



## Composition and Metalepsis in "Tristram Shandy"

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## COMPOSITION AND METALEPSIS

### IN *TRISTRAM SHANDY*

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Towards the end of his life, Sterne received a twisted walking stick from one of his American admirers. In his reply, he characterized this walking stick as "a piece of shandean statuary," saying of the unusual gift that it was an appropriate emblem of *Tristram Shandy*: "in no sense more *Shandaic* than in that of its having *more handles than one*... In *Tristram Shandy*, the handle is taken which suits their [the readers'] passions, their ignorance or their sensibility."<sup>1</sup>

The first-time reader of *Tristram Shandy*, no less than the Sterne specialist, can readily appreciate to what degree the twisted walking stick might serve as an emblem of the book, for although Tristram is supposedly telling his own story--his "life and opinions," as the complete title would have us believe--astonishingly little is said about Tristram himself. The great bulk of the narrative content of this remarkably rambling and digressive work is made up of events and facts dating from the fifty years leading up to Tristram's birth in November of 1718, so that in spite of the pervasive presence of the first-person pronoun in the text, *Tristram Shandy* remains, to an overwhelming extent, a

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1. Laurence Sterne, *Letters of Laurence Sterne*, Lewis Perry Curtis, ed. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1935), p. 404ff.

Research for this article was undertaken during the summer of 1993 under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities thanks to a stipend I was granted to take part in a seminar directed by Professor Everett Zimmerman at the University of California (Santa Barbara) devoted to eighteenth-century British historiography and fiction. For their useful comments, I would like to express my appreciation to Professor Zimmerman and to the seminar participants as well as to the participants in the colloquium *Breaking Points/Usure et rupture*.

heterodiegetic analepsis.<sup>2</sup> Published in five installments between 1759 and 1766, at a time when the novel as a genre had already achieved something of a canonical form (it is noteworthy that Fielding had taken the care to entitle his work *The History of Tom Jones*), Sterne's masterpiece has been qualified as "the first novel about the crisis of the novel."<sup>3</sup> The reasons for which *Tristram Shandy* has continued to occupy an innovative status in prose fiction for more than two hundred years are extremely varied, but historically speaking, it is essential to remember that the work grew out of the convergence of at least four already existent literary practices: the comic novel (Cervantes, Scarron); the contemplative essay (Montaigne, Burton); the tradition of Menippean satire (Rabelais, Erasmus); Augustan wit (Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*).<sup>4</sup> From the perspective of the twentieth century, it may well be the statement by the Russian Formalist, Victor Shklovsky, that best summarizes the appreciation of Sterne's work: "*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel in world literature."<sup>5</sup>

Sterne's work abounds in paradoxes and incongruities which have never ceased to test readers' powers of critical acumen. The book begins, not *in medias res*, but rather *ab ovo*--at Tristram's conception--and, after a brief mention of the protagonist's birth in Volume I, Chapter 5, most of what follows is devoted to matters dating from before his conception, while the novel ends with a scene that takes place four years prior to his birth. As a narrator, Tristram is acutely aware of his uncanny habit of writing himself into corners, for upon realizing, nearly halfway through the book, that it has taken him an entire year to write about the first day of his life, he notes: "'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when

2. Tristram's low profile as a character in the novel puts him on a footing comparable with the evasive Marcel in *A la recherche du temps perdu*. For a valuable study of Proust's work as a memory triggered by the experience of the madeleine, see Serge Doubrovsky, *La place de la madeleine. Écriture et fantasme chez Proust* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1974). An obvious counterpart to *Tristram Shandy* in this regard is *Moby Dick*, a homodiegetic narrative in which Ishmael virtually ceases to refer to himself once the Pequod has set sail, reappearing only at the very end of the novel as the sole survivor of the Pequod's crew.

3. See Robert Alter, "Sterne and the Nostalgia for Reality," in: *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1975); reprinted in: Harold Bloom, ed., Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy", *Modern Critical Interpretations* (New York, New Haven, Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), pp. 87-105; quotation, p. 92.

4. Needless to say, the bibliography on these various aspects of *Tristram Shandy* is extensive. For a useful introduction to the ways in which they are combined, see Wayne C. Booth, "Tristram Shandy and the Problem of Formal Coherence", in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, 2nd ed. (Chicago & London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 221-240. Mention should also be made of D. W. Jefferson, "Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit," in *Essays in Criticism*, vol. 1, 1951; of J. M. Stedmond, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne: Convention and Innovation in Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1967); and of Melvyn New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist* (Gainesville: The Univ. Presses of Florida, 1969).

5. "Art as Technique" (1921), in L. T. Lemon and M. J. Reis, trans., *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Regents Critics Series (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 57.

I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing with at it--on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back...."<sup>6</sup> Tristram's inability to make the temporality of his writing coincide with that of his life and opinions is further aggravated by the ordering of the parts of the book, for not only are entire chapters omitted or displaced, but the "The Author's PREFACE" does not appear until nearly the middle of Volume III, while a number of the incidents occurring at the end of the chronology are referred to in Volumes I and II.<sup>7</sup> And to complicate the work's textual cohesion even more, we find that the sermon on Conscience by Parson Yorick, delivered (in II, 17:142ff.) by Corporal Trim some two or three years after the Parson's death and constituting the last event to be reported in the work, was in fact one of a number of sermons delivered by Sterne himself in his capacity as parson and published (in 1760 and 1766) under the title *Sermons of Mr. Yorick*.<sup>8</sup> It is, moreover, the selfsame Mr. Yorick who appears in *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick* (1768), an early version of which appeared as Volume VII of the work under consideration.

