

Who will save *Tom Jones*?

A restoration proposal for Tony Richardson's 1963 classic

Class: Intro to MIAP
Lecturer: Howard Besser
Student: David Neary

"'Twould be the devil's own nonsense to leave Tom Jones without a rescuer."
- The Narrator (Micheál Mac Liammóir)

This paper is intended to outline the reasons for a much-needed restoration of Tony Richardson's anarchic, bawdy 1963 period comedy *Tom Jones*, and the means by which it could be achieved. For reasons we shall encounter below, such a project, at this moment in time, would appear to be no more than a hypothetical one, although it can be hoped that the research herein may be of use in years to come. I write this paper not as a frustrated fan (although I have been a devotee of the film for some years), but as a long-time student of film history seeing a landmark film undeservingly overlooked by modern audiences, and made available only in threadbare standard definition digital releases that rob the film of so much of its vibrancy.

This is a question of access. It is not that *Tom Jones* cannot be seen with relative ease; Amazon.com stocks DVDs and has a "HD" copy available as video-on-demand. But these digital copies are utterly lacking in the quality that audiences have come to expect from reissued classics. Inferior scans of the film's two cuts (the Theatrical Cut and the 1989 Director's Cut; more anon) mean new audiences are finding a dulled version of a great film that cannot hope to live up to the standards of contemporary moviegoers. This year the film turned 50 years

old. The anniversary went unheralded; by MGM, by the press, by anyone it seems. *Tom Jones* lacks a champion. And until one emerges it is difficult for fans to recommend the film so strongly when it looks so badly weathered. Where preservation fails, restoration must step in.

Why *Tom Jones*?

To justify the efforts and expense detailed below, it is clear I must make a case for this film and explain its importance, both to audiences in 1963 and in 2013. The film is adapted with suitable frivolity from the 1749 novel *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* by Henry Fielding. Tony Richardson, a leading figure of the British New Wave, directed, taking a surprising turn away from 'kitchen sink' drama into adventure, levity, and colour. The screenplay was adapted from Fielding's book by John Osborne, the playwright who had penned the play *Look Back in Anger* (1956), which was Richardson's first big stage directing success, and in 1959 was made into a film marking Richardson's feature-directing debut. Richardson's *Tom Jones* combined three elements – the social anger of the New Wave movement, the aristocracy-lamponing satire of Fielding's novel and a form of sexual liberation that was to become such a defining issue in the coming years of the 'Swinging Sixties' – into one package unlike anything English-speaking audiences had seen before. Sexy, humorous, subtly satirical; *Tom Jones* was a new experience, and one the like of which cinemas have never quite seen since. It certainly instilled a sense of the audacious in the British New Wave, no doubt inspiring films such as *A Hard Day's Night* (Richard Lester, 1964) and Lindsay Anderson's *If...* (1968), while its playfulness with form and sexual content were co-opted by the *Carry On* movies and the comedian Benny Hill.

Robert Shail says it “proved prescient in prefiguring the mood of the coming of Swinging Britain”¹, and it is hard to disagree with him.

To show just how important *Tom Jones* was in its day is not a difficult task; one just needs to look at the accolades it received. Four Academy Awards, including Best Picture and Best Director in 1964. It is also the only film to ever have three of its cast nominated at the Oscars for Best Supporting Actress (Edith Evans, Diane Cilento, Joyce Redman – none of them won the award). It won top awards at the BAFTAs and the Golden Globes, while Albert Finney took Best Actor at the Venice Film Festival, where the film had its world premiere on September 29. Many critics of the time raved, with *Time* magazine calling it a “way-out, walleyed, wonderful exercise in cinema”.² Rich Gold of *Variety* remarked: “It has sex, Eastmancolor, some prime performers and plenty of action... It should breeze its way cheerfully through the boxoffice figures.”³ Gold was not wrong; the film had a startling box office take, with audiences flocking to see the new British film that dared to be so sexy. On an estimated budget of \$1 million (Stg£450,000⁴), the film took in excess of \$20 million⁵, with some estimates as high as \$37,600,000.⁶ *Tom Jones*' success was seen as a huge surprise, most of all to its director and his producers. Tony Richardson wrote in his memoirs:

