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**The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling**

In Four Volumes

**Fielding, Henry**

**London, 1750**

Chap. I. Of Prologues.

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Book XV (133) 132  
as he never told me, if I had asked, you know  
it might have put some suspicion into his Head  
cunning for that, I promise you  
I thought most wonderfully cunning indeed  
I replied  
Chamber, since I believe you will be cunning  
And now having finished the tedious  
I have now down to write  
which Employment we shall leave him for  
THE  
HISTORY  
OF A  
FOUNDLING.

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BOOK XVI.

*Containing the Space of Five Days.*

CHAP. I.

*Of Prologues.*

I Have heard of a Dramatic Writer who used to say, he would rather write a Play than a Prologue; in like manner, I think, I can with less Pains write one of the Books of this History, than the Prefatory Chapter to each of them.

To say the Truth, I believe many a hearty Curse hath been devoted on the Head of that Author, who first instituted the Method of prefixing to his Play that Portion of Matter which

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is called the Prologue; and which at first was Part of the Piece itself, but of latter Years hath had usually so little Connexion with the Drama before which it stands, that the Prologue to one Play might as well serve for any other. Those indeed of more modern Date, seem all to be written on the same three Topics, *viz.* an Abuse of the Taste of the Town, a Condemnation of all contemporary Authors, and, an Elogium on the Performance just about to be represented. The Sentiments in all these are very little varied, nor is it possible they should; and indeed I have often wondered at the great Invention of Authors, who have been capable of finding such various Phrases to express the same thing.

In like manner I apprehend, some future Historian (if any one shall do me the Honour of imitating my Manner) will, after much scratching his Pate, bestow some good Wishes on my Memory, for having first established these several initial Chapters; most of which, like Modern Prologues, may as properly be prefixed to any other Book in this History as to that which they introduce, or indeed to any other History as to this.

But however Authors may suffer by either of these Inventions, the Reader will find sufficient Emolument in the one, as the Spectator hath long found in the other.

First, it is well known, that the Prologue serves the Critic for an Opportunity to try his Faculty of Hissing, and to tune his Cat-call to the best Advantage; by which means, I have known those Musical Instruments so well prepared, that they have been able to play in full Concert at the first rising of the Curtain.

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The same Advantages may be drawn from these Chapters, in which the Critic will be always sure of meeting with something that may serve as a Whetstone to his noble Spirit; so that he may fall with a more hungry Appetite for Censure on the History itself. And here his Sagacity must make it needless to observe how artfully these Chapters are calculated for that excellent Purpose; for in these we have always taken Care to intersperse somewhat of the sour or acid Kind, in order to sharpen and stimulate the said Spirit of Criticism.

Again, the indolent Reader, as well as Spectator, finds great Advantage from both these; for as they are not obliged either to see the one or read the others, and both the Play and the Book are thus protracted, by the former they have a Quarter of an Hour longer allowed them to sit at Dinner, and by the latter they have the Advantage of beginning to read at the fourth or fifth Page instead of the first; a Matter by no means of trivial Consequence to Persons who read Books with no other View than to say they have read them, a more general Motive to reading than is commonly imagined; and from which not only Law Books, and Good Books, but the Pages of *Homer* and *Virgil*, of *Swift* and *Cervantes* have been often turned over.

Many other are the Emoluments which arise from both these, but they are for the most part so obvious that we shall not at present stay to enumerate them; especially since it occurs to us that the principal Merit of both the Prologue and the Preface is that they be short.