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AN EARLY HINT OF MISS BRIDGET'S AFFAIRS, With a Parallel Note on Mr. Allworthy

In *Tom Jones*, I.xi, Fielding declines to draw Miss Bridget Allworthy's picture, on the grounds that

that is done already by a more able Master, Mr. *Hogarth* himself, to whom she sat many Years ago, and hath been exhibited by that Gentleman in his Print of a Winter's Morning, of which she was no improper Emblem, and may be seen walking (for a walk she doth in the Print) to *Covent-Garden* Church, with a starved Foot-boy behind carrying her Prayer-book.¹

Fielding's allusion to the foot-boy and to the wintry chill of which the lady is emblematic is perhaps enough to catch Allworthy's sister's character. A hard look at the engraving, however, lends more extensive meaning. I am indebted to Sean Shesgreen's detailed account of the Aurora print in his recent *Hogarth and the Times-of-the-Day Tradition*,² for the backdrop to which Fielding clearly wishes to direct us for his picture of Tom's mother.

In the 'ancient' and heroical tradition, there are four times of the day. Noble and benign figures preside from the sky over the daily cycle, ensuring that the humans in the scene below are fruitfully engaged in labour that will advance their own lives and those of the community. Read together, the series projects a golden age. As Shesgreen points out, Hogarth, in one of his first progress pieces, modernizes and citi-

fies these familiar pictures, but his book is not simply an annotation and interpretation of the prints as a satiric version of an ancient pastoral tradition; it also examines how that tradition is itself brought under artistic and moral scrutiny. In Hogarth's *Morning*,

Aurora's destination is the classical temple of the Tuscan order which looms over Tom King's Coffee House. In appearance, it is a pagan house of worship in the manner of the Parthenon; in reality it is Saint Paul's Church, Covent Garden - a building executed in a style whose heathen connections Hogarth probably considered inappropriate to a Christian church and whose Palladian associations he certainly viewed with distaste. The dawn goddess is accompanied by Eosporos, modernized from the nude *putti* in van Mander's *Aurora* ... into the shivering page carrying her prayer book.²

Fielding saw Miss Bridget at "comic modern dawn" and uses the correct technical term to describe her, "calling her an emblem" (110).

The Hogarth allusion, however, is even richer in the way in which it further undermines Miss Bridget's apparently virtuous character. Shesgreen notes that, unlike earlier renditions of Aurora, Hogarth's *Morning* is thin, stiff, inelegant and distinctly earthbound (109) - no Fanny Goodwill she. Yet this Aurora controls the scene, as Bridget, of course, does Tom Jones and *Tom Jones*. And although Miss Bridget (like her Hogarthian visual original), lacks beauty, she evidently has attraction (or at least insistent aggression) as her successive affairs with Summer and Blifil show. Blifil may be chiefly drawn by his designs on the splendid Allworthy estate, but Summer, a good-hearted innocent like his natural son, is first won by Miss Bridget's considerable ability to engage in theological intercourse, as well as those other kinds most frequently associated with the passionate in soul. The print is instructive in these ways too, for, in addition to the architectural problem Hogarth may have found in St. Paul's, he also places Tom King's Coffee House (with quarrelling customers) directly in front of the church; it is thus both entrance to and screen for what is presumably a Christian temple. The scene itself, precisely *as* Covent Garden, situates the lady in a place emblematic of lust and prostitution.

Because we know Miss Bridget to be no beauty (cf. I.ii, pp. 35-6), our first inclination is to read her merely as a type of the sour spinster, although our suspicions may be aroused by her initially positive response to the foundling, one at variance both with her own alleged contempt for beauty and by her observations (I.viii, p. 57) about Jenny Jones when she and Deborah listen to Allworthy's lecture through the keyhole. Re-readers of the novel respond, of course, with special

comedy to her delight in Dr. Blifil's abilities in theological discourse (I.x, p. 62) "She had," Fielding tells us, "read much *English Divinity*, and had puzzled more than one of the neighbouring Curates." One, of course, was Tom's father. We do not yet know this, but we might well wonder why Fielding is at pains to highlight her name: "she seemed to deserve the Name of Saint equally with her Name-sake, or with any other Female in the *Roman Calendar*." The Wesleyan editors (I.x, p. 62, n.1) identify her namesake as Brigid. They do not, however, provide the meaning of Brigid, which is, ironically, as any dictionary tells us, "lofty or august". Miss Bridget is unable to marry the theologically-minded doctor because he already has a wife, but no such bar exists for the brother he speedily imports to the monied Somerset scene. His introduction into Paradise Hall brings us to the chapter in which Hogarth's print is invoked. The Captain is quick to perceive what might well go on, as it were, behind Tom King's Coffee House, even in the temple itself. He also knows that Mr. Allworthy is dedicated to celibacy after the death of his wife. His brother, as we learn in Book I.ix (p. 67) has "fished out that ... [Allworthy's] intentions were to make any Child of ... [Miss Bridget's] his Heir". In a wrong-headed epic gesture, he has grandiose schemes for improving Paradise, only to end, in Fielding's own translation of Horace, *Odes*, II.xviii, 17-19, in a grave "of six and two" (II.viii, 109).