“The prognosis was not good. The head of British distribution for United Artists saw the finished cut. He pronounced disaster: The film would be lucky if it made £40,000 worldwide... *The Times* said, ‘There is

¹ Shail, Robert, *Tony Richardson*, Manchester, 2012, p. 53

² ‘John Bull in His Barnyard’, in *Time*, Vol. 82, Issue 16, New York, 1963, p.125

³ Gold, Rich, ‘Review: *Tom Jones*’, *Variety*, 31 July 1963, Los Angeles

⁴ Lassaly, Walter, *Itinerant Cameraman*, London, 1987, p. 81

⁵ Shail, op. cit., p. 7

⁶ <http://www.the-numbers.com/movies/1963/00225.php>

nothing in this film that could give any member of the audience one moment of enjoyment'... [But] lines were forming around the London Pavilion. Rock and roll had just broken through in England with the first impact of the Beatles. The sixties were starting to swing, and *Tom Jones* became part of the 'revolution'. The movie went on to success after success beyond our financial dreams."⁷

What else needs to be said about the importance of *Tom Jones*? It heralded an era of wild youth and free love – Matthew Perry of the *Sunday Times* has called it “the most distinctly ‘sixties’ film to win the top Oscar”⁸ – while also toying with the very medium of cinema itself. In Fielding’s novel, the narrative voice repeatedly calls attention to the fact that you are reading a book, as if to accompany the charming story with a discussion of the novel as a form.⁹ Richardson and Osborne use a similarly omniscient narrator, voiced with surly cheek by Micheál Mac Liammóir, as well as a variety of storytelling, camera and editing techniques (breaking of the fourth wall, freeze frames, sped-up action scenes, editing wipes from all directions) to remind the audience that this is not just a story, but a film of a story. Bailey Slagle and Holtzclaw write:

“[There are] frequent reminders that this is all artifice; we are watching a film, created at the filmmaker’s pleasure and capable of veering in any direction, violating any convention, that the director desires. It is easy to forget about the artifice of a camera until a character within a film decides to remind us... the ultimate impression is one of an eighteenth-century masterwork translated into a classic of cinema, faithful to the original while adventurous in its use of properties of its own medium.”¹⁰

⁷ Richardson, Tony, *The Long-Distance Runner*, New York, 1993, p. 168-169

⁸ Perry, Matthew, ‘Tom Jones’ in *Sunday Times*, 16 Feb 2003, London, p. 49

⁹ Bailey Slagle, Judith and Holtzclaw, Robert, ‘Narrative Voice and “Chorus on the Stage” in *Tom Jones* (1963)’, in *The Cinema of Tony Richardson*, ed. James M. Welsh and John C. Tibbetts, Albany, 1999, p. 191

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 203-204

The film opens with a scene in which the infant Tom Jones is found abandoned by the noble Squire Allworthy (George Devine) but told as a silent movie with dialogue in intertitles and an accompanying harpsichord vamped upon like a nickelodeon piano. As *Tom Jones* progresses, we see influences of classic Hollywood (soft focus), French New Wave (jump cuts) and *Hellzapoppin'*-style madcappery (the frantic chase scene through the inn at Upton); just as Fielding's *Tom Jones* discussed the nature of the novel, Richardson's *Tom Jones* acts as an unofficial history of the moving image.

Tom Jones was Richardson's first film in colour, but rather than shooting it in the gentle manner traditionally befitting the Technicolor period dramas that came before it, the filmmaker opted for a wilder, more New Wave approach, using handheld cameras and at times newsreel styles. "We made one decision right at the start," recalls the film's DP Walter Lassally, "and that was that provided the settings and costumes were impeccably in period (eighteenth century), the camera style could be thoroughly modern."¹¹ Not everyone was a fan however, with the cinematographer David Watkin (also a frequent collaborator with Richardson) later saying: "I thought *Tom Jones* was one of the worst photographed films I'd ever seen. Walter Lassally shot it in the full flood of saying, 'We're going to do this differently!' The antistudio, antiprofessional attitude was there."¹² Regardless of whether one agrees with Watkin or not, his point that *Tom Jones* was such an "antistudio" production makes its success all the more impressive, and more clearly places it in that spirit of 1960s rebellion.

