Fielding's tragedy of tragedies: Papal fallibility and Scriblerian satire

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Fielding’s Tragedy of Tragedies: Papal Fallibility and Scriblerian Satire

Howard D. Weinbrot

Fielding’s Tragedy of Tragedies (1731), we are often informed, disvalues its contemporaries “before a grander vision of the past.” That belief is shared by several of Fielding’s ablest readers, who regard him as a young officer in the Scriblerian army battling the legions of Night. We thus hear that Fielding’s comedy owes to Pope “almost its whole vision of modernity” and that its allusions to Swift “invoke his vision of a filthy modern world, thoroughly debased from the Vergilian world.” Modernity is no more “than a collection of improbable situations, dead metaphors . . . and a total language of sound and fury without significance” in a shabby time “unable to conceive a past better than itself.” Another critic tells us that Scriblerus Secundus is “a perfect example of a Swiftian Modern”; yet another says that Fielding demonstrates his “allegiance to his scriblerian predecessors.”


Several of Fielding’s plays have been performed in London in recent years—with critical and popular success. We now can applaud the rise of the novelist while lamenting the decline of the dramatist. We also can suspect that the notion of Fielding as dour Scriblerian relates to the notion of Fielding as perpetually Walpole’s enemy. This view has been exploded by Martin and Ruthe Battestin, Thomas R. Cleary, Bertrand A. Goldgar, Robert D. Hume, and Brian McCrea in works cited in this and subsequent notes. See also Thomas Lockwood, “Fielding and the Licensing Act,” Huntington Library Quarterly 50 (1987): 379-93. I am indebted to Hugh Amory, Thomas Lockwood, and Eric Rothstein, whose helpful response to this essay does not denote universal approbation.
Fielding's Tragedy of Tragedies

As Fielding might say, I have only one objection to this verity—namely, that it is not true. It overlooks three troubling contradictions. One is that such dark language makes heavy weather out of so light a play. The second is that if Fielding cloned Scriblerian gloom Pope and Swift should not have been so suspicious of him. The third is that Fielding’s contemporaries sometimes regarded his burlesques as exemplums of the dangerous dulness that Pope satirized. Fielding’s critical friend Thomas Cooke observes regarding one of the chief characters in Tom Thumb (1730), “While . . . Doodle’s respected, / Othello and Hamlet are wholly neglected.” Though that judgment is excessive, the Tragedy of Tragedies surely is a crude and rude comic farce designed to evoke laughter, banish solemnity, and entertain us with Noodle, Doodle, Foodle, and a woman named Mustacha. Reconsideration of Fielding’s presumed Scriblerian allegiance suggests an alternative reading of the Tragedy of Tragedies. The alternative is consistent with contemporary response and production history. It also helps to explain why Pope was cool to Fielding by suggesting that Pope legitimately could have thought Fielding cool to him. One part of this alternative seems to me demonstrably valid; the other seems to me at least a plausible if not probable hypothesis.

I. The Scriblerians’ Creed and Fielding’s Creed

As the preeminent Scriblerians, Swift and Pope embodied premises more severe than those of Gay and Arbuthnot. Pope’s admirer Walter Harte well captures one aspect of their often dehumanizing severity. His Essay on Satire (1730) observes that “The good Scriblerus . . . displays / The reptile Rhimesters of these later days.” From at least 1726 for Swift and 1728 for Pope, these Scriblerians held that the corruption of modern learning was a function of the corruption of Walpolean-Hanoverian government. For Swift, if not wholly for Pope, an enduring republic of letters was possible only in a stable and honest monarchy and ministry wedded to a “country party” and guided by a dominant, protected national religion. Failure to meet such conditions endangers the nation, its best values, and its arts that require continuity with the classical past. The consequence of moral chaos is well exemplified in the change from the dark to the darker final lines to Pope’s Dunciad Variorum of 1729 and the Dunciad in Four Books of 1743. In the first, “Thy hand great Dulness! lets the curtain fall, / And Universal Darkness covers all.”

2 Thomas Cooke, The Candidate for the Bays. A Poem . . . Written by Scriblerus Tertius (London, 1730), 2, on which we also read that Ben Jonson’s plays and rules of art are abandoned: “Tom Thumb and such Stuff alone tickle this Age.” The theme of displacement of the good by the bad, of the classical rules by modern irregularity, was a commonplace of Scriblerian rhetoric and rage. The Candidate uses some of the Dunciad’s language of murder, punishment, and banishment, but is far lighter in tone. For another equation of Fielding’s farce and dulness, see Giles Jacobs, The Memoir: Or, Letters Satyrical, Panegyrical, Serious and Humorous, On the Present Time (London, 1733), 3, 13, 14.


On the face of it the *Tragedy of Tragedies* may indeed seem to extend the Scriblerian agenda. Fielding of course displays that apparent genealogy in his assumed name, H. Scriblerus Secundus. Like Swift and Pope he uses the familiar device of a speaker undermining his own words while proudly undermining his culture’s institutions. The speaker is a pedant who often is spectacularly wrong about much of what he says, whether in the mock-learned Preface or notes at the bottom of the page. Like the Wotton-figure trapped in the footnotes to later editions of *A Tale of a Tub* (1704) he explicates the obvious, and like the prime annotator in the *Dunciad Variorum* he mistakes the obvious and squabbles with other learned fools. His interpretive guides us away from his interpretations. He also suggests that the disruptive Moderns seek to replace, if not to annihilate, both the Ancients and Christianity as continuous forces in western culture. Fielding’s Scriblerus Secundus, for example, is “confident that a more perfect System of Ethicks, as well as Oeconomy, might be compiled out of [British familiar proverbs] than is at present extant, either in the Works of the Antient Philosophers or those more valuable, as more voluminous, ones of the modern Divines.” Similarly, Swift’s even more confident tub-thumping Modern assures us that his pronouncements are “literally true this Minute I am writing.” He also claims “an absolute Authority in Right, as the freshest Modern, which gives me a Despotick Power over all Authors before me.”

Scriblerus Secundus convinces himself that the *Tragedy of Tragedies* he annotates is the Elizabethan, perhaps Shakespearean, font of all modern tragedy. He even corrupts the university by offering a pittance to train a research assistant in the proper mode of proceeding. Fielding’s Modern will hire “a young Commentator from the University, who is reading over all modern Tragedies, at Five Shillings a Dozen, and collecting all that they have stole from our Author, which shall shortly be added as an Appendix to this Work” (46). In *A Tale of a Tub*, as in the *Dunciad*, as presumably in the *Tragedy of Tragedies* there is a “vast involuntary throng” that struggles less and less while falling into Dulness’ power. They “Roll in her Vortex, and her pow’r confess” (1743: 4: 82–84). On this hypothesis, Fielding sings the singers of a declining world; and on this hypothesis Scriblerus père et fils are strikingly alike.

