

TRISTRAM SHANDY : Fiction vs. Life

Writing a novel like begetting a child, is a descent from the world of mind into the world of matter. "Tristram Shandy", both the man and the book, is no more, nor less, than what this entails. And it entails a strange world of intrusions, ejections, collisions, manoeuvrings, attacks, retreats, and continuous commotion consequent to a heterogeneous blend of blind accident and human purpose, this eternal limbo where man neither fits nor can hope for deliverance. Tristram is in the thick of all this turbulence. He is in the unenvied predicament of being both the object of a pervading *gaucherie* in the natural world, and at the same time the sensitive mind who renders it. Apparently he cannot reduce it to plan. Not that he has not tried. He has. And the fruit of his endeavour is the book we have. *Tristram Shandy*, however, did attain some object. But the paradox is in our and Tristram's world, where man's zest for living can outweigh all accident inevitably attendant on human life. Both Tristram and his book manage somehow to break through. The book is the man.

Oh Tristram ! Tristram ! can this but be once brought about—the credit, which will attend thee as an author, shall counterbalance the many evils which have befallen thee as a man.(1)

Tristram survives the accidents of his begetting, the flattening of his nose, name and the sash-window, just as the book is shuttled back and forth between plot and experience, words and meaning, clock-time and psychological time, but manages somehow to render the narrator's life. Tristram has managed to shed some fistul light on this unanalysable maze, this interlocking but discordant complex of realities : the reality of Tristram vs. the reality of his book, life vs. art, and flux vs. stasis. It is because Sterne sheds light on these discrete realities and wrenches them apart that he is a revolutionary novelist, and *Tristram Shandy* a "new novel."

1. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman* (Penguin, 1975), vol. IV. ch. 32, p. 332.

Many are the "fortifications" that bedevil the forth faring mortals in human existence. Ironically the science of "fortification" is a major human activity. Walter Shandy's "fence against life is the realm of pure abstraction. In this realm, theory is ostensibly designed to lend order to the flux of existence." (2) He lives by clock-time and its product history: by words and their products logic and rhetoric. "The elements of Logic and Rhetoric were so blended-up in him". (I. 19, p. 79) "The outcome of his dependence on clock-time and belief in the presumably intrinsic value of words is that to him a name can be frozen as a historical fact: "Trimogistus" was and will be for all eternity one and the same as a great man. Logic is not a search for the True but a means for justifying his own truths. It is a mill without meal. In his "Tristra-proedia" he envisages a "Northwest passage to the intellectual world."

-- The whole entirely depends ... upon the *auxiliary verbs*.

.. the use of the *Auxiliaries* is, at once to set the soul a-going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions.

.. Tristram ... shall be made to conjugate every word in the dictionary, backwards and forwards the same way; — every word .. by this means ... is converted into a thesis or an hypothesis; — every thesis and hypothesis have an offspring of propositions; and each proposition has its own consequences and conclusions; every one of which leads the mind on again, into fresh tracks of enquiries and doubtings. — The force of this engine ... is incredible in opening a child's head. (V. 42, pp. 394—95; VI. 2, pp. 397—98)

Parallel to Walter's reality of the "engine" of eloquence is one level of reality in Tristram's book : the conventions of the traditional!

2. John M. Stedmond, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne* (Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967, p. 53).

novel which he professes to adhere to while at the same time reduces to absurdity. One of the assumptions of narrative in the works of Defoe and Fielding is that of the novel as a book of history with a chronological straightline time scheme. This is mere convention and not a realistic representation of time as it purports to be. Exposition may oblige an author to disrupt this chronological history. The characters are left hanging in the air with nothing else to do but wait for the author to finish his exposition and then resume their story from where he left it, if the clock was still in the meantime. Tristram makes use of this convention. But in the act of using it he demonstrates the unrealistic disruption of time it entails. He also uses it for his own ends.