¹¹ Lassally, op. cit., p. 74

¹² David Watkin interviewed in 'Let's Talk About Tony', in *The Cinema of Tony Richardson*, ed. James M. Welsh and John C. Tibbetts, Albany, 1999, p. 43

Produced by Richardson's company Woodfall Film Productions, it marked a major turn away from his previous socially charged films such as *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* (1962). However, *Jones* was not devoid of social consciousness, depicting a miserable existence in the slums of London juxtaposed against the lavish luxury of the oversexed and/or hypocritical aristocracy, while its famous deer-hunting scene shies away from none of the gore of the sport as the privileged elite set their dogs upon a beautiful beast. Kenneth Nolley writes: "There are plenty of things in *Tom Jones*... for all its rollicking good humor, to tie it to the bleak vision of the films that immediately precede it."¹³ *Time* called it "a social satire written in blood with a broadaxe".¹⁴

The film was largely funded by United Artists, who saw a clear market in the US for British cinema. Under George Ornstein, head of UA's London office, the studio produced the first James Bond film *Dr. No* (Terence Young, 1962) and The Beatles' film debut *A Hard Day's Night*, in addition to the colossally successful *Tom Jones*, thus playing a key part in what became known as 'the British Invasion'.¹⁵

It was a film of many firsts, marking the screen debuts of David Warner (as Tom's nemesis Blifil) and Lynn Redgrave (then Richardson's sister-in-law). It was Albert Finney's second lead role after the superb *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz, 1960), although it was *Jones* that catapulted the actor, then only 27 years old, to international star (and sex symbol) status. It was a film of

¹³ Nolley, Kenneth S., 'Reflections on Class: *Tom Jones* (1963) and *Joseph Andrews* (1977)', in *The Cinema of Tony Richardson*, ed. James M. Welsh and John C. Tibbetts, Albany, 1999, p. 223

¹⁴ *Time*, op. cit., p. 125

¹⁵ Shail, op. cit., p. 50

lasts also, marking George Devine's cinematic swansong. Surprisingly, *Tom Jones* is often reported to be the last film President Kennedy saw before his assassination,¹⁶ which places an even greater historical importance on the film by association.

Where, oh where, did *Tom Jones* go?

The vanishing of *Tom Jones* from the public consciousness is as tragic as it is explicable. The success of the Welsh pop singer Tom Jones (born Thomas Woodward) has left him and his music largely synonymous with the name – ironic since he took that as his stage name due to the success of the film¹⁷, and indeed the novel predates both by some 200 years. But with record sales in excess of 100 million¹⁸ it is impossible to deny Thomas Woodward his success, fame, or right to the name 'Tom Jones'.

Richardson confessed his film was "long forgotten by 1977"¹⁹ when he released *Joseph Andrews*, another film based on a Fielding novel, which floundered at the box office. Certainly an element of audience fatigue with the film wore in, as so often happens when films dominate awards show after awards show. The press didn't help – while Albert Finney's career soared, Richardson's subsequent films became punching bags for critics. Lassally recalled, "The press seemed to suffer a bit of an attack of 'sour grapes' after *Tom Jones*, as Tony's next two or three films received rather less than justice at the

¹⁶ Perry, op. cit., p. 49

¹⁷ Bonfante, Jordan, 'The Ladies' Men of Music', in *Life*, Vol. 69, No. 12, New York, 1970, p. 54

¹⁸ William, Charlotte, 'Tom Jones: 'Acting is harder than I thought. I was out of my comfort zone'', in *The Daily Telegraph*, London, 22 April 2012

¹⁹ Richardson, op. cit., p. 297

hands of the critics, to my mind at least.”²⁰ This may not have been helped by his refusal to attend the Academy Awards on April 13, 1964, where he was named Best Director.²¹ Despite directing some fine films afterwards, Richardson’s career never saw such heights again, as “the tone of his work shifted dramatically from exuberance and joyfulness to intense cynicism”²², and he undoubtedly became embittered with his most famous film. In *The Long-Distance Runner*, written some years before his death from AIDS in ’91, although not published until after, he confessed:

