

## Esej komparatystyczny

# GOTHIC FIELDING? PHILIP JAMES DE LOUTHERBOURG'S *TOM JONES*

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**Słowa kluczowe:** Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, Philip James de Louthembourg, architektura neogotycka, estetyka gotycka, Salvator Rosa, *banditti*

**Abstrakt:** Jakub Lipski, GOTYCKI FIELDING? *TOM JONES* WEDŁUG PHILIPA JAMESA DE LOUTHERBOURGA. „PORÓWNANIA” 2 (21), 2017, S. 259-268. ISSN 1733-165X. Artykuł poświęcony jest trzem „gotyckim” ilustracjom P.J. de Louthembourg, przedstawiającym wybrane sceny z powieści *Tom Jones* Henry’ego Fieldinga. Artykuł podejmuje próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie, dlaczego ilustrator zrezygnował z ukazania gotyckich motywów obecnych w powieści Fieldinga, takich jak szczegółowy opis rezydencji Pana Allworthy’ego, i zamiast tego dokonał modyfikacji scen, które w wydaniu powieściowym nie mają z estetyką gotycką nic wspólnego. W konkluzji przypadek „gotyckiego Fieldinga” ukazany zostaje w kontekście istotnych zjawisk na rynku wydawniczym końca XVIII wieku.

**Abstract:** Jakub Lipski, GOTHIC FIELDING? PHILIP JAMES DE LOUTHERBOURG'S *TOM JONES*. „PORÓWNANIA” 2 (21), 2017, P. 259-268. ISSN 1733-165X. This article confronts P.J. de Louthembourg's drawings of the selected scenes from *Tom Jones* with the possible “Gothic” content in Henry Fielding's novel. Commenting on Fielding's pictorialism, I argue that the most suitable scene from *Tom Jones* would have been the actual Gothic mansion of Mr. Allworthy, but the scene does not attract the illustrator's attention. Then, I discuss de Louthembourg's patterns of Gothicizing the selected scenes in the manner of Salvator Rosa, which in the original depend on the mock-heroic or the grotesque. The article concludes with raising more general questions about the paradigms of de-contextualization and re-contextualization in late 18th century print market and book illustration.

In a well-known reading of *Tom Jones*, Dorothy van Ghent came up with the following architectural parallel: “We may think of *Tom Jones* as a complete architectural figure, a Palladian palace perhaps [...]. The structure is all but in the light

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of intelligibility: air circulates around and over it and through it" (van Ghent 80). The parallel proved attractive enough to be elaborated upon by others. Frederick Hilles offered a comparative reading of Fielding's novel and his friend Ralph Allen's Palladian mansion Prior Park on the outskirts of Bath, which was designed by John Wood, the Younger, also the author of the celebrated Royal Crescent (Hilles 91-110). Martin Battestin, too, indicated that real life estates would have been the implied presence behind Fielding's narrative composition: "The same axioms that determined the form of Ralph Allen's 'stately house' at Prior Park or Lord Pembroke's bridge at Wilton have, in a sense, determined the form of *Tom Jones*" (Battestin 1974: 149). As such, Fielding's novel used to be treated as sharp contrast to the emerging Gothic novel, characterised by loose organisation and occasional lack of coherence. Seen in this light, the label "Gothic Fielding" is an oxymoron.

On the other hand, in the recent decades there have appeared some revisionist readings of Fielding and the origins of Gothic fiction, which, surprisingly enough, have pointed to the possible Gothic undertones in Fielding's Palladian aesthetic. Fielding's last novel *Amelia* has been seen as potentially the most Gothic, a standpoint that was encouraged by Claude Rawson's seminal reading of the novel as testimony to the gradual "darkening" of Fielding's literary mood and the fragmentation of a sense of totality he used to offer in the earlier texts (Rawson 96-97). Accordingly, for Scott Robertson in *Amelia's* atmosphere and vivid representation of prison spaces "one can detect an early trace of what was to become a favourite motif of the gothic novel" (Robertson 176). Arguably, the strongest claim for "Gothic Fielding" has been put forward by John Allen Stevenson in the essay "*Tom Jones*, Jacobitism, and the rise of Gothic". Stevenson makes his point in a provocative manner: "I would like to complicate [...] genealogical speculations a bit by introducing into the discussion a name and a title never mentioned [...] or mentioned only for purposes of contrast. I mean Henry Fielding and *Tom Jones*" (Stevenson 16). The critic then continues by suggesting that in introducing anti-Jacobite elements, manifesting "an oddly gothic flavour", the writer "developed a rhetoric that, at times, bears a notable resemblance to the world of gothic novels" (Stevenson 16); in particular, the Gothic aspects in *Tom Jones* are the motif of "the ghostly persistence of a dead claim" and the paradigm of doubling (Stevenson 21).

