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FIELDING'S INDEBTEDNESS TO JAMES RALPH

That Henry Fielding in the period immediately following his return from Leyden in 1729 was associated with James Ralph is well known. As Professor Cross points out¹, in 1730 Fielding's comedy *The Temple Beau* appeared with a prologue by Ralph. In 1736 Fielding is said to have been assisted by Ralph in the management of the Little Theatre in the Haymarket.² And in 1739 Ralph became Fielding's assistant editor on the *Champion*.³

In addition, Professor Cross says that association with Ralph "taught Fielding the ways of Grub Street, of which he soon began to make good use in verse and on the stage."⁴ As evidence of this influence he cites only Fielding's facetious poem to Sir Robert Walpole, published in the *Miscellanies*.

I believe it can be shown that Ralph's influence is to be further traced in Fielding's early work, at least in the two comedies which in the year 1730 followed *The Temple Beau* (performed January 26; published February 2); namely, *The Author's Farce*; and *The Pleasures of the Town* (performed March 30; published March 31) and *Tom Thumb. A Tragedy* (performed April 24; published April 24-25[?]).⁵ These two farces obviously mark a departure from the artificial comedy which had been the model for *Love in Several Masques* (1728) and *The Temple Beau* (1730), and suggest a new interest in literary burlesque. I believe Ralph was in part responsible for this change.

The basis of my judgment is a book of Ralph's published in 1728 under the title:

THE TOUCH-STONE: OR, Historical, Critical, Political, Philosophical, and Theological ESSAYS On the reigning Diversions of the Town. Design'd for the Improvement of all AUTHORS, SPECTATORS, and ACTORS of OPERAS, PLAYS, and MASQUERADES. In which every thing antique or modern, relating to MUSICK, POETRY, DANCING, PANTOMIMES, CHORUSSES, CAT-CALLS, AUDIENCES, JUDGES, CRITICKS, BALLS, RIDOTTOS, ASSEMBLIES, NEW ORATORY, CIRCUS,

¹ Cross, W. L., *The History of Henry Fielding* (Yale University Press, 1918), I, 76-77.

² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁵ *Ibid.*, III, 290-91.

BEAR-GARDENS, GLADIATORS, PRIZE-FIGHTERS, ITALIAN STROLERS, MOUNTED-BANK STAGES, COCK-PITS, PUPPET-SHEWS, FAIRS, and PUBLICK AUCTIONS, is occasionally handled. By a Person of some Taste and some Quality. With a PREFACE, giving an Account of the AUTHOR and the WORK. . . . LONDON: Printed, and sold by the Booksellers of *London* and *Westminster*. MDCCXXVIII.

The work was reissued in 1731, with a new title-page only, as:

THE TASTE of the TOWN: OR, A GUIDE TO ALL PUBLICK DIVERSIONS. VIZ.

- I. Of MUSICK, OPERAS AND PLAYS. Their Original, Progress, and Improvement, and the Stage-Entertainment fully vindicated from the Exceptions of Old *Pryn*, the Reverend Mr. *Collier*, Mr. Bedford and Mr. Law.
- II. Of POETRY, Sacred and Profane. A Project for introducing Scripture-Stories upon our Stage, and acting them on *Sundays* and *Holy-Days* after Divine Service, as is customary in most polite Parts of Europe.
- III. Of DANCING, Religious and Dramatical. Reflections on their Exercise, Public and Private, with the learned Bishop *Potter's* Sentiments thereon.
- IV. Of the MIMES, PANTOMIMES and CHORUSES of the *Antients*; and of the Imitation of them in our *Modern Entertainments* after Plays.
- V. Of AUDIENCES, at our Theatrical Representations, their due Behaviour, and of Cat-Calls and other indecent Practices, concluding with Remarks on our Pretenders to Criticism.
- VI. Of MASQUERADES; Ecclesiastical, Political, Civil and Military: Their Antiquity, Use and Abuse. Also of *Ridottos*, *Assemblies* and *Henley's* Oratory.
- VII. Of the ATHLETIC SPORTS of the *Antients*: Their *Circus* compared with our *Bear-Garden*, and their Gladiators with our *Prize-Fighters*, Of *Cock-Fighting*, *Puppet-Shews*, *Mowntebanks* and *Auctions*.

LONDON: Printed, and sold by the Booksellers of *London* and *Westminster*. MDCCXXXI.