Or not, as the case may be. In 1729, after all, Fielding was closer to the government than to the opposition. Pope’s allies in the generally opposition and occasionally Jacobite *Grub-street Journal* probably would not have started a sustained and angry post-*Tragedy of Tragedies* campaign against Fielding’s comedies if they thought him sympathetic to opposition rhetoric. In the *Dunciad* Pope labels Fielding’s friend Thomas Cooke a counterfeit Prior and agent of Dulness. Cooke probably would not have called himself Scriblerus Tertius and


(continued)
Scriblerus Quartus and Pope “a peevish, mishapen’d diminutive Man” if he did not think that Scriblerus Secundus agreed. The Scriblerus Maximus behind *The Art of Scribling* (1733) was friendly to Pope and hostile to Fielding’s cousin and patron Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. He probably would not have called *Tom Thumb* one of the plays that “breeds Monsters Nature never saw” if he thought Fielding of his party. Such readers may have seen what much of their posterity has ignored: whatever Fielding’s respect for Swift and Pope, parts of the *Tragedy of Tragedies* nonetheless satirize Scriblerians who regard the modern world as a gateway to cultural hell. That splendid farce treats its Scriblerian inheritance with the independence that *Tom Jones* treats its epic inheritance—it adapts form and cleanses violent content to produce a new literary species.

Fielding’s ambivalent response seems predictable. The *Dunciad* attacks impoverished authors, several of Fielding’s friends, and the mingling of genres in the theater and elsewhere as an emblem of national collapse induced by the governing classes (1: 53–76, 227–40; 2: 213–26; 3: 229–44). “That once was Britain” (3: 109) we hear regarding a now intellectually moribund nation whose imminent restoration of Dulness will be aided by dramatic farce “to Nature’s laws unknown” (3: 237). Smithfield, Pope says in his second note, hitherto exemplified the vulgar theatrical “Taste of the Rabble”; the dunces brought it “to the Theatres of Covent-Garden, Lincolns-inn-Fields, and the Hay-Market,” where it then became “the reigning Pleasures of the Court and Town” (1: 21). Given some of Fielding’s audience at the Hay Market, he could not have been pleased by the implicit title of docent to Dulness: Frederick Prince of Wales attended two performances of *Tom Thumb*, and Sir Robert Walpole attended three. The Hanoverian princesses Amelia and Caroline also later attended the *Tragedy of Tragedies.*

Moreover, Fielding chafed at Thomas Cooke’s “dictatorial” and “ tiresome” domination of literary company and requirement “that deference be paid to his opinions.” Fielding’s response to Pope as Scriblerian chafed even more. His unpublished verse poem of 1729 includes attacks on Pope as a squirrel-like “Lilliputian Bard” and impudent schoolboy who can “Give Laws successful to the wiser Crowd.” Fielding shared Lady Mary’s unpublished harshly anti-

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8 For Cooke, see *The Bays Miscellany or Colley Triumphant* (London, 1730), 1; Scriblerus Maximus, *The Art of Scribling, Address’d to All the Scribblers of the Age* (London, 1733), 10.

9 Brian McCrea rightly observes that “Fielding did not share the Scriblerians’ anachronistic ideal for society and politics.” See his *Henry Fielding and the Politics of Mid-Eighteenth-Century England* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981), 97. McCrea notes Fielding’s unscriblerian acceptance of urban trade; that acceptance, however, must be set against his consistent preference for the country and reward of his best or reformed characters with a country life. McCrea’s fourth chapter, “The Uncertain Opposition: The Champion and Jonathan Wild” (78–103), includes other useful remarks regarding Fielding’s uncertain relationship with Pope and the Scriblerians.

10 For such attention and discussion of presumed insults, see the Battestins, *Henry Fielding*, 87, 108–9.

Scriblerian views of the same year. She characterizes Swift and Pope of the *Dunciad* as “A strong Confedracy of Stupid Foes!” able “To stop the progress of o’reflowing Wit.” He may also have shared Lady Mary’s views of Pope and Swift as social upstarts insufficiently respectful of their betters.  

Fielding indeed was among numerous detractors who regarded Pope as a powerful and partial literary dictator able to arrest the careers of those he and his friends thought unworthy. In 1729, for example, John Dennis calls Pope of the *Dunciad Variorum* an absolute monarch who assumes the “plenary Power” to dub his enemies “Fools, Blockheads, Dunces, and Scoundrels, according to his Sovereign Pleasure” Dennis quotes a letter from Giles Jacob complaining that, as an absolute king, Pope “endeavour’d to exercise the most tyrannick Government” over all except his few favorites who were, Dennis adds, “two or three contemptible Wretches in his own Cabal.”

Like other men of letters Fielding depended upon the public’s purse. Hence as late as 1752 in the *Covent-Garden Journal* he associates Pope with censorship and with the Licensing Act of 1737 that drove Fielding from the stage. He discusses the monarch “King ALEXANDER surnamed POPE” who succeeded Dryden in the kingdom of letters. That king “stretched the Prerogative much farther than his Predecessor,” was “extremely jealous of the Affections of his Subjects,” employed spies to inform him “of the least Suggestion against his Title,” and branded their foreheads “with the word DUNCE” so that “no Bookseller would venture to

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13 Dennis, *Remarks Upon Mr. Pope’s Dunciad,* in The Critical Works of John Dennis, ed. Edward Niles Hooker (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1943), 2: 354 (plenary), 373 (Jacob), 375 (cabal). Like comparable attacks on Pope’s “tyranny,” these are designed to associate Pope with Catholicism and Jacobitism. Cooke, *The Letters of Atticus,* As Printed in The London Journal, In the Years 1729 and 1730, On Various Subjects (London, 1731), 35, Letter 2. 29 March 1729, “An Examination into the Controversy between the Poets and Mr. Pope,” 35. For some other complaints regarding Pope as literary dictator, see James Ralph, *Sawney: An Heroic Poem. Occasion’d by the Dunciad* (London, 1728), 7; Smedley, *Gulliveriana,* vii–ix, xi, xii; *Characters of the Times; Or, An Impartial Account of the Writings, Characters, Education, &c. of several Noblemen and Gentlemen, libell’d in a Preface to a late Miscellaneous Publish’d by P—pe and S—b (London, 1728), 12, 22; *An Essay on the Dunciad An Heroic Poem* (London, 1728), 25–26; *An Essay upon the Taste and Writings of the Present Times* (London, 1728), 3–5, 31–52; *Mr. Gerard,* *An Epistle To the Ingenious Mr. Pope,* In Which The Beauties of His Mind and Body are amply displayed (London, 1734), 4–5; Mr. P—pe’s Picture in Minature, But As Like as it can stand; A Poem: With Notes (London, 1743), 4, 48; Colley Cibber, Another Occasional Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope (London, 1744), 11–12; *The Life of Alexander Pope,* Edg. With Remarks on His Works: To which is added His Last Will (London, 1744), 4–8. As one example of the rhetoric, the author of *Characters* observes that so far as Pope and Swift go, “nothing good or bad, shall be publish’d without their Licence” (12). Nero-like Pope designed to destroy all competitors (22).
print a Word that he wrote." King Alexander "put a total Restraint on the Liberty of the Press: For no Person durst read any Thing which was writ without his Licence and Approbation; and this Licence he granted only to four during his Reign"—Swift, Young, Arbuthnot and Gay, "his principal Courtiers and Favourites."