My aim in this article will be to address the question of "Gothic Fielding" on the aesthetic rather than ideological level, in order to confront the text with Philip James de Loutherbourg's drawings of selected scenes. In particular, I will attempt to address the question of selection - why would de Loutherbourg ignore the actual Gothic content in the novel and "Gothicise" scenes having little in common with the target aesthetic.

When *Tom Jones* was written, the Gothic revival had not yet fully affected the realm of fiction. On the other hand, its early phase - the architectural revival - was already at its peak. It is a telling coincidence that the foremost achievement of Geor-

gian Gothic – Horace Walpole’s restructuring of the Strawberry Hill estate – was initiated in 1749, the year of *Tom Jones*’s publication. As a matter of fact, in spite of the popular critical concept of Fielding’s Palladianism, the author himself was allegedly much more enthusiastic about the modern medievalist trends. This would have been reflected by the choice of the “*Gothick Stile*” for Mr. Allworthy’s estate Paradise Hall – the moral and narrative centre of *Tom Jones*. Martin Battestin, the same who treated Ralph Allen’s Prior Park as the Palladian presence behind the composition of *Tom Jones*, elsewhere speculated about the origins of Paradise Hall. He pointed to Sharpham House in Glastonbury, where Fielding was born (Battestin 2000: 1), and his acquaintance with the architect Sanderson Miller, a close friend of Fielding’s patron and model for Mr Allworthy, George Lyttelton, for whom Miller designed Gothic embellishments, such as a miniature ruined castle, and was to have built a Gothic house (Battestin 2000: 101).

The house did not materialise in real life (due to Lyttelton’s wife’s protests), but was given a literary one instead – in Mr. Allworthy’s Paradise Hall. The description of the estate is perhaps the most pictorial moment in the entire narrative and deserves to be quoted in full:

The Gothick Stile of Building could produce nothing nobler than Mr. *Allworthy*’s House. There was an Air of Grandeur in it, that struck you with Awe, and rival’d the Beauties of the best Grecian Architecture; and it was as commodious within, as venerable without.

It stood on the South-east side of a Hill, but nearer the Bottom than the Top of it, so as to be sheltered from the North-east by a Grove of old Oaks, which rose above it in a gradual Ascent of near half a Mile, and yet high enough to enjoy a most charming Prospect of the Valley beneath.

In the midst of the Grove was a fine Lawn sloping down towards the House, near the Summit of which rose a plentiful Spring, gushing out of a Rock covered with Firs, and forming a constant Cascade of about thirty Foot, not carried down a regular Flight of Steps, but tumbling in a natural Fall over the broken and mossy Stones, till it came to the bottom of the Rock; then running off in a pebly Channel, that with many lesser Falls winded along, till it fell into a Lake at the Foot of the Hill, about a quarter of a Mile below the House on the South Side, and which was seen from every Room in the Front. Out of this Lake, which filled the Center of a beautiful Plain, embellished with Groupes of Beeches and Elms, and fed with Sheep, issued a River, that for several Miles was seen to meander through an amazing Variety of Meadows and Woods, till it emptied itself into the Sea, with a large Arm of which, and an Island beyond it, the Prospect was closed. On the right of this Valley opened another of less Extent, adorned with several Villages, and terminated by one of the Towers of an old ruined Abbey, grown over with Ivy, and Part of the Front which remained still entire.

