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Dramatic Publishing

A one-act play

Tom Jones

by
CHARLOTTE BROWN

Taken from David Rogers'
adaptation of the comic
classic by Henry Fielding



THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY

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(TOM JONES)

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TOM JONES
A Play in One Act
For Eight Men and Seven Women with doubling

C H A R A C T E R S

PARTRIDGE
BRIDGET/(MRS. FITZPATRICK)
SQUIRE ALLWORTHY
DEBORAH/(LADY BELLASTON)
JENNY JONES
CAPTAIN BLIFIL/(JUSTICE DOWLING)
BLIFIL
TOM JONES
MR. WESTERN
SOPHIA WESTERN
MISS WESTERN
HONOUR
MRS. WHITEFIELD/(NANCY)
HIGHWAYMAN/(CONSTABLE)
MR. FITZPATRICK/(SERVANT)

Place: From Somersetshire to London

Time: About 1750

This one-act version of TOM JONES must be played with a great deal of energy and little attempt at realism. The theatricality of the piece with the narrator convention and the short scenes can be enhanced by delightful freeze postures – the more outlandish the better – at the opening and close of each scene. The stage pictures can have the quality of seventeenth century caricatures which come to life.

PRODUCTION NOTES

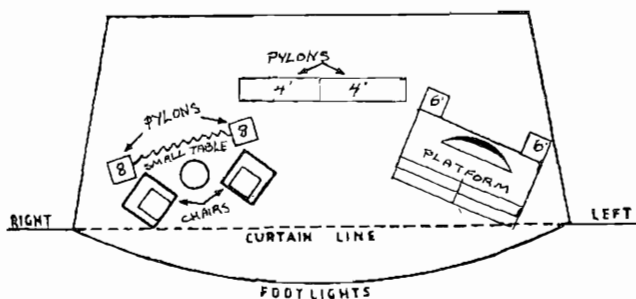
The stage is divided into three areas. On stage R is Squire Allworthy's with two large period armchairs and a small table between them. A large curtain hung between two eight-foot pylons can back this scene and furnish an area for exits. In the UC area is a low wall formed by placing two four-foot pylons end to end. On stage L is Mr. Western's, a platform with steps leading up to it. On the platform is a loveseat with various hunting paraphernalia scattered about, including saddles, tack, horse blankets, and possibly some stuffed birds or trophies. A stool should be placed in front of the curtain on the far left side of the apron for Partridge.

The author suggests that the full-length version be read for a better understanding of the characters and costumes.

SET DESCRIPTIONS

The pylons referred to are 1' x 1' square columns either 8' or 6' or 4' long. The platform used is 4' x 8' x 1'. The step units are 4' wide.

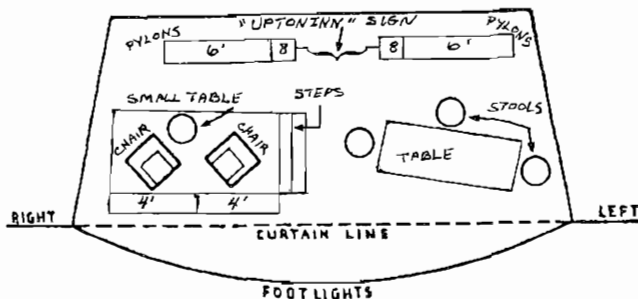
SCENE ONE



SCENE TWO

Played entirely on apron in front of the curtain. While this scene is being played, the Upton Inn set should be put in position behind the curtain.

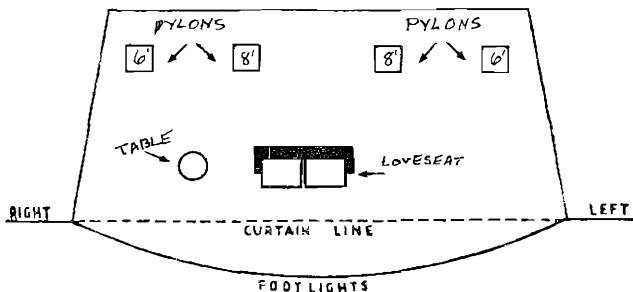
SCENE THREE



SCENE FOUR

Played on the apron in front of the curtain. Lady Bellaston's is set up while this scene is played.