The novel as a history book progressing in chronological time is no more than a convention, a mode of narration. In (I.21) Tristram freezes uncle Toby in midgesture and midsentence:

I think, replied my uncle Toby, taking his pipe from his mouth, and striking the head of it with his thumb upon the nail of his left thumb as he began his sentence. I think, says he: -- But to enter rightly into my uncle Toby's sentiments upon this matter, you must be made to enter first a little into his character, the outline of which I shall just give you, and then the dialogue between him and my father will go on as well again. (p. 87)

This takes Tristram nine chapters, in which he gives us a portrait of uncle Toby's wound and hobby-horse, as well as theoretical digressions and characterization. For what end? Not to write a conventional history, certainly. But it is a history, nevertheless. Whatever may be his technique Tristram writes of the past. The novel form has to do that. But Tristram writes of the past as it is seen in the present. Tristram writes a history of the mind then (3), rather than of the whole man,

3. Tristram's description of John Locke's "Essay" may just as well describe his own book. "Pray, Sir ... did you ever read such a book as Locke's *Essay upon the Human Understanding*? ... I will tell you in three words what the book is. — It is a history ... It is a history book, Sir ... or what passes in a man's own mind." (II. 2, 106—107).

which, according to William V. Hotz, suits the title Sterne gave to his novel, which is partly about "the Opinions" of Tristram (4). Thus, if Tristram, by freezing uncle Toby in midgesture and midsentence, parodies the convention of chronological progress in the traditional novel form, he also makes a discovery, namely the double nature of time in fiction: the chronological time of the narrative and the psychological time of experience. Hence his book is a "new" novel.

Although Sterne follows parodically an old convention, yet he contributes to the chronological segments of a Fielding novel a new simultaneousness, and as a result the continuity of the novel as a whole. Even when chronological time, which is submerged under psychological time, crops up on the surface whenever historical events are mentioned, occasionally even that time, as Theodore Baird demonstrates, is accurately organized. "These events are not lugged in to give a specious air of historicity in the manner of the historical romances; they exist in the consciousness of his characters in the same way that a contemporary historic event exists in our minds today ... [This sense of the relation of time past and time present and of the merging of the two as they exist in the consciousness of the individual is Sterne's unique quality]" (5). This is precisely what Tristram tells us when he compares the "digressive and progressive movements" of his book to "one wheel within another." (I. 22, p. 95)

Here we have the unbroken presentness of all history in Tristram's head. This is effected because not only are we given full view of the writer's mind at work but we are not either allowed for long to get out of it. Tristram takes us fully into his confidence. Hence that never ceasing dialogue between writer and reader from the beginning of the book, "Pray, what was your father saying? — Nothing," (I. 1, p. 36.) a dialogue in which Sterne must imply that the reader shall not fully understand the book unless he is taken into the secret of the craft.

Thus we are shut up in Tristram's mind and constrained to bide his own time as he shifts back and forth between experience in psycho-

4, *Image and Reality: A Study of Tristram Shandy* (Brown Univ. Press, 1970), p. 100.

5. "The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," *PMLA*, 51 (Sept. '36): 803—20; p. 804.

logical time and the chronological framework of the story. This last is the time of the historical process : the present which moment by moment turns into an irretrievable past. But to a creative writer the past is never irretrievable. As Jean-Jacques Mayoux points out,

Memory is ambiguous : it originates in the past but it is only known in the present. There is no conscious reality that is not present, that is not part of this thick present which the creative imagination may organize and display. Again, this was one of Sterne's interests : the mind caught and held in a unit of its living processes, with all its intricate relations and the constant interchange between the inner and the outer world—precisely what Virginia Woolf will define as the moment. (6).

The novelist's "moment" is both in and out of time; in the psychological, out of the chronological. It is in the former that sequence is turned into simultaneousness, and all history is present. This is where the "moment" really belongs. It is the privilege of the creative writer as distinct from the mere story-teller. On the other hand, the "moment" has to be accommodated in the chronological framework of the narrative, if the result is to be such. In effect both chronological and psychological times must each sustain the other whenever that lapses. In the words of A.A. Mendilow,

the *rubato* of perceptual time must be capable of being related to the metronome of conceptual time which it... ignores. The "leadon circles" of Big Ben's chimes expanding through the air are needed to punctuate the irregular ebbing and flowing of the tide of time in Mrs. Dalloway.(7)

6. "Variations on the Time-Sense of *Tristram Shandy*," *The Winged Skull*, eds.: Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond (Methuen, 1971), p. 8.

7. *Time and the Novel* (Peter Nevill, 1952,) p. 139.; 'perceptual' and "conceptual" are Mendilow's terms for "psychological" and "chronological" respectively. "rubato" is a fluctuation of speed within a musical phrase typically against a rhythmically steady accompaniment.