This volume, a half-serious, half-jesting disquisition, was designed, in the words of its author,

to animadvert upon the Standard Entertainments of the present Age, in Comparison with those of Antiquity . . . in Hopes that those who have Power and Capacity may one Day fix our publick Entertainments upon a Basis as lasting, as beneficial to Mankind.¹

¹ *Touchstone*, p. 236.

Inspired, ostensibly, by the unqualified condemnation of the stage by other critics, Ralph in his Preface states his own aims as follows:

My Manner of Criticizing, as observ'd in these ESSAYS, differs widely from anything that has yet appear'd under that Name: Both Censure and Panegyrick are introduc'd after a Method entirely new. I could never give into the slovenly, canting Reflections of Pryn, the arbitrary malicious Learning of Collier, the enthusiastick insipid Arguments of L—w, or the severe tho' justifiable Rules of Rymer and Dennis. I hope my Animadversions upon all polite Entertainments, will be allow'd more agreeably just, if not so deeply Learned . . . I shall . . . point out to the World, what I judge perfect, and what wants Amendment in these Amusements; at the same time proposing the most probable Remedies.¹

Written in the year in which *The Beggar's Opera* had just given a fatal challenge to the supremacy of Italian opera, the book naturally discusses in its first chapter, "Musick, Operas and Plays." On this subject the author writes in his Preface:

THE OPERAS therefore being look'd upon as the Center of the Beau Monde, I begin with them; in an historical Manner trace them to their first Rise: I make manifest their Beauties; how shocking the Italian Performance and Language are to some English Ears; shew what is wanting, what superfluous, and what Alterations or Additions are requisite to suit them to all Capacities, and adapt them to the Taste of this Nation in general.²

These "Alterations or Additions" he alludes to in an amusing passage following his defence of the musical quality of Italian opera:

I am sensible, that their being perform'd in a foreign Tongue disgusts many of my Countrymen, who (tho' great *Philharmonicks*) yet being *True Britons*, and staunch *Protestants*, to shew their love to their Country, and their Zeal for their Religion, are prepossess'd against Singing as well as Praying in an unknown Dialect.

To mitigate such antipathies he suggests the use, as subjects for opera, of native tales:

Some of our most noted domestick *Fables*, which must please an *English* Audience, and at the same time make a beautiful Appearance on the Stage: These shall be principally borrow'd from a Subject which can boast an inexhaustible Fund of Models for Theatrical Entertainments, particularly OPERAS; viz. *Knight-Errantry*, which has in all Ages produc'd so many

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. xvi-xvii.

² *Ibid.*, p. xix.

valuable Volumes of Romances, Memoirs, Novels and Ballads, either written or oral.¹

Compare this passage from Ralph's essay with the following from the Preface to the first edition of Fielding's *Tom Thumb*:

It is with great concern that I have observed several of our [the Grubstreet] Tragical Writers, to celebrate in their immortal Lines the Actions of Heroes recorded in the Historians and Poets, such as Homer or Virgil, or Livy or Plutarch, the Propagation of whose Works is so apparently against the Interest of our Society; when the Romances, Novels, and Histories, *vulgo* call'd Story-Books, of our own People, furnish such abundant and proper Themes for their Pens; such are Tom Tram, Hickathrift, etc.²

Returning to Ralph's exposition of this same thesis, we discover the dramatic possibilities of these domestic fables as follows:

A late eminent ingenious Author propos'd to the then Master of the OPERA-STAGE, *Whittington and his Cat*; and went so far in the Design, as to procure a Puss or two, who could pur tolerably in Time and Tune: But the Inconveniencies arising from the Number of Vermin requisite to be destroy'd, in order to keep up to the Truth of the Story, blasted that Project.³

Many worthy Patriots amongst us (through the Prejudice of their Infant-Education) would doat upon the Representation of *Valentine and Orson*;

The Generality of this Nation would likewise imbibe a Fondness for the *Seven Champions of Christendom*, even from their Nursery; but the Ac— my not being able to furnish so many Heroes at a Time, we must drop that Design: Though I must say, our own *St. George's Part* would equip us with Characters and Incidents for a very beautiful *Drama*; in which the whole History of the G—r might be properly and naturally introduc'd; with a little Episode thrown in about the O—r of the T—le; then tack to their Tails a large Troop of K—ts of the B—h, with their Es—res, by way of a Grand Chorus: And this Scene would be truly great, and worthy of a *British* Audience.