The left Hand Scene presented the View of a very fine Park, composed of very unequal Ground, and agreeably varied with all the Diversity that Hills, Lawns, Wood and Water,

laid out with admirable Taste, but owing less to Art than to Nature, could give. Beyond this the country gradually rose into a Ridge of wild Mountains, the Tops of which were above the Clouds. (Fielding 1975: 42-43)

Of course, this is not how Gothic castles would be described in late 18th century fiction, but the passage does reveal some stock Gothic tropes that would later define the sentimental Gothic aesthetic in the 1780s and 1790s. In particular, it offers a reconciliation of what later aesthetic thinkers would distinguish as the sublime, the beautiful and the picturesque – a quality that was to become Ann Radcliffe’s trademark several decades later. There is little that we know about the Gothic interiors of the estate, and Paradise Hall, ideologically speaking, does not become a space of entrapment and desubjectification (even if it does become a setting for unjust persecution). On the other hand, the outsides, as depicted in the passage, as well as the precisely described environs capture the essence of the mid-century architectural revival and also its artistic (visual and literary) representations: “an Air of Grandeur” striking with “Awe”; surrounding “mossy Stones” and rocks; the neighbourhood of “an old Ruined Abbey, grown over with Ivy”; and the background of “a Ridge of wild Mountains, the Tops of which were above the Clouds”.

Paradise Hall was not the only Gothic edifice to embellish the pages of Fielding’s fiction. *A Journey from this World to the Next* (1743), recounting the narrator’s travels in the nether world, features the “palace of Death”, the institutional centre of the underworld:

Its outside, indeed, appeared extremely magnificent. Its structure was of the Gothic order; vast beyond imagination, the whole pile consisting of black marble. Rows of immense yews form an amphitheatre round it of such height and thickness that no ray of the sun ever perforates this grove, where black eternal darkness would reign was it not excluded by innumerable lamps which are placed in pyramids round the grove; so that the distant reflection they cast on the palace, which is plentifully gilt with gold on the outside, is inconceivably solemn. To this I may add the hollow murmur of winds constantly heard from the grove, and the very remote sound of roaring waters. Indeed, every circumstance seems to conspire to fill the mind with horror and consternation as we approach to this palace [...] (Fielding 1973: 20-21)

Despite the tinge of oriental fashions, the passage is reminiscent of contemporaneous descriptions of the prisons of the Inquisition, an analogy that seems supported by the traveller’s encounter with “an inquisitor-general” inside. Similar edifices can be found in imprisonment narratives, which, in turn, had an impact on late 18th century Gothic fiction. For example, in Ann Radcliffe’s *The Italian* (1796-7) the prisons of the Inquisition are made of “walls, of immense height, and strengthened by innumerable massy bulwarks” and look like “a vast and dreary blank”

(Radcliffe 196). This time Fielding does present the interiors of the place, but again, they do not match the atmosphere of Gothic dread produced by the outside: "this palace, so awful and tremendous without, is all gay and sprightly within; [...] we soon lost all those dismal and gloomy ideas we had contracted in approaching it" (Fielding 1973: 21).

In *Tom Jones*, then, Fielding not only repeated the idea to make a Gothic mansion the centre of the universe, but also followed the very same agenda of a discrepancy between the outside and the inside. "Horror" and "Awe" inspired by the Gothic are counterbalanced by the comforting interiors. In this, Fielding's Gothic moments are illustrative of 18th century medievalism before the emergence of Gothic fiction, when quasi-medieval architectural elements typically enriched homely spaces. The literary transformation of the Gothic setting into a space of danger can be traced in Horace Walpole's transposition of Strawberry Hill into the realm of fiction. In a well-known letter to his friend William Cole (9 March 1765), Walpole identified the origins of *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) in a nightmare that he had in his Gothic villa, as well as drawing parallels between his house and the fictitious castle (Walpole v.1 88). The discrepancy between the brightly-coloured and lavish Strawberry Hill estate and the Gothic castle in the novel is striking, and this would have been noticed by the illustrators of *The Castle of Otranto*. As Peter Lindfield has recently shown, the subsequent illustrators of *Otranto* did not follow up on Walpole's suggestion to perceive the castle through the prism of Strawberry Hill and depicted the setting as properly Gothic and properly medieval (Lindfield 46-63).