We can understand now why Tristram does not care to conceal the stoppages in his narrative. Since he has us already safely lodged in his mind, sharing his privileged view of his creation in his own time, we do not mind a halt in story-time. We have seen the story in the making. Therefore we do not mind a lapse in the telling. But finally much enrichment of character has been attained. We also notice that in providing us with information about his characters Tristram is sometimes anxious not to be either too early or too late for the best effect.

I must give you some account of an adventure of Trim's, though much against my will ... only because the story is certainly out of its place here; for by right it should come in, either among the anecdotes of my uncle Toby's amours with widow Wadman, in which Corporal Trim was no mean actor, — or else in the middle of his and my uncle Toby's campaigns on the bowling-green, — for it will do very well in either place; — but then if I reserve it for either of those parts of my story, — I ruin the story I am upon, — and if I tell it here — I anticipate matters, and ruin it there. (III. 32, p. 215).

Simultaneousness then is the only way out. "In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, — and at the same time." (I. 22, p. 95) Thus the suspension of the story for nine chapters when uncle Toby was on the point of answering Walter (I. 21) proves to be, not time lost, but time amplified. Of this, Sterne's method and achievement, William Holtz gives us a full account.

For Tristram, Toby's statement is charged with the whole weight of his character and history, a fact Tristram apparently recognizes in [midsentence; the problem is how to render that quality in an isolated scene. By suspending Toby's action and utterance so unnaturally and by reminding the reader of this suspension, Tristram sustains the tension of the original scene throughout the expository insertion ... the whole body of intervening material ... occurs in a vast parenthesis in the time flow of the original scene. When finally Toby completes his statement and action, we perceive him as a character

shaped by his personal history, but the time that history occupies has been abolished — no time has passed. Tristram's attempt to produce his simultaneous awareness of different stages in Toby's career, to reflect the direct and immediate impingement of the past upon a moment of consciousness demands that we ignore the conventional causal and temporal relations between exposition and action and that we instead face past and present in a single momentary perception — as we often do in actuality.(8)

Could this achievement have been possible if Tristram had not rebelled against the clock-time story? Paradoxically we cannot examine the clock until it stops counting time(9) In this respect "Lippius's great clock" may be of significance.

And now for Lippius's clock ! said I, with the air of a man, who had got thro' all his difficulties -- nothing can prevent, us seeing that ... except the time (9), said François -- for 'tis almost eleven --- Then we must speed the faster, said I striding it away to the cathedral.

I cannot say, in my heart, that it gave me any concern in being told by one of the minor canons, as I was entering the west door, That Lippius's great clock was all out of joints, and had not gone for years --- It will give me the more time, thought I, to peruse the Chinese history; and besides I shall be able to give the world a better account of the clock in its decay, than I could have done in its flourishing condition. (VII. 39, p. 506).

David Hume denies the continuous existence of objects and hence personal identity. To him, each man is

a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which

8. *op. cit.*, pp. 111—12.

9. Nor can Tristram finish his book unless Death, holding the black-winged hour-glass, is held in abeyance. Actually, this is how Thomas Patch, in "Caricature of Laurence Sterne and Death", reproduced on the cover of the Penguin edition of the novel from the original in Jesus College, Cambridge, paints Death calling for Sterne, who, undaunted, welcomes him with a bow.

succeed each other with inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement (10).

He also claimed that

'tis a property inseparable from time and which in a manner constitutes its essence, that each of its parts succeeds another, and that none of them however contiguous, can ever be co-existent ... every moment must be distinct from, and posterior or anterior to another. (11)

To Hume's school of philosophy then, man is essentially a creature of the senses. To them also, time is a succession of moments. The problem is that succession is inconceivable without a subject, and one who can only conceive it from a point that is *not in* the said succession of moments, but in the one and all moments, a continuum rather than a succession.

But if this admits identity and psychological time into the picture, it does not by any means extricate them from the machinery of the clock. The clock is a reality of existence and death is evidence of it. The "moment" cannot catch up with the clock. If it could, Tristram, Sterne, and the reader should be immortal, and *Tristram Shandy* without end, since the clock goes on for ever. Only death can stop it, or rather, stop Sterne's pen. This is no end : *ars longa*. But it is : *vita brevis*. Yes, life is the only real we can possess.

