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Publication Date

2018

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

"A Little Out of Its Due Course":

The Appeal of the Digressive Chronotope in the Early English Novel

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Boram Claire Kim

2018

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

"A Little Out of Its Due Course":

The Appeal of the Digressive Chronotope in the Early English Novel

by

Boram Claire Kim

Doctor of Philosophy in English

University of California, Los Angeles, 2018

Professor Helen E. Deutsch, Chair

This dissertation argues that the ways in which eighteenth-century pioneers of the English novel played with narrative form challenges the conventional privileging of causality as the organizational principle of plot by imparting value to deferral and digression. Until recently, Structuralist narratology's faith in progression as the only viable momentum of novelistic plot has dominated scholarly treatment of digression, which has been cursory at best. My project proposes that collectively speaking, the formal idiosyncrasies so emblematic of eighteenth-century literature constituted an artistic response to a host of contemporary intellectual and technological innovations in the human ability to perceive.

The long eighteenth century saw the parallel ascendances of empiricist thought led by scholars like David Hume and John Locke, and chronometric innovations that allowed for increasingly nuanced measurements of how time passes. I show that these transformations in the

theory and practice of human perception, which subverted the concept of a divinely created objective world in favor of one that could be shaped by human perception and intervention, encouraged the stylistic experimentation in literature characteristic of the era. The Oriental tales of Antoine Galland and Frances Sheridan deploy the Orient as a backdrop for attesting the power of human induction and its ability to shape the world. Henry Fielding's fiction presents itself as an alternative to historical writing, better able to capture the universal truths of human nature because of its ability to jettison the strictures of time and space. Laurence Sterne's body of work replaces the logic of causality with the logic of contiguity as a way of challenging rationalism and readerly expectations that equate narrative progression with logical plot progression. These examples all point to the eighteenth century's investment in using digression and deferral to contemplate alternatives to the traditional tripartite structure of plot at a crucial juncture in the solidification of the novel genre.

The dissertation of Boram Claire Kim is approved.

Jonathan Hamilton Grossman

Sarah Tindal Kareem

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Helen E. Deutsch, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2018

To both of my families:

the one I was born into, and the one I made.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Introduction

In the twentieth chapter of *Don Quixote* (1605-1615), the titular would-be knight and his faithful servant Sancho Panza are traveling in the middle of the night when they hear a terrifying pounding noise. While Quixote is eager to investigate the source of this sound, the frightened Sancho begs him to put off the adventure until morning, and secretly ties the horse's forelegs together to keep them from advancing. To keep his master distracted and pass the time, Sancho offers to tell a story about a goatherd named Lope Ruiz who is pursued by his former love, a shepherdess named Torralba whom he has grown to hate. Just as Lope realizes that Torralba is chasing him as he travels to Portugal with his 300 goats, he arrives at a river and finds a fisherman with a boat, only to realize that the boat can only fit one goat and one person at a time. Unfortunately, it is the only way he can escape Torralba:

> "The fisherman got into the boat and ferried across a goat; he came back, and ferried another one; he came back again, and again he ferried one across. Your grace has to keep count of the goats the fisherman ferries across, because if you miss one the story will be over and it won't be possible to say another word. And so I'll go on and say that the landing on the other side was very muddy and slippery, and it took the fisherman a long time to go back and forth. Even so, he came back for another goat, and another, and another—"
>
> "Just say he ferried them all," said Don Quixote. "If you keep going back and forth like that, it will take you a year to get them across."
>
> "How many have gone across so far?" said Sancho.
>
> "How the devil should I know?" responded Don Quixote.

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"That's just what I told your grace to do: to keep a good count. Well, by God, the

story's over, and there's no way to go on."

"How can that be?" responded Don Quixote. "Is it so essential to the story to know

the exact number of goats that have crossed that a mistake in the count means you cannot

continue the tale?"

"No, Senor, I can't," responded Sancho, "because as soon as I asked your grace to tell

me how many goats had crossed, and you said you didn't know, at that very moment I

forgot everything I had left to say, and, by my faith, it was very interesting and pleasing."

(146-147; I.xx)

On the one hand, the story is a trick on Sancho's part to keep Quixote preoccupied for as long as

possible so that he does not insist on further exploring the clamor. On the other, this interrupted

anecdote (we never find out what happened between Lope and Torralba) brings into relief the

intersection of fictional and real time—often taken for granted—and the role that such a juncture

plays in establishing what we have come to understand as the mimetic verisimilitude particular to

Western novelistic fiction. Sancho's story of the goatherd, which staked its promise of being

"very interesting and pleasing" on its veracity,[1] as well as Sancho's mimetically rigorous

insistence on narrating the crossing of each goat in quasi-real time, simply falls apart when it

fails to sustain Quixote's attention. This unceremonious dissolution underscores how often

storytelling's capacity to expand, condense, or altogether stop the passage of time—after all, how

else could the operations of the real world otherwise fit into the confines of a story, oral or

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[1] Before he goes into the detail with the story of Lope and Torralba, Sancho tells Quixote: "But the man who told me this story said it was *so true and correct* that I certainly could, when I told it to somebody else, affirm and swear that I had seen it all" (145; I.xx, my emphasis). The degree of a story's truth—if truth can be said to exist in degrees—does not, of course, give its narrator more or less authorial authority through contiguity (Sancho's claim to know the man who had told him the story and vouched for its truth). The story's veracity becomes insignificant when Sancho cannot continue his story without the "help" of Quixote. The contingency of a supposedly factual story on its audience's attention would seem to destabilize the very notion of truth and fact.

written?—goes unnoticed. Quixote's (and most likely the reader's) mounting impatience with each "again" pronounced emphasizes how tedious a story—even, or especially, one based on truth—would be that sought to represent reality exactly as it was without the temporal manipulation that transforms truth into narrative.

By illustrating how a story that fails to engage its audience simply disappears into the ether, this scene also suggests that the proverbial falling tree makes no noise unless someone is there to hear it.[2] As such, narrative emerges as a function of readerly attention, but also more broadly as evidence of individual perception; it becomes a world whose existence relies on the spectator/reader/listener's ability to participate in its construction and sustenance. This notion plays a crucial role in the creation of the second volume of *Don Quixote*, which, as a direct response to paratextual events surrounding the publication of the first volume, features a universe in which the popularity of the first volume affects every aspect of the sequel's plot.[3] Sancho's abrupt finale reveals how a story can come into being within the confines of a beginning and end through its temporal variance with the real world that surrounds it. In the case of the physical book, we might argue that the temporal manipulations of narrative give rise to a world that exists in a space that is captured in the literal pages of a book. In fact, it is precisely the expansive

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[2] Early English empiricist George Berkeley originated this question that is widely circulated today. In *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley argues for a world constructed solely of human perception by claiming that "The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived: the trees therefore are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlour, no longer than while there is some body by to perceive them. Upon shutting my eyes all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and barely upon opening them it is again created" (218).

[3] In 1614, a spurious second volume entitled *Second Volume of the Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha: by the Licenciado Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, of Tordesillas* was published by an anonymous author writing under a pseudonym, and widely circulated. Published a year later, the furious Cervantes's own sequel openly addressed and mocked the Avellaneda version. More importantly, it portrays a world in which Quixote is aware of his status as a personage who has been written about, and whose fame influences his actions and encounters. The sequel could not have existed without the role played by the audience in its response to the first volume.

narrative possibilities of a story that make it capturable within a set number of pages.[4] A point

perhaps so obvious that it is rarely pointed out, narrative time is defined by "its lack of

correspondence to real time," whether the story in questions spans centuries, or a diegetic second

is drawn out to the length of a whole chapter (Calvino 44). Narrative's deployment of relative

time in this way highlights the materiality of the book as simultaneously essential to conveyance

and mere medium. Just as the pages of a book that have been torn out to be used as hair curlers

no longer constitute a story, a publication that is not read ceases to be more than utilitarian

curling or wrapping paper.[5]

I open with this prescient passage from *Don Quixote*, often categorized as the first

Western novel but not to be followed by generically comparable works for almost another

century, for two reasons. Cervantes served as an inspiration, model, and muse for countless

eighteenth-century European writers who admired, translated, and often imitated *Don Quixote* in

their own languages. More specifically, the above passage is just one of many Cervantean

examples that prefigures and captures the particularly eighteenth-century style of experimenting

with self-conscious investigations of the relationships between narrative time, space, and

readership. And so it is that when the sun rises, the two men discover that the horrendous noise

was only the sound of fulling hammers, robbing Quixote of his opportunity to prove his courage,

and making Sancho exclaim "Wasn't it laughable how frightened we were, and wouldn't it make

a good story?" (151; I.xx). Sancho's recognition that the revelation of their deception, the

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[4] Unlike, for example, encyclopedias, dictionaries, newspapers, and other such non-narrative, non-fictional compilatory genres, which must be added to constantly.

[5] During a trip to France, Tristram Shandy discovers on the paper curlers that have fallen from a French woman's hair his "own writing." When Tristram notes that "you have got all my remarks upon your head, Madam!" the woman, "without any idea of the nature of my suffering, she took them from her curls, and put them gravely one by one into my hat—one was twisted this way—another twisted that—ey! by my faith; and when they are published, quoth I,—They will be worse twisted still" (4: X.ix). The pages of an abandoned book being used for practical secondary purposes was a popular Grub Street trope.

deflation of giants for windmills, and the giving way of fear and suspense to comedy all constitute a "good story" (and the metafictional deployment of said "good story" in the novel to which Sancho belongs), exemplifies the claim by scholars like Catherine Gallagher that a new brand of fictionality emerged in the eighteenth century, one that "promoted a disposition of ironic credulity enabled by optimistic incredulity; one is dissuaded from believing the literal truth of a representation so that one can admire its likelihood and extend enough credit to buy into the game" (346).[6] In a world devoid (but created by tales) of knights errant and the monsters they fight, the stories that remain are about the puncturing of fantasy, rather than the fantasy itself. Sancho's insistence on literally-timed narration, as well as Quixote's dreams of finding glory in combatting fantastical beings, fall flat as their own self-contained narratives, but contribute to the broader narrative about the violent encounter between literary fantasy and real life, fantastical literature and realist literature.

This dissertation focuses on how eighteenth-century writers play with temporality in a way that imparts value to deferral and divagation—straying or deviating from what we have come to refer to as plot—and how such techniques cultivate, as the Bahktinian chronotope of time-space does, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bahktin 84). My study stems from an interest in the ways in which precursors and pioneers of the eighteenth-century novel perform the various tensions captured in Sancho's story: between reader/listener and storyteller, between factual truth and verisimilitude, between suspense and boredom, between progression and digression. In a single work, a narrator might be willing to defend his intentions "to digress, through this whole History,

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[6] Gallagher borrows the term "ironic credulity" from Felix Martinez-Bonati, who argued that it was precisely the stated "fictitiousness of the narrated object" that enabled a reader to enjoy a work of fiction as such (Gallagher 345). Also see Gallagher's *Nobody's Story* (1995) and Ian Duncan, "The Rise of Fiction," *Scott's Shadow: The Novel in Romantic Edinburgh* (2007).

as often as I see Occasion: Of which I am myself a better Judge that any pitiful Critic whatever"

(Fielding, *Tom Jones* 28), yet also promise to be selective: "if whole Years should pass without

producing any thing worthy of his Notice, we shall not be afraid of a Chasm in our History; but

shall hasten on to Matters of Consequence, and leave such Periods of Time totally unobserved"

(53). The following pages explore what Carol H. Flynn characterizes as the temporal chaos

specific to eighteenth-century novels, which generate "scrambled, jogging, rocking narratives

that resist interiority while refusing to end" (160). For temporality emerges as one of the most

visible subjects of experimentation and fascination for many writers specifically in the long

eighteenth century; in *Oronooko* (1688), the narrator's temporal and spatial proximity to the

events chronicled undermines the integrity of her story; in *Pamela* (1740), the eponymous

heroine writes in quasi-real time, slowing down the narrative by magnifying detail; in the novels

of Fielding, years at a time are gleefully and openly omitted altogether. I argue that during the

long eighteenth century, the human capacity for perceiving, understanding, and measuring the

passage of time was the subject of much debate and controversy, and that such public discourse

was borne out in how European writers in the eighteenth century experimented with the

triangulation of time, space, and the reader. In the same way that the manner in which the main

characters and the publication of *Don Quixote* are always temporally out of sync with their

immediate surroundings affects the plot of the novel, the works examined in this dissertation

play with time to appraise and create different conceptualizations of human perception that were

popular at the time.

The emergence of empiricists like Pierre Gassendi, John Locke, George Berkeley, and

David Hume in the long eighteenth century popularized the notion that our understanding of the

world around us was filtered through individual perception and therefore not tethered to

objective reality or truth.[7] Accompanying the dissemination of empirical induction in popular

European thought, Dutch horologist Christiaan Huygens's application of Galileo's discovery of

the pendulum's isochronicity—that is to say, the ability to produce constant movement that

occupies equal amounts of time—to the clock in 1656 resulted in technological developments in

the accuracy of chronometry that made human perception of the passage of time increasingly

precise—a change that would naturally give rise to "changes in the inward notation of time"

(Thompson 354). Alongside these parallel developments, each with seemingly diverging

approaches to the possibility of finding accurate ways of understanding the world (and

refinements on the idea of accuracy itself), emerged a new breed of fiction that anchored its

attraction not in truth claims, but rather by building an atmosphere of verisimilitude: the sense

that the narrated events were possible, and that they were happening to people like the ones we

know in real life. With its roots in the Aristotelian faith in the inherence of the literary artist's

mimetic impulse, verisimilitude came to be increasingly associated with the novel by the late

seventeenth century,[8] and was often derived from the probability of a character's actions, as

manifest in Henry Fielding's faith in fiction's ability to capture the truth "as to the actions and

characters of men" in a way that history failed to do (*Joseph Andrews* 183). While the very

etymology of the word "verisimilitude" might seem to tether it to objectivity, the fact that it

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[7] Berkeley, for example, opens *Principles of Human Knowledge* with the following: "It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the *objects* of human knowledge, that they are ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or, lastly, ideas formed by the help of memory and imagination—either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways" (193). Similarly, Locke maintains that it is in experience "that all our Knowledge is founded; and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our Observation employed either about *external sensible Objects*, *or about the internal Operations of our Minds perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our Understandings with all the Materials of Thinking.* These Two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have, or can naturally have, do spring" (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 68; II.i).

[8] According to April Alliston, to define verisimilitude in terms of other popular seventeenth-century genres, "'real solemn history' should be true, and therefore would not necessarily be probable; a proper novel, on the other hand, should be probable rather than true; while romance was increasingly reviled as marvelous, neither true nor probable" (252).

relies on readerly identification implies that there is a measure of subjectivity to its successful execution.[9] Thus it stands at the crossroads between the limitations of a world built through individual perception and the mechanic accuracy of clockwork.

It should come as no surprise then, that this environment gave rise to some of the proudest and best-known digressors, as well as broad formal experimentation with different degrees of narrative subjectivity and the flow and manipulation of the passage of time in writing. This dissertation proposes to think of the results of such experimentation as chronotopes alternative to the traditional tripartite progression of plot. By chronotope, I take Bahktin's term at its loosest definition—I do not mean, for example, temporal or spatial motifs specific to certain genres, examples of which include: "adventure-time," typically found in romances, in which "one day, one hour, even one minute earlier or later have everywhere a decisive and fatal significance"; or the "high road winding through one's native land" that is a staple of the picaresque novel (Bahktin 94, 165). Rather, I define the chronotope as a departure from forward-moving narrative in which time and space manifest and articulate themselves through each other. This approach to digression, deferral, and all other forms of literary dawdling is effective because it avoids treating plot as necessarily linear and forward-moving; indeed, it avoids treating progression as the only viable momentum of a work of fiction in a way that replicates the value-based framework developed by narratologists. By thinking of temporal deviations from the plot as alternative chronotopes, I suggest that stylistic techniques such as deferral, digression, expansion, condensation, or fast-forwarding suspend the correspondence that one expects between the act of reading and the act of narrative progression.

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[9] For Fielding, verisimilitude (he did not use that term, but his conceptualization of literary imitation of nature is analogous) was what allowed the reader to recognize in a character a person she had encountered in the real world.

This characterization of the chronotope is particularly useful in responding to recent

scholarly treatment of temporal playfulness, which has been deeply influenced by the

Structuralist understanding of narrative functionality that would give rise to the study of

narratology. Structuralism's mission to strip down a narrative to the minimal schema of a story

demands the categorization of narrative elements according to their expendability. This, in turn,

means that any discussion of digressive or wayward elements of a story are usually discussed

only tangentially through plot, and usually dismissed as problematic (Barthes 237-238). The

criticism heaped on one of the most infamous digressive episodes in the eighteenth-century

English novel, the interpolated tale of the Man of the Hill from *Tom Jones*, reflects a

longstanding critical history of treating anything that drifts from the main thrust of the novel as

pathological excess.[10] Treating experimentation with temporality as a chronotope avoids the

valuation of digression as the indolent underbelly of plot by shifting the focus onto how

digression suspends the correspondence that one expects between the act of reading and the act

of narrative progression. In doing so, my dissertation challenges the Structuralist privilege

granted to the allegedly more important elements of plot called "cardinal functions" over the

mere filler, called *catalyses* (Barthes 247-248). Unlike Roland Barthes, who likens non-essential

plot points to parasites that sap the plot of its momentum, my dissertation aims to open up

digression to the potential for an alternative time-space that halts the temporal and spatial

movement of that from which it digresses.

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[10] An anonymous pamphlet, "An Essay on the New Species of Writing founded by Mr. Fielding: with a Word or Two upon the Modern State of Criticism" (1751), compared "the long unenliven'd Story" to "Blemishes" and "Freckles" on an otherwise "fair complexion" (44-46). Ian Watt compared it to an "excrescence" (3). Walter Allen calls the story "extraneous" and the "one blot on the novel judged as a formal whole" (30-31). Although he does not directly refer to *Tom Jones*, Gérard Genette describes the insertion of authorial discourse into narrative (like Fielding's many authorial interjections) as forming "a sort of cyst that is very easy to recognize and to locate" (*Figures of Literary Discourse* 141).

My first chapter situates the literary Orient as an outlet for the human preoccupation with manipulating time. The publication of the first volume of Antoine Galland's *Les mille et une nuits, contes arabes traduits en français* in 1704 and subsequent translations soon thereafter inaugurated a centuries-long European obsession with all things Oriental; in England, pirated or embellished editions of *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* were published and remained popular well into the nineteenth century. Beginning with the first English translation of *Mille et une nuits* by an anonymous Grub Street writer, I provide a brief overview of the eighteenth-century Oriental tale in England and France, tracing how the genre utilizes the supernatural as a way of establishing an Other temporality. I argue that the Oriental tale is primed for popularity in the eighteenth century because of the imagined Orient's role as the ideal backdrop for fantastical temporalities to be deployed in a way that was assumed by Western readers to be simply part of Oriental life. This chapter focuses on the works of three authors, all derived from or influenced by the original *Nights*: "The Story of Noureddin Ali, and Bedreddin Hassan," from the second volume of *Nights* (1704), a pair of short oriental tales recounted by Joseph Addison and published in the *Spectator* (1711), and *The History of Nourjahad* (1767), by Frances Sheridan, likely inspired by "Noureddin Ali." Through my close reading of these texts, I argue that the Orient represents the possibilities of creating altered worlds through altered perceptions of time.

If my first chapter examines an exotic world in which time can be manipulated by genies and fairies, my second chapter investigates an author who is able to transform the familiar (if idyllic) world of English shires into seeming fairy kingdoms: Henry Fielding. The romantic and remote atmosphere of Fielding's otherwise mundane English countryside can be traced to Fielding's disenchantment with the historical writing of his time.[11] This chapter argues that

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[11] It has long been subject to debate whether Fielding is a writer of romances/epics in the Classical tradition, or novels. See Homer L. Goldberg, "Comic Prose Epic or Comic Romance: The Argument of the Preface

Fielding, dissatisfied with the nature of fact-based truth offered by contemporary historians, posits his novels as an alternative source of truth centered on human nature and accessible only through the medium of fiction. For Fielding, facts were not only often boring and insignificant details, they also tended to get in the way of portraying truths about human behavior. Although Fielding's binary of history v. novel, non-fiction v. fiction, is reductive, I show how it serves as the basis for one of his best-known literary techniques—the rambling, interfering, yet performatively reticent narrator. As an antidote to the purported neutrality and plodding chronological pace underlying many historical texts of his time, Fielding's infamous "gaps" and "vacant spaces" are moments in which his narrators jettison objectivity in favor of total subjective immersion. By embodying different characters' voices and foibles, Fielding's disruptive, digressive narrators actually perform an aesthetic of self-effacement as a way of lending an aura of truth to his plots and allowing him to transcend the "mere" historical facts that are time and space, and positing fiction as an alternative truth-telling chronotope to history.

Finally, my third chapter investigates a seminally digressive text that departs from the finely plotted works covered in the two previous chapters: Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767). In this chapter, I turn to the influence of empiricism on literature throughout the eighteenth century. Using Stuart Sherman's narrative recuperation of what was previously considered the "merely" chronological genre of the diary as a jumping off point, I claim that Sterne crowds out plot with the help of "mere" details connected to each other by their associative proximity rather than causality. In spite of the common attribution of the novel's associative eccentricity to the empirical philosophy of John Locke, I demonstrate that the latter's

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to *Joseph Andrews*"; Sheridan Baker, "Fielding's Comic Epic-in-Prose Romances Again"; Arthur L. Cooke, "Henry Fielding and the Writers of Heroic Romance"; Henry Knight Miller, *Henry Fielding's Tom Jones and Romance Tradition*; Scott Black, "Henry Fielding and the Progress of Romance"; and James J. Lynch, *Henry Fielding and the Heliodoran novel : romance, epic, and Fielding's new province of writing*.

attitude toward digression is actually much more in line with those of the Structuralists. I propose that David Hume's recognition of the peripatetic nature of human thought is a more suitable context for discussing Sterne's digressive style. I close the chapter by examining some of the specific formal techniques used by Sterne to play out these ideas.

It is clear that the temporal zaniness of eighteenth-century writers is a phenomenon unique to its time. The delaying tactic was by no means a Cervantean or a Shandean innovation; as Erich Auerbach has shown, the Homeric epic is well known for its digressive "retarding element," which manifests the need "to represent phenomena in a fully externalized form, visible and palpable in all their parts, and completely fixed in their spatial and temporal relations" (4). But I would argue that modern digression often accompanies innovation because it encourages experimentation with form. The digressions we see in the eighteenth century look, for the most part, inward into the texts that produce them. Unlike the Homeric retarding element, they are not externally-bound devices that provide background information—rather, they reflect on and question narrative form by turning away from it. Digression and other forms of non-progressive temporality are inherently innovative and self-questioning devices whose chronotopic alterity opens up new realms of possibility—whether that is in terms of form, genre, or fictionality.

Chapter One

The Literary Orient as Didactic Chronotope

Now do you imagine I have entertained you all this while with a relation that has, at least, received many embellishments from my hand. This, you will say, is but too like the Arabian tales. —These embroidered napkins! and a jewel as large as a turkey's egg! —You forget, dear sister, those tales were written by an author of this country, and (excepting the enchantments) are a real representation of the manners here . . . My letter is insensibly grown so long, I am ashamed of it. This is a very bad symptom. 'Tis well if I don't degenerate into a downright story-teller. (Montagu 155-59)

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu wrote the above letter to her sister from Constantinople, where she was traveling with her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, who had been appointed Ambassador at Istanbul. The year was 1717, the same in which the twelfth and final volume of Antoine Galland's *Les Mille et une nuits, contes arabes traduits en français* (1704-1717), was published. By this time, the Orient had thoroughly saturated European culture. Not only had the first volume of Galland's Oriental tales spawned a fervor for Oriental literature that would remain popular for two centuries, the Oriental style was also popular in arabesque fashion, furniture and decorations, and porcelain.[12] Ironically, Lady Montagu's quasi-journalistic firsthand corroboration of the veracity of the manners depicted in Galland's tales has the opposite effect of puncturing the fantasy of the capital of the Ottoman Empire. By pre-emptively ventriloquizing her sister's skepticism of Oriental indulgences, Lady Montagu actually

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[12] Arabesque furniture, initially made popular in the Tudor years, experienced a resurgence throughout the long eighteenth century, enough so that the William and Mary style of furniture design was one of the first European styles to combine Italian Baroque with Asian design and materials such as japanning, woven rattan cane, and lacquering. Its successor, Queen Anne style, was simplified but retained many of the Oriental aspects. See Edwin Foley, *The Book of Decorative Furniture: Its Form, Colour, & History, Volume 2*.

intensifies the region's fabulous reputation, making fantasy real rather than the other way around.

Even more interesting is how Lady Montagu chooses to close her letter to the Countess of Mar: by apologizing for the drawn-out nature of her writing, which she hopes will not be reduced to "stories," a word that carries connotations of lies and fictitiousness.[13] Her use of the word "symptom" implies that she has contracted this long-winded wordiness somehow, perhaps in the summer apartment of her friend Fatima, whose decorations elicited the description so fabulous that they might be mistaken for fabrications. The coexistence of storied fantasy and studied observational truth embodied in Montagu's letters reflects a paradox integral to the genre of the Oriental tale, beginning with Galland's insistence on the anthropological value of his work:

> Ils doivent plaire encore par les coutumes et les mœurs des Orientaux; par les cérémonies de leur religion, tant païenne que mahométane ; et ces choses y sont mieux marquées que dans les auteurs qui en ont écrit, et que dans les relations des voyageurs. Tous les Orientaux, Persans, Tartares et Indiens, s'y font distinguer, et paroissent tels qu'ils sont, depuis les souverains jusqu'aux personnes de la plus basse condition. Ainsi, sans avoir essuyé la fatigue d'aller chercher ces peuples dans leurs pays, le lecteur aura ici le plaisir de les voir agir et de les entendre parler. (Galland 7)

By categorizing the collection on the one hand as a truer depiction of Oriental life than historical texts or travelers' records, and on the other as a world in which "le merveilleux qui y règne d'ordinaire," Galland blurs the line between fiction and reality (7). This move is echoed by almost every one of Galland's successors, who sometimes satirically and sometimes in earnest[14]

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[13] "A narrative of imaginary or (less commonly) real events composed for the entertainment of the listener or reader; a (short) work of fiction; a tale," (*OED* definition 3.b) or simply "A lie" (*OED* definition 7.a).

insist on their works as ethnically and culturally authentic, typically through the trope of the found text, which presents itself as an artifact that has made the journey through space and time and multiple authorial inputs before being delivered to a European readership. As Alain Grosrichard notes in *The Sultan's Court* (1998), "In place of history—of which it can have no conception, and which it cannot beget—the Orient substitutes histories, fuelling the Western imagination" (79). Such claims to authenticity, Galland's included, encourage the equation of firsthand experience with literary consumption. The real and figurative distances between the Orient and its European readers seems to paradoxically do away with the layer of mediation typically associated with the act of learning through reading, which becomes just as urgent perspectively and temporally as experience, as we will see later on in the chapter.

Whether or not such depictions of the Orient were factually accurate does not matter for the purposes of this study. For, following in the footsteps of Edward Said and many scholars who have written on the Oriental genre since the publication of *Orientalism* (1978), I consider the literary Orient as a reflection of a European effort to affirm its identity by constructing "an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) the 'Occident'" as a means of demonstrating imperialist superiority (2-3). My goal therefore is not to probe the veracity of depictions of the Orient by writers like Galland or Montagu, but rather to explore what purpose is served in the trope of the Orient as a place in which fantasy is simply a part of everyday life. I acknowledge that the ensemble of tales that came to be known as the

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[14] For example, Richard Francis Burton discredits previous translations of the text for their inattention to detail and accuracy, and their being dumbed down due to the "despotism of the lower 'middle-class' Philister who can pardon anything but superiority, the prizes of competitive services are monopolised by certain 'pets' of the *Médiocratie*" (x). In contrast, he promises a work that is closest to the original: "a chef-d'oeuvre of the highest anthropological and ethnographical interest" (xi).

Arabian Nights' Entertainments[15] was patched together by Galland from different sources from different regions in different languages and misleadingly presented as a coherent text bound together by the frame tale. These texts "were radically transformed in the process," their linguistic, cultural, and tonal differences flattened to provide a sense of unity, and they likely provide more insight "into the 'precieuse' culture of the eighteenth-century French salon" than they do actual Eastern culture (Ballaster 90). I prefer to adopt the term "French transcreation" used by Srinivas Aravamudan to designate *Arabian Nights,* rather than translation, since it is clear that the origins of the literary Orient are in Europe (237). As such, my study focuses solely on Galland's version of the text and its English translation by an anonymous Grub Street writer. While there are many more accurate translations of the original Syrian manuscript, my objective here is not to seek out linguistically and historically faithful versions of the Urtext, but rather that first transcreation that betrays the traces of the European filters through which it journeyed to become the text we know today. Galland's version is the one that most European versions, for the next two centuries, would draw from in some way or another, and therefore it is the most influential one of the long eighteenth century in Europe.

The turn of the eighteenth century saw, along with a fascination with the East, a fixation on how individuals perceived and spent time, namely due to two phenomena: the emergence of the concept of leisure time (and its companion, boredom); and the mainstreaming of empiricist ideas by philosophers like Berkeley, Locke, and Hume that highlighted the importance of human perception to our understanding of the world. This chapter argues that the literary Orient that emerged in eighteenth-century Europe served as an outlet for this preoccupation with controlling, spending, and moralizing time. This role allows the Oriental chronotope to serve chameleonic

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[15] Unless specified otherwise, I use the title *Nights* to designate both Galland's transcreation and the subsequent Grub Street translation, which, aside from the subtle differences in the Advertisement discussed later in the chapter, is nearly identical to its French source.

purposes to suit each of its creators, be it satire, wish fulfillment, romance, or exemplum. By

harnessing the power of supernatural elements like the divine, genies, and fairies, the Orient

becomes not simply a time-space in which "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes

artistically visible" in the form of the Oriental space, but also a space that represents the

possibilities of creating altered worlds through altered perceptions (Bahktin 84). Indeed, the

literary Orient *is* such an altered world.

I begin the chapter with an analysis of the relationship between the frame tale of *Nights*

and the paratextual material surrounding it. Despite being the most memorable part of *Nights*,

Scheherazade's frame tale is dissolved very early on in the work. I argue that this authorial

decision on Galland's part blurs the boundaries between text and reader by engaging the

arabesque form, allowing the reader to grasp the workings of Oriental time as he gradually

supplants the sultan Schariar and is transported to the diegetic Oriental world. In the next section,

I examine the *Spectator*'s treatment of the Oriental tale. As a popular and didactic publication,

the *Spectator* provides a lucid reflection of how the eighteenth century's interest in the seemingly

magical flexibility of worlds built off of empirical induction could be deployed for didactic

lessons on how to spend time "well" through the Orient. I trace two *Spectator* essays and

accompanying Oriental fragments back to the empiricist influence of Locke, which in turn

echoes the twelfth-century *Philosophus Autodidactus* (Arabic title *Hayy ibn Yaqzan*) by Moorish

philosopher Abu Bakr Ibn Tufayl, and conclude that in spite of its fantastical associations, the

Orient actually serves as the perfect backdrop for proving the power of empirical induction.

