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Abstract
Critically speaking, we live in interesting times--as in the Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times." My title refers to Derrida's claim that all organized narration is a "matter for the police." I am using this famous slogan as a shorthand for the radical critique of narrative and representation which surfaces in much contemporary theory and which makes these times so "interesting"--that is, both provocative and disturbing. In this view Narrative is a way of knowing that "tracks, tames, frames the world under the aegis of the Law (in its various incarnations as the Father, the Censor, the Institution, the State, and ultimately, the Word)." "Shandy Hall" in my title is shorthand both for the realistic novel, a practice allegedly impelled by this motive to track and frame, and for the eighteenth-century culture in which the novel originates and flourishes. Thus, according to this view of the novel, it is no accident that a kind of narrative which tracks characters in a minutely discriminated temporal-spatial grid should arise in a culture discovering similar techniques for rationalizing time and space in the interests of productivity and surveillance--a sinister Enlightenment which, David Harvey tells us, the "core of Post-Modernists" would have us "abandon" in the interests of "human emancipation."

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Critically speaking, we live in interesting times—as in the Chinese curse "may you live in interesting times." My title refers to Derrida's claim that all organized narration is a "matter for the police."[1] I am using this famous slogan as a shorthand for the radical critique of narrative and representation which surfaces in much contemporary theory and which makes these times so "interesting"—that is, both provocative and disturbing. In this view Narrative is a way of knowing that "tracks, tames, frames the world under the aegis of the Law (in its various incarnations as the Father, the Censor, the Institution, the State, and ultimately, the Word)."[2] "Shandy Hall" in my title is shorthand both for the realistic novel, a practice allegedly impelled by this motive to track and frame, and for the eighteenth-century culture in which the novel originates and flourishes. Thus, according to this view of the novel, it is no accident that a kind of narrative which tracks characters in a minutely discriminated temporal-spatial grid should arise in a culture discovering similar techniques for rationalizing time and space in the interests of productivity and surveillance—a sinister Enlightenment which, David Harvey

1 Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines" in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom et al (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 102.

2 This is Christopher Prendergast's gloss on Derrida's formulation in his brilliant account and critique of contemporary attacks on mimesis, *The Order of Mimesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 217.

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tells us, the "core of Post-Modernists" would have us "abandon" in the interests of "human emancipation."[3]

Aside from his relation to Locke (which might make him amenable to being "situated" in relation to the Enlightenment), or his institutional affiliation as a clergyman, Sterne and his fictional surrogates, Tristram and Yorick, seem benign and marginal figures. Certainly they are less likely to be implicated in schemes of legitimation and surveillance than Fielding, the novelist-magistrate, or Defoe and Richardson, the entrepreneur-novelists. But I choose Sterne to stand for the novel because he is the most circumstantially exact of novelists, the one most given to "tracking" his characters on their various paths, and it is this very exactitude which has been connected with the policing function of narrative. Thus Derrida imagines as one possible scene of origin for narrative an "authoritarian demand" made by "a force of order or law" which asks "What exactly are you talking about?" The subject responds by "recounting something, remembering an event or a historical sequence, knowing who he is, where he is, and what he is talking about."[4] Or, in a related formulation, the Law is not the interlocutor demanding narrative of the subject, but the voice of the omniscient narrator tracking the subject's movements.[5] In either case, whether the narrator is the subject accounting for himself to some authority, or an omniscient narrator identified with authority who is rendering an account of the subject, the narrative seeks exactitude, a precise and full notation of circumstances of time and place in order to maintain surveillance or establish guilt. Thus Tristram's precision in establishing chronologies, reconstructing the exact disposition of the family and servants within Shandy Hall, and promising to assemble auxiliary documents, could be seen as a literal response to the demands of an examining magistrate: "Tell us exactly what happened on the night of March 1/2 in 1718 and how did you come to know of these events? Why did Slop arrive on November 5th when he had not been summoned? Under what circumstances did Walter Shandy learn of the birth of one son and the death of another?"[6]

3 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Inquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 14.

4 Derrida, p. 104–5.

5 John Bender argues that the narrator in Fielding "personifies the conventions of transparency and objectivity implied in formal realism and, through the juridical analogy, links them with the rational but invisible order of the metropolitan bureaucracy." *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth Century England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 179.

6 In *Sentimental Journey* Sterne tracks Yorick's erratic path from the exact notation of that hour and twenty minutes in Calais through the twists and turns of the itinerary in Paris and Versailles. Of course the fact that Yorick is travelling without a passport even gives us a literal crime.