Perhaps, then, Fielding is not a Scriblerus Secundus seeking "allegiance" with the stern literary establishment. Perhaps, instead, he is the hungry young author who wants to fill his belly and his pockets and does so in part by mocking the establishment mockers of the sort of work that sinned by giving everyone a jolly good time.

Accordingly, Fielding’s unscriblerian Tragedy of Tragedies encourages readers and viewers to become secure, confident, largely apolitical laughers whose movement from joke to joke nullifies the threats that overwhelm Swift, Pope, and their world. Fielding also softens much Scriblerian satire because of personal and religious differences with it.

Fielding well understood the need to check human depravity, but his temperament and his optimistic Anglicanism normally pointed to the laughing rather than snarling muse. As a committed Hanoverian, he mistrusted Catholics and Jacobites, and as an eclectic author who often blended genres, he could both compliment and correct his predecessors, adapt and modify some of their defining traits, and redefine them for his own purposes.

For example, by 1730 Fielding already had embraced the benevolism that characterizes his later work. His uncompleted burlesque version of Juvenal’s sixth satire, a bitter tirade against women, was written about 1725. As Fielding says in a non-ironic note that may have been added later, "the Remainder is in many Places too obscene for chaste Ears" and for English women to whom such vitriol could not apply. He also adds a note to a passage in which Juvenal’s speaker verbally lashes a servant: "The Romans derived from the Greeks an Opinion, that their Slaves were of a Species inferior to themselves. As such a Sentiment is inconsistent with the Temper of Christianity, this Passage loses much of its Force.


16 Martin Battestin illuminates Fielding’s religious contexts in The Moral Basis of Fielding’s Art (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1939) and in several notes to his Wesleyan Editions of Tom Jones (1974) and Amelia (1984). The Battestins’ Henry Fielding also is a valuable guide to Fielding’s moral and religious life and provides necessary biographical contexts for Fielding’s dramatic career.
by being modernized.\textsuperscript{17} Such beliefs and rewriting of models are clear in Fielding's use of Lucian in 1743.

Fielding regarded Lucian as "the Father of true Humour" whom he hoped to translate.\textsuperscript{18} However filial the sentiment, Fielding knew that sons and fathers were different persons in different times. His own Journey from This World to the Next (1743) thus is demonstrably in the Lucianic tradition of dialogues of the dead and of fantastic voyages; but it is demonstrably altered by the traditions of Fontenelle's polish, Fénelon's morality, and Fielding's own benevolence.\textsuperscript{19}

Specifically, Minos the Judge of the underworld appears in "Menippus; Or the Oracle of the Dead," a parody of Ulysses' visit to the underworld in Book 11 of the Odyssey. Menippus tells his friend Philonides about his journey to the underworld, one significant part of which was watching Minos at his almost wholly unforgiving bloody work.

There "we saw him seated on a high throne, with the avenging spirits, furies, and punishments of every kind, as his assessors. On the other side were the malefactors, bound together with a long chain, and dragged towards him." They are chiefly accused by their own internalized sins and generally are punished by extremely unpleasant tortures. Menippus rejoices at their fate, taunts them "most severely," sees the vanity of human wishes, and notes the equivalence among the beautiful and the ugly, the king and the beggar: "their bones were all alike, without so much as a title to distinguish them."\textsuperscript{20} Fielding adapts and strikingly alters this scene in chapter 7 of his Journey from This World to the Next.

Most obviously, he abolishes the brutally naturalistic cynic Menippus as narrator and thus also abolishes his values. In Lucian almost everyone is punished; in Fielding only the most wicked do not get a second chance to purify themselves by returning to the real world. Some unfortunate are "tumbled immediately into the Bottomless Pit," but Fielding spares the reader a vision of Cerberus munching sinners' entrails.\textsuperscript{21} The worst punishment we see is Minos kicking a pompous duke "on the B—ch" (M2, 34). Menippus' taunts, whips, chains, and pleasure in others' pain are anathema to Fielding's moral scheme of redemption and generosity: "no Man enters that Gate without Charity" (M2, 33).

Many so enter, including a middling dramatist who lent his third night's profits to a friend and thus "saved him and his Family from Destruction" (M2, 33); and the criminal who had supported his parents, loved his wife, and was a kind father;
and the desperately poor folk who "had been honest, and as industrious as possible"; and the speaker himself for "general Philanthropy, and private Friendship." Upon passing the gate, they see a "happy Region, whose Beauty, no Painting of the Imagination can describe" (M2, 36). Fielding rejects Lucian's unacceptable point of view while accepting several of his literary devices. He does the same with Pope, whom he compliments in the Preface to the *Tragedy of Tragedies*, and whose politics, poetry, and person, I shall argue, he smilingly denigrates. Fielding clearly is part of a tradition of satiric and annotative irony that, Thomas Cooke says of Fielding, "laughs without Anger." As Robert Hume more recently puts it, Fielding writes "not with animosity, but with gusto."  

Richard Owen Cambridge explains how such non-apocalyptic success-oriented ridicule functions. "Comic Poetry," he says in 1751, "makes sport" with Pedantry and the "Learned Arrogance" that so mislead human understanding. 23 Cambridge follows the "grave irony of Gervantes" rather than the implicit malignity of the *Dunciad* and comparable works (v-vi). He takes up Scriblerus where the Scriblerians left him and separates himself from their activity. He does not lament the decline of civilization, but shows "the vanity and uselessness of many studies"; and he attempts "to stop the progress of this evil" of pedants who promote their difficult but useless stuff. Unlike Pope in his *Memoirs* of Scriblerus, Cambridge says, "I have shewn throughout my Book that the Follies of Mankind provoke my Laughter and not my Spleen; and so long as they have this effect on me, I cannot have any great quarrel against them" (xvi). These remarks two decades after the *Tragedy of Tragedies* nonetheless illumine aspects of its psychology and its attitude towards those who overstate the danger of Modern learning.

Fielding's benevolence was genuine and enduring; but it did not preclude "disvaluing" one of the eighteenth century's two archetypal Scriblerians. It did so through parody of the poet's poetic and personal body.