Chapter ii of Book II (p. 78) rouses the suspicions of the careful reader, for the fruit of the Blifil marriage is born only eight months later, ostensibly "by reason of a Fright". Apart from the sheer mathematics (the "Fright" is never explained; the "Child ... was indeed, to all Appearance, perfect"; the Midwife discovers that it "was born a Month before its full Time"), we might be further alerted by the pointing of the passage. In addition to the warning in the heading of the chapter, with its inclusion of bastards, the first words are emphasized because capitalized: "EIGHT MONTHS". The Wesleyan editors provide another rhetorical signal, for the announcement of the marriage is a parody of the "fulsome and pretentious language of wedding-notices in the newspapers, a subject which Fielding frequently ridiculed in his journals" (II.ii, 78, n.1). Miss Bridget is not, of course, "a young Lady of Great Beauty", although she pretends to "Merit" and has "Fortune". As his name suggests, Allworthy is the easiest of dupes. Although a splendid lecturer, he is neither listener nor observer, mainly because he is a fixed character, inclined (although with sincerity, unlike his sister) to rigid principle tempered, like the whole family, with a potential for warm affection. He has also been made permanently melancholy through personal bereavement.

A further look at Hogarth's engraving sharpens the suspicions we have of Miss Bridget. In both the engraving and in the painting, she ignores the poor sitting before the fire and the woman who stretches her hands for alms. Despite Aurora's primness, we note that a man holding his arm about a girl also seems to be looking at the lady headed for the church. Ronald Paulson reads the scene as "church vs. tavern, pious lady vs. wenches" and earlier reads the lady only as "simply a cold woman going to church", a character whose colours contrast sharply with the duller scene around her. "Above all, he says, "scarlet ribbons on her cap ... link her to the flames of the bonfire" (I, 405).³ The scarlet ribbons may also be emblems of other suppressed flames. I doubt that Fielding incorporates the clock contexts Shesgreen notes for both *Morning* and *Noon* (107), but the clock we see in the print certainly makes the worshipper late. No commentator on the print or the painting notes that the lady has a spotty face. Facial marks, of course, often had moral meaning. These may perhaps be only patches, but they are not artfully disposed (how *could* they be on this face?); patches were often used to cover marks of various poxes.

David Oakleaf has written an elaborate explication of *Tom Jones*, I.4 which is germane in a related way to my subject of Miss Bridget as fallen Aurora, beginner of Tom Jones' times of the day.⁴ As Oakleaf notes, the title of the chapter puts us on our guard; the narrator tells us that our neck is about to be put into danger *by a description* [italics mine]; Miss Bridget gets into the title as well. The ensuing tour of the Allworthy domain makes Paradise Hall an epic rendition of everything the aesthetic setting of the English country house was supposed to be. It is concluded by an ascent to the sublime, for "the Country gradually rose into a Ridge of wild Mountains, the Tops of which were above the Clouds" (I.iv, p. 43) before the narrator tells us to "take care", for he as "unadvisedly led" us to "the Top of as high a Hill as Mr. *Allworthy's*" and does not know how to get us down without breaking our necks, he throws comic light over the idyllic, nearly textbook scene by his Auroral introduction of Mr. Allworthy himself:

It was now the Middle of *May*, and the Morning was remarkably serene when Mr. *Allworthy* walked forth on the Terrace, where the Dawn opened every Minute that lovely Prospect we have before described to his Eye.

So far, so good. The next sentence, however, shows us the danger, a rhetorical trap like the wedding announcement, a trap to which the narrator has in effect alerted us by the chastely balanced perfection of the early part of the chapter:

And now having sent forth Streams of Light, which ascended the blue Firmament before him as Harbingers preceding his Pomp, in the full Blaze of his Majesty, up rose the Sun; than which one Object alone in this lower Creation could be more glorious, and that Mr. *Allworthy* himself presented: a human Being replete with Benevolence, meditating in what manner he might render himself most acceptable to his Creator, by doing most good to his Creatures.

"Replete" is the critical word. Most often associated with fulness in food, it brings us back, among other things, to the hearty bill of fare announced at the beginning of the novel. But the rhetoric of the rest of the passage is also radically different from the measured prose of the first section, the description of Paradise Hall itself. Unlike that prose, the language used for Mr. Allworthy is highly inflated, in Fielding's best stretched comic epic style. More perfect than his estate, (which is *just* believable perfection, and perhaps not even that, given the mountains) Allworthy exceeds these decorous bounds. As such, and in this description, his appearance with the morn is reminiscent of those earlier and portly Auroras Hogarth was at pains, not simply to reduce to city level, but also to present as unrealistic and overworked artistic and moral projections. If Bridget is too thin, her brother, by inversion, is too ample. It is no wonder that the narrator does not know where to take us next.