In the final section, I look at two Oriental tales—one from *Nights*, "The Story of

Noureddin Ali, and Bedreddin Hassan," and the other, a novella by Frances Sheridan, *The

History of Nourjahad* (written in 1750 but only published posthumously in 1767). Both tales

deploy supernatural elements that turn out to be overshadowed or controlled by human elements. In so deflating the fantastical element of the Oriental tale, they reiterate the importance of the genre not as mere escapism or fairytale entertainment, but as an avenue for Enlightenment thought experiments on human perception, and as a didactic chronotope in which the malleable limits of perception are used to discipline characters that violate the ethics or rules of regular time through the sobering effects of firsthand experience.

Arabian Nights' Entertainments: *Storytelling and the Arabesque*

At the center (or should I say periphery) of *Nights* is the frame tale—universally known, beloved, and countlessly retold, imitated, and parodied. Scheherazade's bravery and creativity is the one aspect of the collection that lives on in our universal collective consciousness, even for those who have never read the tales. In brief summary: Schahzenan, the king of Tartary, discovers his wife is having an affair with a servant, and murders both individuals. He then embarks on a journey to visit his older brother Schariar, the sultan of the Susanians. While at his brother's palace, Schahzenan witnesses his sister-in-law and her ladies-in-waiting engage in an orgy with a group of black servants (or so we assume—we are told that "Modesty will not allow, nor is it necessary, to relate what passed betwixt the blacks and the ladies"). After witnessing it for himself, Schariar initially suggests to his brother that they both "go into foreign countries, where we may lead an obscure life, and conceal our misfortune" (7). However, the two men happen upon the human wife of a genie who forcibly makes love to them both while the genie sleeps, and then collects a ring from each brother. She shows them a whole string of such trophies from "all the men to whom I have granted my favour. They are full fourscore and eighteen of them" (8). Shocked by the woman's promiscuity, Schariar orders the execution of his

wife and her entire retinue. After this, "being persuaded that no woman was chaste, he resolved, in order to prevent the disloyalty of such as he should afterwards marry, to wed one every night, and have her strangled next morning" (9). After many days, Scheherazade, daughter of the sultan's vizier, decides to put a stop to this barbarity by offering herself up for marriage, in spite of her father's protestations. On their wedding night, Scheherazade and the sultan are joined by Scheherazade's sister Dinarzade, who, as part of a planned dialogue, asks her sister to tell a story. Scheherazade obliges, but cuts herself off at daybreak, leaving Dinarzade and the sultan with a cliffhanger: "Schariar, who had listened to Scheherazade with pleasure, says to himself, I will stay till to-morrow, for I can at any time put her to death, when she has made an end of her story" (18). This repeats itself night after night, until finally, on the one thousand and first night of enchanting stories, Schariar finally decides to pardon Scheherazade.

This is the template that has suffused our culture: a storyteller so skilled and productive that she manages to defer and ultimately thwart death, and thereby save a kingdom's worth of young women. The stories Scheherazade tells to the sultan every night echo her own plight, featuring characters also in life-or-death situations who use fascinating stories to commute their death sentences. While this thematic repetition has been widely noted, most scholarly accounts mention only in passing—if at all—that the frame tale's insistence on maintaining its own structure—namely by bookending each night's story with Dinarzade's request "My dear sister, says she, if you be not asleep, tell me one of those pleasant stories you have read" and Scheherazade's interruption "But I see day . . . and must leave off; but the best of the story is yet to come" (21)—is dissolved very early on in the collection. As the elision of the hierarchy between the frame tale and the embedded tales told by Scheherazade has never been critically

probed, I will examine in the following pages how the danger of Scheherazade's execution is quickly dissipated through a paratextual sleight of hand.

In the Grub Street translation of *Nights*, the twenty-seventh night of Scheherazade's marriage to Schariar concludes with the following bracketed "Advertisement":

The readers of these Tales were tired in the former editions, with the interruption Dinarzade gave them: this defect is now remedied; and they will meet with no more interruptions at the end of every night. It is sufficient to know the Arabian author's design, who first made this collection: and for this purpose we retained his method in the preceding nights.

There are of these Arabian Tales, where neither Scheherazade, sultan Schariar, Dinarzade, nor any distinction by nights, is mentioned; which shews that all the Arabians have not approved the method which this author has used, and that a great number of them have been fatigued with these repetitions. This, therefore, being reformed in the following translation, the reader must be acquainted that Scheherazade goes now on always without being interrupted. (65-66)

The English translator argues that the desire for a more adroit unfolding of the nightly episodes—a desire that corresponds to the willingness to forget that it is Scheherazade's voice telling the stories, and her life at stake—is a universal one. Nobody, not even "all the Arabians," whom the reader assumes are well-versed in this style of narration, wants to be "fatigued with these repetitions" when there are more exciting stories at hand. By reducing the interjections of the frame tale characters to "defects,"[16] the translator makes explicit an important shift that has been taking place over the course of the previous twenty-six nights: our reason for reading the

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[16] This term echoes and pre-empts the tendency that we will later see in the criticism of both Fielding's and Sterne's novels to pathologize any narrative element that delays the plot from unfolding, even though these interjections serve a very functional purpose within the frame tale, which is to delay the execution of Scheherazade.

tales is no longer due to or contingent on the survival of Scheherazade. By this point, the reader

is much more interested in hearing what Scheherazade has to offer—her death has become an

afterthought. Through this shift of attention and desire, the proliferation of the nightly tales has

crowded the story of Scheherazade out to the periphery, *turning* it into the frame. As another

frame tale character that is pushed out to the margins, Schariar also vanishes, but his tyrannical

demands (tell a good story or die) are supplanted by the reader's desire for entertainment

"always without being interrupted."[17]

Galland's original *Mille et une nuits* had a similar notice "alerting readers to the

subsequent omission of the Introductory Tale at the beginning of the third book of his

(eventually) twelve-volume collection," although it orients its reasoning differently (Mack 929

n65). While he mentions that some French readers did not like the repetition, the focus is more

on Galland's concern with remaining faithful to the original Arabic manuscript, something that is

absent from the English translation:

> The reader will no longer encounter each night: 'Dear sister, if you are awake, etc.' As
>
> this repetition shocked many refined individuals, we redacted it to accommodate their
>
> delicacy. The translator hopes that the learned will forgive him for his infidelity to the
>
> original in doing so, since he has otherwise so religiously preserved the kind and the
>
> character of Oriental tales . . . He had sensed that this repetition might well offend the

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[17] Another sleight of hand occurs here, as well. The Grub Street writer does away with Galland and the French original altogether by referring directly to an Arabian readership (in spite of the fact that the English translation is clearly based on Galland's French transcreation, not an original Arabic manuscript). By removing the extra layer of authorship, the English translator positions himself that much closer to the Orient, emphasizing the authenticity of his text.

French; but by a timidity rare in an author translating a little known book, he dared not deviate from his text. (Galland 242)[18]

Before they are done away with, the interjections of Dinarzade, Scheherazade, and Schariar serve to remind the reader/listener of the primacy of the frame tale's temporality over the narrative integrity of each episode. By attributing the heady concurrence of the chronological regularity marked by Scheherazade's observation of the rising sun, and the desire for plot fulfillment that is highlighted by the nature of the embedded stories to "the kind and the character of Oriental tales," Galland makes the case for the Oriental tale as a genre that thrives on pairing temporalities and expectations that are out of step with each other. In doing so, both the English translator and Galland set a precedent for a certain type of literary Oriental temporality; they render the frame tale by way of relocating the defective interruptions and separating *Nights* into two distinct temporal tracks, highlighting the need to erase the boundary between them. While the nightly tales are punctuated not by their proper narrative arcs but by the arrival of daylight, they are subordinated to and contained within the small quotidian sliver of time between "before day" and "day-break" (19). The Advertisement gives the nightly tales a chance to form a temporal structure independent of Scheherazade's voice. Instead of succumbing to the appearance of day, the tales can be organized by titled cycles rather than diurnally. Whether or not they included the explicit announcement, all subsequent eighteenth-century European versions of the text followed Galland's example and abandoned early on the disruptive formula of opening and pausing each night's story with interjections from the three frame tale characters.

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[18] "Le lecteur ne trouvera plus à chaque nuit : *Ma chere soeur, si vous ne dormez pas*, etc. Comme cette répétition a choqué plusieurs personnes d'esprit, on l'a retranchée pour s'accommoder à leur délicatesse. Le traducteur espère que les savants lui pardonneront l'infidélité qu'il fait en cela à son original, puisqu'il a d'ailleurs si religieusement conservé le génie et le caractère des contes . . . Il avait pressenti que cette répétition pourrait bien déplaire aux Français; mais, par une timidité assez rare dans un auteur qui traduit un livre peu connu, il n'osa pas s'écarter de son texte."

22

The decision to silence the voices of the frame tale, eliminating that mediating layer, effectively compels the reader to take on the role of the firsthand listeners (Schariar and Dinarzade).

When the nightly tales, initially mere instruments of deferral, become that which is deferred and interrupted by the frame tale, the urgency of Scheherazade's fate becomes correspondingly negligible. The last interruption from the frame tale characters until the closure of the collection is one such example, and it comes at the end of the Aladdin story cycle. In it, Schariar marvels to himself at the delight afforded by his wife's tales: "He found that the sultaness knew how to introduce them very well, and was not sorry that she gave him an opportunity of suspending, by this means, the execution of the vow he had made never to keep a woman above one night, and put her to death the next day. And now he began to have no other thoughts, but to try if he could exhaust her store" (725-26). The sultan knows that Scheherazade has been using her stories to stay her execution and his curiosity is no longer based on suspense. Neither is the reader's. If Scheherazade's earlier stories were strategically paced so that they were interrupted by the rising sun at their most enthralling—"he shewed the sultan that he was a man only from the head to the girdle, and that the other half of his body was black marble—Here Scheherazade broke off, and told the sultan that day appeared" (54)—this tactic is short-lived. As early on as the appearance of the Advertisement, Scheherazade no longer relies on cliffhangers, as the promise of starting a "new story [that] would be as agreeable" as the one she has just told is enough to sustain the sultan's attention (65). E.M. Forster is thus mistaken in his assessment of Scheherazade's survival:

> Great novelist though she was—exquisite in her descriptions, tolerant in her judgments, ingenious in her morality, vivid in her delineations of character, expert in her knowledge of three oriental capitals—it was on none of these gifts that she relied when trying to save

her life from her intolerable husband. They were but incidental. She only survived

because she managed to keep the king wondering what would happen next. (45)

The suspense that comes from withholding information turns into a suspension of the sultan's

violence, and the curiosity about how a story ends grows to encompass a more removed curiosity

and wonder at the proliferation of Scheherazade's tales. This distinction is perhaps best vocalized

by Sarah Kareem, who distinguishes the effects of eighteenth-century fiction as eliciting both

"wonder *at* and wonder *about* objects" (8). The difference lies in being "struck with surprise or

astonishment, to marvel" (*OED* definition 1) and "feel[ing] some doubt and curiosity . . . to be

desirous to know or learn" (*OED* definition 2). Just as Kareem argues for the capaciousness of

the term, it is not that Schariar stops being curious about the outcomes of the stories he hears, but

rather that he develops a different kind of appreciation for Scheherazade's tales, one that requires

accretion over time to emerge. This type of wonder was also manifest in the original Arabic

manuscripts that contributed to the compilation of *Nights* as *'ajab* or *'ajā'ib* (an object or event

that inspires such wonder), which translates as an emotion that is elicited by "marvels, wonders,

astonishing things" (Mottahdeh 29) and was described by renowned Persian linguistic scholar

Jurjāni as "the change of the *nafs* [spirit or soul] through something the cause of which is

unknown and goes out of the ordinary" (Flügel qtd. in Mottadeh 30). According to Roy P.

Mottahedeh, the word and its derivates are reiterated throughout *Nights* at several key moments,

for example: when Schariar and his brother Schahzenan realize the deceit of women, when

Dinarzade compliments her sister's stories, and when Schehrazade offers to tell more astonishing

ones the next night in return for her life (31). Just as the tales proliferate until they overwhelm

and rupture the cohesion of the frame tale, Scheherazade removes herself from the picture, so to

speak, and compels her listeners to lean over the boundaries of the frame tale so that

momentarily they are listening directly to an unmediated embedded story. Abundance thus plays an important role in Scheherazade's creativity, its excess translating itself to her ability to outdo herself with each story.

When the diurnal chronology of the frame tale gives way to the plot-driven temporality of the embedded tales is also when the text begins to betray its arabesque nature. As can be guessed from the vague general connotations it carries of fancy, volubility, and wildness, the arabesque as employed by different writers and critics throughout history is—perhaps only rightly so— impossible to pin down in any meaningful way. Today it is most often associated with the dark and mystical tonal quality found in nineteenth-century American Gothic, such as Edgar Allan Poe's *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* (1840) or Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892). Poe certainly read *Nights* and was influenced by Oriental tales, as evinced in his many short stories like "Al Aaraaf" (1829), "Ms. Found in a Bottle" (1833), or his burlesque "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Schehehrazade" (1845).[19] More broadly speaking for these authors, however, the arabesque is an atmosphere of mystery and fancy engendered by references to the East designed to provoke a sense of awe, magic, and cultural unfamiliarity translated to aesthetic horror.[20] Interestingly enough, the term arabesque has never been used— aside from as a synonym for Arabian origins—to critically discuss the style of an Oriental tale.

My dissertation defines the arabesque as less of a tonal quality and more of a formal event that draws on both the Romantic literary and the ornamental roots of the word. As a scrolling pattern of plant and floral motifs that can be seamlessly and infinitely repeated, the

[19] Jacob Rama Berman's argument in *American Arabesque* that "Poe evacuates material Arabs and Arabo-Islamic culture from the image of the Arab, replacing the real with the figural to create his idealized realm of 'pure fiction'" (24) is analogous to the literary Orient's relationship to the actual Middle East or Asia.

[20] For example, in "A Tale of the Ragged Mountains" (1844), set near Charlottesville, Virginia, Mr. Bedloe walks out into the nearby hills and suddenly happens on 'an Eastern-looking city, such as we read of in the Arabian Tales" (945). In "The Yellow Wall Paper," the wallpaper pattern is described as "a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus" displaying "a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind" (12).

arabesque has its origins in the decorative arts and was popular in Islamic art from the eighth

century and on (Robinson 254). Thus its form shares with Scheherazade's stories the potential

for infinite expansion and reproduction. According to Ernst Kühnel, the conceptual

capaciousness of the arabesque registers the Islamic world's belief that artistic creativity reflects

the divine, but only incompletely, since its medium—the material world—is "of transitory

significance and [is] a priori destined to pass away. This attitude leads to the assumption that it

cannot be the task of the artist to arrest a reality that has been optically perceived or personally

experienced" (5). This is why the arabesque always represents natural subject matter (flowers

and leaves) deliberately reworked into fanciful forms like infinite bifurcations, "mirror images or

upside-down repetitions"; it is nature as would never be found in nature (Kuhnel 7). This places

the arabesque at the crossroads of a strange tension between fact and fictional "truth," medium

and message. The arabesque takes real subject matter and makes it fantastical for human

consumption as a way of approximating (knowing full well it cannot) the divine truth that exists

in all that is real. Even though the formal aesthetics are intentionally unrealistic, their lack of

realism represents the acknowledgement of the ineffability of that which they try to capture.[21]

As if this confused trajectory were not enough, the definition of the literary arabesque is

equally vague. According to Winfried Menninghaus, Enlightenment scholars into the 1780s

looked down on the arabesque, which had been adapted in Baroque and Rococo decorations and

textile patterns. Peripheral and contingent to the actual work of art itself (e.g. in the form of

picture frames or wall decorations), the arabesque motif was not considered a part of true art, and

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[21] When a similar style of decoration became popular in sixteenth-century Italy, it was immediately embraced as originating from the Arab world, and designated *rabeschi*, which spread to France under the term arabesque (*Encyclopedia of Interior Design* 30-34). Today, it is generally agreed that the majority of "arabesque" stylings adopted in Early Modern Europe decorative arts most likely had Ancient Roman origins, rather than Arab. Like *Nights*, the arabesque was erroneously introduced to Europeans as an authentic artifact of Arab culture, and both capture the ways in which Western imaginations make Oriental fantasies "real" while recognizing their fantastic nature and artifice in the same way that the traditional arabesque form strives to render simultaneously the divine in the real and its ineffability.

was often treated as a manifestation of *horror vacui* in its attempt to fill empty space with meaningless curlicues. Even in its secularized, Westernized version, the arabesque works to fill the spatial equivalent of the divine—infinity. Kant and the early German Romantics were the first to consider its potential to embody pure aestheticism, and to attempt to legitimate "the ornament's lack of purpose and significance" as the ability to simply be, rather than mediate or symbolize (Menninghaus 31-33). For them, the arabesque, both in its refusal to be pinned down with significance and in its seeming purposelessness, came to represent the ultimate pleasure of art for art's sake. Of the Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel is most closely associated with the effort to conceptualize the arabesque as a literary philosophy. His notes on the arabesque are vague, and he often uses the term interchangeably with "grotesque," but they do share an affinity with the original definition: "the aesthetic idea of the Absolute, i.e. that which cannot, by definition be signified or become manifest before our eyes" and has "inherent mutability and multiplicity" (Strathausen 375). As "a type of form or structure that flirted with caprice" and opposed systematic coherence, the arabesque "resonated well with Schlegel's definition of poetry as essentially a process of becoming" (Ruotsinoja 3) and represented constant imminence: "the suppleness of its line and its caprice are able to embrace the twists and turns, the spontaneity and chance encounters of life itself" (Gordon 33). For Schlegel, the novel was the ultimate arabesque mode of literature; it had no boundaries because it was a "hodgepodge," a "mixture of storytelling, song and other forms" ("Letter" 293). He admired, in particular, novels by authors like Sterne, Diderot, and Jean Paul Richter, which involve "the unusually close association or transposition of form and content, the discussion within the work of the form or medium along with the actual object of portrayal, or the portraying of this form or medium instead of the

object" (Immerwahr 673). In other words, the mutability of the arabesque is best deployed when a text collapses its structure, turning itself inside out as a way of examining its own form.

In spite of the respectfully nebulous tone with which the arabesque is discussed by scholars, it is clear that several junctures exist between the decorative and literary artistic versions. The arabesque in both cases presents a series of confrontations: of ephemerality with permanence, materiality with divine ineffability, medium with message, fact with fiction. As a form, its objective is simultaneously to capture the ineffable and to accept the impossibility of its own task. In dealing with these confrontations, the arabesque work of art becomes both the art and its medium (hence the transposition of form and content)—Scheherazade's frame tale becomes the delivery mechanism for her embedded tales, but only when the embedded tales take up the space of Scheherazade's voice. On the one hand, the Scheherazade's tales seem to stop the passage of time in their ability to put off her execution. On the other hand, they rely heavily on the passage of time, since it is in their repetition and accumulation that they perform their function of deferral.

This conflict between material and medium lies in a dimension of spirituality that in *Nights* is specifically channeled through temporality. The centrality of the ineffable and the divine to the arabesque makes it an artistic move that is inherently about the limits of humanity—the limits of human perception, the limits of the material world and its temporality, the limits of manmade artistic media. The following section, in which I close read Locke's treatment of time and duration in *Essay on Human Understanding* (1690) alongside Oriental tales published in the *Spectator*, reveals the opposite tendency: to treat the Orient as a place where the divine can be perceived and understood (temporarily), should God will it. This reveals the eighteenth-century literary Orient as a chronotope constructed by the temporary suspension

of the realistic limitations of human perception—a world created through the fullness of human observation and understanding.

Locke and the Spectator*: Empiricism in The Literary Orient*

In 1690, Antoine Galland was an attaché to the French embassy in Istanbul (and later a collector for the French East India Company and antiquary to Louis XIV), and most likely travelling through Syria, Greece, and the Levant, encountering the fragments and manuscripts that would later be included in *Nights*. 1690 was also the year that John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* was published. One of the Enlightenment's foundational texts on empirical thought, *Human Understanding* was responsible for challenging innatism in favor of the idea of the human mind as a *tabula rasa*—a blank slate that acquires knowledge through perception, experience, and reasoning. This section shows how the fantastical mysticism that is such an important part of the arabesque was also perfectly positioned to be taken up by empiricism, and that the Orient deployed magic or the supernatural for the purposes of empirical instruction. Published on the heels of *Human Understanding*, *Nights* and its Oriental contemporaries reached a readership that was primed for a genre of narrative that performed the kinds of investigations of human perception that empiricism set forth. In the following pages, I argue that the Oriental tale used its reputation for entertainment and fancy as a way of illustrating principles of empirical induction. While many empiricists at the time shared similar views on how humans perceive and measure the passage of time,[22] I focus on Locke in particular because his strategy of using cues of space and mobility as ways of understanding the passage of time is

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[22] As Locke's successors, both Hume and Berkeley consider duration as the "succession . . . of ideas and impressions" (Hume, *Treatise* 35; I.ii.3). Similarly, Hobbes argues that "there cannot be of time any other measure besides motion; and that he most universal measure of motion, is a line described by some other motion" (267).

crucial, I argue, to the depiction of an Orient that manifests its exoticism through the manipulation of temporality.

The fourteenth chapter of the second book of *Human Understanding* is dedicated to duration. Duration, which Locke defines as "the distance between any parts of that succession, or between the appearance of any two ideas in our minds" is how humans perceive and understand the passage of time (141; I.ii). It is particularly important because the very "train of ideas which constantly succeed one another in [man's] understanding, as long as he is awake" that allows for the observation of duration is what constitutes no less than human consciousness: "whilst we receive successively several ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist; and so we call the existence, or the continuation of the existence of ourselves, or anything else, commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds, the duration of ourselves" (141; I.ii). Duration is the concrete measure by which we perceive the passage of time, but it is also subject to manipulation, for "one who fixes his thoughts very intently on one thing, so as to take but little notice of the succession of ideas that pass in his mind, whilst he is taken up with that earnest contemplation, lets slip out of his account a good part of that duration, and thinks that time shorter than it is" (141; I.ii).

From the very opening of this section, Locke stresses and demonstrates the inevitability of using spatial terms to talk about time when he introduces the concept of duration as "another sort of distance or length" (141; I.ii). Further interlocking time and space, he argues that it is impossible to measure the passage of time without taking into account space, since "all men manifestly measured time by the motion of the great and visible bodies of the world" and "to measure motion, space is as necessary to be considered as time" (149; I.ii). One of the most striking images that drives this point home is that of a man at sea, who

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may look on the sun, or sea, or ship, a whole hour together, and perceive no motion at all

in either; though it be certain that two, and perhaps all of them, have moved during that

time a great way. But as soon as he perceives either of them to have changed distance

with some other body, as soon as this motion produces any new idea in him, then he

perceives that there has been motion. (142; I.ii)

This example sets an interesting limit on human perception (sight in particular) in its ability to

observe the passage of time; if all the parts of a whole move at the same pace and thereby

maintain the same distance relative to each other, the human eye would not perceive that they

had moved.[23] This image underscores the measurability of duration as a spatial gap, or in-

between. Conversely, Locke also employs analogies of movement through space (for example, a

bullet traversing a human limb or the movement of a clock hand) that are so quick as to be

imperceptible yet undeniable, emphasizing at once the human inability to see certain types of

duration (too slow, too quick), and ability to reason, based on the whole, what cannot be seen in

the parts. For Locke, inductive reasoning steps in where perception fails. Addison's use of the

Oriental tale replaces reason with spiritual experience, as we will see below.

One of Locke's best-known disciples and public supporters was Joseph Addison, who

often used his daily publication the *Spectator* as a mouthpiece for Locke's ideas. Addison

studied Locke while a student at Oxford, and even gave the Encaenia oration[24] on the merits of

Human Understanding in 1693 (Batey, "Magdalen Meadows" 111). Not only does the *Spectator*

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[23] In the previous chapter, on space, Locke poses a similar problem, although focusing more on movement in space than movement as a function of the passage of time: "Thus a company of chessmen standing on the same squares of the chessboard, where we left them, we say they are all in the same place, or unmoved; though perhaps the chessboard hath been in the mean time carried out of one room into another, because we compared them only to the parts of the chessboard, which keep the same distance one with another" (129; I.ii).

[24] An annual "ceremony at which the University of Oxford awards honorary degrees to distinguished men and women and commemorates its benefactors" (http://www.ox.ac.uk/news-and-events/The-University-Year/Encaenia).

explicitly quote Locke at several turns,[25] Locke's prints are everywhere throughout the paper, as in "The Pleasures of the Imagination," originally written as an academic exercise in single essay form in the late 1690s, then later edited and published over the course of eleven issues of the *Spectator* from Nos. 411 to 421 (Batey, "Pleasures" 191). In the essays, Addison makes various Lockean arguments on the role our senses (especially sight) play in furnishing "the imagination with its ideas; so that by the pleasures of the imagination, or fancy . . . I here mean such as arise from visible objects" ("No. 411"), as well as the effect of greatness—"I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece"— rarity or novelty, and beauty on sensual pleasure ("No. 412"). It is interesting, then, that in the essays on the pleasures of beautiful landscapes and architecture, Addison brings up the Orient— with no precedent in Locke's writing—as a source of superior aesthetics: the tower of Babel, the pyramids of Egypt, and the wall of China ("No. 415"). He praises the natural plantations of China in comparison to the overly manicured gardens of Europe, expressing admiration that the Chinese even have "a word, it seems, in their language, by which they express the particular beauty of a plantation that thus strikes the imagination at first sight, without discovering what it is that has so agreeable an effect" ("No. 414"). For Addison, the Orient is the subject of imaginative romanticization; an aesthetic entity more than a geographic location, defined by its temporal distance from eighteenth-century Europe rather than its physical distance, with one foot in a mythic past (the tower of Babel is mentioned among a list of real structures). This fascination with the Orient is just a continuation of a passion that Addison revealed in earlier issues of the *Spectator*, in which this view of the literary Orient as a temporal and spatial Other is first broached through a series of short Oriental tales.

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[25] *Spectator* 62, 94, 110.

This is apparent in the common association between the Oriental backdrop and the morality tale, both widespread elements of popular literature throughout the long eighteenth century. Both Patricia Meyer Spacks and Darryl P. Domingo trace the conceptualization of boredom and the corresponding rise of commercialized leisure to the eighteenth century.[26] While to be boring was "only a social sin," to be bored in the eighteenth century "signaled moral misstep" (Spacks 34). In *Rasselas* (1759), an Oriental tale of sorts, for example, a surfeit of sensual stimuli quickly leads to Imlac's boredom when he encounters the sea for the first time: "I looked round about me with pleasing terrour, and thinking my soul enlarged by the boundless prospect, imagined that I could gaze round for ever without satiety; but, in a short time, I grew weary of looking on barren uniformity, where I could only see again what I had already seen" (25). But the same sense of monotony is also elsewhere termed "vacuity," which Rasselas and the princess feel on witnessing a boundless but boring landscape: "They clambered through the cavity, and began to go down towards every part, and, seeing nothing to bound their prospect, considered themselves as in danger of being lost in a dreary vacuity. They stopped and trembled" (40).[27] If, on the one hand, there were writers who chose "to satisfy the new cultural demand for diversion by way of the formal idiosyncrasies of their work" (Domingo 7), there were others like Addison and Steele, Samuel Johnson,[28] and John Mason[29] who thought it their duty to edify their readership on how to best spend its time.

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[26] See Patricia Meyer Spacks *Boredom: The Literary History of a State of Mind* and Darryl P. Domingo, *The Rhetoric of Diversion in English Literature and Culture, 1690-1760*.

[27] Like the *Spectator*, Johnson recommends learning as one of the best ways to escape boredom: "Ignorance is mere privation, by which nothing can be produced: it is a vacuity in which the soul sits motionless and torpid for want of attraction; and, without knowing why, we always rejoice when we learn, and grieve when we forget" (*Rasselas* 32).

[28] Although Johnson's style was notoriously ornate, it wasn't formally experimental or idiosyncratic in the way of Sterne, for example.

The ninety-third and ninety-fourth issues of the *Spectator* critique the inconsistent nature of the attitude "We all of us" have toward the passage of time, and prescribes how readers might rectify this problem. Addison's way of broaching this issue relies on a distinctly Lockean model of time. Because our time is constituted by a series of alternating durations and ideas, the way in which humans think about time is fraught with self-contradiction: "Though we seem grieved at the Shortness of Life in general, we are wishing every Period of it at an end . . . We are for lengthening our Span in general, but would fain contract the Parts of which it is composed . . . . Several Hours of the Day hang upon our Hands, nay we wish away whole Years" ("No. 93"). This observation echoes Locke's earlier claim that humans are unable to reconcile the big picture with its smaller constituents. At the root of this dissatisfaction lies the human conviction in *telos* as that which determines the significance, or at least experienced desirability, of a period of time; it is the destination, not the journey that matters. The examples provided by Addison depict life as a series of desired moments separated by periods of bored limbo: a minor longing "to be at age," a usurer waiting for the "next quarter-day," a lover impatient for "the happy meeting." In this model of the human experience of time, the word "momentous" captures the concomitance of a moment's brevity and its significance. The in-between periods of waiting—Locke's duration—are only made bearable by the anticipation and punctuation of a pleasurable end.[30]

Contrasting with the disparity between duration and moment is the regularity shared by the many types of temporal units mentioned by the author, from the more abstract "Period," "Parts," and "Moments" to the specifically chronometrical "Hours," "Years," and "Days." The *Spectator*'s use of these terms demonstrates Addison's conceptualization of time as being

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[29] Mason wrote *Self-knowledge: A Treatise Shewing the Nature and Benefit of that Important Science, and the Way to Attain it: Intermixed with Various Reflections and Observations on Human Nature*, published in 1745.

[30] See Jonathan Kramnick, "Locke's Desire."

composed of systematically unfolding chronological units. In criticizing the inconsistent human attitude toward time, he also criticizes the human desire to manipulate time; to stretch it and condense it in ways that make it unpredictable and irregular. He highlights the absurdity of this desire through an equally incongruent metaphor that replaces time with space:

> Thus, as fast as our Time runs, we should be very glad in most Parts of our Lives that it ran much faster than it does. Several Hours of the Day hang upon our Hands, nay we wish away whole Years: and travel through Time as through a Country filled with many wild and empty Wastes, which we would fain hurry over, that we may arrive at those several little Settlements or imaginary Points of Rest which are dispersed up and down in it. ("No. 93")

By describing the "Points of Rest" toward which we wish to speed as merely "imaginary," Addison further underscores the futility of rushing toward what we see as a desirable moment in time. Even as he uses a spatial metaphor to critique the human desire to manipulate the passage of time, Addison resorts to that very language when he proposes to fill the "mere gaps and chasms," and "empty spaces of life" through "the Exercise of Virtue." Not only does the *Spectator* mimic Locke's syntactic spatialization of time, it uses that very tactic to censure "empty" duration—time that is passed in wishing time would pass more quickly and thus void of interest and moral weight—as idle, unproductive, maybe even evil, and makes a moral imperative of the mission to fill or pass such time.