Our destiny ... is not frightful because it is unreal; it is frightful because it is irreversible and ironbound. Time is the substance of which I am made. Time is a river which sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger which mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire which consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real, I, unfortunately, am Borges. (12).

10. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Oxford, 1958), I. iv, 6; 252

11. *ibid.* I. ii, 2; p. 31

12. Jorge Luis Borges, "A New Refutation of Time" tr. Anthony Kerrigan, *A Personal Anthology* (Pan, 1972), p. 49.

On the literary level, there is also a paradox in the attempt of discrete language to render the flow of life. Language is of successive nature, which is a handicap to the novelist who would render the continuity of subjective life rather than a now closed cycle of events, to reveal the total of one's life in the mind of the present. This is what Tristram and uncle Toby, each on his own level, actually do. We may observe in passing that both are victims of accident. Both are in search of full understanding.

The first motive which started uncle Toby off on his hobby-horsical pursuits was the urgent need of a means to explain to his visitors how he came by his wound. Words were not of much use to him. "Twas not by ideas,—by heaven! his life was put in jeopardy by words." (II. 2, p. 108.) He then resorts to "things" as means to self-explanation. And it is through "things" which constitute his hobby-horse that he achieves an understanding of his accident. This enabled Tristram at the same time to "draw uncle Toby's character from his HOBBY-HORSE." (I. 23, p. 98) I say "at the same time" because often when the past of uncle Toby *is* in his mind, Tristram's imaginative eye *is watching* there as well.

Tristram's problem is the same as uncle Toby's. He wants to explain himself to us just as uncle Toby wanted to explain himself to his visitors. But unlike uncle Toby he cannot choose his medium of expression, since in books this must be language, which, as a Lockean, Tristram cannot safely rely on. Apart from the problem that language progresses in clock-time, which the writer can circumvent in favour of psychological time, there is the problem of meaning. Locke, who regarded the senses as the only gate to the mind, put all the blame on words for not rendering accurately our sense impressions on which our philosophical discourse is based. To him as to Sterne — being "a fairly accomplished painter"⁽¹³⁾ — the visual sense was of vital importance. We may remember Tristram's account of the many ways to draw character, and his preference for "Momus's glass."⁽¹⁴⁾

13. Graham Petrie, Notes to *Tristram Shandy*, op. cit. p. 617.

14. "Momus, the god of fault-finding among the ancients, blamed Vulcan because, in the human form he had made of clay, he had not placed a window in the breast through which its secret thoughts might be seen." *ibid.* p. 622.

Had the said glass been there set up, nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have ... looked in, — viewed the soul stark naked ... then taken your pen and ink and set down nothing but what you have seen, and could have sworn to : —But this is an advantage not to be had by the biographer in this planet. (I. 23, p. 96)

Unfortunately, “our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystallized flesh and blood.”

It is no less unfortunate, as well as

one of the silliest things ... to darken your hypothesis by placing a number of tall, opaque words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your reader's conception, — when in all likelihood, if you had looked about, you might have seen something standing or hanging up, which would have cleared the point at once. (III. The Author's Preface, pp. 208 - 209).

Yes, words are a handicap, not because as Locke thought, they lack definition, but because even the most straightforward of them are subject to puns, innuendoes, and *double entendres*. Indeed, for all Walter's precision and care to avoid a pun he was not too safe “to be broke in upon by one.”

I would not, brother Toby ... I declare I would not have my head so full of curtains and horn-works. — There I dare say you would not, quoth Dr Slop, interrupting him, and laughing most immoderately ...

Sir, quoth my uncle Toby, addressing himself to Dr. Slop, — the curtains my brother Shandy mentions here, have nothing to do with bedsteads ... nor have the horn - works he speaks of anything in the world to do with the horn - works of cuckoldum. (II. 12, p. 129)

And it was not through military failing on the part of the citizens of Strasbourg that the city fell, it was all due to their inability to define a “nose.” Does Tristram fare better ?

I define a nose as follows—entreating only beforehand, and beseeching my readers, both male and female ... for

the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my definition. — For by the word *Nose*, throughout this long chapter of noses, and in every part of my work, where the word *Nose* occurs, — I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less. (III. 31, p. 225)

It is therefore against the “suggestions of the devil” and not the treachery of words as such, that we must guard against. They are the real “fortifications” that divide one man from another. Essentially man is individual in nature. And it is to the extent that language reflects this individuality that it becomes an imperfect means for bridging the gulf between different men. We are only left with the war “things” of uncle Toby, the gestures of Trim, and the printing antics of Tristram, as alternative media for communication. All three men are versions of the artist reaching out, over the ambiguity of the linguistic communication, for a universal medium.

