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Family Plays

Based on the book by Henry Fielding

THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES

Comedy by Dennis M. Maganza

Adapted into a one-act play by Luis Muñoz

THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES

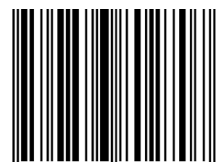
Comedy. By Dennis M. Maganza. Adapted into a one-act play by Luis Muñoz. Based on the book by Henry Fielding. Cast: 20m., 15w. (doubling possible). Tom, a foundling, is in love with beautiful Sophia. Although her father envies Tom's reputation as a daredevil and womanizer, he wouldn't consider letting his daughter marry such a scoundrel. The story of Tom's love for the beautiful Sophia; his everlasting feud with the despicable Allworthy heir, Blifil; the mad race to London, punctuated by the infamous night in the inn and the ill-fated masquerade ball are skillfully transferred to the stage in this dramatization. *The History of Tom Jones* is a vibrant, brisk play for adults and young adults. Although the play has strong farcical content, it also has elements of honest drama and romance. Fielding's novel has lived as a classic because of the author's perceptive analysis of human nature, with its inherent hypocrisy, selfishness, boorishness and indifference toward the welfare of others. These characteristics have been captured in the play. It is presented in a commedia-like fashion, as a troupe of players unload their trunks, dress each other and introduce their characters in story-theatre style. *Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: HE1.*

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The History of Tom Jones

Henry Fielding's

The History of
TOM JONES

by

DENNIS M. MAGANZA

Adapted into a One-Act Play

by

LUIS MUÑOZ

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THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES

In One Act

Cast

(20 men, 15 women; may be played by an ensemble of
8 men, 7 women as follows:)

Henry Fielding/Squire Allworthy

Squire Western/Servant (played by Jim)

Sophia Western/Servant (played by Cindy)

Bridget, Squire Allworthy's Sister/Honour

Miss Western/Servant (played by Karen)

Lady Bellaston/Servant (played by Paula)

Wilkins/Innkeeper's Wife/Bellaston's Maid

Partridge/Sophia's Horse/Servant (played by Dean)

Jenny Jones/Mrs. Waters

Captain Blifil/Blifil/Highwayman/Servant (played by Mike)

Tom Jones/Servant (played by Jeff)

Square/Western's Horse/Fitzpatrick

Thwackum/Innkeeper/Hangman

Judge Dowling/Tom's Horse/Servant

Harriet Fitzpatrick/Servant (played by Monica)

The time is the mid 1700's

ABOUT THE PLAY

In searching for a good contest play for his students at San Antonio's MacArthur High School, Luis Muñoz was intrigued by the fast pace, comic action, and humorous representation of some of the bleaker aspects of human nature that he saw in Dennis Maganza's new dramatization, *The History of Tom Jones*. And so he skillfully condensed the 2-hour script into a 35-minute one-act play.

The novel, *Tom Jones*, won Henry Fielding literary honors in 1749. It won Luis Muñoz and his students theatre honors in 1985 when it took a top prize in the Texas UIL One-Act Play contest.

Tom Jones was a foundling, a loser from birth. Everything he touched turned to lead. A hero in his own eyes, he was a scoundrel in the eyes of everyone else—everyone except Sophia, and she wasn't sure. Tom, the illegitimate ward of Squire Allworthy, is in love with Sophia, the beautiful daughter of Squire Western. Western is a rowdy, hard-drinking bully, and he admires and envies Tom's reputation as a brawling, womanizing daredevil—but he would never allow his daughter to marry such a low-life. Instead, Sophia is betrothed to Blifil, Allworthy's sniveling nephew and heir. Since Tom is seduced by most of the women and cursed by all the men, it's not surprising to find him on the gallows at the end of the play. As Fielding proclaimed: "Tom Jones was born to be hung."