The best way (practically and morally) to pass time is to put an end to the seeming incongruity that is, according to Seneca, that "We are always complaining our Days are few, and acting as though there would be no End of them" (*Spectator* "No. 93"). Addison's solution to this is the pursuit of virtue and wisdom. This is not particularly surprising, concerning the

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generally didactic tenor of the *Spectator*. What is interesting is Addison's faith in perception's

ability to dictate a subject's experience of time in a way that gives rise to very real consequences,

not just perceptual ones. As such, the *Spectator* introduces its plan to instruct its readers on "how

we may extend Life beyond its natural Dimensions, by applying our selves diligently to the

Pursuits of Knowledge" by opening the ninety-fourth issue with the epigraph ". . . Hoc est vivere

bis, vita posse priore frui." In its entirety, this aphorism from Martial's *Epigrams* (X.23)

translates to "For he lives twice, who can at once employ / The present well, and ev'n the past

enjoy."[31] Addison again cites Locke, who argues that "one who fixes his Thoughts very intently

on one thing, so as to take but little notice of the Succession of Ideas that pass in his Mind whilst

he is taken up with that earnest Contemplation, lets slip out of his Account a good Part of that

Duration, and thinks that Time shorter than it is" (141; II.iv). Taking Locke's argument a step

further, Addison suggests that if man "shorten[s] his Time by thinking on nothing, or but a few

things; so, on the other, lengthen[s] it, by employing his Thoughts on many Subjects, or by

entertaining a quick and constant Succession of Ideas" ("No. 94"). In its reiteration of Locke's

words, the *Spectator* elides the idea that the perceived passage of time is a product of an

individual's "thoughts" and suggests that man is capable of actually "shortening" or

"lengthening" his time. Thus the *Spectator* makes the jump from manipulating one's perception

of time to manipulating time itself. The element of fantasy present in the Oriental tale works to

literalize what Addison describes as "lengthening our Lives, and at the same time of turning all

the Parts of them to our Advantage" ("No. 94"). Reading about the seemingly magical

edification of characters who idle, stray, or attempt to dodge the regular passage of time, is an

immersive experience that can cut through the mediation of the literary medium. Like the

characters that are forced to inhabit alternative universes as part of their temporal moral and

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[31] This is Alexander Pope's translation, from *Imitation of Martial* (104).

temporal enlightenment, the reader is made captive in a magical world whose time flows out of his control. The literary Orient, where supernatural occurrences are treated as matter of fact, substitutes the exercise of virtue and pursuit of learning mentioned in the *Spectator* with Orientalized experience—often in the form of sensory and sensual excess—as a way of disciplining immoral spenders of time.

The moral significance of manipulating time comes full circle with the two Oriental parables included in the ninety-fourth issue of the *Spectator*. Addison illustrates *Human Understanding*'s proposal "that different Beings may have different Notions of the same Parts of Duration, according as their ideas, which we suppose are equally distinct in each of them" ("No. 94") with two stories: the first taken from the Koran, the second a re-telling of an episode from Francois Pétis de la Croix's *Contes Turcs* (1707). In the first tale, Mohammed is taken by the Angel Gabriel to see "all things in the Seven Heavens, in Paradise, and in Hell," as well as to attend "ninety thousand Conferences with God." Yet all this takes "so small a space of Time, that Mahomet at his Return found his Bed still warm, and took up an Earthen Pitcher, (which was thrown down at the very Instant that the Angel Gabriel carried him away) before the Water was all spilt." The second tale takes up the first; in it, a sultan of Egypt is skeptical of this particular Koranic episode, and is plunged headfirst into a tub of water by a holy man attempting to teach him otherwise. The sultan ends up in an alternate universe in which he has "some Adventures": he finds a wife, has fourteen children, loses his fortune, and is faced with destitution when, in "a Fit of Devotion" he steps into the sea to wash himself before praying, and finds himself back at his court. The sultan is initially angry that the holy man "betrayed him into so long a State of Misery and Servitude; but was wonderfully surprised when he heard that the State he talked of

was only a Dream and Delusion; that he had not stirred from the Place where he then stood; and that he had only dipped his Head into the Water, and immediately taken it out again."

In both of the *Spectator*'s stories, alternative temporal perceptions manifest themselves as tangible other worlds in which an individual gains knowledge through perception and experience by being exposed to an alternative temporality via the supernatural. In both stories, the process by which the impossible is accepted as credible may seem magical, but the characters learn their lessons through observation and logic. In the first, the angel gives Mohammed "a *Sight* of all things in the Seven Heavens . . . which the Prophet took a distinct *View* of" ("No. 94," my emphasis). In the second, the sultan's behavior in the world within the tub is based on a series of logical reasonings: "at length, *knowing* it was in vain to be angry, he set himself to *think* on proper Methods for getting a Livelihood in this strange Country: *Accordingly* he applied himself to some People" (my emphases). Both stories invoke the Orient—focalized here in the spiritual world of Islam—as a place where explorations of fantastical temporalities become possible and illuminating. If the Enlightenment writings of empirical thinkers provide the theoretical structures for thinking about temporal duration, the Oriental narrative—it is implied with the pairing of the Oriental with discussions of temporality, gives European readers the opportunity to witness temporality experienced in a distinctive way. While Addison may have earlier criticized mankind's universal desire to control the passage of time by using a spatial metaphor— comparing it to the desire to "travel through Time as through a Country filled with many wild and empty Wastes, which we would fain hurry over, that we may arrive at those several little Settlements or imaginary Points of Rest which are dispersed up and down in it" ("No. 93")—the Orient is the actual figuration of that country where such travel becomes possible. In the Orient,

traveling through time like it is a space is not just wishful or reckless thinking, it is accompanied by the acquisition of a wisdom that is specifically not scholastic or textual, but experienced.

The *Spectator*'s stories suit its purposes to the extent that Mohammed and the Egyptian sultan experience highly disparate types of temporality from which both learn valuable lessons. Furthermore, the realization that years can be condensed into the millisecond it takes for a pitcher of water to topple to the ground illustrates the work that storytelling performs—to condense or expand narrative time in a way that is impossible with real chronological time. It is no coincidence that the two anecdotes are presented in a way that reveals the direct influence of *Nights*; the author cannot help but mimic the embedded structure for which *Nights* is best known. The stories of Mohammed and the Egyptian sultan are presented as if they were related only by contiguity or relevance to the topic of duration—the second story is casually described as "bear[ing] some Affinity to the Subject we are now upon." However, Mohammed's strange experience with Gabriel is actually contained within the story of the sultan, since the sultan's disbelief in the tale of the former acts as the impetus for the latter. The effect of this embedment is hardly as noticeable as what happens in *Nights*, since it is a device that acquires prominence through each additional nested narrative, but it does disclose the author's acceptance of the Oriental tale as an embedded genre.

Considering the stature of North Africa and Mesopotamia as the birthplaces of scientific and mathematical innovations, this treatment of the Orient both as a place of scientific rationalism and empiricism and one of supernatural occurrences is not terribly surprising. In fact, the *Spectator*'s use of the Oriental backdrop as a way of demonstrating the prominence of perception in the origination of ideas echoes in yet another way what some scholars in recent years have noticed: that the writing of *Human Understanding* itself was likely profoundly

influenced by a text from the Orient: *Philosophus Autodidactus*, written by medieval Arab Andalusian philosopher Ibn Tufayl in the latter half of the twelfth century. A parable of the *tabula rasa*, *Autodidatus* depicts the development of its titular protagonist, whose name Hayy translates to "Alive, Son of Aware," as he is raised on a deserted island by a gazelle. Starting from a state of "white paper," Hayy acquires knowledge in the physical, natural, and philosophical sciences, and even attains "awareness of God, the creator, as the embodiment of perfection and total knowledge" (Russell 230). The development of the young autodidact—as he "observ'd," "took Notice," "perceived," "consider'd," "resolv'd" to act, and ultimately "began a little to know his own Powers" and exert it over the dumb beasts of his island (Ibn Tufayl 52-53)—prefigures and enacts how ideas are acquired "by degrees" through perception and reflection (Locke 25; I.ii). G. A. Russell has tentatively traced the inspiration for *Human Understanding* to a text translated by Edward Pococke—a friend and mentor of Locke's at Oxford—from Arabic into Latin and published in 1671. While Locke never explicitly alludes to Tufayl or his writings, Russell makes a convincing case for Locke's exposure to *Autodidactus* before the publication of *Human Understanding*.[32] Samar Attar asserts more forcefully the clear influence of Tufayl not only on Locke, but on a wide range of authors, from Daniel Defoe to Jean Jacques Rousseau.[33] Either way, it is clear that the *Spectator*'s consideration of the Orient as the ideal backdrop for empirical experimentation has a well-grounded history. The Orient is able to embrace the two identities imposed on it at once; the fantastical plot twists actually allow for a consideration of how humans react to various perceptual, sensory, and psychological manipulations.

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[32] See G.A. Russell, "The Impact of the Philosophus autodidactus: Pocockes, John Locke and the Society of Friends" in *The 'Arabick' Interest of the Natural Philosophers in Seventeenth-Century England*.

[33] See Samar Attar. *The Vital Roots of the European Enlightenment*.

"To look forward with disgust": Being Out of Time in the Oriental Tale

The two stories I examine in this section are Oriental tales that hinge on dramatic

stagings designed to manipulate characters' sense of the passage of time. In spite of the

(apparent) supernatural that abounds in both tales, the true wonders in each case reveal

themselves to be manmade. The first of these is a tale from *Nights*, "The Story of Noureddin Ali,

and Bedreddin Hassan," itself part of a larger cycle of stories, the overall frame of which is

entitled "The Story of the Three Apples."[34] This frame tale contains "The Story of the Lady that

was murdered, and of the young Man her Husband," a related but untitled story about the slave

who indirectly caused the abovementioned lady to be murdered, and a "response" story told by

the vizier Giafar entitled "The Story of Noureddin Ali, and Bedreddin Hassan."[35] At the opening

of "Noureddin Ali," the eponymous protagonist and his older brother Schemseddin Mohammed

are appointed joint viziers by the sultan of Egypt to take over the position of their late father. The

similarities shared by the brothers are emphasized from the outset. We are told that Noureddin's

name signifies "the light of religion" while Schemseddin's signifies "the sun of religion." They

share the duties of vizier upon their father's death, and take turns joining the sultan on his

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[34] A cycle refers to a collection of stories related to each other, usually through the nested structure that mimics Scheherazade's own predicament of "Tell a story or die."

[35] In "The Story of the Three Apples," caliph Haroun Alraschid discovers a trunk hauled out of the Tigris River containing the dismembered body of a lady. Enraged, he gives his vizier Giafar three days to solve the murder mystery or pay for it with his own life. Failing to do so, the vizier is about to be executed when two men—one young, one old—step forward and confess to the crime at the same time. The young man's story is entitled "The Story of the Lady that was murdered, and of the young Man her Husband," and in it, he explains that he had gifted his wife with three extremely rare apples, only to find one of them in a slave's hands soon after. The slave replies that he got it from a noble young woman after making love to her, and the young man, convinced that his wife's apples were the only ones in the city of Baghdad, kills and dismembers his wife in a jealous rage. The old man who stepped forward alongside the young man is the murdered woman's father. He does not blame his son-in-law and wishes to save his life. Having listened to this story, the caliph gives Giafar three more days to find the real culprit—the lying slave—on penalty of death, once again. Giafar eventually discovers that the slave is one of his own and finds out the truth—the murdered woman's child had taken one of her apples, which the slave stole and lied about. Giafar then asks the caliph for clemency in exchange for the story of an even stranger accident than that of how the apple ended up with the slave—this last is "The Story of Noureddin Ali, and Bedreddin Hassan."

hunting trips. In a self-aware conversation on their parallel lives, Schemseddin one day tells

Noureddin:

> . . . Since neither of us yet married, and that we live so lovingly together, a thought is
> come in my head: Let us both marry in one day, and let us chuse two sisters out of some
> family that may suit our quality: What do you think of this fancy? . . . But hold, this is not
> all, says Schemseddin Mohammed; my fancy carries me farther. Suppose both our wives
> should conceive the first night of our marriage, and should happen to be brought to bed
> on one day, yours of a son, and mine of a daughter, we will give them to one another in
> marriage. (187)

Noureddin readily agrees at each step that "this project is admirable." The situation deteriorates,

however, when Noureddin makes a joke about refusing to have his hypothetical son settle a

jointure on Schemseddin's hypothetical daughter: "I will not consent to that; are we not brethren,

and equal in title and dignity? Do not you and I both know what is just?" (187). Schemseddin

takes these words seriously, and threatens to show Noureddin "that it does not become a younger

brother to speak so insolently to his older brother." Schemseddin uses the word "fancy" twice in

his projected narrative of their future, and as we will see at the end of the story, the concept plays

an important role in the climax. The word carries many nuances. Its most common one at the

time, according to the *OED*, would have been "the process, and the faculty, of forming mental

representations of things not present to the senses' chiefly applied to the so-called creative or

productive imagination, which frames images of objects, events, or conditions that have not

occurred in actual experience" and would also have been used synonymously with "imagination"

(Definition 4.a). Schemseddin's wrath can be understood, then, as a response to his brother's

deflation of his fancy of a perfectly symmetrical narrative. Of course, another definition that

pertains here is "Caprice, changeful mood; an instance of this, a caprice, a whim" (*OED* Definition 7.a). It also sets up Schemseddin as a despotic figure—caprice and whimsy being words commonly applied to Oriental despots[36]—not in the traditional sense, but rather as a creative tyrant—someone who must have absolute control over his preferred narrative. Fearful of his brother's reprisal, Noureddin flees Cairo for Balsora, where he encounters that city's grand vizier. The vizier becomes so fond of Noureddin that he offers him his daughter's hand in marriage and grooms him to take over his position upon his death.

Even after they are physically separated, the temporal alignment of the brothers' lives sustains itself, realizing every one of Schemseddin's fancies, which seem to be not so much a proposed course of action as the pronouncement of a predetermined fate. When Noureddin marries in Balsora, unbeknownst to him, his brother "happened also to marry at Cairo the very same day" and "at the end of nine months, Schemseddin Mohammed's wife was brought to bed of a daughter at Cairo, and on the same day Noureddin's wife brought forth a son at Balsora" (190-91). Schemseddin's word emerges as omnipotent and prescient, and he comes to stand in for the ultimate creator of stories, Scheherazade herself.

In Balsora, Noureddin Ali is suddenly taken violently ill. He calls his son Bedreddin Hassan, who is in the process of being groomed to inherit his father's position as vizier, and tells him the truth of his past, including the story of Schemseddin. He then gives Bedreddin an autobiographical manuscript containing the important dates of his life—his marriage, the birth of his son—that he had "written with his own hand, and carried always about him" (192). With that,

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[36] The Oriental despot is a common archetype in the conventional Oriental tale, and especially prominent in French discussions of the Orient in the years preceding the Revolution. This is Nicolas Boulanger's typical description of the Oriental despot: "His mandates, his will, his capricious whim, were sublimed into edicts from heaven. His cruelty, his ferocity, were respected as judgments from above, in which society was humbly to acquiesce" (182). The front page of the work includes the following heading: "This theologico-political Research is calculated for an Introduction and Key to MONTESQUIEU's Spirit of Laws, as the author declares in his last section." Also see Montesquieu's *Lettres Persanes* (1721) and *Spirit of the Laws* (1748).

Noureddin Ali dies, and Bedreddin hides the manuscript in his turban. Then, overwhelmed with grief, "instead of a month's time to mourn, according to custom, he kept himself close shut up in tears and solitude about two months, without seeing any body" (192). This warrants the anger of the sultan and Bedreddin must flee the city. Outside the gates, he encounters a Jewish merchant named Isaac who pays him a thousand sequins for a shipment of the late Noureddin's goods, and gives him a written receipt. Bedreddin then falls asleep on his father's grave until he catches the eye of a genie, who is entranced by his beauty. The genie brags to a fairy about the beautiful youth and the fairy counters with her own story of beauty, namely the daughter of the vizier of Egypt who was offered a proposal of marriage by the sultan. The vizier refused, and as punishment, the sultan is forcing the young woman to marry the ugliest humpbacked slave in the palace that very night. The vizier is none other than Schemseddin, who has refused the sultan's offer because he hopes to one day marry his daughter to Noureddin's son, for whom he has been searching. The fairy and genie successfully conspire to replace the humpbacked slave with Bedreddin in the nuptial chamber. After spending the night with Schemseddin's daughter, Bedreddin—still asleep and only in his drawers—is whisked away and dropped off at the gates of Damascus, where he wakes up surrounded by crowds gathered to see the beautiful but insane young man (no one believes his claims that he traveled from Cairo to Damascus overnight). Eventually, he is adopted by a pastry maker. In the meantime, Schemseddin and his daughter wonder at the young man's disappearance. Schemseddin goes through Bedreddin's belongings, discovers Noureddin's manuscript and Isaac's receipt, and realizes that the young man who has just spent the night with his daughter is his long-lost nephew and his daughter's intended husband. Schemseddin, in turn, shows the book and the receipt to the sultan, who is appeased— as sultans are wont to be—by the fascinating story. In fact, he is "so much pleased with the

relation of this adventure that he caused it, with all its circumstances, to be put in writing for the use of posterity" (206).

The supernatural emerges, for the first and only time in this story, by way of the genie and the fairy. According to the text, the genie's primary power is his "inconceivable swiftness . . . through the air," and his main feat is transporting Bedreddin from Balsora to Cairo and later to Damascus in the blink of an eye.[37] When he gives Bedreddin directions on how to navigate the crowd to get to Schemseddin's daughter's quarters, the genie's final advice is to "leave the rest to a superior power, who will order matters as he thinks fit," implying that his supernatural powers are only instruments of a greater power (197). As readers, we might carefully probe the source of this power: Schemseddin Mohammed has already predicted this marriage years earlier, and it is his will that is being done on the wedding night. Manmade narrative overshadows the supernatural elements; genies and fairies can fly through space, but authors of narratives can fly through time, as we will see in the climax of this story.

The significance of the written record is another important trope that emerges in this story. Written records abound in this tale—pocketbooks, manuscripts, written receipts, notarizations—and their mundaneness seems at odds with their exotic context until they later serve their purpose in verifying identities and filling in informational gaps. Schemseddin, for example, is able to reunite with his late brother's widow and set out in search of Bedreddin only after reading his nephew's documents. Bedreddin, on the other hand, stripped of any documentation proving his identity, passively waits for a decade to be reunited with his real life and family. The records do more than simply fill gaps. A far cry from the fantastical world that surrounds them, they serve as official evidence of truth in a world where one never knows when

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[37] The genie is also able to take on animal forms in order to frighten the humpbacked slave, and keep Bedreddin's pockets filled with coins.

the supernatural might intervene. While the written record acts as a miniature version of the embedded tale—puzzle pieces of a story that is partially known—temporally, it acts in the opposite way the embedded tale typically does. Most of the embedded tales in *Nights* serve to heighten suspense by delaying the closure of the frame tale to which they belong; they are forward-looking. By definition, a written account records that which has already happened, whether it is a biography or a wedding testimonial; by the time it is read, it is a text of the past, about the past. It is a form of writing whose authenticity inheres in the stability of the past. The written texts here record the past, only to later determine and contribute to the construction of future narratives.

On their journey to find Bedreddin, Schemseddin, his daughter, and her son Agib (with Bedreddin) pass through Damascus, where Bedreddin has his pastry shop. Agib visits the pastry shop, and Bedreddin is strangely drawn to the boy. The party continues on to Balsora, where they find out Bedreddin has been missing ever since his father's death. Joined by Bedreddin's mother, they head back to Cairo, but stop again in Damascus, where Agib brings a cream tart from Bedreddin's pastry shop back to his grandmother. On tasting it, the widow insists that whoever made the tart must be her son, as it tastes exactly like the secret recipe she passed on to him. Schemseddin decides that if this is true, he must stage a reunion; he orders his men to arrest Bedreddin and tells his sister-in-law and daughter to stay hidden, "for I would not have our interview and mutual discovery laid at Damascus. My design is to delay the discovery till we return to Cairo, where I propose to regale you with a very agreeable diversion" (216). This design involves locking Bedreddin in a cage for three weeks as they travel back to Cairo. Schemseddin tells his nephew that he will be nailed to a stake for failing to put pepper in his

tarts. When they finally do arrive in Cairo, Schemseddin instructs his daughter and servants to recreate the scene of Bedreddin's wedding night:

> God be praised, said he, my child, for this happy occasion of meeting your cousin and your husband. You remember, to be sure, what order your chamber was in on your wedding-night; go and put everything in the very same order they were then in ; and in the meantime, if your memory do not serve you, I can supply it by a written account, which I caused to be taken up on that occasion ; as for what else is to be done, I will take care of that. The beautiful lady went joyfully about her father's orders; and he, at the same time, began to put the things in the hall in the same order they were when Bedreddin Hassan was there with the sultan of Egypt's hunch-backed groom. As he went over his manuscript, his domestics placed every moveable accordingly: the throne was not forgot, nor yet the lighted wax candles. When every thing was put to rights in the hall, the vizier went into his daughter's chamber, and put in their due place Bedreddin's clothes, with the purse of sequins. (219)

While it is cruel of Schemseddin to keep his nephew locked in a cage for weeks simply for "diversion," this is the where the artistic despotism comes into play. He is despotic only in his demands for the perfect recreation of Bedreddin's nuptial scene ten years ago. The word "agreeable" used here also echoes Schemseddin's earlier reaction upon reading Noureddin's manuscript hidden in Bedreddin's turban: he "admired how everything *agreed* so exactly" (206, my emphasis). The term "agreement" here indicates both the symmetry with which all of the major life events of the two brothers have lined up, and the perfect correspondence between Schemseddin's predicted narrative and the actual one. Thus the pleasure that Schemseddin feels is not in observing Bedreddin's torment; it is rather in seeing his own "fancy" (I here reiterate

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Schemseddin's own term from the beginning of the story) realized. Schemseddin must wait the three weeks it takes to arrive at the only possible location in which to recreate the scene of the wedding night: Cairo, which will complete the "agreement." Thus, the vizier attempts to rewrite history as he would have it: by erasing the gap between the first wedding night and the reunion ten years later, Schemseddin stages his own narrative which ends with a simple happily ever after.

If written records serve as safeguards against the pranks of fairies and genies, they also reinforce the almost magical nature of the "agreement" between fancy and truth. When ordered by his sultan to have the story of Noureddin and Bedreddin "put in writing for the use of posterity," Schemseddin does not only that, he drafts up a full and detailed account of the setting that night, which he uses later a theatrical director would, to stage a production:

> This is the strangest adventure, said he, that ever man met with. And not knowing what alteration might happen, he thought first to draw up in writing, with this own hand, after what manner the wedding had been solemnized, how the hall and his daughter's bed-chamber were furnished, and other circumstances. He likewise made the turban, the bag, and the rest of Bedreddin's things, into a bundle, and locked them up. (206)

The importance of preserving the narrative of an event through writing comes up every time an incident is considered astonishing or pleasing enough to merit space on paper. In its ability to travel through time, and to allow others to travel through time—the written account can be in enjoyed in posterity long after the fact, but is also precisely the instrument that allows Schemseddin to perfectly recreate the scene that will allow Bedreddin to return to his wedding night—the act of preservation through writing performs the most magical function of all the supernatural elements of the tale. All the while, the emphasis on the materiality of the written

records reminds us of their humble human origins. Compared to the swiftness with which the genie and the fairy operate, the description of how Bedreddin writes out the note of payment from Isaac is painstakingly slow, reproducing word for word the mundane language of the note. If a supernatural intervention is necessary to cover the physical ground that must be bridged to sustain Schemseddin's narrative, it is through the written records that the discovery of that alignment is made and wondered at. No supernatural element in *Nights* is able to turn back time the way Schemseddin does. Thus, it is fitting that when Schemseddin tells his sultan this story, the latter "was so charmed with the recital of the story, that he ordered it to be taken down in writing, and carefully preserved among the archives of the kingdom" (222).

Strictly speaking, however, Schemseddin does not have supernatural powers, and he cannot turn back time—it is just a temporary illusion that serves as metafictional commentary on the magic of storytelling. His theatrical production might be powerful enough to convince Bedreddin for a moment that he has dreamt the past decade, but nothing can actually bring back the lost time. The limitations of Schemseddin's despotic recreations reveal the true tyrant: time. Significantly, this story cycle ends with a short exchange between the frame tale characters, in which Scheherazade offers a tale for the next night that will be "much more so." This puts Schariar in a quandary: "The good sultaness, said he within himself, tells very long stories, and when once she begins one, there is no refusing to hear it out: I cannot tell whither I shall put her to death today or not" (222). Schariar's language reveals that Scheherazade's stories are unstoppable just as the flow of time; their ability to captivate prevents him from "refusing to hear them out." Ironically, it is when Galland gives primacy to the integrity of Scheherazade's tales (over the daily interruptions) that the tales conquer time, so to speak; Scheherazade's vanishing act is also her most powerful one.

Frances Sheridan must have read *Nights* and likely had "Noureddin Ali" in mind when she wrote *The History of Nourjahad*. Both tales culminate in the revelation of an elaborately staged temporal "sting operation" (Aravamudan 251) involving the staging of scenes from the past or purported future, and in both tales these tricks are played by creatively despotic, if well-meaning authority figures named Schemseddin (spelled Schemzeddin in *Nourjahad*). Sheridan, the mother of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, was herself a considerably successful playwright, whose comedies *The Discovery* (1763) and *The Dupe* (1764) were popular even after her death (Doody 325). *Nourjahad* was adapted for the stage in 1802 and 1813, an unsurprising fact considering all of the performative elements in the original novella (Aravamudan 249).[38] It is fascinating that no scholars have picked up on the parallels between "Noureddin Ali" and *Nourjahad* (I have not been able to find any in-depth critical examinations of the former, either in English or French), considering the interest both texts exhibit in the use of dramatic staging as a way of manipulating human understandings of time. Sheridan takes her manipulation of time much farther though, hoodwinking the reader as well as her characters. She also manages to achieve the impossible: to reverse the passage of time through human means alone.

In *Nourjahad*, the eponymous protagonist is a dissipated young man who is the sultan Schemzeddin's favorite at court. After Nourjahad confesses to the sultan that his greatest desires in life are "to be possessed of inexhaustible riches, and to enable me to enjoy them to the utmost, to have my life prolonged to eternity," the two men fall out (Sheridan 25). As Nourjahad lies in bed regretting his admission, a seraphic young "genius" appears and grants him his two wishes: to be rendered both immortal and infinitely wealthy. The only catch is that his debauchery may occasionally cause him to fall into deep slumbers lasting anywhere from several months to

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[38] Aravamudan also outlines the posthumous success of *Nourjahad*, which was published through eleven editions from 1767 to 1830, abridged and illustrated as a children's tale, and translated into several European languages including French, Russian, and Hungarian.

decades long. Nourjahad gives little thought to this threat and happily spends his days indulging in beautiful women, culinary delicacies, and fine music, until one day, he is called to court by Schemzeddin, who demands to know the truth behind the rumors of his newfound riches. When Nourjahad tells him the truth, Schemzeddin flies into a rage at "the relation of so ridiculous a forgery", and places Nourjahad under house arrest (35). Angry at this punishment, Nourjahad decides to "make himself amends for the restraint on his person, to indulge himself with an unbounded freedom in his most voluptuous wishes" (36). That night, among other extravagances, he becomes intoxicated—a sin strictly forbidden by the Koran—and falls into a deep slumber that lasts, he is told on waking, four years and twenty days. He finds out that Mandana, his harem favorite has died in childbirth and that he must spend the rest of his immortal life without her. Bereft, Nourjahad tells himself that "time is a never failing remedy for grief," and tries to rally (41). But, "Immersed in sensual gratifications, he lost all relish for any others" (46). He grows impatient with the poets, sages, and philosophers he invites to his home, and spends his time trying to figure out ways to stimulate his senses with more and more extravagant provocations. One day, he impersonates Mahomet, with the new chosen one of his harem, Cadiga, dressed up as "the favourite wife of the great Prophet" (46). After this sacrilegious masquerade, Nourjahad falls again into a deep slumber, only to wake up forty decades later. Cadiga is now a withered old woman, Nourjahad's son with Mandana has stolen his treasure and fled, and Schemzeddin, "bending under the weight of age and infirmities" has become "so fantastical and perverse, that it is secretly whispered he is not perfectly in his senses" (50). As Nourjahad continues to lose the years he might spend with loved ones, and those around him age and die while he remains youthful; his life, even as it is filled with the greatest epicurean pleasures, becomes unbearable without an end to it in sight. Even the standards of beauty have

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changed, making the newly acquired women in his seraglio unbearably unattractive. Unable to "fill up the vacuity he found in his mind" and "appetites palled with abundance," Nourjahad becomes morose and cruel, and takes to beating his women. During an altercation with the aged Cadiga, he stabs her and faints, only to wake up twenty years later. Schemzeddin has just died, and his son Schemerzad is on the throne. After this final slumber, Nourjahad undergoes a complete reformation; he decides to spend all his money helping the needy. He sends his servant Cozro out with money to disburse freely the poor, but Cozro is arrested—the new young sultan has decreed a twenty-day period of mourning for his father's death, during which no one is allowed to conduct any business. While attempting to save Cozro, Nourjahad ends up in prison, and is visited again by the angelic youth the night before his audience with the sultan. He tells the genius that he wishes to return his two gifts. Of course, everything turns out to be a giant hoax. In reality, only fourteen moons have passed since Nourjahad's first encounter with the genius—Nourjahad's so-called slumbers were drug-induced, allowing Schemzeddin to stage the passage of time. It is Mandana (who is not dead) and Schemzeddin who have been masquerading as the seraphic genius, and Cozro, respectively. Having learned the lesson that unbounded sensual gratification is hell on earth, the newly wise and virtuous Nourjahad is ready to marry Mandana and become the counselor that Schemzeddin always needed.

Nourjahad is an atypical Oriental tale in the sense that it technically contains no supernatural elements or characters. Many scholars, including Mita Choudhury, Margaret Anne Doody and Felicity Nussbaum have pointed out the work's double identity in which "the domestic is dangerously, evocatively intertwined with the exotic" (Nussbaum 134).[39] For

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[39] See: Felicity Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones: Maternity, Sexuality, and Empire in Eighteenth-Century English Narrative*; Mita Choudhury, "Fact, Fantasy, or Mimesis?" in *Monstrous Dreams of Reason: Body, Self, and Other in the Enlightenment*; Margaret Anne Doody, "Frances Sheridan: Morality and Annihilated Time," in *Fetter'd or Free: British Women Novelists 1670-1815.*

Aravamudan, this evinces the novel's status as "metafictional allegory that makes a mockery of the division of supposedly realist and fantastic genres," of the Oriental tale and Bildungsroman, fantasy and domestic realist text (254). Aravamudan is committed to dismantling the attribution of the rise of the English novel to the rise of domestic realism, hence his investment in showing that "the Oriental illusion is unmasked for the audience as domestic morality tale" (253). My argument aligns with his assessment of what is left when Schemzeddin exposes his elaborate hoax: "a cheap bag of tricks, as with Ann Radcliffe's version of the Gothic" (252). As I demonstrated earlier in this chapter, whatever the source of the temporal magic performed by the exotic supernatural—cheap tricks, or the Prophet himself—at the heart of the Oriental tale is always a pragmatic lesson learned through firsthand experience. In *Nourjahad*, that lesson is not simply on "the folly of unreasonable wishes,"[40] but also that no lesson is more effective than firsthand experience.