But I fear we should find some Difficulty in meeting with a proper Dragon; unless the *Af—n* Company could procure us a sucking one, . . . or that *Doctor Faustus* could be prevail'd upon to part with his artificial one, which really roars out a good tuneable Bass: Then if Sign^r *B—chi* would condescend to sing the Part of *St. George's Horse*, with

¹ *Touchstone*, pp. 21–22; cf. p. 122.

² *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, ed. J. T. Hillhouse (Yale University Press, 1918), p. 51.

³ "The Famous History of Whittington, Lord Mayor of London" Ashton describes as a spectacular attraction at Smithfield Fair a few years earlier. *Social Life in the Reign of Queen Anne* (London, 1911), p. 193.

S—no upon his Back; and Sign^r *Pal*—*ni* allow himself to be clapp'd into the Dragon's Belly: I believe this Plan would surprize us not only with a noble Scene of Recitative, but furnish us with an Opportunity of throwing in the newest and finest *Duet* that ever was heard, *viz.* betwixt the *Horse* and the *Dragon*. . . .

Robbin Hood and *Little John* cannot fail of charming the *Brittish Nation*, being undoubtedly a *Domestick Matter of Fact*; but as no Singer in Europe can top the Part of *Little John* but *Ber*—*dt*, we must suspend that Performance till his Return, to bless our Eyes.

The *London 'Prentice* would infallibly gain the Hearts of the City, besides the valuable Incident of a *Lion-Scene*; as the *Abbot of Canterbury* would procure the Favour of the Clergy; and then the whole Audience (in Imitation of that polite agreeable Custom practic'd at *Paris*) might join the Stage; every body beating Time, and singing, *Derry down, down, down, &c.*

Tom Thumb would be a beautiful Foundation to build a pretty little Pastoral on; his Length too being adequate to that of a Summer's Evening, the *Belles* and *Beaus* might arrive Time enough from either Park, and enjoy the whole of his Affair: Nay, it would admit of some very new Scenes, as surprizing as true: Witness the Accident of the Pudding, which would be something as uncommon as ever appear'd on any Stage, not excepting even a *Dutch Tragedy*—N.B. *Cu*—*ni in Breeches would make a delightful Tom Thumb*.¹

¹ *Touchstone*, pp. 22–26. Our knowledge of Ralph up to this time is almost entirely derived from the autobiography of Benjamin Franklin in whose company he left Philadelphia (where he had been a merchant's clerk) arriving in London, December 24, 1724. Franklin remained eighteen months, leaving for America July 23, 1726. The chronology of events within that period is vague. For some time Franklin and Ralph lived intimately together in lodgings in Little Britain, at Franklin's expense, attending plays and other entertainments. Later, financially desperate, having failed to get employment as actor or hackney writer, Ralph retired to a village, which Franklin thought was in Berkshire, where he taught boys reading and writing—taking the name of Franklin, meanwhile, for disguise, and writing an epic poem. Some time before Franklin's departure for America Ralph returned to London, quarrelled with Franklin, and left him for good.

This event may have occurred early in 1726. If so, what did Ralph do between that time and his meeting with Fielding in London in January, 1730? Among other things he published three volumes of verse: *The Tempest: or, the Terrors of Death* (1727) may have been the "epic poem" mentioned by Franklin; it is a dull poem, somewhat tinged with romantic melancholy. *Miscellaneous Poems, By Several Hands . . . Publish'd by Mr. Ralph* (1729), is a curious collection of verses which the *D.N.B.* says are probably for the most part by Ralph; it contains among other things verses in imitation of *Il Penseroso* and the *Fairy Queen*. *Zeuma: or, The Love of Liberty* (1729) is a romantic tale in verse, with the scene laid among the Indians of Peru; a preface summarizes the history of the discovery of America and the Spanish explorations.

I think there are some grounds for suspecting that at this time Ralph travelled somewhat upon the continent, and particularly in Holland. The facetious Preface to *The Touchstone* (1728) may well be a whimsical compound of fact and fiction. In it the author describes his travels devoted chiefly to the study of "the Fundamentals of the publick Amusements most follow'd." The book contains allusions striking and numerous to Dutch places and practices. The following references may be noted: Holland (p. 39), Amsterdam (p. xiv), Dutch tragedy (p. 26), Scripture dramas in Holland (pp. 52–

How much real liking for "low" literature is covertly expressed here and in Ralph's mordant contempt for whatever is of the reigning mode—whether the classical canons of the critics or the artificial taste of the town—it is perhaps difficult to decide. Admittedly he is never more than half-serious in what he says, yet I cannot but feel that at some period of exile from London he himself had found interest and entertainment in "a well-executed puppet-shew" which at moderate expense, he says, provided innocent amusement "of infinite advantage to most country towns."¹ Certain it is that his own early verses exhibit an undeniably romantic strain.² Moreover, the fact that he was newly come to London from America would account for a sharpness of impression and an adventurous taste. Conceivably he was one of those transition types, sensitive to conflicting influences, critical of whatever prevailed. That his interest in the theatrical state of England and the continent was catholic and keen is apparent from the diversity of his information. That he was versed in the canons of the Ancients is equally clear. This diversity of interest together with his satirical temper would obviously commend Ralph to Fielding: and the critical ardor of his associate might easily have directed Fielding's more creative gifts.