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We do not have to take Shklovsky's hyperbole about the "typicality" of *Tristram Shandy* literally to connect this expansiveness, a response to the demand for exactitude, with the expansiveness of those later novelists who give increasingly circumstantial accounts of narrower stretches of time and space, a process of particularization which culminates in the tracking of a group of citizens through the streets of Dublin.[7] In less interesting times it might have seemed that Joyce (or Austen or Woolf) thought, with Blake, that "singular and Particular Detail was the Foundation of the Sublime," or that the precise notation of comings and goings was in the service of mobility rather than constraint. But we have come a long way from the relative cheerfulness of 1957 when Ian Watt could compare the novel's "mode of imitating reality" with the procedures of "another group of specialists in epistemology, the jury in a court of law," which also takes a "circumstantial view of life."[8] Implicit, but unexplored, was the darker side of the comparison: trials and novels both produce narratives which track somebody's movements in order to adjudicate guilt or innocence. What was witty in 1957, a proposed similarity between two such seemingly disparate enterprises as the Law and the Novel (both assumed to be truth-seeking endeavours), between credibility in the courtroom and versimilitude in realism, now seems two aspects of the same phenomenon: D.A. Miller argues a "radical entanglement" between the practice of the police and the novel, John Bender a connection between the sentences of a novel and the Law.[9]

It makes matters worse that the very feature of the novel heretofore taken as liberating and innovative, the particularity of Watt's "formal realism" or the detailed time-spacing of the novelistic chronotope which Bakhtin claimed gives us the proximity that overcomes hierarchical distance and allows access to history, turns out to be the very feature that connects it with a repressive order. From the forensic perspective of the new narratology, the seeming exhaustiveness of realism is illusory because its wide range of data is winnowed down to those "telling details" which will figure in the indictment or the resolution of the plot. The circumstantiality of realism therefore becomes a mechanism for generating "circumstantial evidence," and as Alexander Welsh has recently argued,

7 Such particularity continues to be valued in contemporary culture: in the particularities of Updike, the inexhaustible chronicler of Brewer; in the penchant for "thick description" in cultural studies; in Frederick Wiseman's traversal in real time of the high school or the madhouse. To say nothing of the elaborations of ordinary lives in remote stretches of Alaska or Brooklyn offered by the *New Yorker*.

8 Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957; reprinted 1964), p. 31.

9 D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 20; Bender, p. 35.

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"the whole project and promise of circumstantial evidence in the eighteenth century acquired a prosecutorial bent."[10] Only those circumstances figuring in the ultimate indictment will turn out to be *really* relevant, because those details reveal the hidden order whose emergence has been the secret justification for the narrative all along.

In these "interesting times," much of the energy of recent serious scholarship of the eighteenth century derives from its sceptical (if not adversarial) stance towards the object of study, viewed, not as a remote past that has to be painstakingly recreated, but a still-persistent set of assumptions from which we can liberate ourselves only by the most strenuous endeavours.[11] And the most powerful and distinctive discourse of this culture is a realism which "enables the novel to participate in the containment, control, and reformation of social life."[12] In this essay I would like to comment on the arraignment of the circumstantial realism of the eighteenth-century novel, which in some of its melodramatic versions seems more curse than blessing. But like most provocations it does offer opportunities—in this case the opportunity to interpret "the rise of the novel" as something more than a dynamic redescription of the world which harnesses the energies of a new epistemological-technological-economic order. I would concede that this traditional account of the motives for representation needs to be sharpened by a greater awareness of, in W.J.T. Mitchell's formulation, the relationship between "aesthetic or semiotic representation" and "political" representation. If the old orthodoxy now seems blandly optimistic, I would argue that the radical suspicion of the novel which is fast becoming the new orthodoxy is too reductive, too willing to assimilate all representation within the period to a forensic model of narrative. The eighteenth-century novelists might pursue an exactitude which seems to answer Derrida's question ("What exactly are you talking about?"), but each novelist has a personal version of exactitude, and not all exactitude is a matter for the police. Sterne's way of bounding his representational space suggests that the frames of realism do not necessarily "frame" us, track us in order to stop us in our tracks, or confine us to the familiar and false knowledge

10 Alexander Welsh, *Strong Representations: Narrative and Circumstantial Evidence in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), p. 47.

11 Thus Nancy Armstrong's goal in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) is to "provide some understanding of our own status as products and agents of the hegemony I am describing" (p. 27). Similarly, John Bender emphasizes the need to avoid "a frame of reference—that fundamentally reproduced Enlightenment assumptions themselves." See "Eighteenth Century Studies" in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn (New York: MLA, 1992), p. 79.

12 Bender, p. 257.

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promulgated by an authoritarian order. On the contrary, Sterne's circumstantially dense representational space (and by extension, the density of all realistic notation) undoes a forensic exactitude in which circumstances become relevant only to the extent that they bear upon questions of legitimacy, guilt, and inheritance. In the course of this essay I will be playing Sterne off against Fielding, a novelist who does seems to fit the forensic model (though his connection with the techniques of realism is less clear). My point is not that what happens in Allworthy's Paradise Hall is any more a matter for the police than what happens in Shandy Hall, but that narrative framing and the circumstantiality of formal realism is trickier than the more polemical applications of the "matter for the police" slogan might suggest. Which is, I think, Derrida's point in the essay "Living On: Border Lines" from which the slogan is drawn, an attempt to pose and pursue borderline questions. Derrida's "problematic of judicial framing and of the jurisdiction of frames" encourages us to think through more carefully what is at stake in the framing of narrative fields and the relation of frames to the circumstances which figure within them. A more flexible approach to framing allows us to see that the most powerful narrative fields, realistic or otherwise, always point or can be made to point "beyond" their own borders to something else that might have been given representation. Thus Realism (to the extent that there is such an entity) does not have to be associated with closure, an illusory and misleading totalizing impulse, but, on the contrary, with a constant reminder of the contingency of any given narrative field.