2. Papal Fallibility

Satire of the satirist begins with the Preface to the earlier *Tom Thumb*. The Prologue opens with a redefining allusion to the first book of Pope's *Dunciad*. Fielding writes:

"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.
(Lines 1-4; 20)

The paragraph’s mirth, laughter, and delight evoke the same words in the third paragraph (lines 14, 16-17). Fielding’s emphasis upon amusement differs from Pope’s *Dunciad*, which begins that poem’s insistence on the decline of civilization through generic miscegenation. At the Academy of Poets Dulness sees “How tragedy and comedy embrace; / How farce and epic get a jumbled race” (1: 69-70). For Pope, the poetic mingling of unlikes weds different species in nature and produces the monsters and abstractions we see later in the poem. For Fielding, Farce and Tragedy indeed produce scribblers—one of whom is Fielding-as-Scriblerus. Unlike Pope, Fielding controls his enemy. His audience agrees to mock the Modern foolishness from which their friend the sensible author dissociates them. Fielding assumes an allied audience, Pope an alienated audience. Hence Fielding’s Prologue ends with “Long live the Man who cries, Long live Tom Thumb” (line 30). Whether in pedantic Preface or footnotes, Scriblerian jeremiad becomes the laughter of security.

I suspect that Fielding also mocks Pope’s association with Roman gravitas. Addison’s *Cato* (1713) was popular, ponderous, regular, and among the “Fine Things” Fielding hoped to “banish ... from the Stage” (42). Pope’s Prologue to that tragedy calls for “tears” four times (lines 7, 14, 15, 33) and calls for the inelegant variation “drops” once (line 16). Its first line claims that the tragic muse will “wake the soul by tender strokes of art”; its thirty-seventh line urges that “Britons attend” to Cato’s and Addison’s Roman tragedy. Rid yourselves of “French translation, and Italian song” and create a native theater inspired by Roman heroes.

Dare to have sense your selves; assert the stage,
Be justly warm’d with your own native rage.
Such Plays alone should please a British ear,
As Cato’s self had not disdain’d to hear.
(Lines 43-46)

Fielding’s Prologue to *Tom Thumb* sets itself against this well-meaning but foreign dramatic grandeur. “The Glorious Heroes who in former Years, / Dissolv’d all Athens and all Rome in Tears” (lines 5-6), he says, have indeed been transplanted to the British stage, but in popular Grub Street farces like mirthful *Tom Thumb*. Fielding replaces Pope’s serious plea for Romanized tragedy with his own comic plea for British farce:

24 That line also appeared on the title page of James Ralph’s attack on Pope, *Sauney. An Heroic Poem* (n. 13 above), where it implies Pope’s own “jumbled” shape.
25 Quotations are from the Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope, vol. 6, *Alexander Pope. Minor Poems*, ed. Norman Ault and John Butt (London and New Haven: Methuen and Yale University Press, 1970), 96-97. The editors point out that Pope’s Prologue to Thomson’s *Sophonisba* (1730) deals with some of the same themes as those in lines 41-46: see “Prologue to Sophonisba: By a Friend,” ibid, 310-15. Whether or not Fielding knew that Pope wrote the relevant parts of that Prologue, he of course knew *Sophonisba* itself, which is one of his many targets, and which he may be recalling here.
Fielding’s Tragedy of Tragedies

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

To-Night our Bard, Spectators, would be true
To Farce, to Tragedy, Tom Thumb, and You.

(Lines 18–21; 28–29)

Such truth to British farce is incompatible with Pope’s truth to Addisonian tragic imperial Rome.

_Tom Thumb’s_ Prologue anticipates both the _Tragedy’s_ text and apparatus in which, I suggest, Fielding burlesques his presumed fellow Scriblerians. As the author of _Observations on the Present Taste for Poetry_ (1739) complained, _Tom Thumb_ attacks “all the Great Geniuses England has produced for a Couple of Ages!”26 This should not be surprising in a comedy whose evocation of ghosts in 3. 1 and 2, and concluding corpse-strewn stage mock _Hamlet_ (1603), and whose scene in 2. 7, between Glumdalca, Huncamunca, and Tom Thumb parodies Dryden’s scene with Octavia, Cleopatra, and Antony in Dryden’s highly respectable _All for Love_ (1678). The famously infamous “Oh! Huncamunca, Huncamunca, oh” (2. 5; 70, 71), Fielding’s chronologically inverted note alerts us, is the source for a borrowing in Thomson’s _Sophonisba_ (1730; 70n).27

Once the genie Parody leaves the bottle, it finds a mate, starts a family, and exuberantly visits worlds other than the ones at first designed. This happens in the _Tragedy of Tragedies_ , where Fielding smokes respected senior colleagues, sometimes at the risk of being offensive. Peter Lewis rightly observes: “it is well known that the original members of the Scriblerus Club did not exactly welcome the young Fielding as an ally,” and that “Pope in particular became rather hostile to Fielding after initially ignoring him.”28 The following examples offer some reasons for that response.

In the _Tragedy_ Tom Thumb enthuses: “Whisper, ye Winds, that Huncamunca’s mine; / Echoes repeat, that Huncamunca’s mine!” (1. 3; 60). The footnote merely says that “There is not one Beauty in this Charming Speech, but hath been borrowed by almost every Tragick Writer” (60n). Contemporary readers may also have recalled such beauties from the conventional language of tropes and of repetition in Pope’s pastoral first printed in 1709, but reprinted in 1716 and 1717 and thus at least as current as many of the heroic tragedies Fielding lampoons. Here is a relevant section from “Summer” after Alexis mourns to the beeches and streams:

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26 As quoted in the Battestins, _Henry Fielding_.

27 Lewis obviously, a more learned group of viewers or readers might have seen that it also mocks repetition and parallelism in Hebraic poetry. That device was discussed, praised, and exemplified in John Husbands’ _A Miscellany of Poems by Several Hands_ (Oxford, 1731): “The River Kishon swept them away, that ancient River, the River Kishon.” Richardson later gives such an emblematic device to Clarina in her dangerous pencil knife scene: “Delivered for the present; for the present delivered from myself.” For Husbands, see sig. f&r. The _Miscellany_ included Samuel Johnson’s translation of Pope’s “Messiah.” For Richardson, see Letter 281 in _Samuel Richardson: Clarissa Or the History of a Young Lady, ed. Angus Ross_ (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1985), 951.

28 Lewis, _Fielding’s Bucolique Drama_, 87. See also the Battestins’ _Henry Fielding_, 8q: many Scriblerian allies regarded the _Tragedy_ as a vulgar “Modern” effort. Hume, the Battestins, Goldgar, and Lockwood well-discuss Fielding and others in the shifting opposition to Walpole. See especially Goldgar’s _Walpole and the Wits_. Fielding’s willingness to support Walpole would have been reason enough for some Opposition animosity, and Fielding’s gruff masculinity so apparent in the _Tragedy_ might have been uncongenial to Pope. See Fielding’s attack on Pope’s sexuality, within.
“nor to the Deaf I sing, / The Woods shall answer, and their Echo ring.” In “Autumn” Hylas in turn moans about the absent Delia: “Thro’ Rocks and Caves the Name of Delia sounds, / Delia, each Cave and echoing Rock rebounds.”