    Nourjahad is particularly concerned with the ethics of order, both chronological and spiritual. To violate the passage of time as dictated by such regular and natural markers as the rising and setting of the sun, the passing of days, weeks, months, and years, is to violate the natural or divinely ordained order of things. Consider this description of Nourjahad's search for the cave that was recommended to him by the genius as a place to conceal his supernatural wealth:

> In a remote corner, stood the ruins of a small temple, which in former days, before the true religion prevailed in Persia, had been dedicated to the worship of the Gentiles. The vestiges of this little building were so curious, that they were suffered to remain, as an ornament, where they stood. It was raised on a mount, and according to the custom of

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[40] The subtitle Sheridan gave the abridged children's version of *Nourjahad*.

idolaters, surrounded with shady trees. On a branch of one of these, Nourjahad perceived

hanging a scarf of fine white taffety, to which was suspended a large key of burnished

steel. (125)

The temple is a spiritually obsolete holdover from the days before Islam, but converted into an

object of visual interest and thus is a perfect storehouse for the wealth that can provide

Nourjahad with all the sensual pleasures he uses to forget and encourage his spiritual damnation.

It is soon revealed that this cave is accessed from "within-side the walls of the temple, and under

what formerly seemed to have been the altar": the proof of Nourjahad's ultimate dissipation—his

choice of paradise on this earthly globe over spiritual paradise—is hoarded under a relic that

represents a spiritual world of days bygone. This is a religion, it is implied, whose adherents

worship false idols in the same way Nourjahad worships false and short-lived pleasures. So not

only is the temple itself a sort of idol—raised on a mount that serves as a larger version of the

altar that is found within the temple as well—it has become a mere curiosity or ornament, void of

meaning in a world of "true religion" that accords significance to rewards that are abstract and

not perceivable through the senses. Here, Islamic concepts of paradise and the afterlife could

easily be replaced with Christian doctrines; Billie Melman points out that the sins of lust and

gluttony, both part of the Oriental trope of sensuous excess and "portent symbols in traditional

imaginative and polemical literature on the Middle East" are also "two of the Seven Deadly

Sins" (79).

The description of the temple foreshadows Nourjahad's obsession with sensual pleasures

and his impersonation of Mohammed—a cardinal sin in Islam—in defiance of spiritual

hierarchy. When he has been confined to his home by Schemzeddin, Nourjahad becomes

obsessed with crowding out his displeasure with sensual stimuli, and deploys these stimuli to

challenge the divine by creating paradise on earth: "a splendid illumination of a thousand torches, composed of odoriferous gums, which cast a blaze of light that *vied with the glories of the sun,*" gardens "which seemed to him to *surpass all the descriptions of Eden in its primary state* of beauty" (35, 43, my emphases). When Schemzeddin asks him what he wants most in life Nourjahad responds: "I should desire to be possessed of inexhaustible riches, and to enable me to enjoy them to the utmost, to have my life prolonged to eternity," even if it means foregoing the hope of paradise—"I would . . . make a paradise of this earthly globe, whilst it lasted, and take my chance for the other afterwards" (15). Nourjahad's answer is both spiritually problematic and ethically dubious as a dictum for time-spending. Firstly, his inability to take into account the importance of privileging the afterlife over the worldly one is obviously a poorly thought-out spiritual decision for anyone who believes in the afterlife. More importantly, it reveals his foolishness; from a purely mathematical perspective, paradise for eternity should outshine paradise for the length of a mortal lifetime. Not only is Nourjahad's answer religiously corrupt, it also indicates his willful misunderstanding and denial of the weight of time. Secondly, Nourjahad's wording indicates a desire to "make a paradise of this earthly globe," which is sacrilegious both religiously and temporally. What he is trying to achieve goes beyond simple carnal pleasure; it is an attempt to force a concept that exists outside the scope of human temporality into a finite and mortal arena, a temporal reward that he attempts, in vain, to translate into spatial terms. If celestial paradise is a reward that comes at the end of a life well lived, Nourjahad's attempt to get to the end without living through the middle is an unruly act of trying to manipulate narrative order. Thus the punishment is only fitting; if Nourjahad wants to live the end as his middle, he must be forced to live a middle of (tragic) endings.

Margaret Anne Doody writes that Nourjahad "experiences two time spans at once—but he is aware only of the longer one. His illusory protracted experience seems in duration and complexity more like real human life than does his saner experience, the shorter 'real time' operated by Schemzeddin" (353). In *Nourjahad*, we see the problems that arise when the possibility of closure is eliminated; when a narrative presents a beginning and a middle, but no end. *Nourjahad* complicates the trope of the curse of immortality by also dispensing with the middle—every time he has one of his prolonged slumbers, the losses that he experiences (of Mandana, Hasem, Cadiga, the Sultan) constitute the middle that is supposed to make up the narrative of his life. Each time he awakens, Nourjahad is told that his relationships have been curtailed by death while he was unconscious. What disheartens Nourjahad is the ironic prospect of being forced to miss the middle, living a life without end but constituted solely of endings (or the discovery that endings have already occurred and are in some liminal state waiting to be discovered by him upon his awakening). When he is told of Mandana's death, he becomes for the first time inconsolable and acknowledges the curse of his immortality when he tells his servant Hasem: "the loss of Mandana embitters my joys, and methinks I begin to look forward with disgust" (Sheridan 41). The hell that Nourjahad is forced to live is a thought experiment on what life we be like if we were really granted the kind of life Addison accuses us all of wanting: a life in which we could hurry over what we imagine to be "wild and empty Wastes" so that we can get to the "imaginary Points of Rest" (*Spectator* No. 93).

The mastermind behind this time travel trick is Schemzeddin, who, like his vizierial counterpart in "Noureddin Ali," serves as a despotic author. Learning the backstory from Schemzeddin at the end not only changes the moral, it also changes the scope of the story. In this case, it does so by condensing fifty-six years into fourteen moons and recalibrating our

understanding of the temporality of the story. But even as it pulls the rug out from under our feet, this shift provides one form of security—the accumulation of experience as a form of wisdom that can only be acquired with time. By condensing the amount of time it takes to feel the effects of time, Schemzeddin diminishes the importance of how much time has or has not passed in favor of thinking about how that passage of time manifests itself in the psyche of the individual. However, if Nourjahad does not need (much) time to transform, this also renders forward-moving time insignificant. Nourjahad's disrespect for timeliness is punished by his being forced to rehearse a life of temporal chaos in a way that he did not desire or anticipate. But once the trick is revealed, Schemzeddin orders him: "Take thy amiable Mandana to thee for a wife, and receive the fixed confidence and love of Schemzeddin" (161). The end is a blessing in that it enacts Martial's quote: "For he lives twice, who can at once employ / The present well, and ev'n the past enjoy." By taking Mandana for a wife and re-entering into Schemzeddin's good graces, Nourjahad is given the otherwise impossible proverbial second chance. Narratively speaking, however, ending is replaced by a return to the past. Time does not progress because "the inner meaning of a series of actions or happenings can be understood only by circling back to an original point or time, a point of departure" (Doody 355).

The outlandishness of the literary Orient offers the possibility of fulfilling what David Hume calls "vicious luxury": a gratification that "engrosses all a man's expence, and leaves no ability for such acts of duty and generosity as are required by his situation and fortune" ("Of Luxury" 163). But it quickly becomes evident that such surfeit is there to discipline as much as it is to satisfy. Behind the promise of magical creatures stand humble human teachers whose ability to make their disciples live stories in which time is expanded, condensed, and reversed. The Oriental tale's ability to accommodate empirical experiments on human perception made it

popular with writers, and its ability to serve as a fantastical and pleasurable vehicle for serious

Enlightenment lessons on how we must spend our time wisely and virtuously made it both

popular and respectable for readers.

Chapter Two

What Cannot Be Put Into Words: Fielding and the Problem of History

IN publick Stations Men sometimes are shown,

A Woman's seen in Private life alone:

Our bolder Talents in full view display'd,

Your Virtues open fairest in the Shade.

Bred to disguise, in Publick 'tis you hide;

Where none distinguish 'twixt your Shame and Pride,

Weakness or Delicacy; all so nice,

Each is a sort of Virtue, and of Vice. (Pope 163)

In 1735, Alexander Pope equated femininity with an elusiveness that precluded women

from being proper subjects of public contemplation when he tried all throughout his epistle "To a

Lady" to capture womanly character and failed, only to conclude that "Woman's at best a

contradiction still" (164). Pope was certainly not the first to critique the hermeneutic slipperiness

of that sex that was "Bred to disguise." The trope of the impossibility of uncovering female

"truth" was an ongoing one throughout the long eighteenth century. Six years after Pope's epistle

on the characters of women (or lack thereof), David Hume made a similar comment by way of

the supposed feminine propensity for literary romance:

I remember I was once desired by a young beauty, for whom I had some passion, to

send her some novels and romances for her amusement in the country; but was not so

ungenerous as to take the advantage, which such a course of reading might have given

me, being resolved not to make use of poisoned arms against her. I therefore sent her

PLUTARCH'S lives, assuring her, at the same time, that there was not a word of truth in

them from beginning to end. She perused them very attentively, 'till she came to the lives

of ALEXANDER and CÆSAR, whose names she had heard of by accident; and then

returned me the book, with many reproaches for deceiving her.

I may indeed be told, that the fair sex have no such aversion to history, as I have

represented, provided it be *secret* history, and contain some memorable transaction

proper to excite their curiosity. But as I do not find that truth, which is the basis of

history, is at all regarded in those anecdotes, I cannot admit of this as a proof of their

passion for that study. ("Of the Study of History" 26)

The above anecdote, which prefaces a treatise on the importance of reading historical chronicles

for self-edification, is facetious in the way it pokes fun at women's preference for fiction over

fact. However, Hume's charge that women harbor "an appetite for falsehood" expands the issue

of literary taste to associate femininity with the desire to both consume and fabricate fiction (26).

In doing so, both Pope and Hume reveal the ways in which the eighteenth-century women

embodied the shifting definitions of historical writing, from the neoclassical understanding of the

genre as "*a continued Narration of things True, Great and Publick, writ with Spirit, Eloquence*

and Judgment; for Instruction to Particulars and Princes" (Le Moyne 53-54) to increasingly

popular personal versions of the genre—such as *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber*

(1740), which "functioned self-consciously as both a personal memoir and a formal narrative

history" (N. Gallagher 633). This question of feminine modesty emblematized the tension

between public and private history captured just a few years later by Henry Fielding, for whom

the discrepancy between interiority and exteriority, truth and appearance, was a thematic

preoccupation throughout his literary career:

Nothing can, in fact, be more foreign to the nature of virtue than ostentation. It is truly

said of Virtue, that, could men behold her naked, they would be all in love with her. Here

it is implied, that this is a sight very rare or difficult to come at; and, indeed, there is

always a modest backwardness in true virtue to expose her naked. She is conscious of her

innate worth, and little desirous of exposing it to the public view. It is the harlot Vice

who constantly endeavours to set off the charms she counterfeits, in order to attract men's

applause and to work her sinister ends by gaining their Admiration and their Confidence.

("Characters of Men" 173)

Duality's ability to deceive even the most well-meaning individual is the looming threat facing

the virtuous characters of Fielding's worlds, from Tom Jones to Amelia Booth. It is ironic and a

little disconcerting, then, that Fielding—champion of virtue and goodness—underscores the

beauty of virtue by stripping her. Virtue's very nakedness is proof of her modesty, Fielding

insists, and what makes her beautiful.[41] To push Fielding's female personification of virtue

further, it is disturbing that the only way Virtue's authenticity can be proved is through her

unwillingness to be exposed, rendering every act of discovering virtue one of violation.

Disturbing, perhaps, but not surprising for Fielding, whose first two popular works of prose,

Shamela (1741) and *Joseph Andrews* (1742), were premised on unveiling the perceived

hypocrisies of Samuel Richardson's Pamela, a prolific heroine whose self-professed modesty

took up the entire space of the novel that was named after her—if Pamela's letters painted her to

be chaste, their very verbosity, Fielding suggests, belies the "backwardness" that is the essence

of true modesty.

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[41] The treatment of Virtue here echoes the sentimental yet titillatingly voyeuristic undressing of Fanny on her wedding night with Joseph Andrews: "She was soon undrest; for she had no jewels to deposit in their caskets, nor fine laces to fold with the nicest exactness. *Undressing to her was properly discovering*, not putting off, ornaments; for, as all her charms were the gifts of nature, she could divest herself of none. How, reader, shall I give thee an adequate idea of this lovely young creature?" (322, my emphasis).

Any reader of Fielding's novels recognizes of course the irony of his championing reserve and reticence (both included under the umbrella of modesty), for the meddling loquacity of Fielding's narrators is rivaled by few others in the eighteenth century. Yet, Fielding's texts are peppered with explicit markers of authorial muteness: his infamous fondness for the "gaps" and "Blanks" that he invites readers to fill in at their discretion. These "vacant spaces" are of course highly charged loci at the center of Fielding scholarship, and practically the pillars of critic Wolfgang Iser's school of reader response theory.[42] The combination of the intrusive narrator and his tendency to not only omit information, but to highlight the fact of the omission, the nature of the omitted information, and its reasons, seems to elicit a kind of interpretive passion on the part of the critics seeking to fill the space of these self-promoting silences, hence the prominence of Fielding's works as a subject of debate in reader response theory and its offshoots. Long after the supposed death of the author, Fielding's third-person narrators are treated as spokespersons charged with directly (if through circuitous rounds of irony) conveying the morals of their respective narratives to the reader. It is clear why reader response theorists have been so fascinated by Fielding's work—when read at face value, the philosophical and literary essays he inserts in his novels function as guidelines to the formation of modern reader response theory. In these much-analyzed excerpts from *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, the narrator informs his audience on best reading practices:

> As to those vacant pages which are placed between our books they are to be regarded as those stages, where, long journeys, the traveller stays some time to repose himself, and consider of what he hath seen in the parts he hath already past through; a consideration which I take the liberty to recommend a little to the reader: for however swift his capacity

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[42] When Iser, who wrote his 1952 doctoral dissertation on the works of Fielding, developed his theory of the reader's role in fiction, he used the novels of Fielding not just to serve "as examples to illustrate his theory but actually provide the patterns of substrata on which it is based" (Černý 137).

may be, I would not advise him to travel through these pages too fast … . (*Joseph*

Andrews 99-100; II.i)[43]

The reader will be pleased to remember, that, at the Beginning of the Second Book of this

History, we gave him a Hint of our Intention to pass over several large Periods of Time,

in which nothing happened worthy of being recorded in a Chronicle of this Kind. In

doing so, we do not only consult our own Dignity and Ease, but the Good and Advantage

of the Reader: For besides, that, by these Means, we prevent him from throwing away his

Time, in reading either without Pleasure or Emolument, we give him, at all such Seasons,

an Opportunity of employing that wonderful Sagacity, of which he is Master, by filling

up these vacant Spaces of Time with his own Conjectures; for which Purpose, we have

taken Care to qualify him in the preceding Pages. (*Tom Jones* 77; II.i)[44]

For Iser, who believed that the literary work consumed by the reader is actualized in the process

of reading, this was tantamount to an invitation for the reader to "supply what is meant from

what is not said" by reacting to how the semantic "blanks trigger off and simultaneously control

the reader's activity" ("Interaction" 112). For example, Iser read Fielding's praise of the reader's

"Sagacity" as an endorsement for the reader's ability to take up the author's offer to uses the

"pauses" as an opportunity to "enter into the proceedings in such a way that he can construct

their meaning" (*Implied Reader* 51). This particular claim has since been dismantled as a failure

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[43] Henry Fielding, *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, and of his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*, edited by R.F. Brissenden, Penguin Books, 1977. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

[44] Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, edited by Sheridan Baker, W.W. Norton, 1995. All subsequent citations refer to this edition.

to understand Fielding's irony.[45] In 1992, Lothar Černý critiqued Iser's naïveté, pointing out that "an author like Fielding does not leave out anything essential. The metaphors of space, if not used ironically, are rather unsuitable in a theory of reading as they suggest the author left out parts, almost in the way of a puzzle. If Fielding's irony points to nothing else it points out that the activity of the reader depends on what the author actually put into words" (140). If Iser's perspective is indeed naïve, Černý's example nevertheless unwittingly points to the importance of the silences, whether they indicate meaning in themselves or highlight, in their muteness, what has *not* been voiced.

Another vein of reader response criticism in the works of Fielding has focused on the gaps in terms of the plot's irony that emerges upon multiple readings. Leona Toker recuperates Iser's naïveté by pointing out that "Fielding's handling of scene and summary is precisely calculated to give just the impression that, having been shown how things work in the novel's world, we could easily imagine, if only we wished to do so, how its different character would move when out of the limelight" ("If Everything Else Fails" 153). We are wrong, of course—our confidence in our own inductive abilities echoes that of Allworthy in his misjudgment of Jenny Jones and Partridge. The gaps Fielding leaves are actually important developments that have taken place offstage as a way of underscoring the importance of "prudence," which in the reader translates to "an awareness of the inevitable limitations of one's perspective" (Toker, *Eloquent Reticence* 111-112). John Preston has suggested that the reader is not even aware of some of the gaps on a first reading—it is on a second reading that we recognize the import of the information that has been concealed, and that the narrator knew all along (the identity of Tom's mother, for

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[45] While more measured in their vocabulary in comparison to Černý, scholars such as Brean Hammond, Nicholas Hudson, Leona Toker, and Andrew Varney largely agree that Iser's reading of Fielding's invitation for the reader to participate in filling in the vacant spaces is naïve. See *Connotations: A Journal for Critical Debate Vol. 2-4* for responses to Černý's initial critique of Iser.

example, and the revelation of this information to the lawyer Dowling). The gaps emerge as indications of the irony of Fielding's plot, which "faces two ways. From one side it looks like a forced solution, from the other an open question" (97).[46]

Not only has the question of determining the degree of the (dis)ingenuity of these blanks already been critically addressed, I believe it gives too much importance to the figure of Fielding as a master puppeteer. It treats the question of interpretation as a zero-sum game in which the author and the reader share a fixed amount of knowledge and interpretive authority between them. If the author has more, it turns the reader into a sap who believes he is intelligent while being unwittingly manipulated. If the reader has more, it takes away from the author's ability to orchestrate and manipulate. It seems that the stakes of the reader's own awareness and astuteness, and the importance of being in on the author's jokes has shaped the reader response portion of Fielding studies into a series of binaries difficult to escape. Rather than debate how to solve the "problem" of Fielding's gaps, this chapter explores this seemingly paradoxical pairing of narrative intrusion and reticence specifically in the context of Fielding's treatment of history and his methodologies of character development. I contend that both tactics reflect Fielding's method of staking his authorial autonomy on revealing and withholding information, and that this seemingly inconsistent approach actually reflects Fielding's response to the historical writing of his time and his broader mission to develop fiction into a better source of truth than non-fictional genres. A closer look at Fielding's work reveals that there is an overlap between Fielding's narrators' interruptions and digressions, and the so-called "vacant spaces": the narrators often disrupt their own narration to discuss why they cannot or will not reveal certain

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[46] Also see Eleanor Newman Hutchens, *Irony in* Tom Jones (1965).

types of information. These self-reflexive silences reflect narrative style that Fielding attempts to develop almost as an antithesis to the historical writing of his time.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first, I examine how Fielding situates himself in the context of eighteenth-century historiographical and historical writing. Fielding censured his contemporary chroniclers of English history—among them Laurence Echard and Lord Clarendon—expressing contempt for what he believed was their slavish adherence to the factual details of time and space at the expense of honest revelations of the characters of the men behind historical events. Fielding's proposed solution to the problem of historical writing was the transcendence of historical trappings through the pursuit of human nature. In doing so, he argued for a different model of truth-seeking through fiction, proposing the novel as an alternative chronotope—one in which time, paradoxically, is transcended in favor of capturing the universal truths of human nature. The second section delves deeper into the specifics of Fielding's narrative practice. To this end, I focus on one of the most prominent techniques employed by Fielding's narrators to differentiate themselves from the allegedly objective historian's voice: by channeling the voices and perspectives of their characters—and the omissions they perform to hide or deceive—Fielding's narrators create an echo chamber between the characters' directly quoted dialogue and their own mimicry of it, amplifying the intensity with which human nature is revealed. Fielding's historical method is the opposite of detached—it inserts the reader into the diegetic world by compelling her to interact directly with the characters, sometimes even embodying them. Public history is replaced with private character that can be extrapolated to a universal portrayal of human nature. The final section shows how this particular approach to character development becomes problematic when dealing with a specific category of individual: the virtuous young woman. As suggested by "Characters of Men," Fielding believed that true

virtue could only show itself through concerted concealment. In having adopted the language of

the disingenuous to prove his point more vividly (as well as make a laughing stock of them),

Fielding's narrator paints himself into a corner, having set up a hermeneutic system whereby

withholding signals the presence of transgressive materials. Omissions meant to represent virtue

can no longer straightforwardly fulfill that task—this system leaves no room for actually

virtuous, non-duplicitous, and tacit characters like Sophia Western or Fanny, who cannot be

exposed through irony. This chapter close reads characters from *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*.

It only tangentially cites *Jonathan Wild* (1743) or *Amelia* (1751). The former is a mockery of the

political environment of the 1740s, and is written as such a direct satire that it yields less

nuanced readings of the narrator's voice. Fielding's last novel, *Amelia,* which is often considered

his "problem novel," lacks the humor and irony that allows for a more complex reading of the

narrator's position on his characters (Hunter 193).[47] In replacing "mere" fact with universal

human typologies that transcend time with the kinds of deferrals and digressions for which his

narrators were best known, Fielding posits verisimilar fiction as a non-historical chronotope of

truth-telling.

History and Truth

The third book of *Joseph Andrews* opens with an invective against historians—or

"romance writers," as the narrator scornfully calls them—as being incapable of providing their

readers with the truth "as to the actions and characters of men" (183; III.i). He dismisses the

best-known historians of his generation, including Clarendon, Whitelocke, Echard, and Rapin de

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[47] In *Occasional Form: Henry Fielding and the Chains of Circumstance* (1975), J. Paul Hunter attributes the "radically different tone of Amelia" to "a diminished vision of rhetorical possibility," as well as an acceptance of Richardsonian sentiment (193).

Thoyras,[48] for perpetuating many factual inaccuracies and distortions that reflect that personal and political biases of the authors to the extent that

> . . . facts being set forth in a different light, every reader believes as he pleases, and indeed the more judicious and suspicious very justly esteem the whole as no other than a romance, in which the writer hath indulged a happy and fertile invention. But tho' these widely differ in the narrative of facts; some ascribing victory to the one, and others to the other party: some representing the same man as a rogue, to whom others give a great and honest character, yet all agree in the scene where the fact is supposed to have happened; and where the person, who is both a rogue, and an honest man, lived. (183)[49]

Personal agendas affect the content of each writer's history so drastically that they may as well be writing utter "romance." It is true that partisan politics are apparent in many of the historical texts published around the turn of the eighteenth century. Clarendon's *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* (1702-1704), for example, was well-known for its biased coverage of the English Civil War and the events surrounding it, even at the time of its publication. Clarendon, who served Charles I and Charles II until he fell out of the latter's favor in 1668, was in his first exile in the Scilly Islands when he began writing a history of the English civil war in 1646. The manuscript was set aside with the Restoration, when Charles II made Clarendon Lord Chancellor. When Clarendon was forced into exile again two decades later, he started writing an

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[48] Fielding was intimately acquainted with all of these works. According to Austin Dobson, an investigation of an auction list of Fielding's library reveals that he not only possessed work by the Greek and Roman historians such as Tacitus and Livy, but also was acquainted with the writings of the many scholars he criticized, including Rapin, de Retz, Echard, Whitelocke, and Clarendon: "an exceedingly well-chosen and 'polite' library of books, as varied in character as Johnson's, more extensive by far than Goldsmith's, and—in the matter of those writers whom Moses Primrose describes comprehensively as 'the Antients'—as richly endowed as that of Gray" (*Bibliographica* 166). A complete catalogue can be found in the appendix of Ethel Margaret Thornbury's *Henry Fielding's Theory of the Comic Prose Epic* (1931).

[49] According to Sheridan Baker, Laurence Echard and Paul de Rapin both wrote books entitled *The History of England* from opposite political perspectives, yielding, vastly differing histories (*Tom Jones* 28n2).

autobiography, which was later combined with the old manuscript of *Rebellion*. The result is a

Tory apology for Charles I in which "Clarendon's personal vision shades imperceptibly into a

transcendental perspective on events" (Braudy 15).[50] On the other end of the political spectrum,

Frenchman Paul Rapin de Thoyras's wrote *Histoire d'Angleterre* (1724-1727), one of the most

successful historical serializations at the time. While Rapin de Thoyras was relatively unbiased,

his tracking of the origins of British parliamentary democracy to the Republic of Ancient Greece

was popular with the Whigs, and excerpts of his writing were often used for political propaganda

(Hicks 147). By dramatically likening corrupted history to romance, and more broadly fiction,

the narrator sets the stage for an interesting reversal of roles—if historical writing becomes so

unreliable that it might as well be fiction, then actual fiction can convey truth in a way historical

writing has not been able to. In all this emerges Fielding's conceptualization of history paced for

narrative momentum rather than thorough and chronological display of detail, invested in

understanding human character rather than fidelity to historical facts.

Fielding's criticism of these historians is reductive, and not always fair, as is his strict

separation of history from fiction. As Everett Zimmerman points out, at a very basic level, "Both

forms emplot events, actual or putative, and give them a narrative structure that orders and

emphasizes narrated details in the interests of a larger conceptual unity" (12). Leo Braudy also

argues that "The *History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* has more than a merely verbal similarity to

The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the

Second, 1688, or *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*" (3-4). That is to say,

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[50] Jean Le Clerc accused Clarendon of being too "Zealous for the King's Party" (3). In his *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to The Revolution in 1688*, David Hume remarked that Clarendon was "more partial in appearance than in reality: For he seems perpetually anxious to apologize for the king; but his apologies are often well grounded. He is less partial in his relation of facts, than in his account of characters," which contradicts Fielding's criticisms (166). Philip Hicks writes that Clarendon himself was not a partisan historian, but that his "politically committed sons appropriated his text on behalf of the tory party, transforming his stately work into a shrill, partisan document" (48).

the generic division between fiction and non-fiction is not as straightforward as Fielding makes it out to be, especially because he draws on the epic—which traditionally had several parallels with the historical chronicle—as a model for the "new Province of Writing" he purports to pioneer in his refinement of the novel form (*Tom Jones* 53; II.i). Fielding is vocal about his novels' debt to the epic form: in the preface to *Joseph Andrews*, he proposes to categorize his work as a "comic epic-poem in prose" (25), and the Latin epigraph for *Tom Jones* quotes Horace's description of Ulysses's epic breadth of experiences.[51] There was a longstanding tradition, dating back to *Ars Poetica*, of considering history and epic poetry as comparable genres, formally elevated but distinct ways of writing about high and noble subject matter (N. Gallagher 635). According to Le Moyne, Cicero even argued that "History ... is but a Poem without the Slavery of Dress" (5). William Nelson argues that, given the limited evidence historians worked with during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, there was a fair amount of tolerance for filling in the gaps, so to speak (93). So Fielding's rather unwieldy categorization of the novel as a comic epic allows him to draw on both the realism of historical subject matter and the creative license of the epic poet (25). In doing so, he imports from historical writing—"an already established 'realistic' form"—"the categories for examining claims to approximate reality" (Braudy 94).[52]

Fielding's first move to discredit the historians is to relegate the accuracy of the factual details of time and place to a second tier of importance. The narrator argues that historians do get some details correct: they "should indeed be termed topographers or chorographers . . . it being

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[51] The quote is: *Mores hominum multorum vidit*, which translates to "He who saw the customs of many men."

[52] Noelle Gallagher points out that, even as he criticizes historians, the narrator of *Joseph Andrews* "consistently abstains from making any fixed or firm distinctions between fictional and historical writings in his discussions of literary style. Just as Cibber's *Apology* is ridiculed alongside Richardson's *Pamela*, so Miguel de Cervantes' *Don Quixote* . . . and other European novels are mentioned in the same context of histories by Lord Clarendon, Juan de Mariana . . . Indeed, Fielding's narrator often goes beyond simply offering complementary historical examples to match his discussions of epics, novels, and romances; he seems deliberately to align historical and fictional modes of representation" (634).

the business of the latter chiefly to describe countries and cities, which, with the assistance of maps, they do pretty justly, and may be depended upon" (*Joseph Andrews* 183; III.i). When it comes to writing about the men that make history, however, the historians get it all wrong; instead of capturing truth by "copy[ing] from nature," historians insist on harebrained interpretations of the facts, creating their own narratives, "originals from the confused heap of matter in their own brains" (*Joseph Andrews* 184-85; III.i). This is not the only time Fielding's narrators emphasize the importance of putting aside the geographical and temporal strictures of a specific historical context in favor of a compelling human narrative. In *Tom Jones*, the narrator criticized annalists and journalists for their slavish adherence to chronological accuracy at the expense of narrative dynamism, mocking the writer who "seems to think himself obliged to keep even Pace with Time, whose Amanuensis he is; and, like his Master, travels as slowly through Centuries of monkish Dulness, when the World seems to have been asleep, as through that bright and busy Age" (53; II.i). Unlike this mere archivist of the passage of time, the narrator announces that he will

> pursue a contrary Method. When any extraordinary Scene presents itself, (as we trust will often be the Case) we shall spare no Pains nor Paper to open it at large to our Reader; but if whole Years should pass without producing any Thing worthy his Notice, we shall not be afraid of a Chasm in our History; but shall hasten on to Matters of Consequence, and leave such Periods of Time totally unobserved. (53; II.i)

This mission statement implicitly differentiates fiction from non-fictional forms of writing like history and journalism as a genre characterized by selectivity rather than thorough record-keeping. It also echoes scholar René Rapin's contention that manipulating chronological order and the passage of time was not only acceptable, but even necessary: "Though all must be

natural in an epick Poem, yet the Order that is observ'd in relating Things, ought not so to be; were it natural, and according to the Succession of Time, it would be a History and not a Poem . . . for to render the Narration more insinuating, delightful, and surprising, the Poet must confound the natural Order of Times and Things" (190-191). In spite of their many commonalities, temporality is where history and epic part ways. What replaces thorough chronicling as a *modus operandi* in Fielding's work is the idea of consequence—extraordinary scenes will unfold with greater detail and therefore take up more space on the page and more time to narrate. Scenes where nothing "worthy" of the reader's notice occurs will be omitted altogether—currency lies in the appeal an event might hold for the reader, not the simple occurrence of the event itself. By explaining the rules of emplotment, Fielding differentiates himself from the passive historian "who calmly records facts and chronicles social details"; for he considers "history as a mode of knowledge, a method of creating and expressing a world, not a collection of facts or character types" (Braudy 94).