I shall begin with Fielding because, as his prominence in Bender and Welch might suggest, his way of framing seems to "fit" the forensic account of framing. The typical Fielding novel tracks its characters through seemingly random and far-ranging paths, but ends with a convergence of paths which establishes the final truth about who Joseph (or Tom, Jonathan Wild, Colonel Booth) really is, and what he has and has not done: the circumstances assembled by the omniscient narrator establish the protagonist's guilt or innocence, his legitimacy or illegitimacy, his inheritance or disinheritance. Exactitude is achieved and in that sense Fielding's narratives can be said to be matters for the police.

What is less clear is whether Fielding's way of framing the narrative has as much to do with the circumstantially exhaustive grid of the new realism as John Bender claims. Fielding is in fact notoriously casual in wandering away stretches of time and space which do not interest

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him; his most characteristic gesture as a narrator is to announce that he is skipping something that deserves to be skipped. Fielding preserves the "dignity" of his "history" by ruling something out of bounds: whether the world is seen as time or space to be traversed, there are vacant stretches, "the centuries of Monkish Dulness when the world seems to have been asleep," or "the gloomy and dull Plain" which must be hurried over. One narrates only when the coach is full, only when one has a prize to announce rather than the many more "blanks in the grand lottery of time," only when there is some "news," something "remarkable." Characters and incidents need not be "trite, common, or vulgar; such as happen in every Street, or in every House, or which may be met with in the home Articles of a Newspaper."[13] Only the "painful and voluminous Historian" would imitate the newspaper and think "himself obliged to fill up as much Paper with the Detail of Months and Years in which nothing remarkable happened" (2, 1, 75). What always happens—copulation, marriage, births—or what the readers could figure out for themselves (the predictable scenes of courtship between Blifil and Bridget, or the course of Bridget's grief) is the least promising material for imitation. What *does* have "information value" for Fielding is the apparent break with the norm, what will surprise the reader because it does not happen in every street or every house.[14] The proper concern of narrative is therefore the extraordinary violation of the norm: "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" (2, 1, 76). The mark of the extraordinary is the coincidence, a "falling together" in time or space. The more unlikely the "fit" in space and time, the more remarkable the event, the more narratable it is. As in Bakhtin's chronotope of adventure time, "X" marks the spot where the paths cross or do not cross and that makes all the difference.[15] What happens in Fielding's

13 Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling*, ed. Martin C. Battestin and Fredson Bowers (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1975), 8, 2, 407. References are by book, chapter, and page number of this edition.

14 I. Lotman points out that "an event is that which did occur, though it could also not have occurred. The less probability that a given event will take place (i.e., the greater the information conveyed by the message concerning the event), the higher the rank of that event on the plot scale." See *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, trans. Ronald Vroon (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan, 1977), p. 234.

15 "What is important is to be able to escape, to catch up, to outstrip, to be or not to be in a given place at a given moment, to meet or not to meet and so forth." Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel," *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 91. The various plots against Tom unravel when, at the end, all paths meet in London and the characters can figure out where and when their paths have crossed before. The original cause of many of Tom's difficulties is an incomplete coincidence: a brother and a sister fall ill at the same time, but not in the same place.

novel is therefore a function of a simple relation in time and space: "who is where" and "when," and for the purpose of the kind of narrative plotting very few of the attributes of "when" or "where" are relevant, the mere conjunction of these persons in this place at this time being enough to establish (and exhaust) their remarkability. Circumstances are important only to the extent that they figure in the tightly constructed causal chain which is the plot. Because he is a "judicious" historian, he knows the value of the "many little Circumstances too often omitted by injudicious Historians, from which Events of the utmost Importance arise. The World may indeed by considered as a vast Machine, in which the great Wheels are originally set in Motion by those which are very minute, and almost imperceptible to any but the strongest Eyes" (5, 4, 225). That Partridge just misses seeing Jenny Jones at Upton is one of those instances "we may frequently observe in Life, where the greatest Events are produced by a nice Train of little Circumstances; and more than one Example of this may be discovered by the accurate Eye, in this our History" (8, 2, 916). While the accurate eye of the reader will note and appreciate what the strong eye of the historian has spotted, neither will be overwhelmed by many such little circumstances. Only *some* circumstances need be noted, those that lead to great events, little wheels being important only in relation to big wheels.