He does not hesitate for long. We are to slide down the hill with him; we come from the clouds to the breakfast room where Tom Jones is first presented to the Misses Deborah and Bridget. There *is* no other way of getting from one actual or rhetorical place to another and this noted gap signals further problems in Paradise. The mountainously moral sublime shrinks to an indoor breakfast room where any kind of Auroral grandeur is in short supply. At the end of the chapter, Mr. Allworthy, "as was his Custom", withdraws into his study, the classical retreat of the melancholic, here a denial of continued *individual* benevolence and a perfect representation of Allworthy as a Justice of the Peace. He gives sermons rather than listening sympathetically, as his bastard godson will learn to do as he makes his way out of the cloisters of Paradise Hall, to other times of the day, during the nicely-timed nine months from his nineteenth year when, at twenty-one, he could legally take over and perhaps even improve the estate.

What we have then, are important scenes in which there are two Auroras, the one amplified by the Hogarth context for Miss Bridget, and the Aurora of I.iv who is Mr. Allworthy, a good man, but one who lacks perceptive liveliness. His virtue, in the images it invokes,

is outmoded, and literally impotent, a hangover from the epically heroic tradition about which both Hogarth and Fielding evidently had so many doubts as artists and humanists.⁵ Neither brings the health of the morn as it is presented in the early times-of-the-day sequences. One is shrunken and made more so by the Hogarthian images to which it refers; the other exceeds the bounds of this comic epic, the bounds of that human nature which Fielding tells us will be the subject of his novel. At the end, with the marriage of Tom to his Sophia, we have realistic colour, achieved through eschewing both the high heroic reaches of the prime sublime (or those other elevations Tom sees in episodes like the Man of the Hill, surely a melancholic recollective of Mr. Allworthy), and the low petty meanness of Bridget, Dowling and all those others who interfere with the hero's human and humane education, in a world where lives are presented realistically in tales told to a listener who grows in perception, charity and sympathy. Miss Bridget's affairs (and, of course, I mean the pun) have a happy ending. Her failings, and her brother's limits, create the fortunate faults for this new epic. These are told early at an early stage by brilliant allusion. The Allworthys are both Auroras, one a parody of an ample lady, the other an extravagant replay of a tradition no longer possible at any time of day.

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NOTES

1. Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1975), ed. Fredson Bowers, with an introduction and commentary by Martin C. Battestin, I.ix, p. 66. All further references to this edition will be cited parenthetically in the text.
2. Sean Shesgreen, *Hogarth and the Times-of-the Day Tradition*, (Ithaca, New York, 1983), pp. 108-110. See also Battestin's note 1 on p. 66 for fuller account of other Hogarthian material in Fielding. Further allusions to Shesgreen will be cited parenthetically in the text. It has not been possible to secure plates for this paper. Shesgreen's plate of the oil *Morning* is on p. 97 of his study. It is so dark that details are hard to see. His illustrations of the ancient Times of the Day, all engravings, are much easier to read. See his table of illustrations, pp.7-8. The engraving and the painting are reproduced

much more clearly in Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth: His Life, Art and Times*, 2 vols. (New Haven, 1971). See I, plate 147, p. 399 and plates 151a and 151b, pp. 407 and 408. The painting, in plate 147, makes Fielding's comparison even more vivid. Paulson discusses the colours of the painting on p. 405. I have later quoted (see note 3) his comment on the scarlet ribbons; he also notes that "the painting adds another dimension by giving her [the lady] an ermine muff and pale pink apron over a champagne-yellow dress with delicate sea-green trimmings" (I, 405). He also notes that the heads of "the lovers ... are above the others and in the light". These "are clear - the rest remain a brown indistinguishable mass". The "drab brownish groups of people, the leaden sky, and the pale snow-covered roofs ... are opposed to the colour and movement around the fire, especially the bright blue lining of one girl's hat." He is quite right to say that the engraving "emphasizes the alienation of the two worlds, their utter separateness", but while the painting *does*, as he suggests, point to "the similarities as well" I find it hard to agree that these similarities suggest "an acceptance of both extremes." The lovers' heads (even though, as I have later conjectured, the man seems to be looking round the girl) are *above* those trying to warm themselves at the flames and the colour of the man's jacket, appropriately a muted red, take the eye through the flames to the stockings and jacket cuffs of the footboy, with a final reddish touch in the carrots at the bottom right of the painting. The prude's clothes are chillier and, by means of colour, she is more easily related to the "salmon-colored houses" in the background. In both the engraving and in the painting, these are solidly built and so (especially with the puff of smoke from a chimney) iconic with the lady of a class which rules, however palely.

3. Paulson, II, 72. Paulson (II, 434, n.4) simply notes that "Fielding describes Bridget Allworthy's face by referring the reader to the prude in *Morning*."
4. David Oakleaf, "Sliding Down Together: Fielding, Addison And the Pleasures of the Imagination in *Tom Jones*", *English Studies in Canada*, 9 (1983), 402-416.
5. See *The English Hero: 1660-1800*, ed. Robert Folkenflik (Newark, 1982), especially the essays by James William Johnson, C.J. Rawson and J. Paul Hunter.