Pope’s pastorals also typically repeat introductory words—as in “Autumn,” where Hylas proclaims “For her . . . For her . . . For her,” followed by “Ye . . . Ye . . . Ye . . .” who finally “Say” something that relates the poet’s declining state to nature’s declining state (lines 24-30; 82). Perhaps comparably, in 2.2 the ghost of Tom Thumb’s father proclaims a string of eight similes, each beginning “So have I seen.” The last four repeat the cycle of the seasons on which Pope’s pastorals are based but exchange nature’s sequence for the poet’s need for contrast—rise and fall, smile and frown in amusingly bad poetry. Fielding again creates a world of secure judges and functioning standards rather than Scriblerian apocalypse:

So have I seen the Flowers in Spring arise,
So have I seen the Leaves in Autumn fall,
So have I seen the Fruits in Summer smile,
So have I seen the Snow in Winter frown.

(86)

 Might understandably irritable Pope have thought that Fielding mocked the pastorals as much as Thomson’s tragedies? Pope could parody himself, as he apparently does in the *Peri Bathous* (1727); but it is one thing for a mature lion to joke about his earlier missed kills, and another to be nipped at the heels for them by an aggressive cub from an alien pride.30

Pope would have been more troubled by the guiding device both of *Tom Thumb* and the *Tragedy of Tragedies*—laughter at a little man trying to be a big-shot and lover while actually thought a freak by the proudly normal. Fielding makes his feelings clear in an early note regarding height. Unlike the Ancients, this play honors “Lowness of Stature” rather than the height attributed to classical gods and heroes. “In short,” Fielding behind the annotator slyly says, “to exceed on either side is equally admirable, and a Man of three Foot is as wonderful a sight as a Man of nine” (56n).

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“Wonderful” Tom lusts for Huncamunca, whom he will hug, caress, nay, “eat her up with Love.” In a parody of the aubade tradition, he will spend years in bed with her and make the voyeur rising sun blush “to see us in our Bed together” (2. 2; 65). Mustachia, the practical maid in love with the more substantial Doodle, berates Huncamunca’s choice of “that little insignificant Fellow” who is “properer for a Play-thing, than a Husband” and thus certainly to be cuckolded. She has fallen “in Love with Nothing! . . . The Dove is every bit as proper for a Husband—Alas! Madam, there’s not a Beau about the Court looks so little like a Man” and is so much “a Thing without Substance” (2. 3; 67).

Grizzle’s later courtship of Huncamunca surely would have rubbed salt into the wounded male ego of one whose private parts evoked public speculation. Fielding replaces Tom’s fantasy of endless sexuality, with Grizzle’s factually more ample powers and uses the word “Durgen,” the term for dwarf with which Pope’s enemies often insulted him. In 1717 John Durant de Breval’s farce The Confederates includes Mrs. Oldfield who labels Pope a filth-spewing Durgen. Such attacks would increase shortly after the Dunciad appeared in 1728. The Female Dunciad (1728) mocks Pope as both licentious and sexually inadequate (3, 5-6). Two years later Aaron Hill sings “Tuneful Alexis” who is a mere “Ladies Play-thing.” The triumvirate behind One Epistle to Mr. Pope (1730) says that his poetic gust is “False and unsated as the Eunuch’s Lust!” Pope himself has “Low lowness, unexcited by Desire, / And all great Wilmot’s Vice, without his Fire.” Leonard Welsted later says of Pope that “The Jesuit’s hate inflam’d the Eunuch’s fear.”

The prize for meanest tirade goes to Ned Ward. His Durgen. Or, a Plain Satyr upon a Pompous Satyrist (1729) responds to the Dunciad and appeared some sixteen months before Fielding’s original and popular Tom Thumb of 24 April 1730 at the Little Theatre in the Hay Market. In addition to various unpleasant animals, Ward calls Pope Durgen 13 times; he also is little, a pygmy and incapable of life’s sexual pleasures: “Italian Songsters have been get, we know it, / But, sure, no Eunuch ever made a Poet.” Ward’s Pope is “the little Great imperial Bard.” Pope thrice mentions Durgen in the Dunciad Variorum, first as “a wretched thing against our Author” (1: 200n), then as a favorite of Dulness (3: 162), and then as “A ridiculous thing of Ward’s” (3: 162n). Edmund Curll was maliciously right in 1729 when he told readers that Pope declaimed against Ward “For writing DURGEN.”

On 7 August of the same year Ward’s Apollo’s Maggot in his Cups


brutally belabors Pope's sexual insignificance and calls him both Tom Thumb and Durgen. The drunken divinities decide to punish Britain "In raising up a new Tom Thumb, / To mortify her Poets" (11). The little fellow at first has no male member, but then receives "just an Inch of Stuff, / Enough to show the Gender" (19). Vulcan enlivens the creature with a bellows in his bottom, "which kind suppository puff / Gave Life to Little Durgen" (p. 22).33

Pope himself could not hide from what his mirror told him and what others saw. As early as 1711 he tells John Caryll that he is not "the great Alexander ... but that little Alexander the women laugh at." He surely would have resented a soi-disant Scriblerian whose farce likens its laughable little protagonist to Alexander (1. 3; 58), calls him a mouse and a baby (1. 1; 52; 2.5; 71), obscenely alludes to his sexual power as "small-shot thro' a Hedge" (2. 4; 70—"Oh! say not small," Huncamunca moans), and sees him married to a lusty woman whose metonymic "heart" immediately has room for another husband (2. 10; 81). He also would have resented a putative Scriblerian who equates Tom Thumb, the Great, Durgen, and sexual inadequacy, so much of which had been negatively celebrated in Ward's too memorable attacks.34

Fielding well-knew the pain such often repeated remarks must induce. Whatever his praise and practice of benevolence, he violently protected himself and the benefits Lady Mary could confer. Fielding's unpublished burlesque poem of 1729 inverts the Dunciad and has Dulness address her son Pope as Codrus. Isobel Grundy observes that the effort bids for Lady Mary's support and that Fielding denigrates "Swift as obscene, Gay as low, and Pope as a serious threat to the established order from his Roman Catholic religion, his Tory politics, Bolingbrokan philosophy, and subversive sweetness of rhyme." Fielding diminishes that threat by diminishing a diminutive Pope. Dulness thus observes children as Gulliver's Travels (280); 3) as precursors of the Lilliputians in Gulliver's Travels (230, 331).

34 See Correspondence of Alexander Pope, ed. George Sherburn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), 1: 114, 25 June 1711. Pope was displeased even when his friends brought hostile works to the public's attention. On 14 May 1730, No. 19, The Grub-street Journal refers to the abusive Cooke-Moore Smyth-Welst ed. One Epistle to Mr. Pope, on 21 May, No. 20, it describes and hopes to refute, suggestions that Pope needed to be whipped to be sexually aroused. On 17 May Pope tells the Earl of Oxford that he has seen and dislikes the earlier Journal in part, he says in other contemporaneous letters, because the Epistle was "below all notice"—but not sufficiently so for Pope not to notice it. See 3: 110 for dislike of the Journal, and 3: 106 and 3: 114 for dislike of the Epistle. Pope's brutal enemies long continued their attacks on his masculinity. One of the last is Colley Cibber's A Letter from Mr. Cibber to Mr. Pope (n. 30 above), 47-49. For some other aspects of such slanders, see Maynard Mack Alexander Pope: A Biography, 292-93, 410-11, 779-80, 871n.