“I felt the movie to be incomplete and botched in much of its execution. I am not knocking that kind of success – everyone should have it – but whenever someone gushes to me about *Tom Jones*, I always cringe a little inside.”²³

Richardson would act on this dissatisfaction when in 1989 he undertook a new cut of the film. Richardson’s Director’s Cut followed the recently re-released *Lawrence of Arabia* (the winner of the Best Picture Oscar the year before *Tom Jones*), restored by Robert Harris and Jim Painten under director David Lean’s supervision, but rather than add footage that had been removed from the film, Richardson opted to cut it down from 129 minutes to 121 minutes. This attempt to make the film tighter and faster is largely unsuccessful; the cropped scenes come mostly from the film’s first act, creating a rushed intro that makes the latter half of the film feel stilted in comparison. Many of the superb supporting players lose out in this cut – Lassally claims that around half of the scenes Diane

²⁰ Lassally, op. cit., p. 82

²¹ Richardson, op. cit., p. 169

²² Shail, op. cit., p. 52

²³ Ibid., p. 169

Cilento shot were left on the cutting room floor for the Theatrical Cut²⁴, and another scene of hers is trimmed for the Director's Cut (making her Academy Award nomination seem all the more surprising). Richardson defended his cut in a 1989 interview. It is worth quoting at length:

"I always thought [*Tom Jones*] potentially had a sort of revival possibility, and lots of companies sort of bid for it and wanted to rerelease it. So, the movie's been locked up in some kind of dispute for about 15 years. But the original distributing companies and lots of other companies bid for it, and so I thought ok, eh, why not?

I just sharpened it up... it was just a moment of luxury... (struggles for words)... to say I have a chance to re-do it. The first thing that I did, I totally re-did the sound. Because state-of-the-art of recording 20 years ago was not very good. And recording is so absolutely fabulous now. And secondly then I just sharpened it up, and gave it a haircut, and trimmed a few things as I always think all movies are too long and, um, I wanted it to be a bit shorter. I mean I didn't do anything that if I'd been smart enough I wouldn't have done at the time."²⁵

Richardson's new cut did little to revive the film, and new audiences coming to it since 1989 have for the most part seen this truncated version of the film which, amongst other changes, removes several of the optical wipes for which the film is famous. Richardson also had the film re-colour timed, with troubling consequences.

As noted in *Variety* above, *Tom Jones* was shot on Eastmancolor, specifically Eastmancolor type 5248 (ASA 25)²⁶, which had "finer grain and improved color reproduction compared to its predecessor".²⁷ But as has been

²⁴ Lassally, op. cit., p. 81

²⁵ Interviewed on *Hollywood Stars*, November 2 1989. Transcription by Mark Quigley of UCLA Film and Television Archive

²⁶ Lassally, op. cit., p. 75

²⁷ Ryan, Roderick T., *A History of Motion Picture Color Technology*, London, 1977, p. 151

well documented these particular film stocks are prone to colour-fading. Leo Enticknap explains: “The dyes which form the green and blue layers on a positive element (cyan and magenta on a negative) fade gradually over an extended period of time, with the result that the overall colour balance is disrupted and the image takes on a pink hue. This phenomenon only affected Eastmancolor negatives and reversal materials derived from this technology (colour reversal intermediates were found to fade especially quickly); Technicolor dye-transfer prints were immune because no chemical changes were induced in the substances which formed the dyes after application on the gelatin-coated film base, thereby making these elements very stable as far as colour was concerned.”²⁸ Writing in 1979, only 16 years after its release, film historian Paul Spehr reported that *Tom Jones* was already falling victim to this phenomenon:

“I recently saw a print of *Tom Jones* which had lost so much yellow and green that the romantic revels of Sophie and Tom had completely lost the intended effect of youthful, springtime joy. The roses in the garden were now tinged with a reddish brown that totally destroyed the playful spirit of the original production.”²⁹

While not every print of *Tom Jones* will have suffered to the degree of the print described above, the dangers of Eastmancolor fading have proven to be largely unavoidable, and the original negative materials are no exception. The most notable result of colour-fading and Richardson’s attempts to re-time the film are seen in the night scenes. Lassally had opted not to use studio-quality floodlights in an attempt to capture the “monochromatic” look of moonlight, as