Clearly, then, *Tristram Shandy* is a work which encourages the reader to come provided with some sort of walking stick. This conclusion is borne out even more fully by the impressive variety of scholarly and theoretical approaches to Sterne which have taken shape throughout the history of the criticism devoted to the work.<sup>9</sup> With no necessity in the present context of going into the details of Sterne scholarship or of addressing the ongoing and unresolved issue of whether *Tristram Shandy* is ultimately a work of imitation or one of innovation, I should like nevertheless to point out two of its features that are of general

6. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, Melvyn New and Joan New, eds. (Gainesville: The Univ. Presses of Florida, 1978), Volume IV, Chapter 13, p. 341-342. Further references to *Tristram Shandy* will be given in the text in the following manner: IV, 13:341-342.

7. The chronology of *Tristram Shandy* has been examined with increasing refinement a number of times since Theodore Baird's original attempt in "The Time-Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source", *PMLA* 51 (1936): 803-820, up to Ron Jenkins' article, "Mathematical Topology and Gordian Narrative Structure: *Tristram Shandy*", *Mosaic* 25/1 (1992):13-28. One of the merits of Jenkins' contribution is to call into question the pertinence of the very notion of chronology in Sterne's work, stating: "it is soon apparent that thematic unity is enhanced, rather than hindered, by the book's chronological disunity" (p. 13).

8. There are serious grounds for contesting that the last event in the chronology is the preaching of Yorick's sermon (which took place in 1750), for there are several references by Tristram to his act of writing which extend up to August 12, 1766. Furthermore, a variety of discrepancies concerning dates and other matters make it doubtful that there is any identity between Tristram and Sterne or (contrary to a widespread view) between Tristram and Yorick: there is evidence in Volume I, Chapter 10, for example, that Yorick died in 1741/42. On this point, see Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, p. 223, and Jenkins, "Mathematical Topology," pp. 19 and 23.

9. For an excellent survey of Sterne criticism up to 1965, see Lodwick Hartley, *Laurence Sterne in the Twentieth Century: An Essay and a Bibliography of Sternean Studies, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina, 1966). See also, by the same author: *Laurence Sterne: An Annotated Bibliography, 1965-1977, with An Introductory Essay-Review of the Scholarship*, A Reference Publication in Literature (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1978).

relevance to the observations to be developed in the balance of this paper:

1) the appreciation of Sterne by Virginia Woolf and other members of the Bloomsbury group, as well as the reading of such authors as Joyce, Proust, and Mann, did much, starting in the 1920s and 30s, to bring about a re-evaluation of *Tristram Shandy* in the light of modernist writing and esthetics; this development, along with that of more careful historical research on Sterne, has helped to render the Victorians' charges of Sterne's immorality of little interest;

2) some of the more fruitful insights into *Tristram Shandy* in recent years have come through attempts to see the work in terms of a *textual construction* of reality, rather than in those of a portrait or of a representation of it; this is in sharp contrast with earlier tendencies (derived, in some cases, from the Lockean "association of ideas") to regard the novel as a brilliantly but haphazardly written or erratically structured work of fiction.<sup>10</sup>

With these developments in Sterne criticism in mind, I would like now to examine three closely interrelated features of *Tristram Shandy*, which can be summarized in the following manner:

1) the central event within the diegesis of the work is Tristram's accidental circumcision, signalling the symbolic transfer of Uncle Toby's impotence to Tristram;

2) to a significant degree, character discourse in *Tristram Shandy* can be described either as metaphorical (Walter) or as metonymical (Uncle Toby);

3) a fundamental feature of the narrator's (i.e., Tristram's) discourse (and, more generally speaking, of the textual organization of *Tristram Shandy* as a whole) is to be found in the device known to narratologists as "metalepsis," i.e., the textually disruptive intrusion of one level of narrative discourse into another, as when we confront a narratively absurd but narratologically provocative statement such as this one by Tristram: "--All my heroes are off my hands;--'tis the first time I have had a moment to spare,--and I'll make use of it, and write my preface" (III, 20:226)

10. One approach to *Tristram Shandy*, widely practiced for several decades leading up to the mid-1960s, consisted in linking the work to Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, some critics finding it to be the *Essay* in epic form, others a parody of the *Essay*, and yet others a form of treatise on Lockean philosophy (see, for example, John Traugott's influential book, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric* [Berkeley & London: Univ. of California Press, 1954]). Views such as these have been greatly toned down over the years, and it is Martin C. Battestin who has perhaps gone to the heart of the matter in observing that Sterne's first lesson from Locke was to realize that: "Reality is no longer something external to the individual--something 'out there' to which he must relate in prescribed ways; it has become internal and subjective, a world, as it were, of his own involuntary creating whose tenuous order, imposed by the mechanical operations of mind organizing a multiplicity of sensations, is for each man private and arbitrary and unique" (*The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1974], pp. 243-244).