I would now like to bridge the gap between *Tom Jones* and de Louthembourg's drawings by recapitulating on what I have written so far. Architectural medievalism in the 1740s and 1750s laid the foundations of the literary Gothic revival on the aesthetic level by introducing pictorial motifs that would prove highly inspirational in the period of the "efflorescence" of the Gothic. On the other hand, as represented by Fielding, the mid-century Gothic depended on an aesthetic of "simulacrum", as Jean Baudrillard would have it. That is, it did not produce any Gothic essence and depended on the policy of "void" imitation. As Jerrold Hogle has written on Strawberry Hill, it was generally fake; something depending for its identity on imitation and multiplication of Gothic elements as known from prints, catalogues and other visual sources - an edifice without an essential, architectural identity (Hogle 23). Fielding's mansions illustrate this inner emptiness - they are Gothic only in the outside.

It is now 1775 and a popular painter of sublime and picturesque sceneries, including Gothic ruins and castles, turns to *Tom Jones*. In 1775, the Swiss-French artist Philip James de Louthembourg (1740-1812) had lived in London for only 4 years and was still in the process of making his name. His biggest achievements were to come in 1781, when he became member of the Royal Academy and started putting on his quasi-theatricals known as the *Eidophusikon*. In the meantime, de Louthembourg was employed by David Garrick at the Drury Lane Theatre to work on scenery,





<http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/384068>

**Figure 1:** Philip James de Loutherbourg, *Tom Jones Assisting Molly Seagrim in the Churchyard*, 1775, drawing, Gift of Joseph Baillio, in honor of Philippe de Montebello, 2008, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.



<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/57440>

**Figure 2:** Victor Marie Picot, after Philip James de Loutherbourg, *Tom Jones & Mr Western Combating with Blifil and Thwackum*, 1782, etching, Yale University Art Gallery.

costumes and the machinery and was exhibiting the kind of paintings he had been known for to the Parisian audiences, including “landscapes, pastorals, *banditti*, and shipwrecks” (Groom 127).

The *Tom Jones* drawings were made with the dynamic print market in mind; given the size and format, they would have been meant for display beyond the book context – not as illustrations but as framed exhibits. The first was *Tom Jones, assisting Molly Seagrim, In the Church Yard and Repelling her Adversaries* drawn in 1775 (Figure 1) and engraved shortly after by the popular engraver Joseph Bartalozzi.

The second piece was *A Boxing Match*, now lost, which de Loutherbourg exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1776. Later, it was engraved by Victor Marie Picot as *Tom Jones & Mr Western Combating with Blifil and Thwackum* (Figure 2).

There was certainly a third roundel, also lost – *Tom Jones Threatening Partridge* – preserved in an engraving by Picot (Figure 3). There might have been other drawings, too: A 1780 *Catalogue of Prints* lists “Four circles” from *Tom Jones* after de Loutherbourg (*A Catalogue of Prints* 40), whereas the estate sale on 19 June 1812 listed eleven prints from *Tom Jones* (see Stein and Holmes 164). There is no way of proving, though, that these prints were not repeated, that initially there were eleven original drawings.

The drawings are good illustrations of the artist’s manner – a successful blend of French rococo and Salvator Rosa-like sublime and picturesque qualities. When in England, de Loutherbourg was true to his original aesthetic, as well as welcoming the particularities of the English landscape, including products of the Gothic revival, still at its peak in the final decades of the 18th century.



<http://artgallery.yale.edu/collections/objects/57448>

**Figure 3:** Victor Marie Picot, after Philip James de Louthembourg, *Tom Jones Threatening Partridge*, 1782, etching, Yale University Art Gallery.