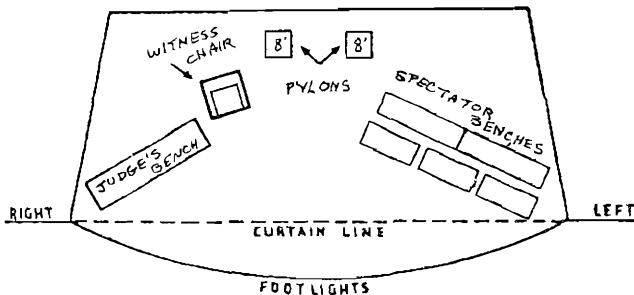
SCENE FIVE



SCENE SIX

Played on the apron in front of the curtain. Courtroom scene is set up while this scene is played.

SCENE SEVEN



TOM JONES

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: Only PARTRIDGE at C is lit. In a dim blue wash are: BRIDGET ALLWORTHY in a frozen posture seated at R, carefully inspecting her teeth in a mirror; MR. WESTERN sprawled across the loveseat at L with his whip dangling; and, unseen behind the wall at UC, TOM JONES with a LADY. The lights come up on each area as the characters are introduced.

PARTRIDGE. Good evening, my lords, my ladies, gentlemen and gentlewomen. Tonight we play “The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling.” I am your humble servant Partridge — schoolmaster, surgeon and barber. Our story takes place more than two hundred years ago when the world was indeed wicked, bawdy, and licentious. In short, a time like any other. Tom Jones, the foundling, was born — or rather found — in Somersetshire, in the home of Squire Allworthy. (Lights up R on BRIDGET ALLWORTHY.) This is the Squire’s sister, Miss Bridget Allworthy. She is to be commended for her good qualities rather than her beauty.

BRIDGET. I thank Heaven I have not the beauty of the ladies of fashion. Beauty leads a woman to misfortune.

PARTRIDGE. Have no fear. And this is the Squire himself,

returned after an absence of some months.

(SQUIRE ALLWORTHY enters from DR with luggage.)

ALLWORTHY. I thank Heaven for my safe return from London.

BRIDGET. Welcome home, brother. (They embrace at RC.)

ALLWORTHY. Thank you, sister.

PARTRIDGE. The Squire, exhausted . . .

ALLWORTHY. I'm exhausted. (He exits behind curtain.)

PARTRIDGE. . . . retired to his bed chamber — from which issued a great cry. (He crosses L and sits on his stool.)

ALLWORTHY (offstage). Merciful Heavens!

BRIDGET. Brother, what's happened?

(The old servant, DEBORAH, enters from DR.)

DEBORAH. What's happened to the master?

(SQUIRE ALLWORTHY re-enters from left of curtain carrying a small bundle.)

ALLWORTHY. In my room! A baby! (He hands the bundle to BRIDGET.)

BRIDGET. A baby! (She hands the bundle to DEBORAH.)

DEBORAH. La, Squire, wherever has it come from? (She hands the bundle back to BRIDGET.)

ALLWORTHY. From my pillow.

DEBORAH. Congratulations! (She shakes Allworthy's hand.)

ALLWORTHY. Nonsense. The child is not mine.

DEBORAH. Of course not, but — many honest souls will delight in saying so all the same.

ALLWORTHY. It must belong to one of the servants.

DEBORAH (with great indignation). Lud, sir!

ALLWORTHY. One of the younger servants. Who else could have put it in my room?

DEBORAH. It was Jenny Jones.

BRIDGET. Jenny Jones!

DEBORAH. She has been seen walking out with the school-master, Mr. Partridge. (Lights come up on PARTRIDGE at L, who jumps to his feet.)

PARTRIDGE. That's a lie!

DEBORAH. The whole village knows – you've been seen.

PARTRIDGE. I was merely teaching her Greek and Latin.

BRIDGET. What need has a scullery maid of Greek and Latin?

ALLWORTHY. Bring Jenny Jones to me! (DEBORAH exits R.)

PARTRIDGE. It's true Jenny is a scullery maid, but she has a good inquiring mind.

(DEBORAH and JENNY enter from DR.)

ALLWORTHY. I'm afraid she has inquired a bit too far . . . Jenny Jones, are you the mother of that child? (JENNY falls to her knees at Allworthy's feet.)

JENNY. Yes, sir. I brought him to you hoping you would give him a good home.

ALLWORTHY. But who is the father?

JENNY. I am under the most solemn vow to conceal his name at this time.

BRIDGET. I entreat you to help this unfortunate girl.

ALLWORTHY. I will give you the money with which to leave the county, and as for your child, I shall provide for

him in a better manner than you can ever hope to.

JENNY. You are too good, sir.

DEBORAH. Too good by half. (She exits DR, pulling JENNY with her.)

ALLWORTHY. But for the schoolmaster, have him run out of the county or I'll have him strung up by the thumbs. (He and BRIDGET exit DR.)