35 Grundy, "New Verses by Henry Fielding" (n. 12 above), 214. Fielding may have known that Edmund Curll, behind "Mr. Philips," wrote Codrus: Or, The Dunciad Dissected. Being the Finishing-Stoke. To which is added, Farmer Pope and his Son. By Mr. Philips (London, 1728).
Fielding's Tragedy of Tragedies

that "some tall Beau o'erlooks the shorter Beaus" (2: 10; 226), and has Pope himself angrily declaim that in a benevolent Hanoverian world virtue might triumph and "Beaus shall be form'd for something more than Dress / Or Belles shall slight them for their Emptiness" (2: 219-20; 233).

By 1733 Lady Mary had responded in kind to Pope's ill-conceived slander that one was poxed by her love or libelled by her hate (Imitations of Horace, 2. 1, line 84). In Verses Address'd to the Imitator of the First Satire of the Second Book of Horace she and Lord Hervey savage Pope as unmoved by beauty. He is "No more for loving made, than to be lov'd" (5). Fielding again supports his cousin's values and in an unpublished epistle to his own and Pope's friend George Lyttelton insists that unhuman Pope is evil, satanic, wretched, and ugly. He also is "too impotent for Love!" and has "no Fruit to tempt a Second Eve" (241). Given young Fielding's rambunctious masculinity, he must then have been temperamentally averse to Pope. For Fielding, that small, frail, and variously vulnerable satirist gave new meaning to the phrase "nasty, brutish, and short.

Fielding, then, clearly had contemporary and continuing suspicion of the Scriblerians in general and of Pope in particular, whose weaknesses he exploited in private and in public works. References to a Durgan and to a sexually inadequate little man with grand aspirations were neither accidental nor undirected. Grizzle's bemused response to a match between Tom Thumb and Huncamunca suggests unlovely allusions to Pope:

And can my Princess such a Durgan wed,
One fitter for your Pocket than your Bed!
Advis'd by me, the worthless Baby shun,
Or you will ne'er be brought to bed of one.
Oh take me to thy Arms and never flinch,
Who am a Man by Jupiter ev'ry Inch.
Then while in Joys together lost we lie
I'll press thy Soul while Gods stand wishing by.

(2- 5; 37)


37 The term "Baby," above, well may be a term for dildo and thus imply that Tom is as procreative as the device—or as a thumb. See Fielding's Historical Register for 1736, 2- 1, in which several women seek to buy wax effigies of the castrato Farnelli. One says that "If my husband was to make any objection to my having 'em I'd run away from him and take the dear babies with me." An endlessly efficient wax-dildo Farnelli is pleasure for which it is worth leaving one's husband. See the anonymous The Happy Courtesan: Or, The Prude Domestic'd. An Epistle from the Celebrated Mrs. C[on] [Phillips], To the Angelick Signor Far-n--li (London, 1733). The attribution to Con Phillips of course is malicious.

Well knowing Eunuchs can their Wants supply,
And more than Bragging Bostiers satisfy;
Whose Pow'r to please the Fair expires too fast,
While F—li stands it to the last.

How much do those display their Want of Sense,
Who scoff at Eunuchs, and dislike a Thing,
For being but disburden'd of its Stings! (6-7)

According to Grizzle, Tom should "seek some Dwarf, some fairy Miss, / Where no Joint-stool must lift him to the Kiss" (2. 5: 71). Like others in the play, Grizzle and Huncamunca themselves assume a voracious sexual ethic based on early Restoration comedy and libertine poetry. Pope's romantic fair-sexing, women of sensibility, or women outraged by a childishly snipped lock, cannot exist in this comic world of desired mutual gratification and sexually divine male inches. Fielding's hostility to Pope was both personal and political; it also extended to his attitude toward the larger Scriblerian enterprise.

3. SCRIBLERIANS SATIRIZED

The apparatus to the Tragedy of Tragedies is less personal but shares an essential unscriblerian trait—mirth in the face of a controlled threat that provokes laughter rather than spleen. In some cases even the minimally educated are invited to mock the maximum pedant.

Huncamunca laments her lover's absence: "O, Tom Thumb! Tom Thumb! wherefore art thou Tom Thumb?" (2. 3: 67). This obvious reference to one of Shakespeare's most familiar lines is thus glossed by Scriblerus, who claims that this tragedy may be by Shakespeare but certainly "was written in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth" (42): "Oh! Marius, Marius; wherefore art thou Marius? Otway's Marius" (67n). Antony and Cleopatra is scarcely better known to Scriblerus than is Romeo and Juliet. Noodle tells Grizzle that Huncamunca now is married to Tom Thumb:

GRIZZLE. My Huncamunca.

NOODLE. Your Huncamunca.

Tom Thumb's Huncamunca, every Man's Huncamunca.

(2. 10; 80)

The note merely says that "Mr. Dryden hath imitated this in All for Love" (8on). In each case, however, someone with modest knowledge of the national icon Shakespeare, whom Pope had recently edited, could laugh at Scriblerus' learned ignorance, at his inability to see that Otway gets his line from Shakespeare. In 1723 Pope included the remark from Romeo and Juliet under "Courtship" in his "Index of Manners, Passions, and their external Effects," calling it "a beautiful Scene betwixt Romeo and Juliet." The Pope-Sewell Shakespeare of 1728 includes Charles Gildon's remark that "It is needless to write the story" of Antony and Cleopatra "since it is known to every body."38 The Dunciad uses major poetry's displacement by minor poetry as an emblem of lost distinctions in a meaningless world. During the Dunciad's mock-epic games Dulness offers prizes to her victorious dunces: "Three wicked imps, of her own Grub Street Choir, / She decked like Congreve, Addison, and Prior" (2: 123-24). Fielding rejects such a view. Neither Otway nor Dryden replaces Shakespeare in part because Fielding assumes a sympathetic audience with good will, intelligence, and laughter at literary posturing. Yet again Fielding sees an enlarging audience and ultimate light, whereas Scriblerians see a shrinking audience and ultimate darkness.