What certainly draws attention is de Louthembourg's selection of material. The painter does not choose the originally Gothic content, the possible reason for which I have addressed before. Nor does he represent the scenes that are the most important for the narrative or the most iconic. The choice of the mock-heroic battle in the churchyard cannot surprise; even if it is only a peripheral embellishment in Fielding's novel, it is a truly memorable one. The other two scenes, in turn, depict moments that even a careful reader of *Tom Jones* would find difficult to locate immediately. Be that as it may, the three pictures are very much similar, and the similarities are both structural and thematic. First of all, in a manner reminiscent of Salvator Rosa, de Louthembourg stages figures of rather limited size against domineering backgrounds. In the first drawing, Tom Jones defends Molly in the shadow of an impressive parish church, the size of which would have been much more appropriate for a cathedral or an abbey. The Gothic church is conveniently grown over with ivy and partially covered by the ominous tree branch. In the second print, Tom Jones and Partridge are dwarfed by an old tree reminiscent of the one in the previous picture, and the scene is set against a natural background, revealing the top of a Gothic tower in the centre. In the third print, the figures are again dominated by natural scenery complemented by the monument on the right, this time reminiscent of the French rococo. As for the thematic choices, the three pictures depict characters engaged in fights – from the mock-heroic battle in a church cemetery, which, however, is here deprived of the mocking dimension, to vivid fisticuffs.

As I mentioned before, de Louthembourg's drawings are not strictly speaking illustrations; nevertheless, I do think it is possible to approach them as such. Writing about book illustration in the 18th century, Philip Stewart points out that even if the text does not determine the way it is illustrated, "there are ways in which it can flag the attention of a potential illustrator" (Stewart 2). On the other hand, it is possible for the illustrator to engage with the text by way of exposing, and thus emphasizing, scenes that are not necessarily central to the narrative. If this be the case, playing the role of a framing device, illustrations may suggest alternative readings and negotiate the alleged "authorial message". De Louthembourg's pieces exemplify the second possibility – they do not seem to depict what might have been possibly "flagged" by Fielding; on the contrary, they frame *Tom Jones* as the kind of story it is not, with a quasi-Gothic or Salvator Rosa-like universe of gloomy natural set-



<http://www.late.org.uk/art/artworks/mortimer-rocky-landscape-with-banditti-400342>

**Figure 4:** Manner of John Hamilton Mortimer, *Rocky Landscape with Bandits*, c. 1770-80, oil on canvas, © Tate, CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported).

tings and *banditti*. De Louthembourg picked those scenes that allowed for their transposition into the genre of “landscape with bandits”, thus adapting the narrative to the pre-romantic tastes of the 1770s and 1780s. Salvatorian landscapes with *banditti* enjoyed a considerable popularity in the 1770s, also in the circles of the Royal Academy. Apart from De Louthembourg, the other important painter who exhibited *banditti* at the time was John Hamilton Mortimer (1740-1779), whose “manner” proved attractive for a number of imitators (see Figure 4).

Coming to a conclusion, I would argue that de Louthembourg’s strategies of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation should be seen in the light of the fashion for anthologies known as “*The Beauties of...*”. The first *Beauties of Fielding* were published in 1782 (followed by two further editions in the same year; it might not have been a coincidence that the two prints were also engraved in 1782), but they were preceded by a number of multi-author anthologies, such as *The Beauties of English Prose* (1772). The drawings stem from the same agenda of depriving the selected scenes and passages of their original contexts and adjusting them to the target aesthetic. When *Tom Jones* was first published, many of its critical readers pointed to immoral content. But only a few decades later, the 1782 anthology adjusted Fielding’s aesthetic to the prevalent sentimental tastes. As Daniel Cook puts it, “No brothels, adultery, nakedness, bawdy language, or even Tom Jones’s many escapades, are to be found in *The Beauties of Fielding*” (Cook 290). If “sentimental Fielding” was a possibility, then “Gothic Fielding” was another one. It is, of course, paradoxical that in adapting *Tom Jones* for the Gothic tastes de Louthembourg ignores the actual Gothic content. But this choice, in a way, is illustrative of the discontinuities in the Gothic tradition itself; in other words, the divide separating the aesthetic of the architectural Gothic revival and late 18th century Gothic fiction. There may be traces of the former in Fielding’s narrative, but in the three pictures I have shown de Louthembourg draws the novel closer to the latter tradition.



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