PARTRIDGE. I was innocent! Innocent! As you shall see. The Squire called the baby "Jones" after Jenny and "Tom" after his own whim. Tom Jones. Shortly after I was banished, a certain Captain Blifil became the guest of Squire Allworthy . . . and fell in love with his host's sister. He was certainly a gallant captain as Miss Allworthy was — to put it delicately — not the fairest of her sex.

(CAPTAIN BLIFIL and BRIDGET enter from DR and sit holding hands.)

CAPTAIN BLIFIL. Beauty is only skin deep and fades as a plucked rose. The deeper qualities such as money and property last forever.

PARTRIDGE. And so they were married — (CAPTAIN BLIFIL and BRIDGET rise and kiss.) — and a year later, blessed with a fine, bouncing baby boy. (A blanket-wrapped doll is thrown on from DR to CAPTAIN BLIFIL, which he catches on the fly and hands to BRIDGET.) Not long after, tragedy struck the good captain, who died of epilepsy or apoplexy, depending upon which doctor you asked. Good-bye, Captain Blifil.

CAPTAIN BLIFIL. But . . .

PARTRIDGE. You may go. Remember, there are no small parts — only small actors. (CAPTAIN BLIFIL exits DR.)

And so, the two boys grew to manhood. The fatherless Blifil, a serious, studious boy who became the most virtuous man in the county, as he was the first to admit.

(Young BLIFIL enters.)

BLIFIL. Sir Francis Bacon, fifteen sixty-one to sixteen twenty-six said, "Nobility of birth commonly abateth industry." I have proved him wrong. (Freezes with his book.)

PARTRIDGE. While the entirely parentless Tom was a cheery fellow more at home in the woods and fields than with books. (He has to look for TOM until he finds him behind the wall UC. Lights come up on wall.)

TOM. I'm a lucky fellow! The whole world is too good to me. (While he is speaking, a very feminine hand creeps up his leg and pulls him back down.)

PARTRIDGE. It shall be our custom to leave such scenes for taste, decorum, and the censor dictate. (He hastily crosses DL with a shocked expression on his face. BLIFIL prances UC, looks over the wall.)

BLIFIL. Foundling! Oh, my! (He exits UR.)

PARTRIDGE. On the next estate to Squire Allworthy lived a Mr. Western, a gentleman much given to horses, hounds and hunting. (Lights come up L on WESTERN.)

WESTERN. Tally-ho! (He staggers to his feet and falls down the steps to DLC.)

PARTRIDGE. He became a good friend to Tom -- who had assisted him in a matter concerning poachers. (TOM comes on from behind the wall and rests on one knee for WESTERN to shoot from his shoulder.)

TOM. Over there, sir!

WESTERN. Got him! (A scream is heard off R.) That's the last pheasant that peasant will pluck from my preserve.

PARTRIDGE. Tom was a welcome guest at Western's table, since Mr. Western had no son. However, he had a lovely daughter, Sophia.

(SOPHIA enters from DL and stands throwing loving looks at TOM.)

WESTERN. A sweet girl. I wouldn't trade her for the best pack of hounds in London.

PARTRIDGE. She was beautiful and modest. She played the piano and sang beautifully . . .

SOPHIA (singing). Believe me if all those endearing young charms . . . (TOM and PARTRIDGE wince at the distinctly off-key "charms.")

PARTRIDGE. . . for a girl educated in the country. . . . Sophia's mother was long since dead and Western had occasional assistance in the rearing of his daughter from his sister, Miss Western . . .

(MISS WESTERN enters from DL and stands next to SOPHIA.)

MISS WESTERN. I have instructed my niece in the whole long appendage of — smiles, ogles, glances and flirtation with her fan. (She and SOPHIA demonstrate each.)

WESTERN. Zooks! I say a pox on your flirtation with the fan. (He crosses L to MISS WESTERN.)

MISS WESTERN. Mr. Western, I think you are a perfect goat.

WESTERN. Baaah! (He bleats in her face and then exits DL. She follows.)

PARTRIDGE. One day when young Tom had joined Mr. Western and his daughter for a hunt . . .

(WESTERN re-enters from DL.)

WESTERN. There she goes! After her! (WESTERN, SOPHIA and TOM gallop in a large circle in C stage jumping the UC wall. WESTERN exits UR after one circle.)

PARTRIDGE. I ask you gentle playgoers to imagine them all on horseback. Miss Sophia lost control of her horse. Young Tom gave chase . . . leaped off his horse . . . the lady's horse reared . . . Delicacy forbids that I hear what followed. (Both TOM and SOPHIA end up on the ground at C.)

SOPHIA. Why, Tom, you saved my life! How can I ever thank you, Mr. Jones?