At the time Fielding was writing, history had its modern sense of "A written narrative constituting a chronological record of important or public events or of a particular trend, institution or person's life" (*OED* definition I.1.a) but was also a catch-all term for fictional narratives—the use of the term "fiction" as a literary genre of "imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters" became common only after the end of the late eighteenth century (*OED* definition 4.a). Fielding's notion of history and the truth that is revealed therein is fairly unique for his time. Based on the essays he includes in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*, we can see that Fielding's model of truth is centered on the revelation of human nature, analogous to what *Ars Poetica* termed "Conservation of Character," hence, Fielding's conclusion that the best

historians are biographers (Coolidge 246).[53] And when Fielding praises the works of "those who celebrate the lives of great men, and are commonly called biographers" as the only reliable source of truth in writing, he does not mean well-known biographers like Samuel Johnson or James Boswell, but rather early novelists, like Cervantes and Le Sage (*Joseph Andrews* 183, III.i). With biographers, among whom Fielding counts himself, "the facts we deliver may be relied on, tho' we often mistake the age and country wherein they happened" (183; III.i).

How, then, can we determine whether a portrayal of human nature is in fact true? Fielding specifies that characters in fiction must be "taken from life" (*Joseph Andrews* 185; III.i). Copied from "nature" these individuals should carry with them a sense of familiarity—the reader should be able to recognize the real-life versions of them. Thus the lovesick fool in *Don Quixote* is a type of character that exists throughout history, as is the self-serving lawyer from the stagecoach that picks up Joseph after he is robbed: "The lawyer is not only alive but hath been so these 4000 years, and I hope G— will indulge his life as many yet to come" (185; III.i). Truth must be able to transcend spatial and temporal specificities. According to this characterization, truth goes hand in hand with fiction, for while a "true" character is taken from life, his universal pertinence makes him inherently incompatible with factual accuracy and historical specificity. It is important to note that the individual portraits that thus transcend historical specificity are rooted in reality, empirical evidence "copied from the book of nature and scarce a character or action produced which I have not taken from my own observations and experience" (*Joseph Andrews* 30; Preface). These traces of empirical induction in Fielding's privileging of firsthand data collection are what make his human portraits so powerful as universal typologies—whereas

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[53] John Coolidge writes that Fielding provides "the 'character' of each person from his omniscient point of view, and he almost invariably does so on the person's first appearance. From that point on his task is to keep each person acting in a way which can be deduced from that original idea of him. The 'characters' are to the individual creatures of this world of the novel what the introductory essays are to that world as a whole" ("Fielding and the 'Conservation of Character'" 246).

a traditional epic poet might be hard pressed to find a real-life Ulysses or Achilles to draw inspiration from, a comic epic writer like Fielding can surround himself with "persons of inferior rank, and consequently of inferior manners" (*Joseph Andrews* 26; Preface). This insistence on conveying the universal truths of human nature through a small-scale epic strikes the fine balance between general and particular that he cultivated earlier in his career as a satirist.

This is why Fielding tells us that while his portrait of the distastefully cautious lawyer we meet in the stagecoach may have many real-life counterparts, it would be shortsighted "to imagine [the author] endeavours to mimick some little obscure fellow, because he happens to resemble him in one particular feature, or perhaps in his profession; whereas his appearance in the world is calculated for much more general and noble purposes" (*Joseph Andrews* 185; III.i). The character of the self-serving, money-obsessed lawyer is also found in Mrs. Tow-wouse, who "may in her turn have stood behind the bar at an inn," and also "sat on a throne" (186; III.i). In short, the lawyer is not simply a lawyer, but the embodiment of a particular collection of human flaws that exists for as long as humanity has: "when the first mean selfish creature appeared on the human stage, who made self the center of the whole creation . . . then was our lawyer born" (185; III.i). For Fielding, historical knowledge was "confined to a particular period of time, and to a particular nation," while a vivid portrayal of man might serve as "the history of the world in general" (185; III.i).

The fact that historical truth located in the discovery of human nature reflects something more universal than its specific context when filtered through the particular addresses an important difference between history and epic, one which was problematic for Fielding: history, unlike the epic and other fictional genres, was not equipped to deal with the general. Bound by fact, historical models set by monarchs and leaders were hardly applicable to the average reader,

while the "General Action" of an epic might provide us with "something in which all might be equally concerned" (Dennis 9). Fielding's background as a satirist lies at the heart of his investment in the general, and this is perhaps what frustrated him the most about the historical writing of his time. René Rapin cites Aristotle's mistrust in the precision of historical depictions of virtue, since they could only be "found in the particulars," while in an epic, virtue could be constructed "free from all imperfections, and as it ought to be in general, and in the abstract" (186). While Fielding was hardly interested in moral perfection, he did believe that fiction could embellish, perfect, and enliven actuality. So it is almost with pride that Fielding points out the factual "mistakes" of his fiction-writing colleagues Alain-René Lesage, Paul Scarron, and Antoine Galland.[54] His point being that it does not matter—a novel's ability to be compelling in spite of factual errors is a badge of honor marking its narrative integrity. The examples of good fiction cited by Fielding—*Don Quixote, Gil-Blas, Le Roman Comique*—by now make it clear what he sees as the source of generalizable truth—human nature.

What Fielding proposes then is somewhat counterintuitive. In spite of disparaging his contemporary historians in favor of novelists (or biographers), all of Fielding's so-called works (*Amelia* excepted) contain the word "History" in their titles, implying that Fielding is offering up the novel as not just as an alternative to history, but as a re-examination and potential replacement of historical writing and what it offers. Rather than advocate for impartial narratives in which facts are presented without personal opinion or bias, Fielding will provide fiction— itself already an interpretation of human types observed in nature. In so doing, he reiterates the superiority of biography over history because he "bases historical authority on his own interpretive ability rather than the spurious authority of events themselves"; in doing so, he is not

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[54] They are all writers of fiction. Fielding writes that the character of Dr. Sangrado, a quack featured in Lesage's *Gil-Blas*, is not from Spain, as the book indicates. Of course, this is nonsensical, as there can be no factual errors regarding made-up characters.

so much dismissing the use of empirical and authenticating evidence that establishes a realistic

setting in the style of Defoe, but rather "criticizing the substitution of topographical detail for

analysis of events" (Drake 721). The former may get "the age and the country" wrong, but

provide true pictures of men that we might recognize in real life. Fiction appears to enjoy the

advantage of a sort of hermeneutic stability that fact-based narratives lack; if facts are open to

interpretation, an interpretation cannot be factually disputed. This means Fielding can be as

biased as he wants—it is always clear whose "side" he is on in his novels—but one cannot be

accused of being biased when one is not writing about facts. Hence, rather than feign

detachment, Fielding implicates his narrator's voice deeply in the personas and actions of each

character. By ventriloquizing the voices of all the characters he describes, the narrator lets the

reader experience what it is like to talk to and as that person directly. Fielding's so-called

detachment comes not from maintaining a distance from his characters, but from becoming each

one in turn; each character gets a chance to present her true ridiculousness, good nature, or greed

to her audience, and be judged accordingly.

The Vindication of Mrs. Slipslop

The previous section discussed how Fielding's decision to focus on human nature gives

rise to fiction as a non-historical narrative chronotope that transcends the strictures of

chronological time. Here, I will demonstrate how Fielding contests another element held up as

crucial to historical writing: authorial objectivity. Fielding's essay on the ineffectuality and

inaccuracy of historians drew on Lucian's monologue "How to Write History," which criticizes

party historians who distort facts, and romancing historians who dispense with them (Braudy

97). Where Lucian and Fielding part ways, however, is with the issue of objectivity. Lucian (and

much later Hume) both believed "that the detachment of the historian, his view from above, is a necessary part of the truth of his work" (Braudy 98). Fielding is not interested in being impartial—part of his criticism of the historians of his generation is not that they get the facts about people wrong, but that they are focusing on the wrong type of information, by "screening life through literary and epistemological forms that were fixed, arbitrary and absolute" (Braudy 94). As mentioned in the previous section, Fielding's reader is not expected to judge the narrative based on "mere" facts; she judges a collection of characters for whom the author and narrator have strong and clear preferences. While he has his flaws, Tom, especially with his foil Blifil nearby, is clearly meant to convey courage, loyalty, gallantry, and good nature. Even the blunders for which he is punished reveal themselves to be motivated by good intentions—he lies to cover up Black George's crimes, secretly sells his horse and Bible to help the latter's family, and becomes joyfully inebriated while celebrating Allworthy's recovery from illness—and the reader who judges these actions as immoral also finds himself in agreement with some of the least likeable characters in the story, such as Blifil, Square, and Thwackum. Those who dislike Tom do so with the full knowledge that they are going against Fielding's instructions (and perhaps that is what the moral critics of *Tom Jones* dislike most about the novel—it is clear that their interpretation would not be endorsed by the author himself).

In this section, I analyze one of the primary methods Fielding employs in order to most accurately and honestly capture human nature. Not only does Fielding's heteroglossic writing use direct dialogue to vividly capture each character's spoken idiosyncrasies, his narrator plays dress-up with those foibles by adopting, at turns, the points of view or speech patterns of different characters. Rather than attempt to maintain a decorous neutrality toward all of his fictional children, Fielding does the opposite: he immerses his narrator in the utter subjectivity of

each character in turn, embracing and enacting every flaw he encounters. By echoing his subjects, the narrator—whose voice mediates between the characters and the reader—strengthens the parodic effect of the work, and folds the reader into the diegetic world. The two characters I examine here are Mrs Slipslop—Lady Booby's maid—in *Joseph Andrews*, and Lady Bellaston, Tom's wealthy lover in *Tom Jones*. The fact that both characters are women is not, I believe, coincidental. The narrator's ventriloquizing of characters is most effective and most entertaining when dealing with hypocrisy or deceptive appearances. While Fielding's works certainly have their fair share of duplicitous men, women of all classes are expected to follow stricter rules of decorum at the expense of freely expressing their desires—love, lust, or ambition. As Pope's skepticism of female character in "Epistle to a Lady" evinces, it follows that women are seen to harbor a greater incongruity between interiority and exteriority. Nothing seems to delight Fielding more than the prospect of exposing the desires of a woman who does not deserve to manifest or express any because she is too old, too ugly, or too coarse.

We first become acquainted with Mrs. Slipslop in the first book of *Joseph Andrews*. The title of the chapter, "*Of Mr Abraham Adams the Curate, Mrs Slipslop the Chambermaid, and others*" (43; I.iii), indicates that she is a chambermaid, but her actual introduction uses a different term: "Mrs Slipslop, the waiting-gentlewoman, being herself the daughter of a curate, preserved some respect for Adams: she professed great regard for his learning, and would frequently dispute with him on points of theology; but always insisted on a deference to be paid to her understanding, as she had been frequently at London, and knew more of the world than a country parson could pretend to" (43; I.iii). The word choice of "waiting-gentlewoman" signals that the narrator is channeling Mrs. Slipslop's own view of herself—we know it is not the narrator's, since he has referred to her earlier as a chambermaid, a much less prestigious title. The regard

she publicly professes for Adams is immediately deflated by a contradiction coming from the narrator—her belief in her superiority to a country parson. This is a woman who thinks she is modest but is in fact supercilious. By switching back and forth between registers, the narrator conveys the discrepancy between her self-image and reality. In a later conversation between her and Joseph, during which she attempts a seduction—for "she was arrived at an age when she thought she might indulge herself in any liberties with a man, without the danger of bringing a third person into the world to betray them"—Slipslop reveals her true ignorance:

'Sure nothing can be a more simple *contract* in a woman than to place her affections on a boy. If I had ever thought it would have been my fate, I should have wished to die a thousand deaths rather than live to see that day. If we like a man, the lightest hint *sophisticates*. Whereas a boy proposes upon us to break through all the regulations of modesty, before we can make any *oppression* upon him.' Joseph, who did not understand a word she said, answered, 'Yes, madam.'—'Yes, madam!' replied Mrs. Slipslop with some warmth, 'Do you intend to *result* my passion? Is it not enough, ungrateful as you are, to make no return to all the favours I have done you; but you must treat me with *ironing*? Barbarous monster! how have I deserved that my passion should be resulted and treated with *ironing*?' 'Madam,' answered Joseph, 'I don't understand your hard words; but I am certain you have no occasion to call me ungrateful, for, so far from intending you any wrong, I have always loved you as well as if you had been my own mother.' 'How, sirrah!' says Mrs. Slipslop in a rage; 'your own mother? Do you *assinuate* that I am old enough to be your mother?' (52; I.vi)

The narrator has hinted earlier that Mrs. Slipslop "was a mighty affecter of hard words," but left open the ambiguity as to whether her vocabulary was actually riddled with errors, or simply too sophisticated for some.[55] To see her speech spelled out in such clarity is both shocking and comical. The erroneous words are italicized, and remain unexplained by the narrator, and while it is usually not difficult to guess what Mrs. Slipslop means, it is easy for the reader, in turn, to channel her listeners, who were "frequently at some loss to guess her meaning, and would have been much less puzzled by an Arabian manuscript" (45; I.iii.). That her seduction fails at first not because of her hideous physique, but because Joseph cannot understand her is precisely the type of ridiculousness that Fielding claimed he wanted to capture in his writing. The gap between the words Mrs. Slipslop utters and the words she means to utter literalizes the discrepancy between her true knowledge and her pretensions. The spoken words may sound similar to the unspoken (correct) ones, but have completely different meanings—their relative phonetic proximity to the correct words emphasizes, rather than disguises, their semantic distance from them.[56]

Halfway through the novel, Joseph—dismissed by Lady Booby for refusing her advances—is in search of his longtime love, Fanny. Fanny, who in turn had been traveling to London to see Joseph, has been saved from two ruffians on the road by Parson Adams. The two stop at an alehouse to take shelter from a storm when they hear "one of the most melodious [voices] that ever was heard" singing a pastoral ballad (156; II.xii.). It is of course Joseph; he and Fanny are finally reunited for the first time. Their reunion is so "luscious" that the narrator offers prudish readers an alternative view, that of "Parson Adams dancing about the room in a rapture

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[55] Her first directly quoted conversation is with Adams. At the point when the narrator informs us of Mrs Slipslop's love of hard words, we have only just met Adams, and have been informed that he "was an excellent scholar," but also that he was "as entirely ignorant of the ways of this world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be," so it is fair to say that we must defer our judgment of either him or Mrs Slipslop until we hear her speak (43; I.iii).

[56] In many other instances, she uses words that sound similar to the correct ones, but look different on the page (*delemy* instead of *dilemma*, and *confidous* instead of *confident*).

of joy" (157; II.xii.). When Fanny realizes she is surrounded by other people, "she began to restrain the impetuosity of her transports" and, noticing that Joseph is accompanied by Mrs Slipslop, attempts to greet her, "but that high woman would not return her curt'sies; but casting her eyes another way, immediately withdrew into another room, muttering as she went, she wondered *who the creature was*" (157; II.xii.).[57] In the following chapter, entitled "A Dissertation concerning high People and low People, with Mrs Slipslop's Departure in no very good Temper of Mind" (158; II.xiii), the narrator points out how it must "seem extremely odd to many readers, that Mrs Slipslop, who had lived several years in the same house with Fanny, should in a short separation utterly forget her" and ventures an explanation of Mrs Slipslop's reaction to Fanny, which he explains "did not in the least deviate from the common road in this behavior" (158; II.xiii).

The narrator explains that there are two types of people in this world: the high people, of fashion—"nothing more was originally meant by a person of fashion, than a person who drest himself in the fashion of the times" (158; II.xiii)—and low people, of no fashion. These two parties avoid being "seen publickly to speak to those of the other; tho' they often held a very good correspondence in private" and "so far from looking on each other as brethren in the Christian language, they seem scarce to regard each other as of the same species" (158; II.xiii). Mrs Slipslop, having learned fashionable language from her mistress,

> thought she had also a right to use in her turn, and perhaps she was not mistaken; for these two parties, especially those bordering nearly on each other, to wit, the lowest of the high, and the highest of the low, often change their parties according to place and time ; for those who are people of fashion in one place are often people of no fashion in

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[57] The narrator tells us in I.x that "a little before the journey to London, [Fanny] had been discarded by Mrs Slipslop, on account of her extraordinary beauty: for I never could find any other reason" (65).

another. . . And now, reader, I hope thou wilt pardon this long digression, which seemed

to me necessary to vindicate the great character of Mrs. Slipslop from what low people,

who have never seen high people, might think an absurdity; but we who know them must

have daily found very high persons know us in one place and not in another, to-day and

not to-morrow; all which it is difficult to account for otherwise than I have here

endeavoured; and perhaps, if the gods, according to the opinion of some, made men only

to laugh at them, there is no part of our behaviour which answers the end of our creation

better than this. (159-60; II.xiii)

In spite of its satirical tone, the actual wording (if not the keen insight into class snobbery)

replicates the opinion Mrs Slipslop has of herself as a woman of fashion—at least in relation to

Fanny or Joseph. Until the punch line that comes at the end of the very last sentence, the

narrator's vindication of "the great character of Mrs Slipslop" is performed with a straight face.

The shrewd takedown of social tribalism is performed, however, with a dexterity that is

comically shattered by Mrs Slipslop's usual speech riddled with semantic errors. When Parson

Adams is shocked that Mrs Slipslop's memory serves her so poorly, she pretends to vaguely

remember Fanny: "'I think I can *reflect* something of her," answered she, with great dignity, 'but

I can't remember all the inferior servants in our family'" (160; II.xiii). By pairing a description of

the voice Mrs Slipslop imagines she projects (one "with great dignity") with her actual voice in

direct discourse, the narrator turns her inside out—a narrative technique that performs a function

similar to that of free indirect discourse while calling attention to the incongruity between the

two very disparate consciousnesses of the narrator and the character. What we are left with, then,

is a template by which we can supply the concealed parts of certain characters through ironic

interpretation. Mrs Slipslop's earlier ironic confusion of "ironing" and "irony" deploys a fairly

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straightforward instance of reader participation in which we are prompted to expose Mrs

Slipslop, and later, in a similar fashion, Lady Bellaston. The hypocrisy of these women

justifies—even endorses—the irreverent nature of the exposure. As the following section argues,

this ironic relationship to virtue becomes problematic when actual virtue is at stake because we

can only find virtue where such readerly exposure becomes a violation.

On the opposite end of the social spectrum from Mrs Slipslop is Lady Bellaston, the

libertine, who, under the guise of helping Sophia avoid her father's wrath in London, conducts a

lengthy affair with Tom. It is during this time Tom becomes a kept man, the most egregious of

all of his moral transgressions for those critics who found *Tom Jones* to be a dangerous text for

impressionable and female readers.[58] Along with Blifil, Lady Bellaston is the most formidable of

Tom's adversaries because, as a particular category of women of fashion who are "distinguished

by their noble Intrepidity, and a certain superior Contempt of Reputation," and "upon whom

Passion exercises its Tyranny," she is adept at hiding through polite speech and manners that she

has no moral scruples (480; XIV.i.). We see that, like Lady Booby in *Joseph Andrews*, Lady

Bellaston is unbridled desire personified, a cautionary tale of what happens when women with

the financial and social means to satisfy their passions become enslaved by their desire. Lady

Bellaston's trade is in lies and secrets—she lies to Tom that Sophia has no desire to see him, she

lies to Sophia about knowing Tom, and she lies to Sophia's father about her whereabouts. So it is

fitting that her first sexual encounter with Tom takes place at the end of a masquerade during

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[58] Samuel Richardson, who claimed he had never read *Tom Jones* but was prejudiced against it because "I know the Writer, and dislike his Principles, both Public and Private," lamented in a letter to Astraea and Minerva Hill the fact that Tom had to be "a Kept Fellow, the Lowest of all Fellows" (*Selected Letters* 127-28). In an extensive chapter-by-chapter "Examen" of *Tom Jones* published in 1749, an anonymous commentator (who goes by the pen name Orbilius) exclaims that the fifty pounds given to Tom by the "impudent Quality-Whore [Lady Bellaston] is beneath censure." While the passage most harshly disparages Lady Bellaston, the author does believe "That so great a voluptuary as Mr. Jones should be alternately committing Acts of Debauchery, an tasting, by conferring, the Pleasures of Beneficence . . . is an Inconsistency in Character never before heard of."

which Lady Bellaston has spent most of the evening pretending to be Sophia's cousin, Mrs. Fitzpatrick. Lady Bellaston waits until she and Tom have safely arrived at her house of assignations[59] and reveals herself, after which the narrator eschews further details, explaining that "It would be tedious to give the particular conversation, which consisted of very common and ordinary occurrences, and which lasted from two till six o'clock in the morning. It is sufficient to mention all of it that is anywise material to this history. And this was a promise that the lady would endeavour to find out Sophia, and in a few days bring him to an interview with her" (464; XIII.vii.). This coy reticence on the particulars of the exchange and the slippage of spoken subject matter into broader "occurrences," combined with the time of day, is enough to imply the sexual nature of this encounter. By remaining tight-lipped, the narrator performs the casual reserve with which the members of the upper class that habitually engage in such affairs might treat them. The next morning, Tom calls Partridge and gives him a fifty-pound banknote to change:

> Partridge received this with sparkling eyes, though, when he came to reflect farther, it raised in him some suspicions not very advantageous to the honour of his master: to these the dreadful idea he had of the masquerade, the disguise in which his master had gone out and returned, and his having been abroad all night, contributed. In plain language, the only way he could possibly find to account for the possession of this note, was by robbery: and, to confess the truth, the reader, unless he should suspect it was owing to the generosity of Lady Bellaston, can hardly imagine any other.
>
> To clear, therefore, the honour of Mr Jones, and to do justice to the liberality of the lady, he had really received this present from her, who, though she did not give much into

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[59] That Lady Bellaston has two different lodgings—one in which she lives, and the other she rents as a place to meet her lovers—symbolizes her duplicity and serves as another example of the "moral architecture" mentioned by Simon Varey in the following section (172).

the hackney charities of the age, such as building hospitals, &c., was not, however,
entirely void of that Christian virtue; and conceived (very rightly I think) that a young
fellow of merit, without a shilling in the world, was no improper object of this virtue.
(465; XIII.viii)

The pivotal moment in which Tom accepts Lady Bellaston's money and begins his spell as a
kept man is neatly sidestepped. As a scene that lays bare the transactional basis of their
relationship, it would be damaging to both parties involved. The act of evading the truth by using
euphemisms like "generosity," and "liberality" reflects the verbal, hence superficial, attempt to
gloss over unsavory acts, and in doing so, accentuates the hypocrisy at play. This rhetorical
technique of highlighting the omission of information is called paralipsis or preterition, and in
Tom Jones, is most strongly associated with Lady Bellaston. In the above passage, the paralipsis
ironically adopts the underhandedly abstruse language that would be employed by Lady
Bellaston in attempt to conceal her assignation. After this encounter between her and Tom, it
becomes clear to the reader that any description of her actions or words (or lack thereof) operates
through straightforward irony—the things she says and does can be consistently interpreted as
being the opposite of what she means.

By the time Lady Bellaston suggests that Lord Fellamar, one of Sophia's courters in
London, abduct Sophia as a way of forcing her into marriage, it is not difficult for the reader to
fill the void created by the word "rape," which is not articulated until deep into the planning of
the crime, and deliberately left ambiguous in its double meaning of abduction and sexual
violation. Lady Bellaston plants the seed of the idea in Lord Fellamar's mind through a variety of
expressions: "nothing but violent Methods will do," she repeats (510; XV.ii), conceding that
there may be a way to convince Sophia to marry the Lord, "indeed it is a very disagreeable one,

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and what I am almost afraid to think of.—it requires a great Spirit I promise you" (510; XV.ii).

Even as the time, location, and logistics of the abduction are determined under the reader's eyes,

the word itself is replaced by the vague understatement: "the intended Mischief" (512; XV.iii).

The downplaying of the crime reflects Lady Bellaston's stance, as she must convince the hesitant

Lord Fellamar to go through with the plan. Even if the reader does not grasp the precise nature of

the plan, the characters' and the narrator's refusal to articulate it indicates its gravity. When the

word "rape" is finally mentioned, it is Lady Bellaston who pronounces it to goad the hesitant

Lord Fellamar into action: "Fie upon it! have more Resolution. Are you frightned by the Word

Rape?" she demands, yet declining to address their plan as an *act*, much more than the mere

word (514; XV.iv). The chapter then immediately returns to its reticent manner of speech: "The

Remainder of this Scene consisted entirely of Raptures, Excuses, and Compliments, very

pleasant to have heard from the Parties; but rather dull when related at second Hand. Here,

therefore, we shall put an End to this Dialogue, and hasten to the fatal Hour, when every Thing

was prepared for the Destruction of poor *Sophia*" (515; XV.iv). The narrator echoes the

characters' attempt to mask the upcoming crime with compliments and pleasantries, but "The

specific choice of 'Raptures' not only suggests the previously unspoken rape but also condemns

the pair by conflating their crime with their pleasure" (Dobranski 642). Having been primed

earlier with the ironically defensive silences regarding Lady Bellaston, we can, by now, read this

description for what it is.

In the prefatory chapter to the ninth book of *Tom Jones*, the narrator counts among the

requirements of a skilled novelist the knowledge of conversation, "of all Ranks and Degrees of

Men" (317; IX.i). An aspect of nature, realistic conversation "can be learnt only in the World."

Not only did Fielding consider conversation a "branch of society," he championed conversation

as "the Art of pleasing or doing good to one another" ("Conversation" 123). Fielding believed

skilled conversationalists showed good breeding, which had nothing to do with class or fashion,

but rather genuine Christian benevolence. For someone who held considerate, substantive,

democratic conversation as one of the moral foundations of human society, it is only natural that

Fielding would choose speech as the medium to expose what he saw as one of the most

egregious violations of the social code: ridiculousness. In the preface to *Joseph Andrews*,

Fielding points to affectation as "The only true source of the ridiculous," which, in turn, proceeds

from either vanity or hypocrisy: "vanity puts us on affecting false characters, in order to purchase

applause; so hypocrisy sets us on an endeavour to avoid censure by concealing our vices under

an appearance of their opposite virtue" (28). Speech was not just a matter of words or ceremony,

but the reflection of a person's spirit and benevolence. In the final section, we will see how this

becomes a problem with characters who are not expected to converse at length.

"A meek and quiet spirit": Sophia Western and the Problem of Modesty

The description of Mr Allworthy's estate, Paradise Hall, begins this way: "The *Gothick*

stile of building could produce nothing nobler than Mr Allworthy's house. There was an air of

grandeur in it that struck you with awe, and rivalled the beauties of the best Grecian architecture;

and it was as commodious within as venerable without" (30; I.iv). These two lines and the

description that follows have received as much attention for representing the benevolent and

magnanimous character of Mr Allworthy, as they have for being abstract and vague. Jayne Lewis

and Simon Varey have both pointed out that, while most scholars assume the building is Gothic,

a close examination of the phrasing reveals the truth: "We are never told. Allworthy's house

simply disappears into the comparison" (Lewis 310).[60] Technically, it matters little what style of architecture Paradise Hall was actually built in—the description, which really tells us nothing about the actual appearance of the structure, serves to reinforce the impression of Allworthy's goodness, and to signal to the reader that, in spite of the poor judgment he will eventually show, Allworthy is, like his house, "as commodious within, as venerable without." Varey points out that Fielding's use of architecture, landscape, and other spatial configurations to signal its inhabitant's character and state of mind was part of a larger eighteenth-century discourse of convenience and moral architecture explored by Shaftesbury, Locke, and Bacon, among others (172). For Fielding, the spatial language of convenience serves his larger purpose of signifying the discrepancies between interiority and exteriority that are at the heart of the ridiculous.[61]

Fielding uses spatial and architectural terminology to describe character even in moments that have nothing to do with architecture. After his introductory blazon of Sophia Western, the narrator informs us:

Such was the outside of *Sophia*; nor was this beautiful Frame disgraced by an Inhabitant unworthy of it. Her Mind was every way equal to her Person; nay, the latter borrowed some Charms from the former; for when she smiled, the Sweetness of her Temper diffused that Glory over her Countenance which no Regularity of Features can give. But as there are no Perfections of the Mind which do not discover themselves in that perfect Intimacy to which we intend to introduce our Reader with this charming young Creature, so it is needless to mention them here: Nay, it is a Kind of tacit Affront to our Reader's

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[60] See Simon Varey, Space *and the Eighteenth-Century English Novel*, 168.

[61] For example, Fielding's *The Vernoniad* (1741), a burlesque named after celebrated war hero Admiral Vernon, included a portrait of the Palace of Aeolus, a satire on a Palladian mansion Walpole had just built on his estate in Norfolk: "A hollow pile, whose marble front displays / To Sol its whiteness, and reflects his rays; / Within all dark, impervious to the sight" (47).

Understanding, and may also rob him of that Pleasure which he will receive in forming

his own judgment of her Character. (103; IV.ii)

The correspondence between Sophia's superior beauty and her benevolence is likened to an

inhabitant in her beautiful home. Sophia is one of the few of Fielding's creations with the

privilege of possessing a character of such unquestionable integrity. But the narrator's promise

that our (eventual) "perfect intimacy" with Sophia and subsequent discovery of her personal

unity comes at a cost. For there is something about the modest, genteel young woman that

troubles Fielding's privileging of straightforward honesty. When it comes to characters like Tom,

his captivating good looks, which often work as actual capital or collateral, correspond to his

good heart and also predict his genteel status that is revealed at the end of the novel. Tom's

interiority, even without concrete descriptions of his thoughts and intentions, is always legible on

the surface. The tactic examined in the previous section only works with characters that are

disingenuous. The problem with genuine modesty, and the reserve that accompanies it, is that in

someone like Sophia, it translates to semantic impenetrability. If women are indeed "Bred to

disguise," how can the narrator prove Sophia's sincerity without violating her?

Playing on the two definitions of modesty as sexual propriety and as humility, Fielding

seems to imply, by way of the preface in *Joseph Andrews*, that a woman who is so eager to

exhibit her virtue and chastity cannot possibly be humble in either sense of the word. The fact

that Pamela became such an easy target for Fielding and other critics of Richardson points to an

important conflict between the feminine likeability/respectability of characters in eighteenth-

century literature and the convenience-based model of morality. Modesty is a prerequisite for

any "successful" female character, and such modesty is built on, as its Latin etymon suggests,

self-effacement. I argue that Fielding's solution adapts the concept of convenience by focusing

on visible physical signs of modesty. I also demonstrate that this solution inevitably damages the purity of the modesty that Fielding so glorifies and fetishizes.

