoys sharing our discoveries (and his) with us, perhaps even more than he enjoys the discomfiture of those who have made none, or too many. Thus, in the nice discrimination of character:

Again, to mark the nice distinction between two persons actuated by the same vice or folly is another; and as this last talent is found in very few writers, so is the true discernment of it found in as few readers; though, I believe, the observation of this forms a very principal pleasure in those who are capable of the *discovery*... (II, 194/X.i)

Fielding also enjoys, and expects us to enjoy, the artful arrangement of events whereby he entices and eludes discovery:

If the reader will please to refresh his memory by turning to the scene at Upton, in the ninth book, he will be apt to admire the many strange accidents which unfortunately prevented any interview between Partridge and Mrs. Waters, when she spent a whole day there with Mr. Jones. Instances of this kind we may frequently observe in life, where the greatest events are produced by a nice train of little circumstances; and more than one example of this may be *discovered* by the accurate eye, in this our history. (III, 296/XVIII.ii)

The accurate eye, then, has work to do, and much of that work is the work of discovery, a process of whose necessity, risks, and satisfactions the careful reader of *Tom Jones* will have an enlarged understanding.

#### Footnotes

1. Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, vols. 3-5 in William Ernest Henley, ed., *The Complete Works of Henry Fielding, Esq.*, 16 vols. (New York: Croscup & Sterling, 1902) II, 157. All quotations are taken from this edition. Citations also include

- Book and chapter—this one is IX.i. I have taken the liberty of italicizing the word “discovery” in every citation.
2. Northrop Frye runs through some of the possibilities of discovery scenes in comedy (he uses the word “*cognitio*”) in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 163-86.
  3. Norman N. Holland, *The First Modern Comedies: The Significance of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 63.
  4. Fielding’s own career in the law may have alerted him to some of the possibilities here, if only by exposing him to so many examples of duplicity, deceit, and selfishness. There is also a formal pretrial process called “discovery” which compels the disclosure of the contents of documents. In Fielding’s day this process was not uniformly available—a manifest inequity which bothered Blackstone, among others. See *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, III, 23 and F.D. MacKinnon, “The Law and the Lawyers,” in *Johnson’s England: An Account of the Life & Manners of his Age*, ed. A.S. Turberville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), II, 295.
  5. I, 181/IV.x. I suspect an image of a process for encouraging a fox to leave his hole. I have not verified that this was, in fact, a practice. The Squire’s “smoke” is one synonym for “discover” I have been unwilling to pass over. It shares something with the “unkennel” he roars out in the timely discovery scene in XV.v.
  6. III, 163/XV.vi. Fielding uses the word “discovery” frequently in connection with this search for Sophia’s whereabouts. See XI,viii, XIII,ii, vii, viii, and xi, and XV.vi. In XIII.xi Lady Bellaston picks up the word and taunts Tom and Sophia with it. That those who sought Sophia had so much difficulty finding her suggests that London was beginning to acquire the vastness and impersonality with which it dominates the characters of Dickens, Conrad, and James; that they eventually succeeded reminds us that we are still, in this novel, in the eighteenth century.
  7. The gradual coming to light of the nature of Harriet’s relationship with her husband, first to herself, then to her Aunt, and, finally, to Sophia, constitutes a microcosm of the process of discovery in the novel. See especially XI.iii-v and XI.x.
  8. I, 261/V.xi; see also 262 and 268-69.
  9. *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews*, ed. Henley, I, 392.
  10. III, 301/XVIII.iii The word is used three more times in this connection in this chapter.
  11. III, 335/XVIII.viii; III, 338/XVIII.ix. Sophia thinks Allworthy is referring to Tom. This accounts for the stiffness of her response: “Yet, sir, such sudden, such unexpected news—*discovered*, you say—may villainy be ever so!”
  12. I, 106-7/III.i. This technique suggests a comparison with Sterne: Sterne had a number of typographical equivalents to Fielding’s “vacant spaces of time”, and was more willing to allow the reader to indulge his own imagination—even to the point of insisting that he do so. Fielding offers him opportunities to do so, but clearly ridicules the process. There is enough for the reader’s mind to do with the material Fielding has given him.