This one-act version opens with a *commedia*-like troupe of players setting up the stage. In story-theatre fashion the players introduce the characters. For the convenience of the director, the actors' given names are used when they appear as servants or narrators (see the *dramatis personae* on the preceding page for doubling suggestions to show how the 35 characters may be played by 15 performers). Fielding steps forward to introduce the story and then assumes the role of Squire Allworthy.

A unit set may be used for all the scenes (see appendix for floor plan). Several levels of platforms can serve as the various rooms in which the action takes place. The play is designed to proceed from scene to scene without interruption.

A note from Luis Muñoz: "It is important that the Director maintain a loose and highly creative atmosphere during the rehearsal period for *The History of Tom Jones*. The piece should be the product of a cooperative effort between director and actors—this makes it fun. The action is designed to incorporate freezes, slow-motion, slapstick, and most things that would make the play an obvious story-telling piece of theatre. Never forget that and always seek the potential for humor."

PRODUCTION NOTES*Props***Scene 1**

Boxes of props & costumes—The Cast
 Manuscript—Fielding

Scene 2

Small tables & stools; stacks of plates—The Servants (Cast)
 Small bench—Jeff
 Silverware—Monica
 Baby in blanket—Cindy

Scene 4

Book—Blifil
 Paddle (slapstick)—Thwackum

Scene 7

Legal document (Squire's will)—Square
 Letter—Judge Dowling

Scene 8

Fan—Miss Western
 Coin—Western

Scene 9

Road sign
 Pistol—Highwayman

Scene 10

Tray of turkey—Innkeeper's Wife
 Muff—Sophia
 Tray of food—Innkeeper

Scene 11

Note—Tom

Scene 12

Red mask on tray—Maid

Scene 13

Masks—all characters (all colors but red)
 Swords—Fitzpatrick, Tom

Scene 14

Noose—Hangman

Costumes

The original production was dressed in historically accurate costumes. They were not overly flashy but were kept in the rustic colors of the time and place. In contrast Lady Bellaston and company reflected the fashion trends in London of the 1760's. For good illustrations look into the works of the artist William Hogarth. One of the most difficult things to do was the quick changes. These were accomplished through the removal and addition of aprons, bonnets, and vests and, of course, where possible, full changes. Many of these changes/transformations happened in full view of the audience, in *commedia* style. Trust the audience to accept these.

Lights, Sound, and Special Effects

Scene changes and change of focus can best be accomplished by the use of area lighting, as suggested in the stage directions. However, effective use of the various levels of the set will do well if proper lighting effects can't be utilized.

Sounds, fanfares, and period music are also suggested in the text, and there are

numerous other places where music and choreographed movement can be used effectively.

Model of set for premiere production

The original set was made up of a combination of platforms, step units, and ramps arranged as shown in the photograph above to serve as the various rooms and scenes in which the action takes place. The platforms shown here are 4' x 8' and 4' x 4'. The ramps are 4' x 4'. The set represents an innyard or a stage; the troupe of strolling players ostensibly arrives at the location with their boxes of props and costumes and prepare to present a play.

The Stage Right platform was used as the various bedrooms (an additional platform was added to serve as the bed and a curtain could be drawn to conceal the bed). Entrance from the outside into Squire Allworthy's home was Up Left. Exterior scenes were played downstage of the platforms.

THE HISTORY OF TOM JONES

In One Act

Scene 1

[The CAST is busily preparing to open the play; some are setting props, others are practicing their fencing. We hear the first FANFARE. At the same time the CAST does a take, noticing the curtain is up. In a mad scramble, not unlike the clowns at a three-ring circus, the CAST gets into their opening tableau and freeze at the same time. The scramble is full of acrobatics, bumps, and near-misses. It is important that there be great variety in the poses the actors take for freezes. They should be seen in the extremes of action. FIELDING enters from upper level and greets the audience. He carries the manuscript to his novel]