My reasons for identifying Tristram's accidental circumcision as the central event in *Tristram Shandy* resulting in the symbolic transfer of Uncle Toby's impotence to Tristram stem, firstly, from a general principle of textual semiotics. In his book entitled *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, Jurij Lotman distinguishes between texts without subjects and those with subjects.<sup>11</sup> Texts without subjects, such as calendars and telephone directories, are characterized by a classificatory function, and the boundaries demarcated by their internal organization are immutable: no violation of the order upon which they are based can occur without undermining this function. Texts with subjects, however, are secondary texts, and insofar as they portray an event in which one or more characters move across the boundaries defining the text's internal semantic field, they negate the stable classificatory function of texts without subjects, thereby triggering an otherwise non-existent narrative action: Dante entering the world of the dead; Romeo and Juliet disregarding the social and political taboos which separate the houses of Montague and Capulet; Little Red Riding Hood violating her mother's interdiction to speak to strangers.

At first sight, Tristram's accidental circumcision, caused by the falling of a sash as the boy urinates out a window, may well appear to be a minor or even trivial incident, rather than a structurally central one, especially given the long-winded digressions and commentaries and the various anecdotes, allusions, fragments, etc., which proliferate throughout the novel. Moreover, the limited quantity of text devoted to this mishap would hardly seem to justify granting it any particular importance: "I was five years old.--*Susannah* [the maid] did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,--so slap came the sash down like lightning upon us;--Nothing is left,--cried *Susannah*,--nothing is left--for me, but to run my country--" (V, 17:449-450). It must be pointed out, however, that the falling of the sash comes as the direct result of a series of other facts and incidents, so that it is well integrated into the text's larger narrative sequences: some time before Tristram's birth, Corporal Trim (Toby's servant and companion) had unintentionally destabilized the sash-window by removing the pulleys and the lead weights used to hold it up, his purpose being to use the pulleys to build model carriages and to melt down the lead in order to cast model field pieces, but also to use the weights as balances in the construction of model bridges required for the military campaigns conducted by Toby and Trim on the bowling-

11. Translated from the Russian by Ronald Vroon. Michigan Slavic Contributions 7 (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1977), pp. 231-239. As in other English translations of Russian poetics, the word "plot" is employed by Vroon for the Russian "*sjuzet*." However, the story/plot distinction in English-language narrative theory does not correspond to the *fabula/sjuzet* pair, which was formulated by the Russian Formalists; in order to avoid conceptual confusion, the term "subject" will be employed in the present article. (Note that in the French translation of Lotman's work, "*sjuzet*" is translated as "*sujet*" rather than as "*intrigue*.") For a lucid study of the terminological aspects of these features of the narrative text, see Emil Volek, "Die Begriffe 'Fabel' und 'Sujet' in der modernen Literaturwissenschaft," *Poetica* 9 (1977):141-166.



green (V, 19; III, 25); the Bowling-Green War, in turn, had been instigated in 1701, following Trim's suggestion to Toby, still convalescing from a wound to the groin sustained at the battle of Namur (1695) during the Nine Years War (1688-1697), that for therapeutic reasons he paste a map of Namur and its environs to a board so as to identify the spot of ground where he was standing when the stone struck him (II, 1 & 5). This (incomplete) summary of a series of events which takes place over a period of nearly thirty years leading up to Tristram's accident reveals the functionality of the accident within the series; but at the same time, it suggests that the narration of the accident, through a retroactive effect, determines the significance of the series. Now, it is precisely the retroactively determined significance of prior events--and not their position in the chronological sequence--that explains the centrality of Tristram's circumcision, giving the novel the status of Lotman's text with a subject.<sup>12</sup>

What is true of the series of events just identified, however, holds equally well for series which are constituted, not of events, but of analogical relations. Series of this type can be illustrated by numerous examples, but the most significant of them are the crushing of Tristram's nose at birth (caused by Dr. Slop's ineptness at using forceps [cf. III, 23]) and the portentous blunder in christening the newborn child "Tristram" (rather than Trismegistus--the name chosen by Walter to counteract the misfortune of the crushing of his son's nose [IV, 8 & 14]<sup>13</sup>). The triple mutilation--nose, name, genitals--linked as much, if not more, in an analogical sense than in a causal one, is clearly significant for thematic reasons; it is equally important, however, to observe that this series also represents a fundamental compositional fact in *Tristram Shandy*, for it fits into a system of boundaries generated within the text that lends coherence to many of the work's details which would otherwise appear to be more or less unrelated.<sup>14</sup> Two aspects of the work will serve to illustrate the character of its compositional features.

The events leading up to Tristram's circumcision and the analogical relations between nose, name, and genitals constitute, as already suggested, two types of series within the text. These series, it will be noted, are both generated *prior to* the accident, making it a

12. This observation provides further evidence of the instability of chronology in the novel. In this regard, it is noteworthy that, to the *ab ovo* beginning of the work (Tristram's conception in Vol. I) can be added at least one other beginning: the death of Tristram's older brother, Bobby, when Tristram was about one year old, making him the "heir-apparent to the *Shandy* family--and it is from this moment properly, that the story of my LIFE and my OPINIONS sets out" (IV, 32:400).