Trim communicates through pose and gesture. To him the death of Robert is a happening rather than a string of words, as it was to Walter.

— ‘Are we not here now;’ continued the corporal, ‘and are we not’ — (dropping his hat plumb upon the ground — and *pausing*, before he pronounced the word) — ‘gone! in a moment?’ (V. 7, pp. 356 — 57. My own italics).

Here we have moved from the representation of fiction to the enactment of drama with the stage directions proper to the form. The “pausing” is significant. Indeed it partakes of that striving for the stasis of chronological time in which the whole book is conceived. That it is as communicative in the visual aspect of histrionic art as silence is in music, Tristram (as well as Sterne) must have known, being “both fiddler and painter.” (I. 8, p. 43) That is why he frequently resorts to the pose on canvas and the gesture on the stage for the illustration of his point.

My father instantly exchanged the attitude he was in, for that in which Socrates is so finely painted by Raffael in his school of Athens. (IV. 7, p. 279)

In *Tristram Shandy* an attitude may be funny, but it is not always just that. It is also a mode of representation as Jean-Jacques Mayoux points out. It does communicate as Walter somehow realized in his character sketch of Tristram's future tutor.

— There is, continued my father, a certain mien and motion of the body and all its parts, both in acting and speaking, which argues a man *well within*. (VI. 5, p. 401)

Ironically, no words can express the convoluted cast of Walter's thought better than the ungraceful posture of "taking his wig from off his head with his right hand, and with his *left* pulling out a striped India handkerchief from his right coat pocket." Tristram comments :

In the latter end of Queen Anne's reign, and in the beginning of the reign of King George the First — "*Coat pockets were cut very low down in the skirt*. — I need say no more — the father of mischief, had he been hammering at it a month, could not have contrived a worse fashion for one in my father's situation. (III. 2, pp. 172 — 73)

But if the studied attitude is not Walter's strong point, it is always Trim's distinction. It is his means to render experience, just what uncle Toby, through "war things", tries to do. And it involves the stasis of chronological time as well. Here Tristram resorts to the actor rather than the painter to illustrate his point.

— And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night ?— Oh, against all rule, my lord, — most ungrammatically ! betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in *number, case, and gender*, he made a breach thus, — *stopping* (my italics), as if the point wanted settling; — and betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times three seconds and three-fifths by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time,— Admirable grammarian ! — But in *suspending* (My italics) his voice — was the sense suspended likewise ? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm ? Was the eye silent ? Did you narrowly look ? I looked only at the stop-watch, my Lord. (III. 12, p. 192)

It is Garrick's "stopping" then, his "suspending" of the voice, just as Trim's "pausing" in his dramatic harangue on Robert's death, that embody the meaning. As to the words themselves, they are clockwork machinery.

Both Trim and uncle Toby enact life rather than live it. Only when uncle Toby is on his howling-green and Trim in his dramatic stance, can they render to life some order, and face up to chance and wonder. Walter too strives to attain the same end through an infallible system of life. But chance being by its nature outside any system, all his pains are defeated. Ironically he does calculate chances as well just before the catastrophic misnomenclature of Tristram. His system is purely verbal. It has no referent in reality, as his "North-west passage to the intellectual world" which "entirely depends ... upon the auxiliary verbs" well demonstrates. His theory of names and their immutable intrinsic significance is again a form of striving after stasis. It is connected with his belief that the word is not merely a verbal sign, "but a powerful entity in itself, he believes words to be such tangible realities" (15) He actually tries to "scratch some sense into" a sentence by Erasmus.