In this kind of narrative, circumstances are crucial only in the sense that, had matters been otherwise, there would have been no "great Event." But there is no sense that the character of events is shaped by circumstances or that another set of circumstances could produce a different but equally remarkable set of events. A narrative's circumstantiality is measured not so much by the number of circumstances which figure within it as by the narrator's sense that each unforeseen contingent circumstance makes a claim upon his attention, establishing thereby a new and wider field of potential relevance for the rest of the narrative. When the accumulation of circumstances deflects the narrative from its original path it is impossible to distinguish between big and little wheels, great and small events. In Fielding's narrative machine the contingent aspect of circumstances, their very chanciness, is overshadowed by the sense that only the particular circumstances selected by the narrator will yield the exact truth about the hero.

Such a narrative is framed centripetally around the extraordinary event, the point of coincidence, which is the test and limit of relevance. If it is the fact of intersection (or non-intersection) which makes the event remarkable, then the circumstances, "the totality of surrounding things" or "condition or state of affairs surrounding and affecting an agent, especially the external conditions prevailing at the time," or "the logical

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surroundings or 'adjuncts' of an action; the time, place, manner, cause, occasion ... amid which it takes place" will figure in the narrative in only a limited way (*OED*). Like Dr Johnson, who associates the circumstantial with "something adventitious, which may be taken away without the annihilation of the principal thing considered," Fielding always feels the secondariness and inessentiality of circumstance.[16]

In striking contrast, Sterne always makes circumstance "the principal thing considered." Tristram claims that circumstances "give everything its size and shape," and Yorick professes to be "governed by circumstances." Since for Sterne there are no blanks in the lottery of time, since all plains can be converted into cities, since it is impossible to imagine Tristram or Yorick saying (as Fielding's narrators always do) "nothing remarkable happened," Sterne's narrative journey is always deliberate and attentive to circumstances that turn up along the way. Each circumstance has a weightiness, a claim to relevance not circumscribed by its relation to a whole. Where Fielding's principle of framing is centripetal (only what is at the point of intersection need be given representation), Sterne's is centrifugal: more important than "X," the point of intersection, is everything that surrounds it.

Thus the most celebrated and extended narrative sequence in *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram's account of his birth, is characteristically circumstantial, a representation of what *surrounds* the event in time and space. The birth is not an event so much as an occasion to pursue "the totality of surrounding things": the causes and the effects, the time immediately before and the time immediately after. The stretch of time preceding the birth is notated: the hour and a half of silence downstairs during which Toby puffs his pipe and contemplates his new pair of black plush breeches. This is broken by the "noise of running backwards and forward ... abovestairs" which signals the impending event; the two minutes and thirteen seconds between the ringing of the bell summmoning Obadiah and the arrival of Slop; the subsequent two hours and ten minutes during which Tristram is still not born.

But we do not know the exact moment of his birth. We know the birth only as something that happens while, elsewhere, something else is happening: it happens while Toby and Walter doze belowstairs in the parlour, while Slop, the midwife, and Mrs Shandy labour abovestairs, and while, somewhere on the premises, Trim converts boots to mortars. And in yet another time and place, Tristram writes his preface. The birth itself, the great event, we find out about only incidentally, when Walter asks about the noise in the kitchen and Trim tells him that Dr Slop is building

16: Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language, 4th edition* (London, 1773).

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a bridge. When Walter learns the truth of the birth and disfigurement, he goes upstairs to collapse in bed. His collapse is minutely described, as are the motions of his body when, somewhat later, he rises from bed and gestures to Toby, who is sitting in the minutely described chair. Walter makes his way back to the stairs, descends to the landing, chats with Toby, and questions the maid Susannah, who appears briefly at the foot of the stairs with a large pincushion. In order to get Walter and Toby off the stairs and off to bed (except for the short nap, they have not slept since "nine hours before Slop's arrival"), Tristram drops the curtain. Walter had asked Susannah how the child was doing and where Slop was. She suddenly appears in Walter's bedroom to answer the questions: the child is doing badly and Slop is gone. And so is Yorick. We do not know when or why both have left, or when the curate named Tristram has come, their departures and arrivals being part of the general comings and goings of a complicated household. After the baptism everybody, the nurse included, goes back to sleep. In the morning Walter asks that Trismegistus be sent down to keep his father and uncle company at the breakfast table; he soon learns that Susannah has run upstairs crying and wringing her hands, and that her mistress is also having hysterics upstairs. As Walter makes his way to find consolation at the fishpond, Toby summons Trim from the Bowling Green. Another unlucky accident has occurred, coincidentally, more or less at the same time as the unfortunate baptism—not in the gallery as Toby thinks, but in the garden. Trim postpones telling Toby that the cow has broken into the fortifications, although Tristram has already, memorably, told us.