²⁸ Enticknap, Leo, *Moving Image Technology: From Zoetrope to Digital*, London, 2005, p. 194

²⁹ Spehr, Paul C., ‘Fading, Fading, Faded: The Color Film Crisis’, in *American Film*, Vol. 5, No. 2, Washington, 1979, p. 59

opposed to the blue-ish nighttime hue films regularly use, that he had “always hated”³⁰. This resulted in night scenes that look almost black and white, but when the colours fade the detail in the image becomes almost indiscernible. In addition, while Lassally carefully planned the lighting in certain sequences to create dusk and dawn effects using “day for night” techniques, a reordering of scenes in the ’63 edit meant much of this work was wasted. Lassally wrote that “some of my carefully planned transitions from day via dusk to night ended up lopsided, and I had a hell of a job in the grading process to try and disguise this”.³¹ Twenty-six years later, The Director’s Cut did more damage; in heightening the blacks it resulted in these night scenes being darker than they had ever appeared before. This means that recent viewers of *Tom Jones* have come across a film where whole scenes (two of them saucy romps between Tom and the “disreputable” Molly Seagrim (Cilento)) are essentially unwatchable. Hardly a worthy condition for so important and so esteemed a film to be left in.

How to make Tom gallivant again

Many issues must be looked at to make a restoration of *Tom Jones* viable. Money is one. While I believe I have justified the importance of the film and the need for all efforts to be made to return it to its former splendour, I will still need to make a financial case for this project. Let us assume for now that money is not a concern. Another issue is rights; who owns *Tom Jones*? This is an even more thorny matter, as Richardson himself implied above, and again one which I will return to later in this paper. The next issue is where is the film, and in what state

³⁰ Lassally, op. cit., p. 75

³¹ Ibid., p. 81

it is in. I contacted a number of major archives to try and ascertain where the original negatives lie, and what other prints are available that could be useful in a restoration.

Despite much investigation, I have not managed to pinpoint the exact whereabouts of the original negative, although I can confirm it is in Los Angeles, and an educated guess would suggest the MGM Archive. However, while I was not able to acquire a current condition report on the negative, enquiring after the film at the Museum of Modern Art turned up the following report in their files, made several years ago, regarding their own print as well as the original negative:

“Condition noted as: scratches, oil spots, broken perfs, color severely faded. Remarks: ‘Bob Harris reports that original neg has slugs, bad fading of night scenes and faded optical dupes, with inserted poor dupe neg from print. Our faded print may be required to generate new printing materials.’”³²

This comment led me to contact Robert Harris, who while he was unable to disclose the negative’s whereabouts, was able to confirm the above description as accurate, and warned that with time passing the negative was in danger of further fading and shrinkage.

My enquiries were able to confirm the existence of the following prints at the archives I contacted:

³² Information provided by Ashley Swinnerton, Collection Specialist, Department of Film, MoMA

Archive	Prints	Cut	Condition
The Museum of Modern Art	35mm acetate	Theatrical	Poor, colour-fading
George Eastman House	35mm LPP (Lowfade Positive Print)	Uncertain (acquired in 1989)	Uncertain, colour likely remains
British Film Institute	Print 1 Print 2	1: Theatrical 2: Unknown, acquired from BBC in 2002	Prints 1 and 2 are referred to as “viewing copies” and unlikely to be in especially good condition
Library of Congress	35mm acetate	Theatrical	Unknown
UCLA Film & Television Archive	35mm acetate	Theatrical	“Faded color, needs cleaning.”
Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences	Acetate Polyester 1 Polyester 2	Unknown, but likely one of the polyester prints is Theatrical and one Director’s	“All appear to be in good condition.”