TOM. I am sufficiently repaid. Ahhhhh . . .

SOPHIA. Are you hurt?

TOM. It's nothing. If I have broken my arm, I consider it a trifle compared with what I feared might happen to you.

SOPHIA. Broken your arm!

TOM. Do not concern yourself, madame. I have yet another arm to lead you home. (He faints.)

(WESTERN enters from UR.)

WESTERN. What, Sophie? Are you all right?

SOPHIA. Yes. Mr. Jones saved me . . . but he has broken his arm.

WESTERN. Saved my girl! I love you dearly, boy. What? Does it hurt? (He drags TOM to his feet by the broken arm.)

TOM. Only when you thank me. (All exit UL as the lights black out. BLIFIL enters stage R and remains there unseen. Lights come up on SOPHIA and HONOUR at L stage. SOPHIA is seated on the loveseat with HONOUR standing at her left.)

SOPHIA. Oh, Honour, is Mr. Jones not the most handsome man you have ever seen in your life?

HONOUR. Certainly the handsomest man without parents, madame.

SOPHIA. It's true he is base born, but when he smiles . . . he seems . . . almost noble. Oh, Tom . . . Tom . . .

(TOM enters from DL. HONOUR exits DL giggling.)

TOM. Yes?

SOPHIA. Oh! Mr. Jones! Your arm?

TOM. A slight but painful sprain.

SOPHIA. You'd best sit down.

TOM. No . . . No . . . (He sits.)

SOPHIA. You would lessen my obligation at having twice risked your life for me.

TOM. Twice?

SOPHIA. Can you have forgotten the day you brought me the little bird who sang so sweetly? (During the ensuing speeches, TOM and SOPHIA get closer and closer and more and more passionate.)

TOM. I remember . . .

SOPHIA. In that instant, I loved — the bird — and then young Blifil set it free. The bird flew to a topmost branch beside the brook, you climbed the tree, and re-captured my little bird. And the branch broke and you fell with it into the stream.

TOM. My only sorrow is that the water was not deeper that I might have given my life for you.

SOPHIA. Oh, no! (She rises.)

TOM. Oh, Miss Western, can you desire me to live? (He rises and embraces her.)

SOPHIA. Yes, yes, with all my heart.

TOM. I fear I've said too much.

SOPHIA. Too much, too little, and too well. (They are almost lip to lip when:)

(HONOUR enters DL.)

HONOUR. Mr. Jones! Mr. Jones, they've sent for you. Squire Allworthy is taken ill. (SOPHIA and TOM jump apart.)

TOM. I must go! (He exits UR.)

PARTRIDGE. The news of Mr. Allworthy's illness drove all thoughts of love from Tom's head. He hurried home to hear the Squire speak of his will and provisions for his heirs — not all of whom were satisfied with their legacies. (Lights come up R on BLIFIL, who had come on during the earlier blackout.)

BLIFIL. True, I am to receive most of my uncle's estate, but I don't see why my mother needs five hundred pounds a year.

(A SERVANT enters from DR and gives BLIFIL a message to read. BLIFIL begins to weep copiously into his silk scarf.)

SERVANT. What further unhappy news?

BLIFIL. Ah, my mother. (He sits.)

SERVANT. Not . . . Not dead?

BLIFIL. Aye, dead . . . at Salisbury. Returning home from London, she was seized by a gout in the head and stomach which carried her off like – like a snap of the fingers.

SERVANT. Unhappy woman.

BLIFIL (a sudden greedy realization). Never to enjoy her five hundred pounds a year.

SERVANT. You must try to enjoy it for her.

BLIFIL. Yes. (Righteously.) She'd want it that way.

(JUSTICE DOWLING hurries on from DR.)

DOWLING. Is anyone within? I bring an urgent message from Bridget Blifil.

BLIFIL. But, Justice Dowling, my mama is dead! (He begins to weep anew.)

DOWLING. Yes, but before she died, she gave me a letter, and her instructions were to hand it to Mr. Allworthy.

BLIFIL. He is very ill. Give it to me. (He practically jerks the letter from Dowling's hand.) I will give it to him.

DOWLING. Very well – I must go! Always late! Quickly, saddle my horse! (He exits DR calling for his horse.)

(TOM enters from UR behind curtain.)

TOM. He's well, the Squire's well! Banish your long faces. (He joins BLIFIL and the SERVANT at DRC.)

BLIFIL. Mr. Jones, your behavior is offensive. I am in mourning. My dear mother has gone to her reward.

TOM. Oh! I beg your pardon. Allow me to offer my condolences. (He offers BLIFIL his hand.)