Narrative on this model is a matter of tracking comings and goings within and around the house, of shuttling between upstairs and downstairs, and even the landing between. The narrative field is decentred and dispersed: each event is preceded or followed by, and simultaneous with, other events which might also deserve representation, and each event takes place in a site that borders on a contiguous site where something else is happening. Nor is there a natural and inevitable scale by which to apportion the "proper" degree of representation. Tristram asks: "Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stair? for we are got no farther yet than to the first landing, and there are fifteen more steps down to the bottom; and for aught I know, as my father and my uncle *Toby* are in a talking humour, there may be as many chapters as steps."[17] Sterne knows the normal narrative

17 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Melvin New and Joan New, vols 1 and 2, *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1978). All references are to this edition.

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value of a conversation on the stairs, the customary relation of chapters to steps, but that does not prevent him from imagining another more exhaustive scale of representation. Neither Tristram nor his reader can predict the duration of the conversation. Tristram pretends to acquiesce in something that is out of his hands ("let that be as it will, Sir, I can no more help it than my destiny"), but then, obeying "a sudden impulse," he drops the curtain and rules a line to begin a new chapter, which becomes the promised chapter on chapters (1:336). The threatened "excess" of representation abruptly gives way to no further representation, and either alternative seems an equally possible framing of the field. Sterne's wilful inclusions and exclusions, his experiments in scales of representation, his lowering of the threshold of narration to include conversations on stairs, the description of rush chairs and the placement of chamber-pots suggest the arbitrariness of any set of representational choices. At any point there is something more that the narrator might have felt as relevant and which therefore might have figured within the frame of the narrative. Instead of producing closure, such exactitude generates new circumstances and the need for new explanations. It may well be that after hundreds of pages, we still do not know the exact truth about Tristram's paternity.

By contrast, the sense of relevance for Fielding is relatively straightfoward: for all the amplitude of his novels, the proper path of the narrative is clearly marked, the speed of the narrative brisk as it moves through a Nature that needs be sampled only selectively. There is no regret about alternate paths, or the terrain on the other side of the path, what Leo Braudy has called "the possibilities beyond the hedge."[18] In *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* Fielding complains that "Nature is not, any more than a great genius, always admirable in her productions, and therefore a traveller, who may be called her commentator should not expect to find everywhere subjects worthy of his notice." It is better to set too little of the world before the reader than too much, "better to be hungry than surfeited, and to miss your dessert at the table of a man whose garden abounds with the choicest fruits than to have your taste affronted with every sort of trash that can be pick'd up at the greenstall, or the wheelbarrow."[19] This kind of pickiness is foreign to Sterne's narrator, who "interests his heart in every thing," and sees "what time and chance are perpetually holding out to him as he journeyeth on his way." The

18 Leo Braudy, *Narrative Form in History and Fiction: Hume, Fielding, and Gibbon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 164. I borrow the figure from Braudy, but I reverse his emphasis.

19 Henry Fielding, *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, ed. Austin Dobson (London: Oxford University Press, 1907), p. 6.

world is barren only to the man "who will not cultivate the fruits it offers."[20] These different ways of moving through the world reflect differences in temperament and situation—one dying man remembers and imagines a journey through which the other dying man is still suffering. But they are also the differences between an older and a newer model of "time-spacing" narrative.

In *Middlemarch* George Eliot observes that Fielding lived "when summer afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter evenings." Because she is a "belated historian," she feels she cannot linger: she "has so much to do in unravelling certain human lots, seeing how they were woven and interwoven, that all the light ... [she] can command must be concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that tempting range of relevancies called the universe."[21] Though misapplied (Sterne, not Fielding is the eighteenth-century novelist who lingers because he feels the universe is "a tempting range of relevancies"), Eliot's images make a suggestive opposition between two ways of framing/plotting/tracking. The light of representation which illuminates an otherwise dark world can be concentrated within the converging geometries of the classical web of plot with its secrets of birth, and secret crimes, or it can be dispersed to "cover" more time and more space of a universe which is seen as offering "a tempting range of relevancies." Eliot's "particular web" is like Fielding's "machine"—a construction for contracting representational space using the time-spacing of traditional plotting. Such constructions do achieve a forensic exactitude in that the subject is tracked until sufficient "telling details" are amassed to reveal the hidden secrets. But such constructions are not a new kind of narrative developed by an "Enlightenment" culture concerned with rationalizing time and space, but a continuation of the oldest models of plot-making descended from the most intricate web/machine of all, the story of Oedipus, a narrative built upon coincidences, all of *them* definitely a matter for the police. Although Eliot may weave her plots out of such webs in the interests of closure, like Sterne (or Defoe or Richardson) she is really drawn to the more leisurely time-spacing which construes the universe as a tempting range of relevance. In this sense the exactitude of realism undoes forensic exactitude: it is expansive, more concerned with opening up frames and the sense of relevance than in closing them down. As in Sterne, more representation is always a possibility because circumstances within the frame may imply circumstances beyond the frame.

20 Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*, ed. Ian Jack (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 28.