FIELDING. Good people! *[Bows]* I now present to you the labors of several years of my life. *[Proudly showing them the manuscript. Then with a devilish grin as he stops by a young lady and a young man who have frozen locked together as they were tumbling down (the pose is innocently suggestive)]* I hope you will find nothing inconsistent with the strictest laws of decency. On the contrary, I declare my purpose is to recommend goodness and innocence. Well, you'll see. I shall detain the history no longer! I remain, your obedient servant, Henry Fielding. *[He claps his hands and the tableau comes to life]*

Scene 2

[There are no blackouts or other interruptions between scenes]

JIM. *[Steps forward]* This history begins in a part of the kingdom known as Somerset, wherein there lived a gentleman named . . .

CAST. *[Pointing at the actor playing Allworthy. With love]* Allworthy.

CINDY. He resided there with his sister . . . *[Focusing on Bridget]*

BRIDGET. *[Who gracefully steps forward and takes Allworthy's hand]* Bridget.

KAREN. *[Squeezing herself between Allworthy and Bridget]* For whom he had the tenderest of affections.

PAULA. Allworthy has been in London a full quarter of a year . . . *[ALLWORTHY exits Right, as if leaving to London. The CAST waves]*

good-bye on cue] . . . and the household is now happily preparing for his long-awaited return. *[The tableau breaks into a three-ring circus of domesticity: People moving furniture, plates being cleaned, furniture being tossed, plates being tossed, stacks of plates, precariously balanced, being carried back and forth, etc. WILKENS and BRIDGET stand Center directing the activities]*

JEFF. *[Crossing from Up Right to Down Left]* Where do you want this bench?

WILKENS. *[Pointing Down Left]* There.

MONICA. *[Crossing from Down Left to Up Right]* And the silver?

BRIDGET. *[Pointing Up Right]* Over there.

CINDY. *[Coming out of the bedroom]* And the baby?

WILKENS. On the bed should be fine. *[They continue their chores for a second and then freeze, realizing what they have just heard]*

CAST. *[They do a take]* Baby???? *[A crash of dishes]*

PARTRIDGE. *[Entering at upper level as if coming from outside. Oblivious to the trauma in the house, he is full of joy at the Squire's return]* The Squire's coming. *[Everyone in the CAST panics. CINDY screams and tosses baby to another servant (PAULA)]*

PAULA. Here, you take it! *[Tosses it to MIKE, who begins to play with it]*

MIKE. Goo! Goo!

CAST. *[Impatient with him]* Hey!!!

MIKE. Hide it! *[Tossing it back to CINDY. She puts it under the bed covers (perhaps on the Up Right platform)]*

CINDY. *[Relieved]* There.

CAST. *[Sighs. ALLWORTHY enters. They bow and curtsy]* Welcome home, Squire.

ALLWORTHY. It's good to be home. Bridget, darling. *[Embracing his sister]*

BRIDGET. *[To Allworthy]* Tell us, how was your journey?

JIM. Yes, tell us! *[He slides a chair under Squire, forcing him to sit]*

ALLWORTHY. Dear ones. I would like to chat with you, but I have been driven by one thought since I left London and that is to once again *[yawning]* sleep on my own bed.

CAST. *[They panic]* Bed?!!!

MIKE & MONICA. *[Running from extreme Right and Left, they both jump on the Squire's lap]* It's awfully early to be going to bed. *[BRIDGET massages his shoulders. EVERYONE talks at once]*

ALLWORTHY. [*Pushing Mike and Monica off*] Enough! [*They stop*] All of you back. [*EVERYONE takes a step back at the same time. ALLWORTHY crosses to his bed*] I don't know what you are up to, but mark me . . . [*pulls back covers*] . . . I will uncover the reasons for it . . . [*Double take by ALLWORTHY. The CAST cringe*] There is a baby in my bed.

CAST. [*With obvious guilt*] A what?

ALLWORTHY. [*He crosses with the baby and shows it to her*] Bridget, what is this?