13. Trismegistus: cf. Hermes Trismegistus: "A clumsy translation of the Egyptian 'Thoth the very great'... When so named, Thoth is the reputed author of the philosophico-religious treatise known collectively as *Hermetica*... also of sundry [apocryphal] works on astrology, magic, and alchemy." In Greek and Latin, "Trismegistic" corresponds to "hermetic" literature. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, quoted in Vol. 3: The Notes, of the New edition of *Tristram Shandy*, pp. 95-96.

14. On this point, see also Sigurd Burckhardt, "Tristram Shandy's Law of Gravity," *ELH* 28.1 (March, 1961):70-88.

pivotal event *after* which is located the Grand Tour of Europe in 1741, at a time when Tristram is aged twenty-two. Being one of the rare events to appear in the chronology of Tristram's life after his accident, it is also the only one at this point to be narrated in any detail, as nearly all of Volume VII is devoted to it. Moreover, this Volume, containing an account of Tristram's attempt to flee death through foreign travel and ending with a celebration of life ("VIVA LA JOIA! FIDON LA TRISTESSA!" [VII, 43:650]), is the most "linear" narrative to be found in the novel; and by this fact, it is the only true "digression" in the work, so that it forms a sharp contrast with the intricate succession of incidents resulting in Tristram's circumcision.<sup>15</sup> The pre- and the post-circumcision phases of *Tristram Shandy* (if they might be so named) can thus be considered to lie on either side of an internally defined textual boundary, two phases complementary by the very divergence of their characteristic features, much as the image seen in a mirror is an inversion of the original. In this regard, the falling of the sash serves as a particularly fitting metaphor, for the open window, succeeded by the precipitous closing of the window with all of its consequences for Tristram, parallels the two phases we have been speaking of on a reduced scale and in a different verbal register, thus giving a figurative dimension to Tristram's initiation into the world.

The second aspect of the composition of *Tristram Shandy* that I would like to discuss is an extension of the principles which govern the first and is in fact inextricable from it: the Bowling-Green War (related esp. in VI, 21-28, but with references in VIII & IX). Like Tristram, Toby (as noted above) had been the victim of a falling object, although this was as a soldier at the battle of Namur during the Nine Years War.<sup>16</sup> With little said about Toby prior to his being wounded, however, the text of *Tristram Shandy* lays emphasis on his long recovery process. In the

15. See VI, 40:570-571, for the five well-known scribblings, said by Tristram to "describe" the lines he has followed in the first five Volumes; the chapter concludes with Tristram announcing that he has yet to write "my chapter on straight lines," but he adds: "by what mistake--who told them so--or how has it come to pass, that your men of wit and genius have all along confounded this line with the line of GRAVITATION?" (VI, 40:572).

Burckhardt, in the above-mentioned article, has emphasized the importance of gravity in *Tristram Shandy*, observing: "A messy fatality attends the falling bodies of the novel, the things that stupidly plummet: they always land on the genitals. Rocks, sash windows, chestnuts do far more damage than bullets" (p. 72). He also comments on the link between Toby's hopeless attempt to master the science of ballistics (and consequently gravitation and the mathematics of cycloids, parabola, curves, etc.), bridges as a metaphor for communication, story lines, and writing, and he concludes: "the novel is a vast system of indirection" (p. 80; my emphasis).

16. Affirmations that Toby has been made impotent by his battlefield wound can be contested on the basis of textual evidence. It has been suggested, however, that his "total lack of interest" (cf. his *amours* with widow Wadman) prove him to be impotent for psychological reasons, rather than for physical ones (Helen Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne* [Gainesville: The Univ. Presses of Florida, 1975], p. 118).

The following discussion has been inspired partly by Fritz Gysin's brilliant study, *Model as Motif in Tristram Shandy*, The Cooper Monographs on English and American Language and Literature 31 (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1983), Ch. IV: "Model and Reality: 'Battles' on the Bowling-Green," pp. 86-129.



course of his long search to discover *where* he was mutilated (we shall see later that the double meaning is not inconsequential) and to come to terms with his misfortune, Toby is drawn farther and farther afield, first by his studies of military fortifications and of ballistics and later, during the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) up to the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), by the game of model warfare in which, with the aid of daily newspaper reports, he and Trim recreate and re-enact real events on the bowling-green near Shandy Hall, using various objects found in the Shandy household (e.g., pulleys and lead weights from the sash-windows). The model war can thus be regarded as Toby's substitute for reality--not only for contemporary reality, but also for the reality of the war in which he was wounded.<sup>17</sup> However, the abrupt termination of this model war, brought about by the demolition of the fortifications at Dunkirk under the terms of the Treaty of Utrecht, comes as a brutal awakening to Toby who, with his defenses down, subsequently finds himself exposed to the advances of widow Wadman: "the shock my uncle Toby received the year after the demolition of *Dunkirk*, in his affair with widow *Wadman*, had fixed him in a resolution, never more to think of the sex,--or of ought which belonged to it..." (III, 24:245). It can be concluded, then, that Toby's experience is one of displacing his sexuality onto the conduct of miniature warfare in such a way as to foreshadow the symbolic transfer of impotence to Tristram, while the interchangeability of sex and war in the narrative concerning Toby reaches such a degree as to become, in the words of one critic, "the chief structural metaphor of the novel."<sup>18</sup>