21 George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. W.J. Harvey (London: Penguin, 1964), p. 170.

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Nicholas Boyle notes that Roland Barthes in speaking of a photograph of his mother refers to " the chance detail ... in which the absolute singularity and contingency of the recorded moment leaps from the frame. In virtue of that one detail the otherwise unknown subject acquires 'a whole life outside her portrait.'" Boyle then goes on to argue that what Barthes says happens in a photograph also happens in the realistic novel: the chance detail leaps from the frame to imply a "hidden ground" beyond the frame:

> the realistic work of literature ... suggests that beyond it, between its chapters and before and after, lies *more* of the world, its world and ours, than happens, contingently, to have been articulated. ... we recognize that every picture has its frame, but our mind is projected beyond this particular frame into the one world which we share with the creatures of the writer's fiction and which we know in many modes and from many pictures and many different stories. "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" is a trivial question ... but it is not meaningless.[22]

As with Sterne's provisional borders, there is always more of "the world" beyond the frame of the text. Boundaries can be extended in time and space, since there are potential narratable events as well as describable contiguous existents before, after, and beyond the actual margins of the narrative. Tristram's foregrounding of his representational choices (this site or this interval rather than the adjacent site or interval, and on this scale rather than another) is a reminder of the extent to which representation is always a matter of choice, of framing in or out a piece of "its world and ours."

Such framing, as contemporary criticism argues, is ideological in nature, since only some of the things that happen (or can be imagined as happening) will seem significant enough to be "narratable." Dr Johnson insists that the novelist "select objects, and cull from the mass of mankind, those individuals upon which attention ought most to be employed. ... it is necessary to distinguish those parts of nature, which are most proper for imitation."[23] But *which* objects, *which* individuals, *which* parts of nature are most proper for imititation? Why will some things rather than others seem worthy of narration or description? And narration or description on what scale? In the past such choices might have been

22 Nicholas Boyle, "Nietzsche and the 'Middle Mode of Discourse,'" in *Realism in European Literature: Essays in Honour of J.P. Stern*, ed. Nicholas Boyle and Martin Swales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 150.

23 Samuel Johnson, *The Rambler* 4 (31 March 1750). Reprinted in *English Literary Criticism: Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, ed. Samuel Hynes (New York: Appleton, Century, Crofts, 1963), p. 294.

seen largely as a matter of the internal dynamics of narrative or the particular stylistic choices of an artist, but it is becoming clearer that the sense of what is "most proper for imitation" depends upon prior (and ideologically shaped) framing conventions. Thus Barthes imagines the realist author as needing to place an empty frame in front of objects: he can only describe them by first transforming "the 'real' into a depicted object (framed)."[24] Or in Michael Holquist's formulation: "Novels are not pictures but Frames. They are pictures of frames."[25]

Thus Fielding's concern that the rotten fruit be framed out and Sterne's that the abundant fruit of the world be framed in are matters of inclusion and exclusion that involve "radical social assumptions of causation and consequence."[26] Fielding's man of sense would rather miss dessert at the table of a gentleman than resort to the greenstall for nourishment. The social implications of the comparison of the parts of the world that are unworthy of representation with the trash of the greenstall are as difficult to ignore as they are in Sir Joshua Reynolds's assertion that "whatever is familiar, or in any way reminds us of what we see and hear every day, perhaps does not belong to the higher provinces of art, either in poetry or painting."[27] The unworthy parts of "Nature," the trash of the world, what we see and hear every day, must be denied representation; a properly militant framing must "cull" and "select" to avoid the plebian food/narrative or familiar sights and sounds offensive to the fastidious Augustan gentleman. Dr Johnson's celebrated warning about excessive representation in the novel makes the social issue clear:

> If the world be promiscuously described, I cannot see of what use it can be to read the account; or why it may not be as safe to turn the eye immediately upon mankind as upon a mirror which shows all that presents itself without discrimination.[28]

Unlike the mirror, which promiscuously reflects all parts of the world, safe accounts of the world discriminate lest they be contaminated by pieces of the world unworthy of representation.

Johnson's uneasiness about narratives which promiscuously represent too much of the world and mix together what should be kept distinct reverses the current longing for a radically promiscuous narrative that fully

24 Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), p. 55.

25 Michael Holquist and Walter Reed, "Six Theses on the Novel—And Some Metaphors," *New Literary History* 11 (1980), 418.

26 Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 176.

27 Sir Joshua Reynolds, "Discourse 13" (1797), *Discourses on Art*, ed. Stephen Mitchell (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 198.

28 Johnson, p. 244.

mingles categories of high and low or calls those categories into question: a heterogeneity that confounds the hierarchies of class, race, and gender. The ideological preferences of contemporary criticism reverse Johnson's. In order to "rise" in the first place, the novel had to overcome neoclassical qualms about "minute particularity," representation for its own sake that descended to circumstances unworthy the dignity of narrative. In our own time, precisely because the possibility of representation for its own sake has been called into question, critics like Bender and Miller see the "telling detail" as more forensic than artistic. Where the contemporary critic wants a promiscuity of representation that he or she knows is illusory (narrative being "always already" in the service of what is being passed off as moral truth), Dr Johnson worries that too much representation will undermine the social order's "moral truths." The neoclassical critic worries that not enough of the world will get framed out while a modern critic like Barthes complains that what is allowed into the frame only replicates prior framing practice. One worries about the precariousness of frames, the other about their ubiquity. The neoclassical critic complains that frames might not do what the contemporary critic claims framing cannot help doing.