In order to distinguish between the dissembling silences and the modest ones, we must examine the silences that the narration itself models. Fortunately, the text—in its words and its silences—enacts the earnest modesty that is modeled by its most virtuous female characters. At the beginning of the budding romance between Tom and Sophia, Tom is convalescing at Squire Western's home after breaking his arm while saving Sophia from a falling horse (145-147; V.iv). Throughout Tom's stay, from the moment he has his broken arm set up to his departure, Sophia has taken great care to respect the boundaries of decorum by physically being out of his sight (and putting him out of her sight): "Sophia, when her Arm was bound up, retired: For she was not willing (nor was it, perhaps, strictly decent) to be present at the Operation of Jones" (133; IV.xiv). Indeed, once Sophia leaves the hall where her bloodletting and subsequently Tom's bone-setting occurs, the two remain in their private rooms, convening only in more public contexts, like when Sophia plays the harpsichord, or visits Tom's sick-room accompanied by her father. As such, Sophia's maid Honour becomes their unofficial go-between by communicating information about the other that was strictly supposed to be kept a secret. Honour recounts to Sophia how Tom kissed her muff, and then tells Tom about how Sophia favors that particular muff; each time the story reaches its climax (when the listener realizes the other's feelings for him/her) is when the story is interrupted—in the case of Sophia by a dinner bell, and in the case of Tom by the entrance of Squire Western.

Consider the way in which Honour approaches Tom to tell him Sophia's reaction to his kissing her muff: "The day after Mr Jones had that conflict with himself which we have seen in the preceding chapter, Mrs Honour came into his room, and finding him alone, began in the

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following manner:--"La, sir, where do you think I have been? I warrants you, you would not guess in fifty years; but if you did guess, to be sure I must not tell you neither" (145; V.iv). The upper hand Honour has on Tom is based on the exclusive knowledge she has—her secret is her currency (and although she does not use it maliciously or to its full advantage the way Lady Bellaston does, this scene nevertheless shows Honour working through that currency out loud)—a currency that Tom then "beg[s] earnestly to be let into" (145; V.iv). Not only is her secret about a place, it *is* a place to be let into. On a more symbolic level, Honour's whereabouts are not just at the Seagrims, but in Sophia's room (her private space), the one place in the Western house that Tom has no access to. Sophia's conversations with Honour stand in as the closest glimpse we get into Sophia's interiority, which is otherwise kept secret both by Sophia and by the narrator, who remains at a loss for words at her reactions on hearing Jones's thoughts on her:

> Til something of a more beautiful Red than Vermilion be found out, I shall say nothing of Sophia's colour on this Occasion . . . As to the present situation of her Mind, I shall adhere to a Rule of Horace, by not attempting to describe it, from Despair of Success. Most of my Reader will suggest it easily to themselves; and the few who cannot, would not understand the Picture, or at least would deny it to be natural, if ever so well drawn. (136; IV.xiv).

When both Sophia and the narrator collude to keep her feelings hidden, all we can rely on is her dialogue with Honour, and even in that, Sophia remains reticent. What remains to be read is the abundance of dashes that break up Sophia's speech as she stutters with bashfulness at being told that Jones referred to her as an angel, or her empty dismissals of Jones: "…tho' I really believe, as you say, he meant nothing. I should be very angry with myself if I imagined" (136; IV.xiv).

Even those dismissals are weakened by the fact that they are words copied from Honour—"I really believe," "as you say"—rather than produced by Sophia herself.

Stephen Dobranski argues that the impossibility of describing Sophia's state of mind in this and other similar situations indicates an unspeakable emotional intensity: "the narrator's silence distinguishes Sophia's emotions from the various other, less profound feelings that he more openly describes" (644). This silence is in the tradition of the modesty topos, which Ernst Robert Curtius traces back to Classical judicial oratory as a rhetorical device that allows "the orator to put his hearers in a favorable, attentive, and tractable state of mind" by affecting a performance of submissiveness and humility (83). In Cicero's *Orator*, addressed to Brutus, the author expresses a fear of criticism and failure, and pre-emptively apologizes for his feebleness—a pattern widely applied to other written genres throughout later Christian Antiquity and eventually "in the Latin and vernacular literature of the Middle Ages" (Curtius 83). The fear is often associated with physical reactions such as "trembling" and "agitation" and a "tongue [that] threats silence" (Dobranski 85).

While I agree with Dobranski that the reticence of Fielding's narrator draws on the modesty topos ("from Despair of Success"), I also believe that the way in which the modesty topos is used by Fielding pivots on the double interpretation of the word "modesty" as a way of applying it mainly to situations that involve Sophia (for whom modesty is more of a social requirement than it is for Tom and other men).[62] The narrator's words fail him most commonly with her. For example, Sophia and Tom's respective discoveries that they are in love with each other, made by the mediation of Honour as she goes back and forth between the two characters'

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[62] In *Natural Masques: Gender Identity in Fielding's Plays and Novels*, Jill Campbell also notes the parallel between the narrator's and Sophia's reticence, pointing out that Allworthy expresses his approval of Sophia and her "modesty of a learner" by way of an anecdote in which, asked to settle a disagreement between Square and Thwackum, Sophia modestly (or coyly) refuses. Allworthy concludes that "as she is most apparently void of all affectation, this deference must be certainly real" (161).

respective rooms, are presented close to each other—three chapters apart—and made to constitute mirror images of each other. In Sophia's, from which the passage above is excerpted, Honour tells her lady of Tom's kissing Sophia's muff; in Tom's, she then tells him how Sophia has been cherishing that muff. But if, in the scene of Tom's discovery of Sophia's love, the text works to lay bare his emotions; in Sophia's version, everything conspires to conceal her true feelings (even the dinner bell interrupts Honour's re-telling of the story at the crux of Tom's declaration of love for Sophia). The effect of Sophia's diving in to the fire to save her beloved muff, "trifling as it was, it had so violent an Effect on poor Jones, that we thought it our duty, to relate it" (146; V.iv). Thus what is hidden and "trifling" in Sophia is purposely illuminated in the case of Tom. Dobranski also notes how, in contrast to Fielding's detailed description of Tom's emotional state, "the scene with Sophia seems substantially not there . . . Instead, the narrator highlights the absence of this information" and thereby piques the reader into "speculat[ing] more freely about what may have happened that remains unsaid" (651). I would go even further to argue that the lack of detail on Sophia's state of mind is a protection of her modesty. Fielding feigns modesty as a narrator in situations where modesty as a specifically social and gendered standard of behavior is expected. Sophia's true feelings are hidden even from her maid (we the readers are able to glean it only from non-verbal hints such as her blushes, her silences or stammers) and her interiority is a closely-guarded space. Tom's, on the other hand, is compared to Troy laid bare after the war, a "Citadel" whose guards "ran away from their Posts" (147; V.iv).

But if Sophia succeeds at concealing her thoughts from her father, aunt, and Blifil—all negligent readers—better readers like us must be able to gather something more. As the excerpts above show, Sophia's truth can often be read—as with many young women in eighteenth- and

nineteenth-century novels—through her body. The description above has Sophia blushing a shade "of a more beautiful Red than Vermilion," while Honour's earlier admiration of Tom's physique has "an Effect on Sophia's Countenance" (134; IV.xiv). Nowhere is the relationship between Sophia's body and her inner self best described as in the following passage:

> Notwithstanding the nicest guard which Sophia endeavoured to set on her behaviour, she could not avoid letting some appearances now and then slip forth: for love may again be likened to a disease in this, that when it is denied a vent in one part, it will certainly break out in another. What her lips, therefore, concealed, her eyes, her blushes, and many little involuntary actions, betrayed. (142; V.ii)

By pathologizing her love as a disease, the narrator establishes the adversarial relationship between Sophia's body and the emotions that her propriety forces her to hide. Mary Ann O' Farrell argues that an author's decision to create and describe a blush on a character is the decision to treat it as "a temporal phenomenon that has been taken to imply causality," which is to say that a blush is written of within a text if it is to be treated specifically as a psychosomatic event, not the result of external stimuli like digestion, health, or alcohol consumption (3). Interpreted as such, the blush and other comparable physical manifestations of emotion become "the writing of the body" that "supplemen[t] language with an ephemeral materiality—and novelistic usage would even suggest that, by means of the blush, body and language are identical and simultaneous in function and effect (O'Farrell 4). This is precisely how Sophia's silences speak volumes—unlike Tom, whose body is likened to an abandoned fortress, Sophia's continues the struggle to defend its walls, but what is inside emanates in spite of her best efforts and her body is read as narrative. As the preface to *The Female Reader* (1789) tells young women, "a blush is far more eloquent than the best turned period" (xiv).

In other moments too, Fielding turns to the image as a way of betraying information when words fail or seem too direct a way of expressing things, precisely because they are often centered on Sophia's body. Her famed introduction, for example, starts off not with a description, but rather "a visual tour of the reader's possible visual reference points for envisaging Sophia, culminating in the suggestion that the only accurate visual likeness is not external but the mental image of the narrator's beloved" (Kareem 134). This tactic reiterates Fielding's dedication to *Tom Jones*, in which he declares that novels like his promote virtue by setting a good example, which "is a Kind of Picture, in which Virtue becomes as it were an Object of Sight, and strikes us with an Idea of that Loveliness, which Plato asserts there is in her naked Charms" (7). References to pictures and images can be more effective than words in an instance where language might otherwise penetrate the subject's veil of modesty. Whereas Sophia censors her own speech for a variety of reasons—modesty or embarrassment, disdain, convenience—the narrator's speech (telling) is often replaced by a visual reference (showing) that he pre-emptively dooms to failure, as when he announces that "our highest Abilities are very inadequate to the Task" (102; IV.ii).

In the description of Sophia's vermilion blush, I showed how Fielding replaces descriptions of Sophia's inner thoughts with descriptions of her body—a body that reveals in spite of itself. But some of Fielding's most striking descriptions go beyond bodily descriptions, by referencing other artistic works that already capture to perfection the impression that which Fielding wishes to convey. The aforementioned introduction of Sophia starts with a reference to the Venus of Medicis, courses through a series of portraits of celebrated English beauties, and ends with a mysterious allusion to the narrator's love—"most of all she resembled one whose image never can depart from my breast" (102; IV.ii). Instead of describing Bridget Allworthy's

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appearance, the narrator recommends that the reader consult a particular figure from Hogarth's drawing "Winter's Morning." Before describing the servant who discovers Sophia's flight from her father's estate and must announce it to her father and aunt, the narrator laments that he has neither Shakespeare's pen nor Hogarth's pencil, and ultimately resorts to a reference to the *Aeneid*. By turning to (mostly) visual external references at the climax of describing a subject in a moment of heightened sensation or feeling (Sophia is extremely beautiful, the servant extremely perturbed), Fielding's descriptions arrest our attention "only to vanish the object of attention before our eyes" and replace it with something we may already know, or at least can look up and consult (Kareem 134). But when examined carefully, the descriptions often remain vague and uninformative. The readers are prompted "to create in their minds the complete represented world from the prompts given in the text" while simultaneously redirecting their "wonder toward the virtuosic literary effects that appear" in the given subject's stead (Kareem 135). Associating his text with other well-turned works of art allows Fielding to transcend time and space; instead of giving the reader a specific image of a single person or scene, Fielding can evoke a series of visual references linked through time by their emotional congruity and their ability to capture that emotion, fulfilling his objective of revealing the universal truth of human nature in his portraits.

Sophia embodies the limits and the possibilities of silence—her modesty means that she can only be read through the narrative of her body, but the legibility of her body also shows the potential of imagery as a method of non-verbal communication. When the narrator enacts his characters' silences, he conceals information also as a mode of engaging, commanding, and titillating the reader's attention. Ruth Bernard Yeazell notes a similar erotics of modesty to which the woman as an object of courtship is subjected. Conduct books like Thomas Marriott's

Female Conduct (1759), James Fordyce's *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), articles in *Lady's Magazine* (1770-1847), and Edward Moore's *Fables for the Female Sex* (1744) were written under the guise of *natura amatoria*, but were actually *ars amatoria*—not describing the behavior of women in love, but rather prescribing what made such women attractive (Yeazell 47). Modesty as self-concealment was purportedly attractive because of the moral rectitude it representrf, but the way modesty concealed also made it erotically attractive on its own merit—what Yeazell calls "the art of the soft pornographer" (47).

Fielding is engaging in precisely this kind of art when he tells his reader that he "shall say nothing of Sophia's Colour on this Occasion" (136; IV.xiv). As I argued before, Fielding's use of the Classical modesty topos can be superimposed onto the modesty topos of the conduct book in which withdrawing, withholding, and concealing are treated as indications of "fancy's aid, / Which evermore delighted dwells / On what the bashful nymph conceals" (Moore 62-63). Fielding's invitation to "supply the hidden Part" is an erotically charged one in which the reader takes the on the role of the observing, searching, anticipating man whose imagination fills in for "The Charms [a woman] hide[s]" (Marriott 62). Such invitations, as well as fetishizations of modesty, rely on the visual nature of imagination: "By covering up and holding back, the modest woman inspired men to just such imaginative pleasure—which suggests why Addison thought 'the pleasantest Part of a Man's Life,' as he famously remarked in the Spectator, 'is generally that which passes in Courtship'" (Yeazell 49). Not only does Fielding use the erotic implications of modesty and withholding as a way of increasing the reader's pleasure in imagining and filling in the gaps, in such moments he also turns to the visual—whether it be descriptions of visible physicality rather than interiority or references to specific paintings or sculptures—as a way of securing the reader's desire to imagine what goes unsaid.

The erotics of anticipation that comes with concealment adulterates the modesty with which it is associated. In the same way that the *ars amatoria* function of the conduct book subtly replaces its purported goals of *natura amatoria*, it becomes difficult to extricate the titillation experienced by the male observer from the innocence of the woman who conceals out of modesty; in fact, to separate the two would ruin the excitement. That said, the anticipatory arousal is a central part of eighteenth-century discourse on the enjoyment of art—both literary and visual. Marcia Allentuck adopts the art history term *non finito* to describe the style of *Tristram Shandy*, and applies it more broadly to the concept that the eighteenth-century observer's pleasure in enjoying a painting "lay in completing mentally, in a complicity of the imagination, the work that the artist had abandoned" (Starobinski 119-120). Allentuck exemplifies the *non finito* in "a work which the artist intended to leave unfinished, like a torso or sketch . . . challenging and motivating its audience to creative cooperation—to fill in and find out by empathy and association" (147). The concept of expressive imitation encouraged artists to go beyond the directly and realistically mimetic, to achieve an "illusory realism" that "has it greatest force when it allows for a high degree of inference from the dumb, still, planar, external show that painting literally presents" (Rothstein 316). German Enlightenment art critic G.E. Lessing first popularized in *Laocoön* (1766) the notion that pictures captured a *punctum temporis*, "the happy moment chosen by the painter to epitomize the thrust of the narrative" (Rothstein 317). Lessing believed that visual art "must imitate actions through imitating bodies at the temporally most pregnant moment" and that "painters and sculptors must not show emotions at their peak, since that would stifle imagination, which should carry the action forward" (Rothstein 318). Offering anticipation rather than fulfillment of an image, the *non finito* implies that "art must limp behind imagination" (Rothstein 327). Samuel Johnson shared this notion of

the superiority of the seemingly unfinished work of art. Johnson's dictionary describes the adjective "general" as "not restrained by narrow or distinctive limitations," and offers this important illustration from Locke: "A general idea is an idea in the mind, considered there as separated from time and place, and so capable to represent any particular being that is conformable to it" ("Understanding of Man" 105). The dictionary also describes "general" as "extensive, though not universal"—a close paraphrase of how Fielding talks about his fictional depictions of humans and human nature in *Joseph Andrews*. In *Lives of Poets*, Johnson also criticizes seventeenth-century poet Abraham Cowley for being "so particular that he deprives his reader of the ability to bring the work into his own experience," which he treats as "an impertinence, since it demands that we wholly accept the author's conception however banal it might be; we are excluded from the artistic process, and cannot 'improve the idea in our different proportions of conception'" (Weinbrot, *Aspects of Samuel Johnson* 188). Addison's praise of the fable genre in the *Spectator* is in a similar vein (although he focuses more on the fact that the reader enjoys it because he is flattered)—"the Reader comes in for half of the Performance; Every thing appears to him like a Discovery of his own . . . and is in this respect both a Reader and a Composer" (*Spectator* 512). This is the logic that operates behind the introductory description of Sophia's beauty. The final line in which Fielding compares Sophia to an unnamed woman he loves must bring to mind a similar type of beloved companion for the reader precisely because the reader is not hampered by a specific reference or even a name.

By withholding as a way of achieving erotic titillation, intellectual flattery, and creative participation, Fielding takes advantage of the overlap between the belief that the imagination promises so much more than the "felicity of the senses" could ever afford and the belief that to let the imagination speculate was the most pleasurable thing a reader could do (Yeazell 49).

Ironically, something that Fielding does not think is worth the reader's time to imagine is the actual happiness of his characters. He believes that domestic happiness might be morally desirable, but makes for dull subject matter. Mrs. Bennet's happy youth for example, sounds monotonous: "During the first Part of my Life, even till I reached my Sixteenth Year, I can recollect nothing to relate to you. All was one long serene Day, in looking back upon which, as when we cast our Eyes on a calm Sea, no Object arises to my View. All appears one Scene of Happiness and Tranquility" (*Amelia* 268). Booth similarly describes the happiest time early in his marriage as practically un-narratable: "I scarce know a Circumstance that distinguished one Day from another. The whole was one continued Series of Love, Health, and Tranquility. Our Lives resembled a calm Sea" (*Amelia* 147). A similar sensation is mentioned in *Jonathan Wild*:

> Most private histories, as well as comedies, end at this period; the historian and the poet both concluding they have done enough for their hero when they have married him; or intimating rather that the rest of his life must be a dull calm of happiness, very delightful indeed to pass through, but somewhat insipid to relate; and matrimony in general must, I believe, without any dispute, be allowed to be this state of tranquil felicity, including so little variety, that, like Salisbury Plain, it affords only one prospect, a very pleasant one it must be confessed, but the same. (102)

Fielding is most certainly ironic in the last passage from *Jonathan Wild*, because the narrator's tone in this text is consistently so throughout the novel. That said, there is a reason why the marriage plot ends where it does—a formula that Fielding faithfully follows in *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*. If he is not condemning marital bliss morally, he clearly does not believe it capable of being a compelling subject of artistic treatment. Happiness and stability are ultimately incompatible with good storytelling because of their tendency to flatten time—consistency of

emotion makes the typical units by which we calculate the passage of time (minutes, hours, days,

etc.) blur. Happiness and domestic bliss fit the description of the kinds of times that Fielding will

skip in his writing because they are not "worthy" of the reader's attention. They are not worthy,

because they are complete; they do not *need* the reader's attention. Looking back at the scenes in

which the narrator's refusal to enlighten the reader on Sophia's state of mind, it is clear that they

are all scenes in which pleasure and distress intersect. The intimacy Fielding promised us is

established, but in a voyeuristic manner that trades on the aestheticization of exposing what does

not want to be exposed.

By way of conclusion, let us return to Joseph Andrews, who, as perhaps the only

eighteenth-century paragon of male virtue, challenges my claim that it is specifically the virtuous

woman who problematizes Fielding's narrative reticence. The majority of scholarship on Joseph

has located the joke of his modesty in his sex—the notion of a chaste and virtuous man is as

funny as a man in drag.[63] In a brilliant reading of Joseph's transition from *castrato* caricature to

masculine hero, Jill Campbell argues that the traces of femininity that follow Joseph to the end of

the novel suggest a new model of male epic hero, one that displays both strength and

sensibility.[64] I agree with Campbell that Joseph's virtue ends up developing into something more

complex than a cross-dressed version of Pamela's chastity. But when it comes to the *expression*

of modesty, it becomes clear that Joseph, while certainly invested in his chastity, has little

concerns for reticence or reserve. In an early scene that acts as a counterpart to one of the many

scenes of Booby thrusting himself on Pamela, the dialogue between Lady Booby and Joseph

reveals the exact same gendered power dynamics as if this were a "traditional" seduction. Lady

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[63] See Bernard Schilling, *The Comic Spirit: Boccaccio to Thomas Mann* (1965); Arthur Sherbo, *Studies in the Eighteenth Century English Novel* (1969); Dick Taylor, Jr. "Joseph as Hero in *Joseph Andrews*" (1957).

[64] See "The Meaning of a Male Pamela: Genre and Gender," in *Natural Masques*.

Booby begins by circuitously testing the waters, asking Joseph: "Suppose a lady should happen to like you; suppose she should prefer you to all your sex, and admit you to the same familiarities as you might have hoped for if you had been born her equal, are you certain that no vanity could tempt you to discover her?" (49; I.v). Her tentative hypotheticals betray her unwillingness to openly proposition Joseph; she must first make sure that her reputation is safe. When Joseph fails to read her insinuations correctly, she exposes her neck to him, and "'La!' says she, in an affected surprize, 'what am I doing? I have trusted myself with a man alone, naked in bed; suppose you should have any wicked intentions upon my honour, how should I defend myself?'" Even though she holds social and financial power over Joseph, Lady Booby follows the gender-normative script of seduction, in which a woman is at the mercy of a potential ravisher. Joseph continues to reject her advances, and finally Lady Booby re-writes the circumstances of their scene in a desperate attempt to bed him: "'Must not my reputation be then in your power? Would you not then be my master?'" She literally reverses their roles, giving up her superiority and making him the "master." The comical contradiction between Lady Booby's words and her status reveal the persistence of the rhetoric of modesty, the one scrap of propriety that Lady Booby refuses to give up, even as her pursuit of Joseph becomes all-consuming. Modesty does seem to be the ailment that affects only the women of Fielding's world. As the title of *Amelia*, Fielding's only novel named for a heroine and also his only novel that doesn't not bill itself as a "history" implies, this desirable yet impenetrable modesty excludes women from joining the ranks of historical subjects to be written and read about for public edification.

Chapter Three

Fact or Friction: *Tristram Shandy* and the Plot of Contiguity

In a fortnight's close and painful application, which, by the bye, did my uncle *Toby*'s wound, upon his groin, no good,—he was enabled . . . to form his discourse with passable perspicuity; and before he was two full months gone,—he was right eloquent upon it, and could make not only the attack of the advanced counterscarp with great order;—but having, by that time, gone much deeper into the art, than what his first motive made necessary—my uncle *Toby* was able to . . . give his visiters as distinct a history of each of their attacks, as of that of the gate of *St. Nicolas*, where he had the honour to receive his wound.

But the desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it. The more my uncle *Toby* pored over his map, the more he took a liking to it;—by the same process and electrical assimilation, as I told you, thro' which I ween the souls of connoisseurs themselves, by long friction and incumbition, have the happiness, at length, to get all be-virtu'd—be-pictur'd,—be- butterflied, and be-fiddled. (63; II.iii)[65]

What is most notable about this description of the early stages of Toby Shandy's hobby horse is how quickly its intended objective of easing the pain of Toby's wound is abandoned— by Toby himself and by the writing, which buries any allusion to the injury in the first two lines. So distracted is Toby by the minutiae of mapping, modeling, and retelling the Battle of Namur

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that he forgets why he took up his obsessive pastime in the first place.[66] Even so, Toby develops

over the months a deep expertise of and eloquence on the many battles surrounding the

circumstances of his injury. Toby's wound will not heal, we are told, due to "a succession of

exfoliations from the *os pubis*, and the outward edge of that part of the *coxendix* called the *os*

ilium" (56; I.xxv). The connotations of this exfoliation are echoed above, when Tristram likens

Toby's passion for his maps and military study to "electrical assimilation," and "long friction

and incumbition." Toby's passion for his hobby horse is acquired through the energy created by

the rubbing and chafing of two bodies together, so it comes as no surprise that his bones cannot

heal. The sexual connotations of his fervor are inescapable. There is of course the location of

Toby's injury—his groin—and all the chafing and the rubbing taking place around it. More

importantly, however, the appetite for military scholarship stands in contrast to all other types of

passion in a man who otherwise seems unable to muster any meaningful desire for any other

object; Toby's courtship of the Widow Wadman falls apart because his chastity is "almost to

equal, if such a thing could be, even the modesty of a woman" (48; I.xxi).[67]

Friction is a useful trope for Sterne because of its comical and bawdy undertones, but this

chapter proposes that it epitomizes the author's deeper purpose of challenging readerly

expectations of how plot unfolds by replacing causality with contiguity as the drive behind

narrative progression. For Sterne, I argue, contiguity—the condition of two or more things being

close to or touching each other—is the *modus operandi* of his body of work. Sterne was writing

at a time when philosophy and metaphysics were deeply invested in the "work of critical

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[66] "He was one morning lying upon his back in his bed, the anguish and nature of the wound upon his groin suffering him to lye in no other position, when a thought came into his head, that if he could purchase such a thing, and have it pasted down upon a board, as a large map of the fortification of the town and citadel of *Namur*, with its environs, it might be a means of giving him ease," (*Tristram Shandy*, 59-60; II.i).

[67] Or perhaps his hobby horse (the origins of which precede the appearance of the Widow) has sapped his desire for anything else. Either way, it seems fair to argue that Toby's hobby horse has expropriated all of his passions, including the sexual ones.

discrimination aimed at distinguishing the true nature of things, at clarifying their systematic relations, and at giving them proper names" (Braider 5). Cartesian dualism's "ontological cleavage between mental and material existence" would shape metaphysical and philosophical debates for centuries to come, including that of Locke's differentiation of the world as it exists objectively and as it is perceived by the mind (Alter 37). Sterne's affinity for the logic of contiguity embodies the digressive, rather than strictly rational or causal, logic by which the typical human mind was said to orient itself by many eighteenth-century rationalists. It challenges the binaries of soul and body, or mind and matter, so popular in scientific and metaphysical thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries among thinkers like Newton, Descartes, and Locke; and it symbolizes the integration (or at least rapprochement) of such worlds otherwise treated as disparate and disconnected.

The madcap directions taken by Tristram's mind and the resulting lack of any apparent narrative cohesion was, of course, one of the main criticisms leveled at Sterne. In a 1760 review of *Tristram Shandy*, Edmund Burke describes the book as "a perpetual series of disappointments," a haphazard collection of satirical episodes that "are introduced with little regard to any connexion, either with the principal story or with each other" (247). Burke goes on to criticize the distracted plot: "The author perpetually digresses; or rather having no determined end in view, he runs from object to object, as they happen to strike a very lively and very irregular imagination" (247). A more lenient critic from the *Critical Review* enjoyed the "digressions, divertingly enough introduced" but ran up against a similar difficulty as Burke, which was that "we are unable to convey any distinct ideas to our readers" what the novel was about ("*Explanatory Remarks*" 320). This impossibility of capturing what the novel is *about* precisely indicates how Sterne surrenders any sense of progress that comes with reading a

traditional plot for a more digressive mode of narration. The semblance of a cohesive framework, speciously offered in the title (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*), is just that—an outer shell that challenges the reader's instinct to keep returning to a plot that isn't there. Tristram hints at this possibility in the introductory pages of his autobiography when he begs for the reader's patience until a stronger rapport is established between him and us: "As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.—*O diem praeclarum*!—then nothing which has touched me will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling" (7; I.i). Tristram implies that the terminus of our literary journey with him is not based on the fulfillment of a plot, but rather "friendship," which is instrumental only in its ability to buy Tristram leniency from his readers. The *telos* of *Tristram Shandy* is the tolerance, and eventually even enjoyment of that which is trifling—in short, it is the enjoyment of digressions.

In the first section, I will examine and expand on the theoretical inspiration behind this chapter, Stuart Sherman's response to the longstanding academic favoring of *kairos* or Messianic time over *chronos*, or empty, homogenous time. *Kairos* is "time filled with the presence of the now" that disrupts the flow of *chronos*, which is made up of identical and interchangeable units unmarked by occasion. As I will detail shortly, *kairos* is associated with a cataclysmic event whose literary equivalent is the plot point, while *chronos* corresponds to those stretches of time "pass[ing] by without producing any Thing worthy" of the reader's attention that we rarely read about precisely because they served no purpose in masterful plots woven by the likes of Fielding (*Tom Jones* 53). Sherman challenges the implicit hierarchization contained in this division and advocated by scholars like Walter Benjamin and Frank Kermode by demonstrating that seventeenth and eighteenth century genres of writing traditionally categorized as chronicles—

such as diaries, daily newspapers, travel records—actually do emplot supposedly homogenous or merely chronologically organized writing. In the second section, I provide an overview of the importance of causality to the rational empiricism of John Locke and to Structuralist narratology—two seemingly unconnected schools of thought that have respectively influenced the writing of and about Sterne's digressions. Locke, whose ideas on rational empiricism deeply influenced the style of *Tristram Shandy*, believed that the zenith of the human mind's ability to reason was its ability to correctly ascertain causality. As a result of this faith in human rationality, Locke dismisses other types of associations, like digression, as whimsical or foolish. More than two centuries later, Structuralism's search for a "functional syntax" that could account for every type of narrative would result in a similar privileging of causality as the driving force of novelistic plot. In the third section, I propose that it is rather David Hume—both in his writings on the importance of experience to the human acquisition of knowledge, and on literature and history—who offers a compelling template for understanding the wildly associative narration of *Tristram Shandy*. Hume considers digression a natural and fundamental part of the way in which the human mind operates, and suggests that digressive forms are permissible—indeed, sometimes appropriate—in certain genres of writing. In the fourth and final section, I close read several sections of *Tristram Shandy* to demonstrate how exactly the power of contiguity is formally borne out in Sterne's writing. I examine two prominent stylistic aspects of the text in particular—the double entendre and the often visual, non-verbal cues that highlight the materiality of the book—as manifestations of Sterne's experimentations with contiguity.

Crowding out the Plot

In "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin cites the unfolding of the French

Revolution as an illustration of how "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not

homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]" (261). Namely,

by modeling the ideology of the Revolution on the Roman Republic, Revolutionary leader

Maximilien Robespierre selected ancient Rome and "charged [it] with the time of the now which

he blasted out of the continuum of history. The French Revolution viewed itself as Rome

reincarnate" (Benjamin 261).[68] According to Benjamin, even though "The concept of the

historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a

homogeneous, empty time," humans will strive to fill that emptiness with some sort of plot. For

Robespierre, invoking the Roman Republic would endow the French Revolution with a

corresponding plot of revolution, republicanism, and prestige (ironically, Robespierre was

willing to disregard what followed chronologically: the Roman Empire), allowing the two

republics to reflect back at each other across history. This instinct to construct narratives out of

the past, and to treat such narrativized time as more meaningful and "full" than mere

chronological, undifferentiated time, is taken up by Frank Kermode in *The Sense of an Ending*

(1967). Kermode uses the chronometric onomatopoeia "tick tock" as "evidence that we use

fictions to enable the end to confer organization and form on the temporal structure" (45). That is

to say, by imposing through language an artificial difference between the beginning tick and the

closing tock of a clock, the way in which we have come to describe the sound of time passing

serves as "a model of what we call a plot, an organization that humanizes time by giving it form;

and the interval between *tock* and *tick* represents purely successive, disorganized time of the sort

that we need to humanize" (45). Kermode uses the Greek words *kairos* to designate "the coming

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[68] Robespierre famously responded thusly to concerns about the victims of the Revolution: "Stop shaking the tyrant's bloody robe in my face, or I will believe that you wish to put Rome in chains" (47).

of God's time . . . the fulfilling of the time, the signs of the times" and *chronos* to designate simply "one damn thing after another" (45).[69] Time that is not organized and "purely successive" is not human because it is characterized by its regularity and measurability, chugging along regardless of event, incident, or human intervention. It is we humans who impose a beginning, middle, and end to create a story out of time that is otherwise simply "kept." In other words, we invent endings to purge the interval between tick and tock "of simple chronicity, of the emptiness of *tock-tick*, humanly uninteresting successiveness" (Kermode 46-48).