Another point to be stressed is the important contrast between the narratives relating, respectively, to Tristram and to Toby. Whereas Tristram's biography is divided into two phases by the fateful accident, Toby's, also marked by a (possibly imaginary) mutilation of the genitals, is separated into two phases of the *reconstitution* of this mutilation: 1) through the evocation of the Nine Years War in the attempt to cure his wound by reading treatises on military architecture and ballistics; 2) through the *mise en scène* of the War of Spanish Succession on the bowling-green as Toby physically transforms a current public reality into a personalized model of that reality with the aid of maps, newspapers, etc. Paradoxically, Toby's initiatives appear to be more "artistic" than Tristram's in the sense that, rather than treat experience at its immediate level, they result in the transformation of experience through the means of representation. From the point of view of the composition of the work, the Bowling-Green War thus represents what is probably the most important *mise en abyme* in *Tristram Shandy*, a sort of model for

17. The Bowling-Green War is, then, Toby's "Hobby-Horse", *Tristram Shandy's* equivalent of a "ruling passion" (cf. Pope's *An Essay on Man*); however, unlike other authors of the eighteenth century, for whom a person's ruling passion can be controlled by reason and willpower and thus has an ethical sense, Sterne gives the expression an epistemological and ontological sense (cf. Battestin, *The Providence of Wit*, p. 247).

18. Burckhardt, "Tristram Shandy's Law of Gravity," p. 82.

the text as a whole.<sup>19</sup>

Note must also be made of a brief but significant renewal of the Bowling-Green War that occurs some six or seven weeks prior to Tristram's conception in which Trim and a servant girl named Bridget accidentally smash one of the model bridges on the bowling-green and fall into a ditch (III, 23-27). Being comparable to the demolition of Dunkirk, it acts both as a sequel to the interruption of the Bowling-Green War and as an echo of Toby's *amours* with widow Wadman that serves to prefigure Tristram's conception. At the same time, however, the reconstruction of the bridge (which seems never to occur, as no choice among the four different types of bridge considered for replacement of the original is settled on) turns out to be a sort of "bridge" between the Bowling-Green War and the crushing of Tristram's nose at birth: "When *Trim* came in and told my father, that Dr. *Slop* was in the kitchen, and busy in making a bridge, my uncle *Toby*... took it instantly for granted that Dr. *Slop* was making a model of the marquis d'*Hôpital*'s bridge[...] --This unfortunate drawbridge of yours, quoth my father--God bless your honour, cried Trim, 'tis a bridge for master's nose" (III, 26:252; 27:253). More is at stake here than a mere pun, for within its narrative context, the word "bridge" signals a variety of textual networks beyond those already indicated. In particular, the bridge sequence serves to *mediate* between the biographies of Toby and Tristram, assuring the transition from the two phases of the narrative concerning the uncle to those of the narrative relating to the nephew. And not only does the smashing of the bridge announce the crushing of Tristram's nose, but it also announces the falling of the window and Tristram's accident, thereby linking the demolition of Dunkirk to Tristram's circumcision in yet another of the tortuous and innumerable series that define the novel's composition. Finally, the highly developed analogical relations existing within the work suggest that, just as the bridge sequence represents an extension of the Bowling-Green War, so the various references made by Tristram to the dates of his writing and to other contemporaneous facts and events which are posterior to the diegesis of the story properly speaking constitute an ulterior development in the flight from death recounted in Volume VII, a "bridge" one step closer, perhaps, to the narrating instance of the text.<sup>20</sup>

In identifying the principal textual boundaries in *Tristram Shandy* which make it a text with a subject, we have seen that Toby's attempts to reconstitute his mutilation result in the displacement of his sexuality onto miniature warfare, a fact which gains structural significance especially in the Bowling-Green War, the work's principal *mise en abyme*. We have also seen that the parallel between the Toby

19. For further reflections on this point, see Gysin, *Model as Motif in Tristram Shandy*, p. 125ff.

20. Through a different line of argumentation than the one employed here, John M. Stedmond has arrived at a similar conclusion in suggesting that the relation between Toby and Tristram corresponds to the relation between the bowling-green and the writing pad (*The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne*, p. 76).

and the Tristram narratives is reinforced by the bridge sequence, one of whose functions is to mediate between the two narratives. Consequently, *Tristram Shandy* is a work where *repetition* takes on particular importance and in which the psychoanalytical principle of the *compulsion to repeat* is of no meager interest. Especially relevant is that aspect of the compulsion to repeat which Sigmund Freud, in his *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), identified as the game of "fort" ("gone") and "da" ("there"), i.e., an activity which consists in a child's reproducing the cycle of disappearance and return (of, say, a parent) through a series of imaginative acts and which Freud explicitly links to artistic play and imitation.<sup>21</sup> With reference to this game, we can now say that one of the major functions of the Bowling-Green War, the playful transformation of sexuality into miniature warfare, is to provide Toby with the cathartic experience of the "da," while the somewhat more direct evocation of the wound received by Toby at the battle of Namur (an evocation undertaken with the aid of scientific treatises) lies closer to the "fort" of the original trauma. Although the two phases of Tristram's biography cannot be said to reproduce the two phases in Toby's attempt to reconstitute his mutilation, the accident which punctuates Tristram's biography, dividing it into a pre- and a post-circumcision phase (a "fort" and a "da"), does prove to be an indirect consequence of the demolition of Dunkirk, so that the narrative relating to Tristram repeats the Toby narrative, thereby signalling the symbolic (and not physically-imposed) transfer of Toby's impotence to Tristram. And as repetition is by its very nature recognizable retroactively, we must conclude that it is the "accident" of Tristram's circumcision that sets the narrative mechanisms of *Tristram Shandy* in motion.