These converging and contrasting worries suggest that the current mistrust of representation is, as Christopher Prendergast has demonstrated in *The Order of Mimesis*, only the latest stage of a long-standing debate about the motive and purposes of representation. The present emphasis on the ideological basis of framing seems to me an interesting and legitimate contribution to that debate. Less helpful is the claim that the ideological basis of framing necessarily contaminates it and ultimately implicates *all* mimesis (the realistic novel is only the easiest target) in an "authoritarian gesture" that imprisons "us in a world which, by virtue of its familiarity, is closed to analysis and criticism."[29] I have been arguing that the frames of realistic representation are not as clearly demarcated or as predictably forensic in intent as Bender and Miller would claim. Rather, as Boyle argues, chance details within the frame can imply more of the world beyond the frame. Bakhtin insists upon the "sharp and categorical boundary between the actual world as source of representation and the world represented in the work," but he also warns that is "impermissible to take this categorical boundary line as something absolute and impermeable."[30]

Thus Fielding's militant patrol of the borders of his text might lead some modern readers to feel that he has framed out what they most

29 Prendergast, p. 6.
30 Bakhtin, p. 253.

might have wished to see represented. When Tom Jones goes into George Seagrim's house in search of Molly, such readers might feel that Fielding has missed the opportunity to describe the circumstances of the rural poor, even though what we get instead is as amusing as the discovery of Square squatting behind the rug/blanket. But when John Richetti reads the passage it is reframed: Square's ridiculous posture reminds the narrator of "the Attitude in which we often see Fellows in the public Streets of London, who are not suffering but deserving Punishment by so standing" (5, 5, 229). Richetti says that:

> we are violently transported from a Somersetshire transformed by comic invention to an actual London ... to urban squalor unmodified and unmediated by comic artifice. ... these squatting fellows point briefly to something like an actual urban disorder the novel pointedly avoids and consistently transforms.[31]

Richetti's reframing of the narrative field makes it "point" to something that Fielding "pointedly avoids," the urban disorder which E.P. Thompson has taught us to seek. Square's squatting points to the hidden ground of history in the same way that the wreath of smoke in "Tintern Abbey" points to the dispossessed workers camping just around the bend of the Wye. In this kind of criticism, the distinction between what is inside and outside the frame is tenuous, and interest shifts to what might have figured within the field.[32] What figures within a narrative is always less than the more that might have figured (and vice versa), narrative being an actual saying against the ground of a potential might-have-been-said. Frames seem more ubiquitous in that everything turns out to be a matter of framing, but also a lot less solid in that frames can always be reframed.

Sterne's emphasis upon the arbitrariness of any representational space, of the world that is always beyond the frame, seems to me consonant with this understanding of the hypothetical nature of frames. Moreover, his novel does not need much reframing to get us from its represented world to the historical world "outside" the text. If Fielding (via the interventions of a reader like Richetti) can momentarily transport us to the urban squalor of eighteenth-century London, then Sterne far more directly and

31 John Richetti, "Representing an Under Class: Servants and Proletarians in Fielding and Smollett" in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 93–94.

32 Stephen Greenblatt asserts that the "rigid distinction between that which is within the text and that which is outside" must "be opposed on principle." See "Culture" in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 227.

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in an unprecedentedly sustained way takes us "inside" domestic space to render an account of the birth of a child to a Turkey merchant living in quiet retirement in an English village. From Walter's perspective all of the circumstances of Tristram's conception and birth are remarkable, instances of extraordinary and tragic coincidences, but all the hypotheses about noses, names, and undisturbed homunculi do not hide the fact that from another perspective—Toby's for example—Tristram's birth is entirely normal: a natural process that takes place against a background of such ordinary human activities as waiting, sleeping, having breakfast, or walking up and down the stairs.

With the exception of book 7, almost everything that happens in *Tristram Shandy* happens within Shandy Hall or its immediate vicinity. For Sterne, as his phrase "domestic misadventures" suggests, the domestic is not incompatible with having a story worth telling. The reference to the traditional romance plot that underlies so much of Fielding and Smollett's fiction (disinheritance, exile, return) is vestigial, surviving only in the news of Bobby's death and Tristram's subsequent status as heir to Shandy Hall. And if, as Robert Gorham Davis has suggested, the circumcision and subsequent breeching of Tristram refer to the rites of passage of the mythic hero, both the birth of Tristram and the death of Bobby are assimilated to a domestic context.[33] The news of Bobby's death comes on the day that Obadiah discovers that the household is out of yeast, and when he brings in the letter bearing that news, he follows his usual practice of making sure that the parlour door is ajar when anything interesting is in the air. The bad hinge that separates the kitchen and the parlour is thus associated with the news of Bobby's death just as it is with the news of Tristram's birth. The news revealed in the letter reaches Mrs Shandy as she bends at the door in the dark passageway, and becomes the subject of simultaneous and contrasting orations in the parlour and the kitchen in the same way that the news of Tristram's circumcision also traces a path through the household: as Susannah runs from the nursery she passes the cook, who gives the news (with commentary) to Jonathan, who gives it to Obadiah, who, summoned by the bell, gives an account to Walter, who goes upstairs to see for himself.