Stuart Sherman's *Telling Time* (1996) responds to and challenges this conventional privileging of *kairos*, and hence time-with-plot, by Benjamin, Kermode, and other scholars including Benedict Anderson, Gérard Genette, and Paul Ricoeur.[70] Sherman begins by pointing out how the phrase "tick tock" describes chronometry, not temporality, highlighting Kermode's conflation of the sound we interpret a clock as making, and our actual relationship with time. Before horologist Dutch Christiaan Huygens's innovation of attaching a pendulum to clockwork in 1656, the sound of a clock was likened to "jarring" and "muttering"—a "harsh inharmonious sound" (Sherman 2). Furthermore, according to the *OED*, the "tick tock" which Kermode takes for granted as human instinct was only introduced in writing for the first time in William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847), when the successive "tick, tick, tick" had already been in use for almost two centuries (Sherman 7). "Tick tock," then, is neither a universal nor an instinctive way of filling time; clearly, there is something more to "mere" succession than empty passage of time:

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[69] The latter is from John Marsh's *The Fulness of Time* (1952), quoted in Kermode 45.

[70] In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (1983), *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (1980), and *Time and Narrative* (1984-88), respectively.

identical syllables vouch for identical durations, and leave no "gap" of the kind Kermode

and Fraisse posit between *tock* and *tick*. . . . *Tick*, *Tick*, *Tick* fills what were hitherto

emptier and more shapeless tracts of time (minutes, quarters, hours) with steady, sharp

definition. . . . sheer *chrono*metry—performs some of the functions that Kermode

reserves for *tock* and *kairos*; it organizes intervals and fills them (and hence perhaps

charges them also), but in terms that privilege successiveness and resist closure.

(Sherman 11)

Sherman's claim centers on the isochronicity that clocks offer—unlike "tick tock," which

differentiates clearly between beginning (tick), middle (the brief pause between), and end

(tock)—the repetition of tick over and over again offers a new "temporality of smallness and

sameness [that] occurred as an arresting innovation" (8). In his close readings of Samuel Pepys's

diaries, Sherman argues that Pepys's act of writing every single day "foster[s] the textual illusion

of temporal continuity," and that it is the regularity and the attention to detail of Pepys's writing

that allows him to "fill" supposedly merely successive time: "Pepys's diary figures homogeneous

time as full rather than empty by a strategy of double containment: a plenum of narrative within

each day, and a plenum of narrated days within the calendar. Measure defines narrative

obligation; the fulfillment of the obligation produces temporal fullness in text" (35). In short, it is

not a plot-based narrative, made up of only the most significant details curated from an

assortment of daily activities, that fills the days of Pepys's diaries, but a "running tally" (or at

least the illusion of one)—a narrative punctuated by measure rather than occasion.

My reading of *Tristram Shandy* uses Sherman's position as a starting point. I argue that

Sterne erases the gap between plot ("full" narrative) and digression ("empty" narrative) in the

same way that diarists like Pepys sought to humanize by emplotting what appears to be a merely

chronological genre of writing. Sterne does the reverse by emptying out the *kairos* of *Tristram Shandy*, that is to say, Tristram's actual life and opinion. Rather than create plot, Sterne fills it with digressions, musings, interpolated stories, and trivia, which are connected to each other through their associative proximity rather than any sense of causality or consequence.[71] In doing so, *Tristram Shandy* shatters the notion of the digression as a departure from an expected trajectory, because the very object that is being departed from is disappeared, overthrowing the "tyranny of teleology" (Iser, *Tristram Shandy* 73). Events from which plot usually emanates— birth, death, crisis, attraction—are swiftly circumvented in favor of details of little to no consequence, and rambling associations take the place of the potential development of narrative momentum. The day of Tristram's birth, for example, is famously overwhelmed by details and tangents that delay his actual delivery for half of the novel. In a study that contrasts St. Augustine's *Confessions* with *Tristram Shandy*, Fredrick Bogel notes in the latter the utter absence of a theodical "crucial determining event, a point at which the character of his life undergoes a real and radical change"—instead, Sterne parodies the epiphanic moment filled with significance by turning it into something "grounded in mere chance and contingency," from Tristram's enervated conception and the corruption of his name from Trismegistus, to his accidental circumcision (501-502).[72] Not only are these potential tragedies passed over with little ceremony, their failure to generate kairotic moments of plot symbolizes the impotence that they embody.

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[71] Closely mimicking the way in which the nightly stories crowd out the frame tale in *Nights*.

[72] Bogel explains that Augustine's text "established the experience of conversion as a central—almost a generic—element of Western autobiography," with anguish and self-doubt in the first half succeeded by "a history of redemption" in the end (499). In spite of its roots in the Christian paradigm, this structure underlies a wide range of autobiographical works, including those of John Stuart Mill, Wordsworth, Malcolm X, and Robert Lowell.

The handling of Tristram's brother Bobby's death demonstrates how a momentous event can be reduced to minutia. Around the time Bobby should have taken his grand tour of Europe,[73] Walter Shandy receives a legacy of a thousand pounds from his sister Dinah. This throws Walter into a puzzle—should he use the funds to improve Ox-moor, an undeveloped tract of land on his estate, or should he use them to send Bobby to the Continent? With this introduction, Bobby's death is framed as a solution to Walter's dilemma rather than an event in its own right; Tristram even uses the word "rescue" to describe how it extricates Walter from having to make an impossible decision (236; IV.xxxi). To add insult to injury, the initial mention of Bobby's death, which occurs at the end of the fourth volume, is separated from the diegetic description of its announcement and the subsequent effects it engenders by several trivial non-narrative interruptions: a checklist of topics Tristram must cover in the following pages, a dedication to Sterne's friend and patron Viscount John Spencer, and a bawdy interpolated story set in the court of the queen of Navarre, just to name a few. It is only in the second chapter of the following volume that Tristram returns to Bobby's death, of which Walter is notified just as he is calculating the transportation costs for Bobby's trip. Toby reads the letter containing the news as Walter examines his map of Europe, and when Toby cries out Bobby is "gone!" Walter, in his confusion, takes him to mean that Bobby has left for Europe: "What—without leave—without money—without governor?" (245; V.ii). Walter's reaction to Bobby's death is even further delayed by a series of negative comparisons to a series of well-known historical figures who wept for the deaths of their children (which Walter pointedly does not do),[74] and an anecdote

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[73] Travelogues and travel narratives on the topic of the Grand Tour were an eighteenth-century literary genre unto their own. See Lisa Colletta, *The Legacy of the Grand Tour*.

[74] "My father managed his affliction otherwise; and indeed differently from most men either ancient or modern; for he neither wept it away, as the *Hebrews* and the *Romans*—or slept it off, as the *Laplanders*—or hanged

about Obadiah ruining one of Walter's mares. When Walter is finally given the opportunity to respond to his son's death, he can only speak in aphorisms (mainly mangled quotes from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*) that remove him from the situation of Bobby's death until "he had absolutely forgot my brother *Bobby*" (249; V.iii).[75]

In the kitchen, where Obadiah has announced the news of the death, the servants' reactions are similarly distracted:

–A green sattin night-gown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which *Obadiah*'s exclamation brought into *Susannah*'s head. –Well might *Locke* write a chapter upon the imperfections of words. –Then, quoth *Susannah*, we must all go into mourning. –But note a second time: the word *mourning*, notwithstanding *Susannah* made use of it herself—failed also of doing its office ; it excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black, —all was green. –The green sattin night-gown hung there still. (252; V.vii).

Tears notwithstanding, Susannah's mind is occupied by the wardrobe of Mrs. Shandy, which the latter will have give up to mourn her son, and so it is that Bobby is forgotten from the text in favor of the brightly colored dresses. As Walter's resigned comment, "My son is dead!—so much the better—'tis a shame in such a tempest to have but one anchor" implies, the only trace that will be left of Bobby is the unfinished *Tristrapaedia* that Walter begins to compile as a way of educating his surviving son (252; V.vii). Yet if these associations seem somehow callous or

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it, as the *English*, or drowned it, as the *Germans*,—nor did he curse it, or damn it, or excommunicate it, or rhyme it, or lillabullero it.— (246; V.iii)

[75] Judith Hawley notes that Walter can "achieve resignation by drawing on stores of philosophy: 'Philosophy has a fine saying for everything. –For *Death* it has an entire set' (421: V.iii, emphasis in original)'," but also that the abundance of such sayings, and the conundrum of which to pick is what flusters Walter more than his son's death ("Tristram Shandy, Philosopher," 236-37). In this instance, Walter's mourning as the natural outcome of Bobby's death is bypassed for a series of quotes and aphorisms that are meant to capture a father's grief but comically fail to convey it.

cruel, they prove themselves to be accurate: nine chapters after she hears of Bobby's death, Susannah indeed "had got possession of my mother's green sattin night-gown" (261; V.xvi). The associations appear ridiculous and scattered at first glance because they replace what we typically consider to be important information (How did Bobby die? How old was he? Where has he been this whole time?). What they demonstrate is how the mind wanders to places that are easy to access due to their proximity. When Walter mistakes Toby's use of the word "gone" to mean that Bobby has left for Europe, it is because he is interrupted while staring at a map that routes Bobby's potential trip. Susannah, whose first task will be to prepare her lady's wardrobe for mourning, naturally thinks of her favorite article of clothing while being able to grieve, in all sincerity, for her mistress. Rather than select more apparent and typical signs of mourning to create the cohesive narrative of a bereaved family, Sterne supplies all of the data as it occurs; in doing so, he overwhelms the occasion of Bobby's death with the whole gamut of responses that takes place around it, and shows how the privileging of relevant plot points over supposedly gratuitous information actually denies the nuanced and incongruous conduits that the human mind can take.

Locke and the Narratologists

Until recently, scholarly treatment of digression has been a relatively neglected area of interest. I believe this is because of the profound influence of structuralist narratology's tendency to grant primacy to plot, which is manifest in the pervasiveness of the distinction insisted upon between the chronologically ordered events of a story, and the plot—the reorganization of the events in the recounting of the story in a literary narrative—in all branches of narratological

thought.[76] Russian Formalist and French Structuralist analyses of narrative in turn rarely

explicitly address digression, most likely because neither considered it a valuable enough

subject. Both schools of thought ranked plot above events merely organized by chronological

order, and both considered all narrative elements that do not directly contribute to plot

advancement as having an inferior functional utility that "is attenuated, unilateral, parasitic"

(Barthes 266).[77] The goal of the narratologist is to conceptualize a universally applicable series

of narrative structures that can "describe and classify the infinite number of narratives" (Barthes

239) that exist, and this is achieved by reducing "a sequence to its nuclei and a hierarchy of

sequences to its higher terms without altering the meaning of the story: a narrative can be

identified even if its total syntagm be reduced to its actants and its main functions" (Barthes

291). This approach emblematizes the problematic legacy of structuralism in regard to

digressions. The assumption that it is possible to pare down narrative to a minimal framework

containing the overall message of a text creates a hierarchy that does not effectively apply to a

text like *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments*, for example, and certainly not *Tristram Shandy*.[78]

What is the role of the peripatetic and whimsical digression—at times purposely non-

contributive to the plot—in a system that claims that a narrative summarized down to its bare

bones can still retain its original integrity?

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[76] This is reiterated in different terms by many French Structuralists and Russian Formalists. Vladimir Propp and Viktor Shklovksy coined the terms *fabula* (story in chronological order) and *syuzhet* (plot), Tzvetan Todorov made an analogous distinction between *histoire* and *discours*, which Roland Barthes also adopted. Although a predecessor of both Structuralism and Formalism, E.M. Forster's distinction between story (events in sequential order) and plot (narrative bound by causality) is similar. What all these scholars share is the belief that narrative is made literary precisely through the manipulation of chronologically ordered story.

[77] Barthes's essay served as the introduction to the 1966 issue of the French semiotics journal *Communications*, which was a narratological ur-manifesto of sorts. All quotes in this chapter are from the English translation, published in 1975.

[78] "The Tale of the Two Lovers" in Volume 7 of *Tristram Shandy* is a romance stripped down to its skeletal plot including only the bare bones of the encounter, separation, emotional distress and physical wandering, and reunion. The brief tale ends anticlimactically with "…they fly into each others arms, and both drop down dead for joy," demonstrating exactly how tedious such a schema would be to read (366; VII.xxxi).

Barthes's classification of functional units according to their expendability is paradigmatic of the privileged position we are used to giving narrative elements closely tied to plot. He calls the more important units cardinal functions or *nuclei*, which "constitute actual hinges of the narrative" while the others, called *catalyses*, "do no more than 'fill in' the narrative space separating the hinge-type functions" (Barthes 247-48). If a function is cardinal, "the action to which it refers opens (or maintains or closes) an alternative directly affecting the continuation of the story, in other words, . . . it either initiates or resolves an uncertainty" (Barthes 248). Barthes presents an example of the two sentences: "The telephone rang" and "Bond picked up the receiver." Both are essential plot points that "can be saturated with countless minor incidents or descriptions, such as 'Bond made his way to the desk, picked up the phone, put down his cigarette'" (248). Here is how Barthes details the difference between cardinal functions and catalyses:

> These catalyses are still functional, insofar as they enter into correlations with a nucleus, but their functionality is toned down, unilateral, parasitic. The functionality involved is purely chronological (what is described is what separates two moments of a story), whereas the link between two cardinal functions possesses a double functionality, at once chronological and logical: catalyses are no more than consecutive units, while cardinal functions are both consecutive and consequential. Indeed, there is a strong presumption that the mainspring of the narrative activity is to be traced to that very confusion between consecutiveness and consequence, what-comes-after being read in a narrative as what-is-caused-by. (248)

Not only does the act of qualifying chronological functionality as "simple" or "pure" void the catalyses of any meaningful role, but Barthes' pathologizing of them as "parasitic" (a word he

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uses more than once to describe elements that contribute nothing to moving the plot forward)

implies that, as details that create and widen the gap between the cardinal functions, the catalyses

enervate the narrative potency of plot's forward momentum. Barthes' argument that "catalyses

are no more than consecutive units"—non-consequential, minor, parasitic—maps easily onto

Tristram's digressions, which, as I will show presently, are governed by associations based on

proximity rather than consequence (248). Later, Barthes likens catalyses to "areas of security,

rest, or luxury" (much like Fielding does of his inter-chapter pauses). As the word "luxury"

implies, non-nuclei are ultimately dispensable and separable from the minimal structure of the

plot, according to Structuralist logic (250).

Unlike suspense, which uses functional narrative obstacles to breed a "disorder which is

consumed with that particular anguish tinged with delight (the more to be savored, since it is

always straightened out in the end)," the digressions in *Tristram Shandy* refuse to be

contextualized by that yearning for the ending to impose itself as a hermeneutic skeleton key

(Barthes 267). Barthes's metaphor of sickness illustrates suspense as a perversion that needs to

be cured by an ending that can "straighten out" the masochistic excitement of not knowing.

Without the expectation of that remedial ending, the anguish loses any trace of delight. The

unceremonious vanishing of Bobby upon his death illustrates how Sterne's digressions refuse to

bracket themselves within existing timelines to serve the purpose of such titillation. In this,

Tristram's digressive associations are something more dynamic than a pause in progress or a

"shuttling back and forth along a temporal line"; they are "also sinuous, or mov[e] from side to

side or twis[t] around as well as back and forth" and need to be considered in all of their

dimensions (Hawley, "Digressive and Progressive" 23-24). Tristram's digressions deconstruct

and dissolve linear plot as it occurs because they neglect to return to the plot from which they depart.

Even more recent recuperations of the role of digression in plot reveal the influence of narratology's strong teleological tendency. In *Reading for the Plot* (1984), Peter Brooks vitalizes the static formalist/structuralist narratological project, which he believes has focused on the "identification of minimal narrative units and paradigmatic structures" at the expense of "temporal dynamics that shape narratives in our reading of them" (xiii). Brooks's biggest contribution and limitation is the layering of Freudian psychoanalysis on to the conceptual framework developed by the likes of Barthes, Genette, and Todorov. For Brooks, the reader's consumption of plot is shaped by the Freudian paradox of desire: "diminishing as it realizes itself, leading to an end that is the consummation (as well as the consumption) of its sense-making . . . the realization of the desire for narrative encounters the limits of narrative, that is, the fact that one can tell a life only in terms of its limits or margins. The telling is always *in terms of* the impending end" (52). This last sentence captures how Brooks's conceptualization of plot, like the paradox of desire, simultaneously accepts and diminishes the significance of deferral. Digressions are necessary because they heighten our anticipation of plot resolution, but they are only necessary in this capacity. In *Loiterature* (1999), Ross Chambers redeems the errancy of thought as the desire for comprehensiveness that opens up to "a multiplicity of mediations with a globality that, in the end, resists inventory" in favor of a Barthesian form of *jouissance* (13). What Chambers calls "loiterly literature" disarms criticism by departing from the position of linearity that dominates it, and that departure creates a distance that allows for a more dispassionate and ironic analysis of the status quo (15). In particular, digression can be used as "a subversive narrative tactic, either as a means to challenge the conventional form of the novel . . .

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and to contribute thus to the renovation of the novel form, or as a mode of calling into question

the existing (and often predetermined) order within a society" (4). The fact that Chambers

references *jouissance* reveals that he, too, defines digression in terms of the future, even while he

attempts to void the future of the teleology of its presence.[79]

The narratologist framework of privileging causality over consecutiveness finds an

unexpected exponent in the seventeenth-century rational empiricism of John Locke. The

influence of Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*—in particular his theory on

the association of ideas—on *Tristram Shandy* is a widely accepted fact of Shandean studies. In

his 1909 biography of Sterne, Wilbur Cross writes that Sterne discovered Locke while at

Cambridge, and that the latter's "famous essay became Sterne's companion to the end of his life

and coloured much of his own thinking" (33). The exact nature of Sterne's take on Locke's

brand of rational empiricism has been the subject of debate—while earlier scholars tend to read

Tristram Shandy as a straightforward exposition of Locke's ideas,[80] more recent criticism tends

to agree that the work satirizes of Locke's blind reliance on reason.[81] My own position echoes

that of Christina Lupton's, who writes that *Tristram Shandy* takes to the literal extreme Locke's

attempts to trace the workings of the mind, and in doing so turns against its muse "through an

overextension of empiricist psychology rather than a clean turn against it" (100-101).

Locke's faith in the human capacity for reasoning is firmly rooted in empirical induction,

which is apparent throughout his body of work. In the chapter entitled "Of Cause and Effect, and

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[79] See also Samuel Frederick's *Narratives Unsettled: Digression in Robert Walser, Thomas Bernhard, and Adalbert Stifter*.

[80] See Cross, and also Theodore Baird, "The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source."

[81] Both John Traugott (*Tristram Shandy's World),* and Wolfgang Iser (*The Act of Reading*) argue that the novel is a satirical dramatization of "the abysm between ideas and reality" intended to "perfectly display the worldly problem of Locke's *Essay*" (Traugott 6)*.*

other Relations," Locke explains his theory on how the human mind comes to understand cause and effect: in a world filled with "the constant Vicissitude of Things, we cannot but observe that several Particulars, both Qualities and Substances, begin to exist; and that they receive this their Existence from the due Application and Operation of some other Being" (276; II.xxvi). Specific instances of cause and effect—one of Locke's examples is the creation of ashes from the application of fire to wood—but more importantly, the very concept of cause and effect itself, can be deduced through "ideas received by sensation or reflection": "it suffices to consider any simple idea or substance, as beginning to exist, by the operation of some other, without knowing the manner of that operation" (277; II.xxvi). In other words, the actual process of causality by which change is wrought on the affected element does not have to be perceived or understood in order for causality to be rationally inferred. Unlike Hume, who argues that any reasoning that relies on empirical induction nevertheless requires a leap of faith to be made at some point (we can never be certain that the cause and effect we observe in an instance can be universally generalized), Locke allows reason the final word in the empirical process.

Locke's choice of words in discussing the human understanding of causality reveals his privileging of causality as the paradigm of the mind's ability to rationalize. For even substances that undergo formal changes based on agents "working by insensible ways which we perceive not," (say, the generation of a cherry from seemingly thin air) can have their origins traced (277; II.xxvi). Yet, if causality represents, in theory, the peak of human reason, it is also often subject to human error. Later, in his chapter "Of the Association of Ideas," Locke calls the "connexion of ideas wholly owing to chance or custom" an utter "madness" that is nevertheless "found in most men" (367; II.xxxiii). While "the office and excellency of our reason" is responsible for making associations between ideas that "have a natural correspondence and connexion one with

another," there are also nonsensical associations established "wholly owing to chance or custom":

> *Ideas* that in themselves are not all a-kin, come to be so united in some Men's Minds, that it is very hard to separate them, they always keep in company; and the one no sooner at any time comes into the Understanding, but its Associate appears with it; and if they are more than two which are thus united, the whole Gang, always inseparable, shew themselves together. (367; II.xxxiii)

Sterne famously capitalizes on the comedic potential of the nonsensical association made through custom from the very opening pages of *Tristram Shandy* in the story behind Tristram's conception: Walter Shandy's habit of following the winding of the house-clock "on the first Sunday night of every month throughout the whole year,—as certain as ever the Sunday night came" with "some other little family concernments" causes his wife to associate the two acts, so that she "could never hear the said clock wound up,—but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popp'd into her head,—& vice versa:—" (5; I.v.). At the very instant of Tristram's conception, Mrs. Shandy interrupts their monthly coitus to demand whether her husband has "*not forgot to wind up the clock?*" distracting her husband (2; I.i.). Tristram claims that the misfortune of having his father's animal spirits "scattered and dispersed" at the crucial moment established an "unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature" that was inherited by his homunculus and consequently integrated into his very subjectivity—hence his propensity for delay and distraction. By establishing the problem of his birth as one of random associations (made through custom—in itself not necessarily logical—rather than causality), Tristram sets the tone of his "Life and Opinions" as one that is guided by "mad" associations, to use Locke's vocabulary.

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A closer look at these associations reveals not so much their madness, but rather the privileged place that Locke gives to cause and effect over other types of associations. Indeed, it acts as a framework for the whole chapter on the association of ideas, which Locke primarily uses to critique the establishment of cause and effect based on factors other than reason. While the understanding that fire applied to wood results in ashes is a correct observation of cause and effect based on what "our senses are able to discover in the operations of bodies on one another" (277; II.xxvi), the following is an example of a "wrong connexion": "A man has suffered pain or sickness in any place; he saw his friend die in such a room: though these have in nature nothing to do one with another, yet when the idea of the place occurs to his mind, it brings (the impression being once made) that of the pain and displeasure with it: he confounds them in his mind, and can as little bear the one as the other" (369; II.xxxiii). What Locke here deems "madness" is not simply a mistaken causal relation established by the mind, it is specifically an instance of contiguity being interpreted as causality. The man cannot stand the room in which his friend died not because he mistakenly attributes the cause of his friend's death to the room—in his mind, the fact that the room is the place where his friend died is, in and of itself, reason enough to cause him pain. This association is one that is based on contiguity—the man died *in* the room—but Locke can only see it as a foolish association, because the room did not cause the death *per se*. Many of the other examples he cites work similarly: the instance of a man, after being sensibly injured by another man "never thinks on the man, but the pain and displeasure he suffered comes into his mind with it"; the man who was cured after a painful operation who, in spite of his gratitude for his savior "could never bear the sight of the operator: that image brought back with it the idea of that agony which he suffered from his hands, which was too mighty and intolerable for him to endure"; or children who "imputing the pain they endured at school to their

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books they were corrected for, so join those ideas together, that a book becomes their aversion" (370; II.xxxiii). In all these instances, it is the proximity (both literal and figurative) of the different elements of the "irrational" aversion—the injury and the injurer, the physical pain and the operator who inflicted it, the book and the corporal punishment that came from not learning it—that creates the association, not the direct causality. By nature, cause-and-effect may be the most logical type of relation that two entities can have with each or on each other, but as an overarching framework for explaining the building blocks of how the human mind moves in different directions at once, it has its limits.

Hume and the Freedom to Wander

In contrast to Locke's rigid ratiocination of the workings of the human mind stands Hume, who in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1938) first, and later *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1948), not only questions our understanding of causality, but also embraces "the very categories which earlier empirical investigation had tried to bracket out of the science of perception," namely by accepting uncertainty as a given part of human experience rather than trying to rationalize through and theorize it away" (Lupton 102).[82] Hume and Locke differ not only in the degree of emphasis they place on the human ability to reason through the process of cause and effect, but more fundamentally on the issue of whether reason is even such valuable mental ability. Unlike Locke, Hume argues that "No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes, which produced it, or the effects, which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference

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[82] For other scholars who take this position, see: A.E. Davidson, "Locke, Hume, and Hobby Horses in Tristram Shandy", Wolfgang Iser, *Sterne: Tristram Shandy*; Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle*.

concerning real existence and matter of fact" (*Enquiry* 25; Iv.vi). What we cannot experience firsthand, we cannot know with certainty. For Hume, such uncertainty was not problematic, for he believed that there were various faculties of the mind—such as will, imagination, and the passions—that could fill in the gaps left by knowledge and reason. From the beginning of his career, in *Treatise*, Hume celebrated the imagination's ability to create a narrative from virtually any set of circumstances: "nothing is more free than the imagination, which can join any two ideas it pleases" (10; I.iv). This idea remains largely intact in *Enquiry*, where Hume makes the case for the digressive mind in his section on the association of ideas: "Even in our wildest daydreams and night dreams we shall find, if we think about it, that the imagination doesn't entirely run wild, and that even in imagination the different ideas follow one another in a somewhat regular fashion" (17; III.i).[83] For Hume then, the ability to enjoy digression, both as a writer and a reader, is not the sign of an outlandish mind, but a compelling one.

An anonymous critic of *Tristram Shandy*, writing under the pseudonym Christopher Flagellan, lamented his "strange sceptical age" in which "A famous Scotch philosopher— Hume—"has for many years past, been blowing with great self-complacence, pretty, glittering, dazzling bubbles of metaphysick into the atmosphere of science, has denied the connexion between *cause* and *effect*" (8). Flagellan, of course, was referring to Hume's notorious "proposition that causes and effects are discoverable not by reason but by experience," that "there isn't the slightest hope of reaching any conclusions about causes and effects without the help of experience" (*Enquiry* 12-14; I.iv). Flagellan's essay plays on Yorick's death by equating

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[83] Published in 1738, *Treatise* was, by all accounts, even Hume's own, "Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my *Treatise of Human Nature*. It fell dead-born from the press, without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots." After *Treatise* was lambasted by critics, Hume reworked it into *Enquiry*, which was published in a decade later. Most of his ideas on the association of ideas remain the same in both texts.

Yorick with his creator Sterne. By officially "killing" Sterne/Yorick, Flagellan claims to quash

"malicious" or "stupid" rumors that "*the late Mr.* ST--E*, alias* YORICK*, is not dead, but that, on*

the contrary, he is writing a Fifth *and* Sixth*, and has carried his Plan as far as a* Fiftieth *and*

Sixtieth *Volume of the Book, called* The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy" (9).[84] Flagellan's

choice to satirically mourn the death of Tristram's creator by ridiculing the ideas behind Humean

skepticism is telling. Hume's claim that the self is a "heap" of transitory thoughts and

perceptions without a higher form of subjectivity uniting them resonates with the structure of

Tristram's scatterbrained memoir, which, in spite of its title, is predominantly composed of the

stories and opinions of those around him. For Flagellan, Tristram's "battological[85] fertility as

nothing could exhaust" is, morally speaking, as much of a sin as his "licentious wit" and "ill-got

fame" (33, 48).

The only publicly available opinion Hume expressed regarding *Tristram Shandy*, is this

succinct and cryptic comment from a letter he wrote to William Strahan: "The best Book, that

has been writ by any Englishman these thirty Years (For Dr. Franklyn is an American) is

Tristram Shandy, bad as it is" (*Letters* 256). With this single line, we may never know exactly

what Hume thought of the novel, but Flagellan's pairing of the two men stresses the degree to

which both writers accept, and even embrace, the looseness and unpredictability with which the

human mind operates—unlike Locke, for whom reason is the only proper method of mental

processing. While Locke and Hume both acknowledge that there are several ways in which

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[84] "Funeral discourse" was published in 1761, immediately after the publication of the fourth volume of *Tristram Shandy*. The ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy* would not be published until 1767, a year before Sterne's actual death. Flagellan parodies what he considers Hume's nonsensical skepticism by arguing that Yorick/Sterne is technically alive, but that "of the two principle kinds of life distinguished by the epithets of animal and spiritual . . . the former alone is possessed by YORICK, in whom the animal lives, while the man is dead" (9).

[85] Given to "needless and tiresome repetition in speaking or writing" (*OED*).

associations like cause and effect are established in the human mind, Locke gives cause and effect a much more privileged place in his reasoning than Hume. Locke dismisses as "wrong and unnatural combinations" such associations, but Hume categorizes "Contiguity in time or place" as one of his principles of connexion (the others are resemblance and "*Cause* or *Effect*"). Hume's example of how "the mention of one apartment in a building naturally introduces an enquiry or discourse concerning the others" makes use of a spatial metaphor as a way of normalizing the meandering motions of a mind that operates perceptually (17; III.ii-iii). While Locke's reliance on the human ability to reason leads him to pathologize the "Connexion of *Ideas*, wholly owing to *Chance* or *Custom*, *Ideas* that in themselves are not all a-kin," in favor of those that "have a natural Correspondence and Connexion one with another," Hume's privileging of experience over reason—that is to say, *a priori* knowledge—allows him to treat contiguity as a different— not an erroneous—way of creating associations (*Human Understanding* 367; II.xxxiii)

This attitude toward contiguity has productive implications for thinking about the digressions in *Tristram Shandy*. Hume's theory on the association of ideas leaves room for digressive forms by recuperating the presence of "a connexion upheld among the different ideas" that compose "even in our wildest and most wandering reveries" (17; III.i). For Hume, no digression is a complete *non sequitur*, for "a principle of connexion" inheres in the human mind. Hence, even if a person seemingly breaks "the thread of discourse," closer investigation reveals "that there had secretly revolved in his mind a succession of thoughts, which had gradually led him from the subject of conversation" (17; III.i). A digression can be seen as a process whereby a succession of related thoughts occurs with such rapidity that by the time the latest one is expressed, the chain of connection is so extended that it appears to have been severed. It would seem then, that it is at the moment of conversion of thought to language that digression becomes

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problematic, for language must impose a linear grammatical structure on thought, which respects neither temporal nor spatial order.