In turning now to the question of metaphor and metonymy in *Tristram Shandy*, we shall see that, by an large, the role played by these rhetorical figures in character discourse complements and confirms the observations made in the previous section. Metaphor and metonymy are in fact referred to in a frequently-quoted passage from the Preface, where Locke's statements about wit and judgment are satirized:

--Here stands *wit*,--and there stands *judgment*, close beside it, just like the two knobbs I'm speaking of, upon the back of this self-same chair upon which I'm sitting.  
 --You see, they are the highest and most ornamental parts of its *frame*,--as wit and judgment are of *ours*,--and like them too, indubitably both made and fitted to go together, in order as we say in all such cases of duplicated embellishments--to answer one another. (III, 20:236)

21. Trans. and ed. by James Strachey, intro. by Gregory Zilboorg, with a biographical intro. by Peter Gay (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1989), p. 12ff. For an approach to *Tristram Shandy* which is based on the "Homo Ludens" concept of Huizinga and Caillois, see Richard A. Lanham, *Tristram Shandy: The Games of Pleasure* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1973).

The reference here is to Locke's *Essay* (Bk. II, Ch. XI) where wit, said to lie in the assemblage of ideas, derives from the mental perception of resemblance or congruity, giving rise to pictures or visions in the fancy (as in metaphor or allusion), but at the same time hindering the exercise of reason, while judgment permits us to avoid the perils of similitude by separating ideas in accordance with the rules of truth and good reason.<sup>22</sup> In the passage quoted from *Tristram Shandy*, the intention is to restore wit to a position of equality with judgment and to show that wit and judgment are the two interdependent poles of mental activity.

It has been observed in a perceptive article by Max Nänny that the relation of similarity which defines wit also defines metaphor, while the relation of contiguity upon which judgment is founded is also the basis of metonymy.<sup>23</sup> Nänny further emphasizes the relevance of Roman Jakobson's classic article on discourse typology, "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbance",<sup>24</sup> to the wit/metaphor and judgment/metonymy connection. The link with linguistics enriches the Lockean distinction with categories that are useful for the analysis of discourse, since from a linguistic point of view, metaphor develops along the paradigmatic axis of language (selection), while metonymy (and synecdoche) derives from relations along the syntagmatic axis (combination). A further step should be taken, in my opinion, by adding Jacques Lacan's proposal to link Jakobson's theory of metaphor and metonymy respectively to *condensation* and *displacement*, the two basic rhetorical devices through which dreams are elaborated, as discussed by Freud in his *Interpretation of Dreams* and elsewhere.<sup>25</sup> Taken together, these various overlapping systems of thought provide us with a rich set of possibilities for the analysis of character discourse in *Tristram Shandy*--possibilities which are, moreover, evoked by the text itself.

In light of the numerous passages which the work offers for consideration, we are limited here to a brief look at a few suggestive examples. There is, firstly, the comparison between the two brothers' respective Hobby-Horses:<sup>26</sup> "[Walter] collected every book and treatise which had been systematically wrote upon noses, with as much care as my honest uncle Toby had done those upon military architecture" (III, 34:265). Walter's preoccupation with noses and Toby's with military architecture are so fundamental to the Shandean world that, in one sense, the text of *Tristram Shandy* might be considered an expansion of this statement. Walter's discourse is no less marked by the nose's

22. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), edited with a Foreward by Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 156.

23. "Similarity and Contiguity in *Tristram Shandy*," *English Studies* 60:4 (1979): 422-435.

24. In Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language*, *Janua linguarum* 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).

25. Cf. Jacques Lacan, *Les Psychoses*, séminaire, Livre III (1955-1956), (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1981), pp. 243-262.

26. On the Shandean notion of Hobby-Horses, cf. note 17.

relations of analogy with other phenomena ("ANALOGY [Walter attempts to explain to Toby] is the certain relation and agreement, which different --" [II, 7:118]) than Toby's discourse is characterized by "the unsteady uses of words" (II, 2:100). The "dialogue of the deaf" which results from the two brothers' divergent modes of discourse appears in many forms, but it can be illustrated by a discussion during which Walter, explaining to Toby that "in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or other, which follow each other in train just like--," is interrupted by his brother who asks: "A train of artillery?"--"A train of fiddle-stick!--quoth my father... (III, 18:225). Before the locution containing a metaphorical use of the word "train" is completed, Toby introduces the word into another syntagm with a radically different meaning, after which Walter neutralizes his original locution and goes on to explain himself (unsuccessfully) in another way.