BRIDGET. [*Looking under the blanket*] Why, Squire, it's a boy. [*He hands baby to Bridget*]

ALLWORTHY. [*Addressing the crowd*] One of you must know something about the disposition of this child.

JENNY JONES. [*Steps forward*] I am the child's mother.

CAST. [*In unison*] Gasp!

JENNY. [*Crossing to the Squire and kneeling before him*] My hope was that you would take this child and provide the care I could never give it.

ALLWORTHY. [*Gently lifting her up*] Jenny. You know it is within my power to punish you for what you have done. But . . . I shall only ask you to leave this estate.

JENNY. [*Kissing his hand*] Squire, I can only say that someday you will know the truth of this matter. [*She exits Down Left*]

ALLWORTHY. [*Crosses to Bridget*] Bridget, if you will agree to take care of this child, I will assume guardianship. [*Taking child*] We shall call him Jones, after his mother, and . . .

BRIDGET. . . and Thomas, after you.

ALLWORTHY. [*The name pleases the Squire*] So be it! Welcome to your new home, Tom Jones. [*He lifts the baby high into the air and draws back a wet hand. Does take and wipes hand off on his pants. The LIGHTS change to the higher level*]

Scene 3

CINDY. [*Crossing to the higher area. As the narrative is spoken the Bridget/Blifil story is acted out in the style of a dumb show*] These were the unusual circumstances in which our hero, Tom, came to be the ward of Squire Allworthy.

PAULA. [*CAPTAIN BLIFIL enters scene*] Enter an unpleasant character by the name of Captain Blifil.

CINDY. [*BRIDGET walks in*] A chance meeting with Bridget . . . [*They bump*] . . . becomes a liason . . . [*They kiss*] . . . and then matrimony. [*They hold hands*]

PAULA. Nature blessed the marriage of Blifil and Bridget. [*A baby appears in BRIDGET's arms*] A fine young boy, although several months premature.

CINDY. They named him . . .

CINDY & PAULA. Blifil.

PAULA. This charming scene would last only a year, for Captain Blifil would die of apoplexy. [*CAPTAIN BLIFIL dies and the dumb show ends. LIGHT comes up on FIELDING Center*]

Scene 4

FIELDING. The next sixteen years would find Tom and Blifil raised as brothers. [*BLIFIL enters reading a book and sits down to read*] Master Blifil had a remarkable disposition for one his age. Tom? Well, it was the general consensus that Tom was born to be hung. [*A young TOM enters chasing a rather buxom SERVANT. As they run behind the bed we hear a loud crack of a paddle and TOM reappears with SQUARE and THWACKUM, his teachers. (NOTE: It is important that the director utilize Square and Thwackum as a means for showing the moral hypocrisy to be found in Tom's England. They are not unlike twin Tartuffes)*]

SQUARE. [*Dragging Tom in by the ear*] Must we do this every day?

THWACKUM. [*Practicing his swing with a paddle, as BLIFIL provides his stool for the paddling*] Will there be no end to your trickery, lying, petty theft, and fighting? [*Spanks him. BLIFIL, SQUARE, and THWACKUM enjoy this*]

BLIFIL. [*Grabs the paddle and takes his turn at hitting Tom*] And trifling with young ladies.

SQUARE & THWACKUM. Ladies? Ha!

SQUARE. Trollops! [*THWACKUM takes the paddle from Blifil*]

THWACKUM. And tarts! [*He spansks Tom*]

TOM. [*Rubbing his behind*] Masters Square, Thwackum, please understand that I never endeavor to do wrong.

THWACKUM. The problem is that you never endeavor to do right. [*Spanks him*]

SQUARE. Well said, Thwackum. [*SQUARE and THWACKUM smile at each other*]

BLIFIL. [*Using the opportunity to taunt Tom*] I believe Tom may

not be totally responsible for his actions. After all, the only certainty in his life is that he is illegitimate.