38 Pepe, The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare (London, 1723), 6: new pagination for the Index, sig. Ggggiv. See also "Section III. Index of fictitious Persons, with the Characters ascrib'd to them." Juliet is "beautiful, constant, and unfortunate in Love." Romeo is "passionate, tender, and unfortunate in Love." Sigs lxxiv and liizz, respectively. The lines need not have been publicly performed to have been publicly known.
This inference is supported by the footnotes’ comic internal dissension. Fielding’s Scriblerus squabbles with André Dacier and other unnamed critics (81n); he disagrees with John Dennis regarding the use of puns (84n); and he scolds Dennis the “incredulous Critick” and “ignorant . . . Carper” (89n–90n) for thinking that a mortal cannot fight and defeat all the gods. After all, Scriblerus shows, both Dryden’s Almanzor and Charles Johnson’s Achilles in The Victim (1714) claim that distinction (89n). In so showing, he compounds Dennis’s errors and again allows the reader to be superior to critical folly.

The notes also sometimes suggest the “real” Fielding who lets us know that he is present, at our side, and in control. In 3. 9 Grizzle asks all to draw their swords and fight for liberty, for “Liberty the Mustard is of Life” (93). “This Mustard (says Mr. D.) is enough to turn one’s Stomach: I would be glad to know what Idea the Author had in his Head when he wrote it.” Scriblerus knows the answer and quotes this line from Dennis’s own Liberty Asserted: “And gave him Liberty, the Salt of Life . . . The Understanding,” Fielding as Scriblerus says, “that can digest the one, will not rise at the other” (93n). If salt, why not mustard?

If covert authorial intrusion, why not nearly overt authorial intrusion? This happens after a long footnote near the beginning of the play. Scriblerus then proves that Tom Thumb was a contemporary of King Arthur, and Fielding proves that he and his audience share a living and reassuring classical tradition. He invokes Nathanael Salmon, John Bunyan, Petrus Burmanus, Lewis Theobald, Hermes Trismegistus, Justus Lipsius, centaurs, Hercules, Edward Midwinter, Richard Bentley, Edmund Spenser, Latin and English, high and low culture, classical mythology, native folklore, and various editorial and genealogical practices. Here is a self-consciously incoherent but dazzling paradigm of comic, pedantic, excess. By the end of the note, Fielding is so pleased with himself that he assumes we have bonded to him as a friend who is tickling our ribs, just as Horace tickled the Pisones’ ribs circa 20 B. C.: “Risum teneatis, Amici” (50n), he says. The full line is the fifth in the Ars Poetica: “spectatum admissi, risum teneatis amici?” If admitted to a private view could you keep from laughing? We would laugh because we view a portrait of a lovely woman’s head on a horse’s neck, with oddly placed limbs covered in feathers, and a body that ended with the shape of a fish. The image long remained an argument on the need for coherence in art. Pope thus quotes “Risum tenatis amici” to undercut his own pedantic Scriblerian annotator in the first note to the first line of his Dunciad Variorum. Richard Hurd later says (1757) that “The epistle begins . . . with that general and fundamental precept of preserving an unity in the subject and the disposition of the piece.” True Scriblerians regard disunity as a private joke made public for an audience willing to laugh with him and with Horace.

4. THE END OF SCRIBBLING

I return to a caveat near the beginning of this essay. I regard my view of an anti-Scriblerian Tragedy of Tragedies as essentially valid. I also regard my view of Tom Thumb as alluding to Alexander Pope as a plausible if not probable hypothesis rather than a verity. Candor urges recognition of the potential flaws in that hypothesis. If Fielding’s Tom Thumb-plays target Pope, we might anticipate two consequences: 1) Fielding should be excoriated by Pope’s friends in opposition, and 2) the name “Tom Thumb” should be a familiar post-1730 label for Pope. So far as I now can tell neither of these happens and neither sinks the good ship Hypothesis.

Fielding’s several consequent farces denied his contemporaries the chance to focus on Tom Thumb or its revised Tragedy. These other plays were even more offensive and all of them before the Licensing Act of 1737 could be regarded as emblems of modern cultural decay. In June of 1732 the hostile Gnsb-street Journal, No. 130, for example, complains of Fielding: “Besides his Lottery and Modern Husband in the winter, he has produced two more, his Covent Garden Tragedy and Old Debauchee within four months after.” All this, it says, is “barren fruitfulness.” The author of The Usefulness of the Stage (1738) observes that “The Decay of Dramatick Poetry hath been assigned” to these and comparable entertainments (unsigned Preface).

Moreover, by 1730 Fielding already had shot at the Opposition’s sitting-duck Colley Cibber and in spite of reconciliation later would do so again. By early 1734 Fielding was established both as a master of ridicule and as a friend and protegee of the Boy-Patriots George Lyttelton and William Pitt, who were pups from the powerful Lord Cobham’s den. Prudence suggested that earlier sins be forgotten if not forgiven.

In addition, Pope’s numerous enemies, who continued to regard his diminutive size as an emblem of diminutive poetic and moral talents, could do so without evoking the Tom Thumb story still associated with innocent children’s tales.40 By 1742 Lord Hervey’s The Difference Between Verbal and Practical Virtue perpetrates an especially unpleasant version of this familiar emblematic device. He insists that Pope’s ugly shape betrays “the double Darkness” of a mind “suited to its vile Abode.” The deformed body “seems the Counterpart by Heav’n design’d

of Mr. Pope’s Preface Writings. By Sir Richard Blackmore
Essay on the Original & Progress of the Popelings—
Basum tenatis Amici?” (xi). The term clearly was asso-
ciated with Pope and the Dunciad. As an example of
Scriblerian response to such incoherence, see the
Dunciad Varnum, in which we are appalled by a fright-
ening, collapsing world of art, morals, and politics.
We see

How, with less reading than makes felons ‘scape
Less human genius than God gives an ape,
Small thanks to France and none to Rome
or Greece,
A past, vamp’d, future, old, reviv’d new piece,
’Twas Plautus, Fletcher, Congreve, and Cornelle,
Can make a Cibber, Johnson, or Ozell.

Colley Cibber comments both on his own role and on
the excess in these lines. See his A Letter to Mr. Pope,
33–34.

40 For example, see the unsigned A Tryal of Skill Between
a Court Lord, and a Twickenham ’Squire. Inscrib’d to Mr.
Pope (London, 1734). Amusingly, for young John
Hervey “Tom Thumb was always his Delight” (9).
Bezaleel Morris also observes that in “Publick
Amusements,” which children often attended, “little
Thumb, and Puppet Shows go down. / And please the
choicest Relish of the Town!” See his Dissectio Mentis
Humanae: Or A Satiric Essay on Modern Critics, Stage and
Epic Poets . . . . Ambition, Truth, Greatness, and Life
(London, 1730), 77, 78.
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/ A Symbol and a Warning to Mankind” (5-6). Other insults to Pope included terms like ape, ass, Cain, Caliban, demon, devil, dog, elf, eunuch, monkey, monster, murderer, puppet, pygmy, rat, satyr, scorpion, Thersites, traitor, viper, and worm. Such stuff makes Fielding’s vulgarity seem almost playful, and demonstrates how one could emphasize Pope’s deformity without calling him Tom Thumb.