The nose as a metaphor for the phallus in Walter's discourse is too obvious to require any particular comment here ("Slawkenbergius's Tale", taken from Walter's personal library and placed as an interpolated narrative at the beginning of Volume IV, will convince even the most sceptical that for Walter the nose possesses a phallic significance). However, it is important to note that Walter's foiled attempt to compensate for the crushing of his son's nose by naming him "Trismegistus" (already referred to in the previous section) adds a new dimension to the metaphorical quality of Walter's discourse. According to Tristram, "his judgment, at length, became the dupe of wit" to the point where, in the matter of "the influence of Christian names,... he was serious;--he was all uniformity;--he was systematical, and, like all systematick reasoners, he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature, to support his hypothesis" (I, 19:61). It is, then, all the more meaningful that: 1) two years prior to his son's birth, Walter should write a dissertation on his abhorrence of the name "Tristram," while after the birth he embarks on a "TRISTRA-paedia, or system of education" for his son--a work that Tristram himself is curiously obliged to complete (V, 16:445); 2) many readers find Tristram's paternity to be a doubtful matter (across the Shandy coat of arms, for example, is drawn a *bend-sinister*--the heraldic sign of bastardy [cf. IV, 25:373-374]). The intricate double metaphoric substitution through which Walter's discourse is structured--from phallus to nose and from nose to name--is rich in psychoanalytic overtones, most notably Lacan's notion of the *Nom-du-Père*, itself a metaphor for the various phases of the Oedipus complex involved in the acquisition of language and in access to the symbolic dimension.<sup>27</sup> In oversimplifying matters somewhat, we can advance the general principle that Walter's failure to transmit his name and all that this implies to a son (his other son, Bobby, died when Tristram was aged one) contributes to, or in any case

27. "Les Formations de l'inconscient," seminars held in January 1958, summarized by J.-B. Pontalis in: *Bulletin de Psychologie* 11:4-5 (1957-1958):293-296; 12:2-3 (1957-1958):182-192; 12:4 (1957-1958):250-256.



complements, the metaphorical nature of his discourse.

In contrast with this "comedy of frustration," as one critic has interestingly dubbed Walter's case, is Toby's "comedy of displacement."<sup>28</sup> We have already seen how Toby uses treatises, maps, newspapers, etc., to reconstitute an absent reality, with the icons (miniature fortifications, etc.) of this reality tending to take on a life of their own that is only remotely related to the wound to Toby's groin which lies at the origin of his initiatives. Linguistically speaking, this situation produces some curious effects, but perhaps nowhere more so than when widow Wadman, who has marital ambitions but feels some anxiety over her future conjugal relations with Toby, asks: "--And whereabouts, dear Sir, quoth Mrs. *Wadman*, a little categorically, did you receive this sad blow?" (IX, 26:793). Rather than point to the place on his groin where he was wounded, Toby takes widow Wadman's finger and places it on the map of Namur at the very spot designating the geographical location where he sustained his wound, leaving the woman in a great state of perplexity: the misunderstanding between Toby and widow Wadman concerning the spatio-temporal bearings of the deictic expression "whereabouts" stems from the recurrent metonymic shifts that dominate Toby's discourse, contributing to the transformation of language as a social form of expression into a highly individualized one. In this particular case, "whereabouts" evokes for Toby neither a place on his body nor the place name "Namur," but an iconic representation of the geographical place where he was wounded, so that in physically designating a place on this icon (in preference to naming or touching the place of the wound on his body), he is reenacting the story of his wound through its displacement.

While *Tristram Shandy* is a text which unfolds with a puzzling lack of direction, it proves at the same time to be a highly composed work, one whose unceasingly deflected linearity is compensated for by a purposefulness of another order. Tristram himself is the first to point this out, for he writes: "though my digressions are all fair, as you observe,--that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in Great Britain; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my silence" (I, 22:80). Between Tristram's digressions and his "main business," then, lies a gap (or even, at times, a gulf), and this gap has numerous consequences for the economy of the work. One of these consequences is the narrator's recourse to a variety of textual metaphors such as bridges, hinges, knots, clocks, and machines, and they are employed, not only in the work's series of narrative events (as is the case with the bridge sequence), but also to fulfill certain strategic metanarrative functions. With reference to machines, for example, Tristram writes:

the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled,

28. A. R. Towers, "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story," *ELH* 24:1 (1957):12-29.



which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,--and at the same time. (I, 22:80-81)

Further on, he develops the metaphor into what could well be a clock, insisting on the machine's self-perpetuating motion:

from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;--and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits. (I, 22:81-82)

Machines, we can conclude, provide Tristram with a means for speaking about the narrative of his life and opinions as a verbal construction governed by a complex compositional schema.

In *Tristram Shandy*, textual gaps take on many forms in addition to the digressions and the metanarrative features just spoken of. They also appear in the puns and misunderstandings which are sprinkled throughout Walter's and Toby's discussions, in footnotes which are marked by an authorial tone, and in problems arising from the temporal ordering of narrative events. An interesting example of the latter variety of gap occurs when Tristram finds himself having to decide where to relate the incident of Trim's smashing of the bridge:

the story, in one sense, is certainly out of its place here; for by right it should come in, either amongst 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'm upon,--and if I tell it here--I anticipate matters, and ruin it there. (III, 23:243-244)

More is at issue in this metanarrative comment than merely finding a way to get around an awkward technical problem, for Tristram's dilemma concerning where to narrate the story about Trim is, among other things, an echo of Toby's dilemma as to how to respond to widow Wadman's "And whereabouts... did you receive this sad blow?": it reveals how an element belonging to the novel's sequence of events is capable of reverberating beyond its immediate diegetic boundaries.