Although Bobby dies only once, and Tristram is born and circumcised only once, Tristram's emphasis is not on those extraordinary departures from the norm, but on the ordinary workings of the household, what is *always* the case with the Shandys: "was every day of my life to be as busy as this—And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to

33 Robert Gorham Davis, "Sterne and the Delineation of the Modern Novel," in *The Winged Skull*, ed. A. H. Cash and John M. Stedmond (London: Methuen, 1971), p. 38.

take up as much description—And for what reason should they be cut short?" (1:342) "This day" is "busy" because it is Tristram's birthday, but Tristram sees every other day of his life as similarly eventful, full of "transactions" that merit telling. Unlike Fielding and Reynolds, Sterne sees that the quotidian is compatible with having a story worth the telling. Although the representation is not fully "promiscuous" in the sense that Johnson fears and contemporary critics admire (Mrs Shandy is usually out of the range of the narrative, the servants are *comic* servants, the narrator is an Augustan gentleman, and so forth), it nevertheless makes a contribution to the history of the everyday, a beginning at least in giving representation to what Lefebvre describes as "the immense wealth that the humblest facts of everyday life contain."[34] We are given a precise representation of how a husband and wife, a pair of brothers, servants and masters arrange themselves within domestic space. We are told how two sets of stairs connect upstairs and downstairs, how the gallery connects the bedrooms, how the dark passageway, the bellpull, and the bad hinge connect the parlour and kitchen. And beyond the house are the paths leading to and from the fishpond and the bowling alley. Tristram gives us all the conduits along which the life of the family flows, making Sterne the first of the major novelists to be interested in exploring the narrative possibilities of intersections of paths within a household.[35]

This is tracking, as concentrated a circumstantial realism as it is possible to find in the eighteenth century and an obvious model for the later tracking and framing of Jane Austen and her successors, but it is not, I would argue, a matter for the police. The surveillance is innocent: nobody is watching Tristram but Tristram himself, or us watching ourselves watching Tristram. Moreover, the exactitude of the narrative is an exactitude that Tristram himself insists upon rather than an exactitude that has been enjoined upon him. Indeed, if there is an "authoritarian demand" anywhere in the transaction, it is Tristram's demand that the listener/reader submit to so much exactitude. Although exactitude might suit the purposes of the police, it also suits any teller who thinks he has a story worth the telling. And if the teller can justify his tale, make it seem "narratable," it suits the reader as well. This traditional view of the genesis of the narrative situation tells us at least as much about

34 Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. John Moore (1947; reprinted London: Verso, 1991), 1:132.

35 Perhaps a similar claim could be made for Richardson. But although the positioning of the various family members within Harlowe Hall is carefully notated, the emphasis is more on their placement in an extraordinary crisis rather than on their place in the family's ordinary domestic routines.

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the "narrativity of narrativity" as Derrida's more provocative reconstruction of the scene of origin of narrative. Michael Holquist has claimed that the function of the novel is to "mitigate the laws that govern the 'proper' categories of biography, thus keeping open possibilities of individuation available nowhere else in society."[36] By contrast, John Bender argues that "the liberal state ... aspires to record as many stories as it has citizens or subjects; its mode is realism of the most extremely particularized kind." But for Bender such narrative Particularity is ultimately in the service of bureaucratic Generality: these individual stories are organized "categorically so that they will be comprehensible, that is, so that their subjects can be identified as controllable, storable resources."[37] The contrast between the Holquist's Bakhtinian spin on the novel and Bender's Foucauldian spin could not be clearer. In this essay I have been arguing that the linkage of circumstantial exactitude to forensic tracking is less persuasive than the traditional claim that the particularity of "formal realism" opens up rather than closes down possibilities of representation. Tristram's Exactitude (or Clarissa's or Moll's for that matter), far from homogenizing him and making him a "controllable, storable resource," allows us to know who he is in all his singularity: to know Tristram is to know his circumstances. At the same time, for all of Tristram's insistence upon the particulars of his account, his narrative is inescapably general in its thrust, appealing as it does to the history of the family, the routines and "scripts" drawn from a familiar social world. And this too is more than a mere recycling of official, authoritarian knowledge. Sterne draws upon and contributes to "a world intersubjectively known and held in common"[38] which is not (though the "matter-for-the-police" critics would say otherwise) an illusion or part of a plot against us.

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36 Holquist, p. 423.

37 Bender, p. 155.

38 Prendergast, p. 22.