TOM. [*Attacks Blifil. BLIFIL escapes by running between Tom's legs*] You little twit! [*SQUARE and THWACKUM stop Tom*]

THWACKUM. Jones! Master Blifil was only trying to save you from your . . .

SQUARE & THWACKUM. . . . evil tendencies.

SQUARE. Now perhaps we can make time for your lessons. [*TOM sits down on the stool*]

BLIFIL. [*Walks by and whispers to Tom*] Bastard! [*And runs off*]

TOM. That does it! [*TOM, followed by SQUARE and THWACKUM, chase BLIFIL. When FIELDING enters Down Left, the chase turns into a slow-motion sequence*]

Scene 5

FIELDING. [*Entering the scene*] You have now seen our hero in action, or should I say the world in action against our hero. [*The chase is back to regular motion and BLIFIL, TOM, SQUARE, and THWACKUM run out*] Despite this, Tom did have one supporter. On the neighboring estate there lived a . . .

WESTERN. [*Played by JIM, enters riding on another actor's shoulders*] Mr. Western. He was a robust man given to drinking, hunting, and wenching. [*TOM rides in on another's shoulders. WESTERN waves to Tom*] Good day, Jones!

TOM. Good day to you, sir. How is your lovely daughter, Sophia? [*SOPHIA rides in*]

WESTERN. [*Points at Sophia and her horse. SOPHIA waves*] There she is now. [*He slaps Sophia's horse as it passes by. The HORSE bolts. A chase ensues. TOM catches up with Sophia and pulls her off her horse. SOPHIA and TOM fall to floor Down Left; she falls on Tom's arm*]

TOM. Ow!!

SOPHIA. [*Pulling it*] Your arm?

TOM. Ow! [*WESTERN walks up with Tom's horse, as well as his own*]

SOPHIA. Oh, Tom. Careful, it could be broken. [*Freeze as SOPHIA pulls on his arm once more*]

Scene 6

WESTERN. Sophia's fears were realized.

SOPHIA & TOM. Tom had broken his arm.

WESTERN'S HORSE. [*In a Mr. Ed voice*] Sophia was now eighteen years of age . . .

SOPHIA. . . and a truly remarkable girl.

TOM. Tom had known her all his life.

WESTERN. But it was only now that he began to see her and . . .

TOM. . . himself . . .

ALL. . . in a different light. [*HORSES and WESTERN exit Left. The LIGHTS change. SOPHIA and TOM are in a different place, perhaps a forest. They are playfully chasing each other. TOM catches Sophia. They fall laughing*]

TOM. [*Getting serious*] Sophia? Who am I?

SOPHIA. [*Thinking he's joking*] Oh, Tom.

TOM. [*He is frustrated and stands up*] They speak of my exploits. The county calls me a lecher and a rogue. Sophia? Who is this Tom Jones they speak of?

SOPHIA. [*Trying to comfort him*] I don't know Tom. I've never met him.

TOM. [*Her response calms Tom*] Do you remember when we were young? I gave you a gift.

SOPHIA. A small songbird. I loved you for it.

TOM. [*Takes her in his arms*] And now?

SOPHIA. [*They are about to kiss. SOPHIA pulls away*] We're not children any more, Tom Jones. I just can't be sure of you. [*SOPHIA runs off. TOM, upset, freezes. FIELDING walks into the picture and stands by Tom*]

Scene 7

FIELDING. I trust, good people, that you will not feel pity for poor Tom . . . [*He crosses to the bed and hops in. He is surrounded by the members of the household*] . . . for fate, as it often does, has heaped upon Tom an even greater calamity. [*TOM runs to the bed and then crosses to SQUARE, THWACKUM, and BLIFIL, who are studying the Squire's will Down Right*]

TOM. Good heavens. The Squire? He is not . . .

SQUARE. He clings to life. [*Passing will to Thwackum; then with a smile*] But only by a thread.