With the negative in such poor condition it might be necessary to use some of these prints to stand in for frames that may be beyond repair in the negative. Before any restoration project could go ahead a more thorough survey of these prints, and those in other holdings, would need to be made. What other prints may exist out there is uncertain, but Walter Lassally threw some light on the matter. He wrote that “the great success of the film meant that lots of prints were needed, so I got the chance to compare prints made by different processes, such as Eastman and Technicolor, as well as in different cities, such as London and Rome, which was interesting.”³³ In this case, a cinematographer’s notes on his work become a remarkably useful guide for the restorer. I didn’t even need to go looking for more prints, as a short while after my initial dialogue with their archivists, a contact at AMPAS got back to me saying they had a fourth print in

³³ Lassally, op. cit., p. 81

their collection. This is an Italian print of the film, described as “thrashed”, with “serious base and emulsion scratching”, and given its footage and the number of splices is evidently not a complete cut of the film. However, it is an IB Tech (imbibition Technicolor) print. IB prints are known for having extraordinarily stable and vibrant colours due to the manner in which the dyes are absorbed (‘imbibed’) into the film, as discussed by Enticknap above. While the condition of this print makes it impossible to restore the film from, we can assume that its colour is still in excellent condition, and it is very possibly one of the original Technicolor prints Lassally mentioned in his memoir. Therefore, this IB Tech print likely has the closest record of what the colours of the original negative looked like before fading of any print currently in existence, and could thus be used as a consultation aid in the restoring of *Tom Jones*.

Rights, damned rights, and licenses

The rights issues that surround *Tom Jones* are an unexpected and night-indecipherable nightmare. The United States Copyrights Office records that copyright on *Tom Jones* (theatrical motion picture) is registered³⁴ to Woodfall Film Productions, Ltd. If only it were that simple. The distribution rights are currently held (partially) by MGM, although how they came to be there is a long, confusing story with more than a few gaps in it. I contacted their archives and was given an extensive walkthrough of *Tom Jones*’ history by Scott Grossman of MGM Technical Services. United Artists had initially held the US distribution rights to the film, and after the *Heaven’s Gate* (Michael Cimino, 1980) fiasco UA had been absorbed by MGM under Kirk Kerkorian in ’81. However, the rights to

³⁴ Registration Number / Date: RE0000517406 / 1991-02-12

Tom Jones did not come to MGM then, as UA no longer held the full rights to the title at that time. How exactly and by whom the rights had been acquired is unclear, but the rights had come to the Samuel Goldwyn Company (headed by Sam Goldwyn Jr., son of Samuel Goldwyn of MGM), presumably very shortly after its founding in 1979. It was while at the Samuel Goldwyn Company that Richardson released his Director's Cut, and that cut of the film still bears the company's logo before its credits.

Metromedia, which had purchased Orion Pictures in 1986, absorbed the Samuel Goldwyn Company in 1996, merging it with Orion. MGM bought the whole package from Metromedia the following year, explaining how the rights to *Tom Jones* ended up in MGM's lap. Mr. Grossman explained that in 2001 MGM saw a market in a new theatrical release of the film. They undertook a basic restoration of the original cut and had the film released on DVD in June of that year. The poor transfer was both an indicator of the rush job done on piecing *Jones* back together as well as the technology available at the time. The difficulty arose subsequently when it was revealed that Tony Richardson had made a deal with Sam Goldwyn Jr. not to distribute the Theatrical Cut of the film, only his Director's Cut. This agreement had been overlooked, it seems, but once discovered MGM chose to honour it, and production of DVDs of *Tom Jones'* Theatrical Cut ceased (there has not been a reissue since, and current VOD copies of the film are the Director's Cut only). It is unclear whether or not this agreement is perpetual, and whether or not it will carry forward as the film's rights trade hands in future. MGM's license on the film will, as I understand it, expire in the coming years, so what future that leaves for *Tom Jones* is unclear.

Keeping up with *Tom Joneses*

“Film restoration always creates a lacuna, a difference between the original and the duplicate.”³⁵

Let's once more assume that these complications have resolved themselves; much like Mrs. Waters (Joyce Redman) revealing the truth of Tom Jones's parentage and his innocence of attempted murder at the last moment, resulting in a happy, tidy ending for all. We find ourselves with two rather different cuts of the one film; which do we restore? As discussed above, Richardson was not happy with *Tom Jones*, and despite his claims otherwise, “struck an attitude”³⁶ when the Oscars came around. Albeit for me to deny the auteur his dues, but it is the Theatrical Cut of *Tom Jones* and not the Director's Cut that won so many accolades, garnered so many positive reviews and stunned its own producers by exploding at the box office.