Omitting Ralph's account of the spectacular possibilities of *Chevy Chase* (reminiscent, of course, of Addison) and his grotesque outline of a dramatization of *The Children in the Wood*, I pause on his mention of *Tom Thumb*. Sufficient has been quoted, I think, to show how Fielding might well have derived from him notions of a burlesque of contemporary opera and tragedy, of the use of a nursery rhyme, and, specifically, of the choice of *Tom Thumb* as the vehicle of this burlesque.

53), French strollers in "one of the Hans Towns" and the attitude of "a High-Dutch Audience" on the occasion (p. 61), the closing of the Dutch theaters on Sunday nights (pp. 74-75), the Dutch method of recruiting actors from the crowd (p. 69), the maintenance of hospitals by the revenues of the theaters "in several Towns in Holland" (p. 76), the observation that "the Germans are noted for their long Stride, Turkey-cock Strut, and dancing in the Ox-Stile; as the Low-Dutch are for their awkward Imitation of the French a-la-Clumsie" (p. 112), a "Low-Dutch Commentator" (p. 131), a music house in Amsterdam (p. 203). Was a common interest in Dutch life one of the factors in the acquaintance of Fielding and Ralph? In any case Ralph seems to have been a literary dissenter of some interest, worthy of further study.

¹ See below, pp. 30-31.

² See biographical note, p. 5.

In his discussion of the source of *Tom Thumb* in the Introduction to his recent edition of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*,¹ Mr. Hillhouse points to *The Rehearsal* as Fielding's model for the burlesque of contemporary dramatic conventions. For the use of the editor instead of the author and critic, he holds *The Dunciad* responsible. For the use of a nursery rhyme for the burlesque, a device described as "common at this time," he thinks Fielding is indebted to "an anonymous pamphlet of twenty-five pages in octavo, entitled *A Comment upon the History of Tom Thumb*," published first in 1711, "generally attributed to William Wagstaffe (1695-1725), and included in his collected works (1725)."²

In my review of Mr. Hillhouse's work³ I suggested that Fielding was more likely to have used what seems to be a later, and perhaps an enlarged, version of this anonymous pamphlet, appearing in 1729 under the title:

Thomas Redivivus; or, a compleat History of the Life and marvellous Actions of Tom Thumb. In three Tomes. Interspersed with that ingenious comment of the late Dr. Wagstaffs' and annotations by several Hands. To which is prefix'd historical and critical Remarks on the Life and Writings of the Author. Folio, 1729.⁴

This anonymous piece of burlesque editing, together with Ralph's suggestion of a burlesque play, both making use of the story of *Tom Thumb* as a vehicle for their satire, seems to account for the theme and the motive of Fielding's farce. But I believe that the suggestion derived from Ralph's facetious essay is the more significant as the initial inspiration for the earlier version of Fielding's *Tom Thumb* in which the satire is conveyed by character, dialogue, and incident, and not by annotations.

It will be recalled that though not exactly a "little pastoral," Fielding's burlesque was originally very short, consisting of two brief acts, and serving as an afterpiece. Though "the Accident of the Pudding" does not find a place in the action of the play, it does

¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 3-9.

² This pamphlet was evidently a burlesque of Addison's essays on *Chevy Chase* (*Spectator*, Nos. 70 and 74).

³ *Jour. Eng. Ger. Phil.*, XVIII (1919), 464-67.

⁴ Ritson, *Pieces of Ancient Poetry* (London, 1791), p. 98; also a contemporary notice in *Monthly Chronicle, For the Year MDCCXXIX*, II (Feb. 1729), 46. In my review, previously cited, I raised certain questions bearing upon the authorship of this work.

receive pointed reference in the dialogue in the Queen's speech to Grizzle:

Sure the King forgets,
When in a Pudding, by his Mother put,
The Bastard, by a Tinker, on a stall
Was drop'd. . . . O, good Lord Grizzle! can I bear
To see him, from a Pudding, mount the Throne?