The anti-Scriblerian and anti-Papal readings are not foolproof, but they are superior to the orthodoxy of Fielding as tag-along kid brother of gloomy elders. Those readings also are faithful to the experience of the Tom Thumb farces, to Scriblerian coolness towards Fielding, and to the characterization of Pope’s apparent lust and apparent inability to satisfy himself or the women over whom he was presumed to salivate. Pope was middle-aged, sensitive, polished, and distinguished; Fielding was young, insensitive, crude, and ambitious. These are not the ingredients for a good cocktail—about which then feckless Fielding scarcely cared. He hoped that his audience would pay for the pleasure of laughing with him rather than scowling with Pope. The enduring comic pleasures of the Tragedy of Tragedies suggests that he was right.

APPENDIX: THE DIRECTORS’ CREED

At least some production history also suggests that experience of the Tragedy of Tragedies is consistent with laughter not gloom. Those productions also are inconsistent with another commonplace regarding it—that Tom Thumb is an acting play and, as the Preface and footnotes seem to require, the Tragedy of Tragedies is a reading play. Even the presumed reading play, however, can lend itself to the stage and heighten the reader’s sense of control and confidence. We lack a full prompt book and extended audience response to the many eighteenth-century performances of the Tragedy of Tragedies; but Fielding’s dramatic practice could literally or figuratively bring the closet pedant onto the public stage. Accordingly, the printed version of the play was sold on opening night so that the audience would better appreciate Fielding’s parodies.41 Eliza Haywood and William Hatchett recognized such potential in their version of The Opera of Operas; Or, Tom Thumb the Great (London, 1732). At the end of that play Sir Crit-Operatical enters and is outraged by the final act’s ketchupy Grand Guignol and the author’s “stupid, irregular, bloody, abominable Catastrophe.” It will be damned “in the Eyes of all good Judges.” His auditor Modelly assures him that the merely enchanted dead await Merlin’s wake-up call for the proper happy ending (41). In 1989 Harvard’s Lowell House performed the Tragedy of Tragedies, using Scriblerus’ Preface as a kind of Prologue and his notes as an occasional interruption and riotously wrongheaded comment amusing to a collegiate audience—as was the ghost of Gaffer Thumb. He appeared as a video to be shut off and, while encased in a resolutely modern television set, wheeled off when necessary. This whimsical staging is appropriate for a play in which during the eighteenth century both Huncamunca and Glumdalca could be played by men, and Tom Thumb the Great could be played by boys or girls.

Bright plots lighten dark readings. The casting of Yale’s Silliman College performance in May of 1953 was legendary. The late William K. Wimsatt, Jr., played the Amazon

41 The Battersins, Henry Fielding, 107. They do, however, second the distinction between the reading and acting plays, one I hope to blur.
Glumdalca with a blue-mop wig and partially blackened teeth: he was over seven feet tall (figure 1). At appropriate times, two Scriblerian clerks sitting near the front of the stage read printed notes. Such casting and stage-practice well exemplify the cloud-cuckoo land into which Fielding invites us, in which book and performance mingle, and which provokes our laughter but neither spleen nor fear. Cross-dressing, violation of generic expectation, and an intrusive pedant are Scriblerian nightmares in a tottering world; they are jokes in Fielding’s stable world.42 There characters speak in couplets, triplets, blank verse, prose, and whatever is most adaptable to zany metaphorical language we recognize as non-threatening.

Envision this as one sign of the comic release that Fielding hoped his stage would create: Wimsatt the seven-foot tall blue-mop-headed preeminently high-serious and distinguished scholar-critic wrapped in drapery, and reciting his own “Epilogue: A Key to Tom Thumb.” It parodies the critical commonplace of the 1950s and tells us what much of The Tragedy of Tragedies is not.

Figure 1. William K. Wimsatt, Jr., as the Amazon Glumdalca. William Kurtz Wimsatt Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

"They who have best succeeded on the stage,
Have still conformed their genius to their age."
Thus Dryden wrote, and thus repeats your bard,
 Conscious you may have found his moaning hard.
The action of our play, the outward show,
Has been but rough, nay rowdy—that we know.
But now I'm here to expound our serious pith,
Unfold our symbols, explicate our myth.
Our theme tonight—this truth will shave the devil—
Our theme has been the profound theme of evil.

Glumdalca, Amazonian queen, moans what?
Her size, her poise—what thoughtless sot
Could miss the fact she stands for all she's got:

Good uncorrupted, primitive and tall.
And then Tom Thumb, good too, and brave, though small.
The pint-size package of the virtues, Thumb
Is Innocence Abroad and Nature's chum.
And O their fate! Think you our message glum?
Think you our bard has botched his tragic fable,
Messed up poetic justice, smeared his label?

Our bard has painted Nature's honest phiz,
Life as he sees it, and as in fact it is.

King, Queen, and Courtiers, each a bleeding hunk, a
Disfigured corpse, and eke fair Huncamunca.
Glumdalca, noble girl, the sword that stuck her
Thrust by a fopling gallant, a low mucker.
And Thumb, our youthful tender, raw idealist!
The dark bovine digestion now thou foolest!

That cow, my friends (don't laugh) it stands of course
As symbol of brute evil—that rude force

That stalks fields, streets, schools, shops, and towers and hovels.
That cow occurs in each of Faulkner's novels.
That cow its cud on every lawn doth chew,
And moos in every home—that cow is you!

The cow is as much brute evil as the Tragedy of Tragedies disvalues its world "before a grander vision of the past."

43 Cited by kind permission from the William Kurtz Wimsatt Papers, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.
On Monday 4 May 1953 the Yale Daily News announced the weekend's entertainment and observed: "Prominent in the cast is a member of the English Department who, rumor to the contrary, will not play the title role." On 12 May 1953 Professor Eugene Waith, staggered by the quality of his colleague's acting and poetry, wrote to Wimsatt:

'My respect for your achievements has never been less than gigantic, as I hope you know, but it is infinite now that I have seen your interpretations of the mighty role of Glumdalca. I was right there with you through pathos and wrath, grandeur and tenderness. It was a terrific emotional purge.

Clearly, the stage is for you, Bill. No more of the idle pedantry and pedagogy which have been wasting your time. From now on you must please, improve, instruct, reform mankind from over the footlights.

This is a begging letter. Could you give me a copy of that superb epilogue you wrote and delivered! I was vastly amused and should treasure it.

The Wimsatt papers include an early draft of the Epilogue, photographs of Wimsatt on stage, and a copy of the program. H. Scriblerus Secundus was divided into two parts, H. Scriblerus and H. Secundus. Scriblerus was the, subsequently, distinguished Renaissance scholar Thomas Roche. I am grateful to Martin Price for helpful anecdotes regarding this performance, which I must lament never having seen. Given the description, however, perhaps some of the more solemn readers should consider the value of production history as a restraint upon interpretive excess. Martin Battestin informs me that Scriblerus's commentary also was worked into a production of the Tragedy of Tragedies at the University of Michigan late in the 1960s.