The Director's Cut may now look crisper than the Theatrical Cut, but that is only because the Theatrical has not had the attention given to it (nor the expense) that it deserves. For the most part the scenes cropped from the Theatrical for the Director's Cut do little to speed the film along. In one case, a scene in which the character Black George (Wilfrid Lawson) is chastised for stealing a sheep was removed; this deleted scene is confusingly still referenced to in a subsequent scene that survived in Richardson's later edit. The newer cut is faster, perhaps, but sloppier.

There seems little doubt then that the priority of a restoration project on *Tom Jones* must focus on the Theatrical Cut of the film. Living in this age of Blu-

³⁵ *Restoration of Motion Picture Film*, eds. Paul Read and Mark-Paul Meyer, Oxford, 2000, p. 75

³⁶ Richardson, op. cit., p. 169

ray/DVD releases and the features they offer film aficionados, it seems like an ideal situation would be to restore both versions and release them in a package together (although the additional cost of this may raise problems). Richardson's final cut, whatever flaws or successes it might have, is still a work worthy of study, and the two cuts provide an interesting insight into the director's mind and editing style at two very different times in his life. However, in terms of a theatrical re-release (a 50th anniversary re-release has sadly sailed by), the Theatrical Cut, once restored to its former glory, is assuredly the only option, especially with the cost of making release prints today.

Making the grade

Imagine, if you will, that our search for the rights to *Tom Jones*, and our search for the negative, has turned up more than the half-certainties it did. We have the rights to restore and distribute the film, we have the original negative and the IB Tech print from AMPAS to work from, and funding is no matter. How exactly do we go about restoring *Tom Jones*?

“Although no fixed set of rules or a code of ethics of film restoration has yet been established, a general awareness among film restorers with regard to ethical principles, applicable to both film restoration and film reconstruction, is very strong now.”³⁷

I interviewed Danny DeVincent, the Senior Colorist and Director of Digital Services at Cineric in New York City, to clarify issues around film restoration in the digital age which, due to dramatic improvements in technology year in year out, literature has not been quite able to keep up with. Cineric is one of America's leading restoration companies; in the last four years it has worked on 4K digital

³⁷ Read and Meyer, op. cit., p. 69

restorations of films such as *The Grapes of Wrath* (John Ford, 1940), *On the Waterfront* (Elia Kazan, 1954), *Taxi Driver* (Martin Scorsese, 1976) and *Richard III* (Lawrence Olivier, 1955). While Cineric would undoubtedly be capable of handling a project as delicate as *Tom Jones*, it would not be advisable for them to undertake this restoration simply because the fragile negative should not be shipped outside of Los Angeles. But with the superb-quality facilities at Cineric, Mr. DeVincent was more than qualified to describe the processes that *Tom Jones* would need to undergo at a suitable film lab in Hollywood.

Firstly the negative will need to be inspected, with sprocket damage checked and shrinkage measured to ascertain how best to scan it. The negative will then undergo a liquid gate scanning at 4K standard, which strips the negative of almost all dirt while creating an extraordinarily high-resolution digital image. An adjustable PES Gate can allow the scanning of a film that has suffered shrinkage, while the image is recorded using Area Array CCD technology. Once the image has been digitised, the cleaning process can begin.

The software tools used at Cineric are DaVinci Revival (for eliminating scratches, dust, etc.), Pixel Farm (for frame-by-frame reconstruction metadata capture), and Dark Energy (for emulating film grain – making digital look like film). The colour-grading takes place after the film has been cleaned. “Fading is fairly straight-forward,” says DeVincent, although it helps to have a colour reference. An IB print, for example, would do nicely, although it’s also helpful that the cinematographer, Walter Lassally, is still alive, and could perhaps be consulted if need be – Paul Read and Mark-Paul Meyer called film restoration “an

activity of interpretation and opinions, of taste and editorial decisions”.³⁸ With regards the troubled night scenes, DeVincent did not seem worried. “If there’s image in the negative,” he says, “we can do anything with the night scenes.” As noted by Robert Harris above, the dupes used to create the numerous optical effects have resulted in noticeably weaker image. Scott Grossman warned that while a 4K restoration cannot disguise all the dips in image quality during dissolves and wipes, MGM have been successful in making scans of their Westerns (a genre commonly using optical fades) that are of a very high standard. As for sound, the audio would be restored at a facility such as Audio Mechanics in LA. Ideally *Tom Jones* would be upgraded and remixed to a 5.1 surround soundtrack. Once the project is finished, *Tom Jones* should look and sound better than ever.