And finally the part of the little hero was played by a woman, on some occasions at least.¹

A number of minor points of similarity between Fielding's play and Ralph's essays can be pointed out. Any one or two of these, it might be claimed, represent nothing more than similar selection from a common environment by like-minded authors well versed in the critical jargon of the day. But the number of such resemblances seems to indicate association rather than mere coincidence, especially since we know that at least from the date of the writing of the Prologue to *The Temple Beau* Fielding and Ralph were more or less intimately connected. My conviction is that the plays were written after a fairly recent perusal of Ralph's book.

Recalling Ralph's plea for a use of "domestick Fables" as more pleasing to "True Britons" than foreign subjects, themes already used to good effect in "Romances, Memoirs, Novel and Ballads," we may compare with it, in addition to the passage already quoted from Fielding's Preface, the following lines from the Prologue to *Tom Thumb*:

Since then, to laugh, to Tragedies you come,
What Hero is so proper as Tom Thumb?
Tom Thumb! whose very Name must Mirth incite,
And fill each merry Briton with Delight.
Britons, awake!—Let Greece and Rome no more
Their Heroes send to our Heroick Shore.
Let home-bred Subjects grace the modern Muse,
And Grub-Street from her Self, her Heroes chuse:
Her Story-Books immortalize in Fame
Hickathrift, Jack the Giant-Killer, and Tom Tram.

It should be noted, in passing, that in his Preface Ralph describes his family, "The Princock's," as allied "to every Man in Europe; from L——s of B——n to Tom Tram."

¹ Hillhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

In his discussion, in chapter ii, of dramatic poetry, Ralph charges the poets with writing "merry Tragedies, or sad Comedies [a] Disease in a Manner *Epidemick* amongst that Tribe."¹ Compare this charge with the lines just quoted, and likewise with these others in the Prologue to *Tom Thumb*:

With Mirth and Laughter to delight the Mind
The modern Tragedy was first design'd:
"Twas this made Farce with Tragedy unite,
And Taught each Scribler in the Town to Write.

In his Preface to the first edition Fielding writes again of this mirthful tragedy:

And here I congratulate my Cotemporary Writers, for their having enlarged the Sphere of Tragedy: The ancient Tragedy seems to have had only two effects on the Audience, *viz.* It either awakened Terror and Compassion, or composed those and all other uneasy Sensations, by lulling the Audience in an agreeable Slumber. But to provoke the Mirth and Laughter of the Spectators, to join the Sock to the Buskin, is a Praise only due to Modern Tragedy.²

Ralph in another passage to be compared with this last one from Fielding's Prologue refers to the contemporary poets' "mistaken Notions in Choice of Subjects for the Stage," and to "their strange Mismanagement in relation to the Effects of a *Stage-Play*, in giving us TRAGEDIES to make us laugh, and COMEDIES to make us cry."³

The "Terror and Compassion" which Fielding notes as the emotions proper to classical tragedy are paralleled by Ralph's commendation of *The Children in the Wood* as a story "capable of giving us a vast deal of the *Pathetic*, the *Wonderful* and the *Terrible*."⁴ The "bloody catastrophe" to which Fielding refers in his Preface,⁵ Ralph discusses as among the dramatic possibilities of the ballad of *Chevy Chase*.⁶

The satire on the physical grandeur of the conventional tragic hero Ralph conveys in this wise:

TRAGEDY borrows vast Advantages from the additional Ornaments of Feathers and high Heels; and it is impossible, but that the two Foot and a Half of Plumes and Buskin must go a great Length in giving an

¹ *Touchstone*, p. 56.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

² *Hillhouse, op. cit.*, p. 51.

⁵ *Hillhouse, op. cit.*, p. 82.

³ *Touchstone*, p. 49.

⁶ *Touchstone*, p. 26.