Both Walter and uncle Toby fail to lend order to the chance multiplicity of existence. All Walter's plans for Tristram are frustrated, while uncle Toby's hobby-horse does not ultimately safeguard him against Mrs Wadman and the facts of life. Trim fares better, maybe because he is not sufficiently involved in life, but a mere player. All three are essentially comic in the Bergsonian sense. They are so because all their endeavour to organize life has ended as mechanism: Walter's inflexible system, uncle Toby's inanimate hobby-horse, and Trim's stylized attitudes. Still, they *look* human, except when the mechanistic circuit is closed within. Then we may be sure that Walter will theorize, uncle Toby conduct his mock-war, and Trim play his part. We have the comic effect when, in the words of Henri Bergson, "two images, that of a person and that of a machine, fit into each other." (16)

15. Holtz, op. cit. p. 71.

16. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, authorised translation by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Macmillan, 1913), p. 31.

Finally it is in Tristram that lies our hope for the "order" we have been in vain seeking. Our final resort becomes the narrator's own book : *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman*. As a writer he has to render his life and opinions in words. But unlike Walter he is not mesmerized by them. He, like Yorick, is an incorrigible jester, and in fact both are two voices for the real author. Instead of becoming the jest of the word, as the citizens of Strasbourg tragically were, they make the word their jest. Sometimes it may take a jester to tell a jester, but when that happens, as it does when Tristram examines Yorick's sermon on the death of Le Fever, the result can be very interesting.

The sermon which was found by Tristram after the parson's death is not merely a jest of words in words; the concrete nature of the sermon itself is a jest of "the blue-covered *Critical Review*, which had attacked *Tristram Shandy* ... [whose] editor, the novelist Tobias Smollett, had once been a doctor." (17) As to the concrete nature of the sermon, it was found

rolled up and twisted round with a half-sheet of dirty blue paper, which seems to have been once the cast cover of a general review, which to this day smells horribly of horse drugs. (VI. 11, p. 415)

The jest goes on when Tristram tells us that

at the end of the sermon ... he [Yorick] had wrote
Bravo !

Though not very offensively, — for it is two inches, at least, and a half's distance from, and below the concluding line of the sermon, at the very extremity of the page, and in that right-hand corner of it, which, you know, is generally covered with your thumb; and, to do it justice, it is wrote besides with a crow's quill so faintly in a small Italian hand, as scarce to solicit the eye towards the place, whether your thumb is there or not, — so that from the

17. Notes to *Tristram Shandy*, op. cit., p. 647.

manner of it, it stands half excused; and being wrote
moreover with very pale ink, diluted almost to nothing,
— 'tis more like a *ritratto* [portrait] of the shadow
of vanity, than of VANITY herself — of the two.
(loc. cit.)

What Tristram is actually doing here is portraying Yorick's character, not from the content of his sermon but from print. He is portraying character by examining the word "Bravo" as printed on paper: its inconspicuous place at the bottom right-hand corner of the page, the way it is written, the ink it is written in; and deducing from all that the modesty of the parson. In all this Walter would suspect no jest. He could not agree more with Tristram. And perhaps we could not either, the word holding such power over our minds. But this is precisely the object of the jest: that power. And it is of that power and the conception of the word as an entity in itself that the above passage makes jest, and *Tristram Shandy* stands evidence. Here we have a book as a concrete object, printed matter as a physical presence, and language as a visual extension on the page. Hence all the typographical devices of the book, the shuffling of chapters, and the pages that are just black, marbled, and white paper, with no words on. All this is done with the purpose of loosening the hold words have on our minds. In short, Tristram wants to break the spell of the word and make us realize the fictiveness of fiction, to see the mechanism behind the illusion.

Tristram's object of insulating the mechanism from the illusion is really a worthy one, because by achieving it he has avoided the pitfall into which all the attempts of Walter, uncle Toby, and Trim, to lend order to life, have floundered. For we should realize that, failing to see the mechanism behind the illusion, they consequently identified the illusion with life. In effect, the order they have achieved is not a real order, since it still partakes of the mechanism which is implied in the illusion, and it does show as mechanism.

Tristram, on the other hand, uncovers the mechanism. He does not care for the illusion. Most he cares for is life, not art. To him the obtuseness of Walter is that of a robot working by the clock. His system signifies nothing since it is mere rhetoric. Uncle Toby is an inno-

cent child living in a fool's paradise. Trim is a mere player, and he lives in privacy, behind a mask. All three, each in his own way, have made themselves inaccessible to life.

Only Tristram remains. And he is saved because although (or rather since) he is an artist, he knows his art too well to identify it with life. He cannot give up either. This is a dilemma, and only a jester is equal to it : his cap and bells and our indulgence.

Esmat Wali