Tom Jones seeks his fortune

For a project of this nature, there’s no denying it’s not going to be cheap. While he admitted he would need to inspect the negative thoroughly to give a precise cost estimate, based on the information I gave him Mr. DeVincent told me the restoration project would likely cost in the region of \$200,000, not including the sound mix. A steep sum, but not insurmountable.

So where will the funding come from? MGM may still have some interest in the project. Scott Grossman warned me that these projects are “more of a commerce thing, less of an art thing”, but surely it can be both. The Film Foundation, Martin Scorsese’s non-profit which raises funds for film preservation and restoration, could be approached in the case of a film this

³⁸ Ibid., p. 70

important and so desperately in need of support. As a cornerstone of British cinema, the BFI should have some interest in the project; similarly AMPAS, with the film a former Best Picture winner (they screened the film at the Academy Awards' diamond jubilee celebration 'Facets of the Diamond' in 2003, proving its importance to them). The more parties that contribute to the project, the more complicated it becomes to run the restoration, and rights regarding distribution subsequently become confused. For this reason, larger contributions by fewer institutions are preferable.

Because of the film's fading from the public consciousness, without a superb publicity campaign (further expense) a theatrical re-release could not be expected to raise the same kind of revenue as say the re-release of a film such as *Lawrence of Arabia* – again, it seems a great shame the film's 50th anniversary was missed. However, there is certainly a market in home media, with a classic of this nature likely to fare well as a special edition for avid collectors, especially if both cuts of the film can be included. Albert Finney was reportedly unhappy during the filmmaking process³⁹, but now 77 years of age and enjoying a late career renaissance (c.f. *Big Fish* (Tim Burton, 2003), *Before the Devil Knows You're Dead* (Sidney Lumet, 2007), *Skyfall* (Sam Mendes, 2012)) may be acquiescent to discussing the successes of yesteryear in an accompanying interview. Famous for roles in *The Omen* (Richard Donner, 1976) and *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997), David Warner is also still active, and might offer insights on the film. The actress Vanessa Redgrave was married to Richardson at the time *Tom Jones* was made, and both her late sister Lynn and late mother Rachel Kempson (Bridget Allworthy, Tom Jones's real mother!) appeared in the film, so

³⁹ Richardson, op. cit., p. 162

her input would be of huge value. And Walter Lassally, whose wild filmmaking style defined the look of the film, is still active, having recently made his acting debut in the drama *Before Midnight* (Richard Linklater, 2013). His memoir *Itinerant Cameraman* is hugely forthcoming about the production of *Tom Jones*, and he might be willing to discuss it if the opportunity could be arranged. The more time passes by the fewer of these people will be in any position to discuss this film, reducing the value of the product both financially and as historical record.

Additional extra features on such a DVD/Blu-ray release might include comparisons of the book and film, and a short documentary on the locations in the film and how they appear 50 years later.

Who will save *Tom Jones*?

As he hangs by the neck for a crime he did not commit, Tom is rescued, unexpectedly and with much audacity by Squire Western (Hugh Griffith). "I've always loved that boy!" Squire Western declares before leaping to the rescue, having just learned that Tom is to inherit Squire Allworthy's estate. Loving *Tom Jones* may not be enough to save it, as for Squire Western there will need to be financial reward in it. As I have laid out above, I believe there is a great future in remastering *Tom Jones*, introducing it to a new generation of fans who can appreciate its wild and bold comedy and daring filmmaking. Its success would open the rest of Tony Richardson's filmography to potential rerelease and revenue intake. If the project is not deemed to provide suitable reward, funding should be found through other means, lest the negative be lost to the ravages of

time and vinegar syndrome, and inferior digital scans of the film be all that is left to posterity.

To paraphrase the film's narrator: "To forget a movie is a common evil, to lose a movie is the devil."

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