Audience a just Notion of a Hero. . . . In Rome, commenc'd once a famous Dispute betwixt two eminent *Tragedians*, which best represented Agamemnon; he that step'd loftily and on tip-toes, or, he who appear'd pensive, as if concern'd for the Safety of his People; but the tall Man carry'd it.¹

Fielding is, of course, satirizing this same convention in his small hero, "little Tom Thumb," and in his defence of his hero's size in the Preface: Mr. Dennis, finding the tragedy incompatible with the precepts of Aristotle which require "a just Greatness," inquires, "What Greatness can be in a Fellow, whom History relateth to have been no higher than a Span?" The author replies:

This Gentleman seemeth to think, with Sergeant *Kite*, that the Greatness of a Man's Soul is in proportion to that of his Body, . . . if I understand *Aristotle* right, he speaketh only of the Greatness of the Action, and not of the Person.²

In his essays Ralph gives satiric consideration to other conventions of the tragedy of the time, the importance of a retinue for a hero, of spectacles which "make the thinnest Plot appear full of Business," such as "a Wedding, a Funeral, a Christening, a Feast, or some such Spectacle, which must be manag'd by a Multitude," which provides "a well-dispos'd Succession of Crowds in every Scene." The importance of battles, with trumpets and drums, and "handsome, noisy Skirmishes on the Stage," he emphasizes. He refers more than once to the interest aroused by the appearance of giants and dwarfs.³ To all these precepts and suggestions as to the matter of tragedy, Fielding in his farce gives ample illustration.

In his satirical strictures on the form of drama and opera, Ralph reviles tragic diction as "nonsense, gilded Fustian, and pompous Bombast."⁴ Like Fielding, he has much to say of Longinus and the true sublime, too often neglected by "those Novices in polite Literature, who are ignorant of the true Art of *Dramatick Poetry*."⁵ Fielding in his Preface places "the Sublime of Longinus" in opposition to "the Profound of Scriblerus."

¹ *Touchstone*, p. 82.

² *Hillhouse*, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

³ *Touchstone*, pp. xxii, 80, 105, 106.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62; see also pp. 39, 49, 59, 63.

The other critics mentioned by Ralph are all in the list of those whom Fielding treats: Aristotle, Horace, Dryden, Dennis, Rymer, Rapin, Scaliger. He cites, too, the practice of Corneille and Molière. Upon the formal theories and artificial standards of contemporary critics Ralph animadverts in Fielding's own spirit. He says:

I look upon our present Race of Criticks to be either formal, deep finish'd Blockheads by Nature, or those, who from tolerable natural Parts, are made so by Art, wrong understood, and Talents misapply'd. . . .

The Criticks of the second Class come into the World with tolerable natural Parts, and a Disposition for Instruction; but in Place of being improv'd by Learning, they are sow'd with Pedantry, and puff'd up with Pride. . . . They immediately establish critical Rules, by which the world must be guided; the old Laws are refin'd upon, new made, and stated Limits fix'd, over which no enterprising Genius must leap, tho' of ever so great Advantage to the Republick of Letters; . . .

There is another Branch of this flourishing Tree. . . . These Gentlemen, at the Expençe of much Labour and Birch, are whipp'd at School into bad Translations, false *Latin*, and dull Themes; from thence they run the Gantlope through all the pedantick Forms of an University-Education: There they grow familiar with the Title-Pages of antient and modern Authors. . . . Their Mouths are fill'd with the Fable, the Moral, Catastrophe, Unity, Probability, Poetick, Justice, true Sublime, Bombast, Simplicity, Magnificence, and all the critical Jargon, which is learn'd in a quarter of an Hour, and serves to talk of one's whole Life after.¹

An audience's enjoyment of what it cannot understand is satirized by Ralph as one great attraction of Italian opera, and of the hack writer who "must be held wise, who is unintelligible."² Fielding asserts "that the greatest Perfection of the Language of Tragedy is, that it is not to be understood."³

In *Tom Thumb*, then, I believe Fielding shows the influence of Ralph in his design of satirizing through a burlesque tragedy the artificial conventions of the stage of the day; in his choice of a nursery rhyme, and specifically of *Tom Thumb*, for the purpose; and to some extent in many of the details in the working out of his design, as in his satire on "merry Tragedy," on the emotions of "Terror and Compassion" and on the "bloody Catastrophe" proper to

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-61; see also pp. xxi, 18, 38, 39, 162.

² *Ibid.*, pp. xxiii, 12.

³ Hillhouse, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

tragedy, on the tall hero, on the sublime of Longinus, on the rule-bound pedantry and stupidity of contemporary critics, on spectacular incidents and bombastic diction.

Less than a month before *Tom Thumb*, Fielding had brought out another play, also a literary satire and burlesque: *The Author's Farce; with a Puppet-Shew called the Pleasures of the Town*, performed first at the Haymarket on March 30, 1730.¹ Obviously written at about the same time, we should expect to find in this play marks of the same influence we have noted in *Tom Thumb*. And I think we are not disappointed.