To be clear, Hume does not glorify digression, nor does he accept the rambling aesthetic in its own right. For Hume, digressiveness is a natural part of the mind's operation, and all digressions can be traced through a logical series of thoughts to their origin. Where excessive digression can become problematic is in writing. He writes that in all written works, "there is a certain unity required, and that, on no occasion, can our thoughts be allowed to run at adventures, if we would produce a work, which will give any lasting entertainment to mankind," and argues that literary design—without which a work of literature "would resemble more the ravings of a madman, than the sober efforts of genius and learning"—must engage the different ways in which readers associate their ideas (*Enquiry* 18; III.v). The design of each work depends in turn on its genre—historical writing "would be influenced by the connexion of contiguity in time and place" while "in epic poetry, the connexion among the events is more close and sensible: The narration is not carried on through such a length of time" (19-20; III.viii-x).[86] What may be considered superfluous or irrelevant in one form of writing might be perfectly fitting for another. Although he does not advocate rampant digression, Hume does recognize it as a formal decision that can heighten the emotional effects of reading certain types of literature. It is significant that Hume uses literature and literary genre to flesh out the framework for his theory on mental associations. He presents history (non-fiction) and epic poetry (fiction) as generic examples of how different styles of writing can engage the reader's attention in different ways. It is clear that Sterne takes delight in muddling and pushing to their extreme the generic expectations laid out

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[86] This resonates with Fielding's ideas on consequence and his privileging of occasion, rather than chronology, as the organizing principle of fictional plots.

by Hume; the clash between the different expectations (both of writers and readers) associated with different types of texts plays a central role in the narrative chaos that is Tristram's life.

Hume argues that literary genre determines the type of unity, or "connecting principle among the several events," to be used in a work. Historians, biographers, and other such writers working with non-fictional genres must be faithful to the details of time and space, while epic and tragic poets need to ensure that "The imagination, both of writer and reader, is more enlivened, and the passions more enflamed than in history, biography, or any species of narration, which confine themselves to strict truth and reality" (20; III.viii-x). In short, genre determines how plot should be presented. The progression of plot is more important in fiction, which should have a more limited time frame, "And the actors hasten to some remarkable period, which satisfies the curiosity of the reader" (20; III.viii-x). History is chronology-based; fiction is plot-based—readers of historical texts are driven by the curiosity to know the details of an event whose outcome they (likely) already know, while readers of fiction are driven by the curiosity of outcome. This binary maps onto the ambiguity with which Sterne plays throughout *Tristram Shandy*: the fictional creation of Tristram's "Life and opinions" presented as supposed autobiography (and read as such by certain critics)[87]. Hawley succinctly declares that "Whether or not Sterne thought of himself as writing a novel, Tristram did not" ("Tristram Shandy" 234). By layering these two genres one onto the other, Sterne finds himself able to play with both temporalities accepted as historical, "tracing the series of actions according to their natural order," and poetic, which uses a plot-based "stricter and closer unity in the fable" peppered with "minute circumstances" to "enliven the imagery, and gratify the fancy" (*Enquiry* 20; III.x). Thus the clash between Sterne's zany, non-linear experiments, and Tristram's plodding attempt to

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[87] The very first published review of *Tristram Shandy*, written by William Kenrick, confuses Tristram as the author of his "memoir."

exhaustively record "strict truth and reality"[88] results in Tristram running back and forth between these two generic temporalities and achieving, as it were, no unity of action.

This lack of unity of action is seen either as the work's charm or its weakness. Ironically, the appearance of disorder comes from Tristram's urge to thoroughly chronicle the events of his life to their originary causes—not unlike the "collecting impulse" behind the "sexual cruiser's urge to be comprehensive" (Chambers 5)[89]— an important aspect of historical writing according to *Enquiry*: "Not only in any limited portion of life, a man's actions have a dependence on each other, but also during the whole period of his duration, from the cradle to the grave; nor is it possible to strike off one link, however minute, in this regular chain, without affecting the whole series of events, which follow" (19; III.x). As an autobiographer, Tristram's digressions stem from a desire for historical comprehensiveness that distracts from the plot of the novel of which he is the supposed protagonist—a case in point is the decision to trace his character back to its days before *ab ovo*, and getting stuck there until a third of the way through his supposed life story. Yet the excessive immersion to which the reader is subjected also reflects the intimate knowledge of a literary subject that is the part of poetic design according to Hume: "All poetry, being a species of painting, brings us nearer to the objects than any other species of narration, throws a stronger light upon them, and delineates more distinctly those minute circumstances, which, though to the historian they seem superfluous, serve mightily to enliven the imagery" (*Enquiry* 20; III.x). It is important that Hume likens poetry to painting, for both (along with eloquence and music) appeal to sentiment rather than reason or logic ("Delicacy of Taste and

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[88] Robert Alter has attributed "The idea of exhaustive presentation through slow-motion narration" that had the potential for "comic exaggeration" but also revealed the "fundamental problematic bearing on the inherent limitations of literary mimesis" to Sterne's interest in Richardson's *Pamela* (44).

[89] Chambers's argument that "what divides attention is desire" aligns with the sexual passion that drives hobby horsical behavior—Tristram's hobby horse is the act of writing his life (5).

Passion" 6). Sentiment, fancy, and passion, Hume argues, can never be wrong, "because sentiment has a reference to nothing beyond itself, and is always real, wherever a man is conscious of it" ("Standard of Taste" 231).

By appealing to a satisfaction that is free from the judgment of correctness, Sterne creates a space at the intersection of the non-fictional chronicle and poetic fiction, where the failure to adhere to a purported plot nevertheless yields poetic intimacy through a deep dive into minutiae. The multitude of anecdotal threads that make up *Tristram Shandy* excites "a thousand different sentiments," which "are all right: Because no sentiment represents what is really in the object" ("Standard of Taste" 231). Like his father's struggles to compile the *Tristapaedia*, Tristram's determination to provide his reader with the full picture of his life and the chain of causality underlying it actually ends up being undercut by the exhaustive (and therefore digressive) mode of narration that he chooses—that of contiguity.

Contiguity in Action: Wordplay and Worldplay

Sterne's modeling of an inner world that operates on contiguity is not just an exercise in seeming randomness; it is a way for him to bring together supposedly disparate worlds and modes of thinking together and to see how they might interact with each other. Why contiguity then? One answer to that can be found in the "constant dynamic tension between the mental and the material spheres" throughout the text—equally detailed renderings of Corporal Trim's grief over his brother's plight on the one hand, and of the motions that constitute the puffing of a pipe on the other, are given equal attention, and are thus shown to be interrelated, if not necessarily through cause and effect (Alter 36). This tension reflects Sterne's historical context on the heels of Newton's *Principia* (1687) and Descartes' metaphysical analyses, which had set a precedent

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for splitting human cognition and existence into binaries—of mind and body, subjective and objective (Alter 37). Sterne resists this trend toward splitting reason and feeling, soul and body, plot and digression, through the stylistic subversion that combines rather than divides, with contiguity often replacing causality, as is apparent in one of Tristram's performances of his hobby-horse, discoursing on the hobby-horse:

> A man and his HOBBY-HORSE, tho' I cannot say that they act and re-act exactly after the same manner in which the soul and body do upon each other: Yet doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind, and my opinion rather is, that there is something in it more of the manner of electrified bodies,—and that by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the HOBBY-HORSE.—By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill'd as full of HOBBY-HORSICAL matter as it can hold;—so that if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other" (55; I.xxiv)

According to Tristram's logic, the kinship between a man and his hobby horse is established not so much through interest, but rather through physical contact which, repeated at enough length and with enough passion (hence the analogy of friction), has an osmotic effect. By literalizing the hobby horse, Sterne is able to establish a physical metaphor for the power that a pastime can hold over the man who has it. What is important to the osmotic passage of "hobby-horsical matter" from the hobby to the man is not the nature of the hobby horse, or even the nature of the man, but simply the fact of their physical closeness. Contiguity becomes a basis for knowledge. The part of the man that comes into contact with a (hobby) horse is of course his genitals, imparting a sexual aspect to the transference of matter. The implication is that a man can be

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obsessed with a hobby-horse to the degree that it becomes an almost sexual passion, but also that

the transference of the passion is sexual—hobby-horsical matter "fills" the body of its rider until

the rider, it seems, is taken over by it. It is made clear from Toby's obsession with his

reenactments that even the most absurd tastes can become hobby horses through no other reason

than proximity and friction. The sexual joke works because of the possibility of digression or

(mis) interpretation that lurks around the corner from any double entendre (in this case, the

image of a horse being ridden)—an example of how Sterne compels the reader to rehearse the

messiness of the association of ideas.

If persistent friction can ignite a man's passion for his hobby-horse, can it also spark the

reader's interest in the text he is reading? Tristram's comparison of the encounter with literature

to conversation would seem to indicate that he does think of reading and writing, "when properly

managed," as not just a passive acceptance or unilateral generation of narrative, but a dialogue

that reminds the reader of her status as interpreter and supplier of meaning:

> As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so
>
> no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would
>
> presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding,
>
> is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well
>
> as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do
>
> all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own. (77: II.xi)

The unfolding of Tristram's narrative demands that the reader's imagination be rubbed and

heated, engaged and challenged through keeping the reader's "imagination as busy as my own."

This requires more than just the passive absorption of information. In the following pages, I will

demonstrate how *Tristram Shandy* frames the world of the Shandys as one that operates by

contiguity through literary tactics that question traditional binaries. Not only do these tactics

enact the power of contiguous association by actively engaging the reader's imagination through

confrontation as a way of stimulating friction and hence heat and passion, they also establish a

new sense of contiguity between the reader and the text. While the text does this in many

different ways, the two most pervasive tactics of contiguity that I examine in detail bring

together 1. Different meanings within the same word (double entendre), 2. The different worlds

of the text and reader through the materiality of the book as a physical gateway.

I begin with wordplay because it is so omnipresent throughout the novel and because, as

a device, it perfectly captures and enacts the essence of the contiguous association while serving

as a framework for the all other forms of contiguity. Double entendre relies on what at first

glance seems like the arbitrary closeness of two (or more) utterly different meanings inhabiting

the same word. Tied together in every aspect—sound, spelling—other than their significance, the

multiple definitions that make up a double entendre may have nothing in common

etymologically but upon closer inspection, reveal the source of the double meaning. Sterne's use

of the word "mole," for example, which is used in its architectural sense in the military context

of the battle of Dunkirk, is also slang for penis, and allowing Sterne to emphasize how "its naked

situation" aroused pity from the queen of France "(who was but a woman)" (326; VI.xxxiv). The

murkiness of this slang word's etymology—the *OED* ties the origins of the slang use to the

animal, but it is also easily associable with the military definition in which Sterne uses in here, as

in a pier or breakwater—only strengthens the thread of commonality (a protruding, phallic

shape) shared by the definitions. This is but one of the many examples (the story of the abbess,

her novice, and the mules; or the misunderstanding between the Widow Wadman and Toby

about the whereabouts of his wound—both of which I examine shortly—are some memorable

examples). While most of the double entendres in *Tristram Shandy* are sexual innuendos, their function is not just titillation or even comedic relief. Double entendre allows Sterne to poke fun at the loneliness of a Lockean world in which each person carries his own definition of a multivalent word and thus is trapped in a world of his own making. But because of its plurality, it is also the very tool by which we might resist such loneliness; it offers the opportunity to convert "What has been perplexing and counterintuitive in isolation" into something "natural and customary through shared experience" (Lupton 108). As a tactic that relies on its audience's ability to conjoin disparate meanings under a single signifier, the double entendre is then the perfect metaphor and tool for inciting the reader's imaginative engagement with the text and considering what common ground might be found between the two.

In Volume VII, Tristram, who is traveling through France, remarks that French post-horses would never advance if "not for the two words ****** and ****** in which there is as much sustenance, as if you gave him a peck of corn" (352; VII.xx). Tristram longs to tell us what these words are. Unfortunately, the words, which "must be told [to the reader] plainly, and with the most distinct articulation," would be the subject of mockery in the bed-chamber and abuse in the parlour. After some hemming and hawing, Tristram decides that he dares not tell us, fearing that his ink "will burn, (I fear) my paper" but he offers up instead, "if we wish to know it" the story of the abbess of Andouillets, who sets off on a journey to cure a stiff knee with her novice Margarita. The two travel in a calesh drawn by a pair of old mules. Halfway through the journey, the muleteer leaves to find wine, and the mules stop in their tracks. In spite of their best efforts, the two nuns are unable to get the mules to move. At this point, Margarita informs the abbess that she knows of "two certain words, which I have been told will force any horse, or ass, or mule to go up a hill whether he will or no" (356; VII.xxiv). The problem is that these words are

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"sinful in the first degree." The abbess offers a solution: if the pronouncement of such words is a sin, "being halved—by taking, either only the half of it, and leaving the rest—or, by taking it all, and amicably halving it betwixt yourself and another person—in course becomes diluted into no sin at all" (357; VII.xxiv). Each woman will say half of each word—technically not a sin. Thus, the abbess yells "bou" and the novice "ger" (*bouger* in French means to move, but also implies *bougre*, or "bugger"); the abbess yells "fou" and the novice "ter" (*foutre*, or fuck). These, presumably, are the two words Tristram was so loath to mention in the previous chapter.

The joke operates on multiple levels. First, we have to admire the sleight of hand with which Sterne manages to skirt two dirty words (while still clearly conveying their meaning) by using alternatives that sound very similar and work in the context. In fact, Tristram doesn't even have to say them out loud—they are whispered to the abbess, out of the reader's earshot, but we quickly find out what they are when the two nuns speak them together that. The characters bear the full brunt of the responsibility (ironically, considering their efforts to remain innocent), and consequently Tristram can sidestep accusations of lewdness. An extra irony is that the word *bouger* is not a dirty word at all—it is a perfectly suitable word to yell at a mule. It is the novice's fear of sinning that conditions the reader to expect a dirty word before we are even exposed to it. On a secondary level, the text replicates the hair-splitting logic of maintaining the nuns' innocence, literally by splitting the words in half. In doing so, however, the words are transformed into syllables that complement and complete each other aurally and visually, syllables that must be pronounced in tandem, faster and faster—until they seem to be copulating and giving birth to unintended words that are, despite best efforts, indecent.[90] The technical

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[90] The text cleverly uses line breaks and dashes to give a visual sense of how the syllables fit together in a sexualized manner:

somersaults performed to maintain innocence end up making everything so much worse. The final joke is that the mules do not move. In a panic, the nuns repeat their commands "Quicker still," sounding like a scene of sexual climax, but to no avail: "[The mules] do not understand us, cried Margarita—But the Devil does, said the abbess of Andouillets" (358; VII.xxiv). Any reader worth her salt will of course realize that she stands on the same side as the knowing devil rather than the innocent mules. While part of the wordplay lies in identifying the different possible interpretations of the commands, the most important discovery comes from seeing how words— no matter how they are distorted, sliced, or spoken by nuns—are only as powerful as the associations they summon. With every element of the story working to undermine the words' well-intentioned speakers, the words never fully voiced are the most memorable parts of the story.

There is no shortage of anecdotes that reinforce this argument. The interpolated fragment of the whiskers, at the end of the fourth volume, in which double entendre is created where there was none, echoes, albeit gleefully, Samuel Johnson's lament that "words are but the signs of ideas" and hence far from permanent (Johnson "Preface"). The story is set in the sixteenth-century court of Margaret, Queen of Navarre, and it traces how a lady of the court is able to load the word "whiskers" with mysterious and improper connotations simply by pronouncing it with a particular accent and with sufficient frequency.[91] Eventually, the word becomes "indecent, and (after a few efforts) absolutely unfit for use" (243; V.i.). The pithy moral at the end of this tale is that "Chastity, by nature the gentlest of all affections—give it but its head—'tis like a ramping

Abbess   ⎱ Bou– bou– bou– bou– bou– bou–
Margarita ⎰ —ger, ger, ger, ger, ger, ger.

[91] The extent of the story is literally the repetition of the word "Whiskers" in suggestive tones by La Fosseuse, a lady of the court,. By claiming a knight "has no whiskers," La Fosseuse is able to drive him out of the court: "'Twas plain to the whole court the word was ruined: La Fosseuse had given it a wound, and it was the better for passing through all these defiles" (243: V.i.). The actual implications of the word are never clarified.

and roaring lion" that might cause us even to question the most innocent of words such as "trouse, and placket-holes, and pump-handles—and spigots, and faucets" (243; V.i). Ironically, chastity serves the same function as innuendo (becoming a double entendre itself) and even the most mundane household article, as long as it has either a hole in it or a protrusion, is transformed into something scandalous.[92]

The final volume of the novel marks the deflated end of Toby's amours with the Widow Wadman. Leading up to the scene of the bawdy *qui pro quo*[93] centered on the Widow's quest to better understand the nature of Toby's wound are a string of titillating deferrals (on their way to Widow Wadman's house, Toby and Trim stop to discuss the story of Trim's brother Tom, and later Trim "stood with the rapper of the door suspended a full minute in his hand, he scarce knew why"), and bawdy wordplay (the story of how Tom courts a Jewish widow by helping her stuff sausages, a second tale from Slawkenbergius that allegorizes a woman's search for a husband)[94] that build up the suspense of the courtship, which culminates in a hilarious misunderstanding. The Widow, "whose first husband was all his time afflicted with a Sciatica," has long been wondering the exact location of Toby's wound, "and how far she was likely to suffer more or

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[92] The last sentence of *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) famously performs the nature of the innuendo as a gap or blank to be filled in by a reader's indecent mind. During his travels in Italy, when Yorick is forced to share his room at an inn with a lady and her maid, the three occupants decide to establish an invisible barrier between their beds for propriety's sake. When Yorick and the lady exchange words in the middle of the night, the maid positions herself between the two in the dark, "So that when I stretch'd out my hand I caught hold of the fille de chambre's—" (104).

[93] In Romance languages, the term can refer to a misunderstanding usually based on two or more different interpretations of the same word.

[94] Much like the fragment of the whiskers, the purposeful obscuring of a signifier (in this case, the word "it") is what makes Slawkenbergius's story dirty. In this case, "it" refers to that which the woman is searching for in an ass (standing in for husband), but the referent of which is never clarified. The woman "thrusts her right hand into the very bottom of his pannier to search for *it*" and does this with several asses until she finally gets "to the asse which carries *it*," then "looks at *it*—considers *it*—samples *it*—measures *it*—stretches *it*—wets *it*—dries *it*—then takes her teeth both to the warp and weft of *it*" (441, my emphases). Slawkenbergius never reveals the significance of "it," but the fact that it succeeds the many indications of Widow Wadman's interest in Toby's groin wound and how it might affect his love life, and the fact that it replaces the scene in which the Widow will presumably satisfy her curiosity by checking the wound herself is enough to suggest its bawdy significance.

less in her feelings" (449; IX.xxvi). She consults several texts on human anatomy and even

questions Doctor Slop whether and to what degree Toby will recover—all to no satisfaction. The

Widow is forced to question Toby herself; to do so, she must take on "an accent of humanity—

how shall I describe it?—'tis an accent which covers the part with a garment, and gives the

enquirer a right to be as particular with it, as your body-surgeon" (450; IX.xxvi). This accent of

sincere and innocent concern allows the Widow to cloak her questions ("Was it more tolerable in

bed?" "Was he able to mount a horse?") in a clinical sympathy that shields her true intentions

and prompts Toby to fall in love with her. When the Widow asks her final question: "And

whereabouts, dear Sir, quoth Mrs. Wadman, a little categorically, did you receive this sad blow?"

and Toby tells her she "shall see the very place," the widow is sent into a tizzy as she silently

debates the propriety of directly contemplating Toby's groin. But she is disappointed, for by

place, Toby of course means the battlefield: he sends Trim to fetch his map, measures the precise

location of his injury "before the gate of St. Nicolas; and with such a virgin modesty laid her

finger upon the place" (450; IX.xxvi). This double entendre plays on the different meanings that

the word "place" has for each character. This is certainly not the first time that Toby's one-track

mind leads him away from the vein of conversation (450; IX.xxvi); in fact, he is so filled with

hobby-horsical material that the military map stands in for the part of his body that is otherwise

designated for reproduction (or at least very close to it). This substitution is finalized when Trim

clarifies what the Widow wants from Toby by pointing out the geographic and strategic

importance of his groin injury, for it "is upon the very *curtin* of the *place*" (454; IX.xxxi).[95] For

the Widow, Toby's wound is a thing of the past; her potential marriage with Toby a thing of the

future. When Dr. Slop tells her that Toby's groin is fully recovered, the Widow Wadman, who

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[95] According to Toby himself, the curtin is "that part of the wall or rampart which lies between the two bastions and joins them" and which "besiegers seldom offer to carry on their attacks directly against . . . because they are so well flanked" (79; II.xii). It is only reasonable that the Widow's attacks against the curtin fail.

attributes Toby's modesty to the wound (a case of mistaken causality), cannot believe her ears. Unlike the Widow, Toby keeps the wound—and the story of how he got it—very much alive in the present through his re-enactments.

The effect of this punctured climax is heightened throughout the final volume by the various ways in which the text is materially manipulated to conceal or delay the revelation of information. For example, the most noticeable fragmentation of the text occurs at a crucial point in Toby's amours with the Widow— just as Toby and Trim enter the Widow's house so that Toby can make a marriage proposal, the pages of the following two chapters are missing (XVIII and XVIX), and do not reappear until after Chapter XXV. Following the blank pages, instead, is Chapter XX, which (opens with a block of dashes and asterisks and) resumes in the middle of a sexually suggestive scene in which the Widow is blushing at Toby's offer to show her "the very place" where he was wounded (440; IX.xx). The moment Toby asks Trim to get his maps from the garret is also redacted and replaced by asterisks—since this request is not revealed until eight chapters later, we are left ignorant of the wordplay surrounding the word "place" upon which, I argued above, the whole scene hinges. Since the rest of the scene is cut short before Toby actually shows the Widow the location of his wound (only to be replaced by Slawkenbergius's bawdy tale of the woman searching for a husband), the misunderstanding remains unresolved until the end of the volume. When the missing chapters XVIII and XVIX resurface after chapter XXV, they do reveal some crucial information—Toby has both declared his love for the Widow and proposed to her—but this information is overwhelmed by the sea of awkward silences that literally stops plot in its tracks. Ultimately, the importance of these potential plot points is invalidated when Toby finds out that the Widow was only interested in his health because she suspected he was impotent; his seemingly cathartic and pivotal proposal—which in a Fielding

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novel would surely have ended with a marriage—reveals itself to be just as unproductive and impotent as we suspect Tristram is himself. It would seem that the materiality of the text works to fulfill what is only implied in the words themselves—the impotence, the infertility of the Shandy men.

The "typographical silences" in this volume work with the deliberately deferred revelation of information not only to hold the reader in suspense, but also to prolong his misunderstanding (Alter 48). Such holes abound throughout the text, of course: the content of the letter announcing Bobby's death, which Toby hums while he reads, is summarized by a series of dashes; while the story behind Tristram's accidental circumcision is redacted by a series of asterisks that are partially clarified only nine chapters later. The deliberate mystery surrounding the extent of Tristram's accident (like that of Toby's) is sustained—as a cruel joke to both the reader and to Tristram, who cannot vindicate his masculinity—in the subsequent volume, when the rumors surrounding "poor Master Shandy"'s accident is also redacted with a series of asterisks[96]. The puns I examined earlier engage the reader's interest by their capacity for being immediately grasped as multivalent. Some of the missing or out-of-place portions of text seem to pay similar respect to the reader by inviting him to "halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine," as promised earlier; others, however, remain gleefully impenetrable. The flourish Trim gives with his stick, illustrated by a line with waves and loops, expresses with greater ease the joy of freedom than "A thousand of [Walter's] most subtle syllogisms" (Keymer 74). Nevertheless, the irony of this phrase is palpable, for by now, we are well acquainted with Walter's tendency to "force every event in nature into an hypothesis, by which means man never crucified Truth at the rate he did" (426; IX.iv). While the free-form shape of the typographical

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[96] 245; V.iii, 264; V.xvii, 304-305; VI.xiv..

flourish does *seem* to capture a sense of looseness, it is also simply a doodle—prone to as much

confusion as clarity.

The best known of these silences is the black page following the description of poor

Yorick's death. Much has been made of this page. Some see it as a tombstone—a marker of

Tristram's grief,[97] others as "ocular proof of the ends to which [Sterne] as an author is driven

when the limits of language have been reached" (Wright 216)[98] and still others as evidence of

Sterne's faith in the "crucial productive involvement of the reader's imagination in the

generation of meaning" (Alsop & Walsh 28).[99] The only certain truth we can garner from the

abundance of interpretations of the black pages is that its lack of verbal cues—as with the

marbled page, the asterisks and blanks, the missing or fragmented pages—serves to anchor the

reader to the physical medium of the book itself. Or, as Julia Fawcett points out, the obscurity of

the black page suggests by contrast the white spaces that the reader must fill in with his or her

own 'figure'—the missing details of the text that must be supplied by extratextual means"

including the critiques and imitations that followed the publication of the early volumes of

Tristram Shandy—a tactic that would have drawn the eighteenth-century reader out of the text

and into the world (123). Unlike the sense Fielding gives of being immersed in a finely wrought

and comprehensive fictional world that feels like a plausible reality because of its detail and

completeness, in *Tristram Shandy*, the reader is consistently reminded that she is only able to

approach the fictional world because she is holding a book—an object that is prone to being

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[97] Peter de Voogd notes that "the 1779 Dublin edition of *Tristram Shandy* has placed the phrase 'Alas, poor Yorick!' in the black page, thus turning it into a perfect tombstone" ("Tristram Shandy as Aesthetic Object").

[98] Similarly, J. M. Stedmond notes "a distrust of words, which are after all a rather inadequate substitution of sounds for "ideas"—"ideas" which are originally, in the pre-speech phase, pictures or images projected on the screen of the mind" (61). Also see Dennis W. Allen, "Sexuality/Textuality in *Tristram Shandy*," and William Holtz, *Image and Immortality*.

[99] See also Madeleine Descargues, "The Obstetrics of *Tristram Shandy*."

misprinted, misread, damaged, torn, and discarded. The book, not the text, becomes the medium via which the real and diegetic worlds meet.

For such a susceptible vehicle for a narrative, the supposedly stable through line of causality seems ill-fitting. Just as Tristram's thought processes are interrupted by various ideas or narrative elements that may be relevant, if not causally related to his objective of narrating his life story, the printed book is something whose consumption might be disrupted by a number of things and events that are contiguous to it. One of the most skillful ways in which Sterne reminds his readers of this fact is by interchangeably referring to the material pages of the book rather than moments in the narrative. In the hours preceding Tristram's birth, Tristram purposefully conflates diegetic time and the extra-diegetic marker of time—pages—as a way of forcing the fictional and the real world to "touch" through the materiality of the book.

In the eleventh chapter of the second volume, Dr. Slop the man-midwife has made an unceremonious entrance, although not in person (Slop is first mentioned by name at the beginning of Chapter VI, when Walter suggests they call him, and it is not until Chapter X that he arrives on the scene). After Walter sends Obadiah to fetch the doctor in Chapter 6, Slop comes up again in Chapter VIII, a mere two pages after Obadiah's departure. Tristram judges this to be "about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby run the bell, when Obadiah was order'd to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. Slop the man-midwife;—so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come—tho', morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots" (73-74; II.viii). Tristram juxtaposes the time of the reader's world and the time of the characters—two types of temporalities that would never come into contact with each other were it not for the act of reading, and that operate in vastly

different ways (fictional time is tensile, plastic, and reversible while "real" time can only move in one direction and at a regular pace). In doing so, Sterne makes the reader's attention a prerequisite for the unfolding of the fictional world. Making explicit the difference between these two types of time (a difference that is perhaps so obvious that it often goes unquestioned) has the seemingly opposite effect of conflating them. For example, Tristram preempts a hypothetical critic that will mistrust the speed of Obadiah's return with Dr. Slop thus:

> If the hypercritick will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum, and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell and the rap at the door;—and, after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths, - - - - should take upon him to insult over me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability, of time . . . I would, therefore, desire him to consider that it is but poor eight miles from Shandy-Hall to Dr. Slop, the man-midwife's house;—and that whilst Obadiah has been going those said miles and back, I have brought my uncle Toby from Namur, quite across all Flanders, into England: - - - That I have had him ill upon my hands near four years; - - - and have since travelled him and Corporal Trim, in a chariot and four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire;—all which put together, must have prepared the reader's imagination for the enterance of Dr. Slop upon the stage,——as much, at least, (I hope) as a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts. (74; II.viii.)

Here, we are—as always while we are reading—dealing with two different temporal registers. A fictional world must always be condensed and compactable enough to fit within the pages of a physical book, and the fact that Tristram has had Uncle Toby "ill upon my hands near four years" and followed him for two hundred miles in the span of seventy pages is in fact nothing remarkable—it is something that happens all the time in the romance genre, and as we have seen

in the first chapter, in the Oriental tale. Tristram points out an obvious difference between temporal registers when he mocks the "hypercritick" who would measure the passage of fictional time with a "real" measure of time—the pendulum (already criticized by Locke as being but a fallible measure of duration).[100]

The slippage from temporal to spatial terms is equally important here. Tristram predicts the hypercritick will want to "measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell and the rap at the door," slyly replacing what should be duration (a Lockean term that Tristram has already referred to several times) with distance. This works seamlessly because the event whose timing is being questioned is Obadiah's physical journey from Shandy Hall to Dr. Slop and back, an event in which time can be measured precisely in terms of distance. In fact, this digression— which is unnecessary since it turns out that Obadiah didn't have to go all the way to Dr. Slop's house; he met the good doctor just outside of the gates of Shandy Hall—serves one purpose, which is to introduce the discussion of time in spatial terms. Even the example of the pendulum—as fallible as it may be—as a way of measuring time highlights the fact that movement through space can be an effective way of thinking about duration in time. For Tristram, it goes even beyond this; two minutes and thirteen seconds is more than a simple and fixed amount of time measured by its duration; not only can it be measured by the story it can tell, it can also be translated into space—in this case, under threescore yards.

Rather than present itself as a text that is about something, *Tristram Shandy* is a thing that is about nothing other than itself. In spite of the work's failure to constitute the type of plot-based structure endorsed by Barthesian narratology, Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky famously

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[100] In *Essay*, Locke argues that "yet if any one should be asked how he certainly knows that the two successive sings of a pendulum are equal, it would be very hard to satisfy him, that they are infallibly so: since we cannot be sure, that the cause of that motion, which is unknown to us, shall always operate equally; and we are sure that the medium in which the pendulum moves, is not constantly the same" (149; II.xiv).

described *Tristram Shandy* as "the most typical novel in world literature," noting that Sterne

calls the reader's attention to novelistic form by exposing and manipulating the structure of plot,

and that "it is the consciousness of form through its violation that constitutes the content of the

novel" (Shklovsky 170, 149). When the causality—that simple throughline of storytelling that

we take for granted—is removed (alongside, of course, other structural elements of plot, moral

impetus, and the fulfillment of the promise a novel offers with its title), all that is left of *Tristram*

Shandy is a bundle of pages, just as susceptible to destruction, distraction, and confusion as the

human mind that they attempt to portray.

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