

**Henry Fielding,
1707 - 1754**

Born in Somerset, England, Fielding was educated at Eton and then studied law at Leiden. His plays, novels, and essays established him as a leading satirist of the eighteenth century. Despite his many political lampoons, Fielding went on to become a London magistrate in his later life.

As for *Tom Thumb* itself, the play is not without its famous fans: Hogarth designed the frontispiece for the print edition; Jonathan Swift supposedly LOL'd, and both Frances Burney and Jane Austen were said to have performed the piece during their regular family theatricals.



TOM THUMB, A TRAGEDY



About the Actors

Charles Bonds is a Ph.D. Candidate in History and Jewish Studies.

Bobby Wells is a Ph.D. Candidate in History and C18 Studies.

Mary Christian has a Ph.D. in English (IU) and Theatre Studies.

Rachel Seiler-Smith is a Ph.D. Candidate in English and Gender Studies.

Richard Nash is a Professor of English.

Jesse Molesworth is an Associate Professor of English.

Rebecca Spang is a Professor of History and Director for the Center.

Tracey Hutchings-Goetz is a Ph.D. Candidate in English and C18 Studies.

Mallory Cohn is a Ph.D. Candidate in English and Victorian Studies.

Kate Blake has a Ph.D. in English (IU) and Gender Studies.

Thanks

To Oz Kenshur and Bev Hankins for supplying various rehearsal and performances spaces.

Annual Workshop
Bloomington, Indiana 2017

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Tom Thumb, a Tragedy

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MEN.

KING, (Mr. *Bonds*.)

TOM THUMB, (Mr. *Wells*.)

GRIZZLE, (Dr. *Christian*.)

NOODLE, (Mrs. *Seiler-Smith*.)

DOODLE, (*An Infamous Puppet*).

1 PHYSICIAN, (Dr. *Nash*).

2 PHYSICIAN, (Dr. *Molesworth*).

WOMEN.

QUEEN DOLLALOLLA, (Dr. *Spang*).

PRINCESS HUNCAMUNCA, (Miss. *Hutchings-Goetz*).

MUSTACHA, (Miss. *Cohn*)

PROPSMASTER, (Dr. *Blake*)

Our collective decision to perform this play started as a bit of a joke. “What play deals with scale?” asked Rebecca Spang at the Workshop planning meeting. I offered the first thing that came to mind: “Tom Thumb?” Everyone laughed. I think I even snorted. Rebecca didn’t: “That’s perfect!” she cried. And, true to form, she was right.

If we want to talk about numbers, measures, scales, Fielding’s farce supplies endless fodder. The play itself was an “addition” to the Author’s Farce; its revisions include critical commentary by a faux scholar, “Scriblerus Secundus”; and, as J. Paul Hunter rightfully points out, the little piece “depends primarily on one joke”: the size of Tom Thumb himself. But Tom Thumb’s size is really only funny due to scale, just as Secundus’s footnotes are comical because they take up more space than the play text. In many ways, these facets of the play (among others) make it a perfect fit with our workshop.

That said, we struggled with some of the decisions concerning the staging of the play itself. Central to our debate was this very problem of size, as the joke about Tom Thumb’s stature plays into ableist and sexist performance histories. The character was often performed by young women—hence Mustacha’s joke that Thumb is “nothing,” or lacking a proper length of “horn”—or represented by little persons, both of which were seen to play comically against Western notions of able-bodied, virulent, “serious” masculinity.

So, in the end, we decided to update the play’s joke about scale by drawing upon more contemporary conversations in literary criticism: namely, affect theory. If the other characters are larger-than-life, ridiculously expressive figures, why not cast Tom Thumb as utterly and unapologetically flat in affect? One-dimensional rather than multi-faceted? Such a staging opens up new and equally exciting questions for contemporary scholars regarding the weight of emotions: can we measure feeling? Does affect have a scale?

We hope these questions, as well as the numerous references to counting and weighing, add to our workshop’s discussions at “large.” We also humbly hope that, contrary to Hunter’s claim, our audience encounters more jokes than one throughout. After all, if Jonathan Swift was rumored to laugh aloud at Grizzle’s stabbing of Tom Thumb’s ghost, then surely we can count on others to follow suit.

Rachel Seiler-Smith | Director