In the first place, the "Puppet-Show," which is the play within the play in this farce, though frequently performed separately, shows an interest on Fielding's part in that type of popular entertainment which Ralph had treated with considerable spirit in chapter vii of his book, as follows:

The Mechanical Genius of the *English* is obvious to every body in many Cases, but in none more properly, than in the Contrivance and Conduct of our PUPPET-SHEWS: The Improvement of which is certainly owing to us, if not the invention;

I confess, I cannot view a well-executed PUPPET-SHEW, without extravagant Emotions of Pleasure:

These portable Stages are of infinite Advantage to most Country Towns, where *Play-houses* cannot be maintain'd; and in my Mind, superior to any Company of Strolers: The Amusement is innocent and instructive, the Expence is moderate, and the whole Equipage easily carry'd about; as I have seen some Couples of Kings and Queens, with a suitable Retinue of Courtiers and Guards, very well accomodated in a single Band-box, with Room for *Punch* and his Family, in the same Machine. The Plans of their little Pieces do not barely aim at Morality, but enforce even Religion: And, it is impossible to view their Representation of *Bateman's* Ghost, *Doctor Faustus's* Death, or Mother *Shipton's* Tragical End, but that the bravest Body alive must be terribly afraid of going to the D——l.²

In another place Ralph treats of these entertainments, again with a playful appreciation of their ingenuity:

There is one thing more I must observe, to the Shame of the Masters of our THEATERS in general; which is, that the only just Remains of a true

¹ Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 80. This fuller form of the title is that of Chalmers's editions (New York, 1813).

² *Touchstone*, pp. 228-29.

CHORUS appear in the artful Management of our *Puppet-Shews*; and, indeed, the entire Performance of these small, itinerant, wooden Actors, is a kind of Grand CHORUS in Miniature; Especially their Prompter answers exactly to the Character and Business of the *Corypheus* with the Antients; whose Office it is to explain to the audience, the most intricate Parts of what they see and hear, or to tell what is to come; to make wise Reflexions on what is past, or what may be; to enter into moral Dialogues pertinent to the Subject with his little Play-Fellows; nay, he generally talks as much to the Purpose as any of them; his Behaviour (with the Humours of *Punch*, and the MUSICK, DANCING and MACHINES, which are beautifully and prudently scatter'd up and down thro' the Whole) exactly discharges the Duty of an antique CHORUS.¹

Moreover, both Fielding and Ralph refer by implication to the puppet-show character of the stage of the time. Ralph says:

Those Domestick Matters of Fact always prove the Favourites of the People; which induc'd me to believe, that they might appear with equal Success on the Stage of the great PUPPET-SHEW in the H—y—m—t.²

Fielding in the *Author's Farce* makes Bookweight ask incredulously, "A puppet-show in a play-house?" And Luckless, the author, replies, "Ay, why, what have been all the playhouses a long while but puppet-shows?"³

The characters of Fielding's puppet show are the personifications of the types of popular entertainment which Ralph had discussed: Don Tragedio, Sir Farcical Comic, Dr. Orator, Signior Opera, Monsieur Pantomime, and Mrs. Novel. To these are added (also included in Ralph's essays) Jack Pudding, Punch and his wife, and Count Heidegger (as Count Ugly), the manager of the Masquerade in the Haymarket whom Fielding had already celebrated in verse in 1728. Be it observed, too, that Dr. Orator, who plays so conspicuous a rôle, is the same Henley whose "Oratory" Ralph mentions in his title-page to the 1731 issue of his book, and discusses in chapter vi. One is tempted to wonder, very cautiously, whether the cat of Fielding's Epilogue is in any way descended from Ralph's "Puss or two, who could pur tolerably in Time or Tune," said to have been procured for a performance of *Whittington and his Cat*.⁴

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

² *Ibid.*, p. 229.

³ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, ed. Chalmers (New York, 1813), I, 319.

⁴ See above, p. 22.

In this play, too, occurs mention of the "merry Tragedy" which we have seen appear in Ralph's essay and in the Preface and Prologue to *Tom Thumb*. Don Tragedio says:

Is Nonsense, of me then forgetful grown,
And must the Signior [Opera] be preferr'd alone?
Is it for this, for this, ye gods, that I
Have in one scene made some folks laugh, some cry?
For this does my low blust'ring language creep,
At once to wake you, and to make you sleep?¹

Unintelligibility, too, is extolled. Dr. Orator says:

What has understanding to do? My hearers would be diverted, and they are so! which could not be if understanding were necessary, because very few of them have any.²

Certain other incidental points of similarity reinforce the impression of specific, and of recent, influence. In advocating the use of familiar tales, Ralph says (the italics are my own):

This amusing Variety of the Choice of Subjects for our Operas, will allow a greater *Latitude in Composition* than we have yet known.³

In the *Author's Farce* Luckless says:

I have introduced, indeed, several other characters, not entirely necessary to the main design; for I was assured by a very eminent critic, that, *in the way of writing, great latitude might be allowed*; and that a writer of puppet-shows might take as much more liberty than a writer of operas, as an opera-writer might be allowed beyond a writer of plays.⁴

In speaking of the fairs as one source of popular entertainment, Ralph writes:

Nay, my Old Friend *Bartholomew's Wings* are close clipp'd; his Liberties retrench'd, and Priviledges invaded. . . . We live in Hopes, the Losses there sustain'd will be made up to us t'other side the *Thames*, and that *Southwark* may be what *May and Bartholomew Fairs* have been.⁵

Very similarly Fielding writes in the *Author's Farce*:

My lord mayor has shortened the time of Bartholomew-fair in Smithfield, and so they are resolved to keep it all the year round at the other end of the town.⁶

¹ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, 341; cf. above, p. 27.

² *Ibid.*, p. 335.

³ *Touchstone*, p. 30.

⁴ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, 324. Ralph uses again these terms *Variety* and *Latitude*: "There being as great Variety and Latitude in the Dances as in the passions themselves." *Touchstone*, p. 33.

⁵ *Touchstone*, p. 230.

⁶ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, 331-32.

Finally in speaking of the ephemeral entertainments which he will not discuss, Ralph says:

Our natural Philosophers will sneer at my total Neglect of *Mary of Godliman*, and the whole Rabbit-scene. *What! not a page of his Book set aside, to inspect the Affairs of the wonderful Rabbit-Woman?*¹

This imposture occurred in 1726; Hogarth's print, "Cunicularii, or, the Wise men of Godliman in Consultation," was published December 26, 1726. London was much stirred by the story during 1726 and 1727;² hence it was fresh in Ralph's mind as one of the follies of the town at the time he was writing his book. But would it have been so fresh in Fielding's mind in 1730 if he had not been recently reminded of it? In his Epilogue to the *Author's Farce* the cat, now changed to a woman, says:

Gallants, you seem to think this transformation,
As strange as was the rabbit's procreation;
That 'tis as odd a cat should take the habit
Of breeding us, as we should breed a rabbit.³

In the *Author's Farce*, then, Fielding seems to show Ralph's influence in his use of a puppet show, in his reference to the puppet-show-like qualities of the stage of the day, in his personification of the various types of entertainment Ralph discusses, in his mention of mirth-provoking tragedy, unintelligibility, "latitude" in writing, the strictures upon Bartholomew Fair, and the "rabbit-woman."

Though Ralph's book had come out in 1728, the chances are that Fielding did not read it until January, 1730. He left London early in 1728, presumably soon after the performance of *Love in Several Masques* on February 16 of that year.⁴ He has already enrolled in the university at Leyden by March 16.⁵ He was in England for the university vacation from the middle of August to the middle of October, 1728, but apparently went to Salisbury.⁶ University records indicate that he left Leyden for good before February, 1730.⁷

¹ *Touchstone*, pp. 235-36.

² Traill, *Social England* (London, 1896), V, 48; Wheatley, *Hogarth's London* (New York, 1909), pp. 36-37.

³ *The Works of Henry Fielding*, I, no page.

⁴ Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 61.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Concerning the events of this period Professor Cross says:

From his subsequent movements it is clear that he came home in the summer of 1729, and did not go back to Leyden at the end of the vacation. . . . Thus thrown upon his own resources, his choice of a career lay, he used to tell his friends, between being a hackney-writer or a hackney-coachman. He chose the former and took the plunge at the opening of the new year.¹

Fielding probably did not come to London earlier than the opening of the theatrical season in the fall of 1729. If Professor Cross's statement is founded on evidence which makes it *literally* true that Fielding came up to London "at the beginning of the new year," then it means that in the month of January, 1730, Fielding wrote *The Temple Beau*, "fell in with James Ralph" "at this juncture," to quote Professor Cross again, secured his prologue for the comedy, and conceivably heard of and read Ralph's book. Thus it would have been fresh in his mind from recent reading, and, presumably, from conversation with its author, at the time when Fielding began work on his two comedies of literary satire which followed *The Temple Beau* in March and April of the same year.

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¹ Cross, p. 72.