It is precisely the violation of the limits between narrative levels that leads us to the problem of metalepsis, the third feature of *Tristram*

*Shandy* proposed for consideration in this article.<sup>29</sup> The example of metalepsis already given, which shows Tristram taking leave of his characters in order to write a preface, is characteristic in that the action within the primary narrative level is temporarily suspended while that of the extradiegetic level is activated. It is important to remember, however, that metalepsis is distinguished from metanarrative comment by its use of a double temporality: hence, Tristram's remarks about taking 364 days to write about the first day of his life, or those he makes concerning where to place the story of Trim and the bridge, are motivated by difficulties arising from the coordination of the temporality of the narrative act with that of the narrative content, but they give no evidence of attempting to resolve the temporalities of concurrent diegetic levels into a single utterance. This distinction is clearly illustrated in the following passage, where a metalepsis is punctuated by a metanarrative comment:

--I have left my father lying across his bed, and my uncle *Toby* in his old fringed chair, sitting beside him, and promised I would go back to them in half an hour, and five-and-thirty minutes are lapsed already.--Of all the perplexities a mortal author was seen in,--this certainly is the greatest,--for I have *Hafen Slawkenbergius's* folio, Sir, to finish--a dialogue between my father and my uncle *Toby*,... and all this in five minutes less, than no time at all.... (III, 38:278)

Here, diegetic time invades the extradiegetic narrator's time to such a degree that, apparently, the time of the narrative act is squeezed out of existence.

Complementary to the time of the extradiegetic narrator is that of the extradiegetic narratee, disguised in the passage below as reading time:

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle *Toby* rung the bell, when *Obadiah* was ordered 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;--though, morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots. (II, 8:119)

29. For the original discussion of this narratological principle, see Gérard Genette, "Discours du récit", in: *Figures III*, collection Poétique (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1972), pp. 243-246. See also my "Freudian Symbolization Devices and their Relevance to Intertextuality," in: *Semiotics 1990 & Symbolicity*, Part 2: *Symbolicity. Proceedings of the International Conference in Honor of Thomas A. Sebeok's 70th Birthday*, Budapest/Vienna, 1990, eds. Jeff Bernard, Vilmos Voigt, and Gloria Withalm (Lanham [Maryland]: Univ. Press of America, 1992), pp. 140-147. A French translation of this article, entitled "Symbolisation freudienne et intertextualité", is to appear in *Littérature et psychanalyse*, Annales Littéraires de l'Université de Besançon.

On the same page, the arbitrary measure of an hour and a half's reading which is allotted to over forty pages of digressions (from Volume I, Chapter 21, to Volume II, Chapter 6) is set against the very precise "no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths" required by Obadiah to put on his boots.<sup>30</sup> A bit further on is presented an analogous set of circumstances, but with Tristram stressing how, during a limited period of diegetic time, he has managed to compress several events of a lengthier duration into the same span of time:

it is but a 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* .... (III, 8:120)

That the various forms of time at issue in the passages we have quoted are a purely textual convention (rather than a physical phenomenon) is borne out nowhere better, perhaps, than at a point when Tristram envisages the possibility of calibrating chapter divisions according to divisions within the diegesis:

Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs? 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... (IV, 10:336)

With the chapters of the text--an element of the extradiegetic level--put into a relation of analogy with the steps on a stairway which appear in story, it is revealed yet again to what extent metalepsis exercises a parasitic influence on the textuality of *Tristram Shandy*, disrupting the syntactic and the semantic organization we are accustomed to find in more conventional works. Not unlike Walter's "comedy of frustration" or Toby's "comedy of displacement," then, we can speak of the "comedy of inadequacy" played out by Tristram--inadequacy being, in this case, a *textual* inadequacy.<sup>31</sup>

30. See the diagram of these digressions in Gysin, *Model as Motif in Tristram Shandy*, p. 45.

31. With reference to a different sort of evidence, namely the parodic use of the scholarly activities involved in textual criticism, Everett Zimmerman has arrived at a similar view of how narration in *Tristram Shandy* seems to unravel at the seams: "Sterne's novel creates itself before our eyes, assembling itself as a book in the way that a textual editor might disassemble one" ("*Tristram Shandy* and Narrative Representation," *The Eighteenth Century* 29:2 [1987]:127-147, quotation p. 127).

Metalepses constitute a particularly striking variety of textual gaps in Sterne's masterpiece, and for this reason they provide a valuable key to the understanding of the imperfect fit between the work's use of language and its narrative content. At the same time, however, it is fascinating to observe how these devices are not limited to the strictly verbal features of the text, but enter into relation with its visual aspect, adding an intersemiotic dimension to metalepsis in *Tristram Shandy* and confirming in yet another way how the work goes about separating words from their objects. By drawing on the resources of typography, some visual devices are used to eliminate text, occasionally to the extent of irretrievability (stars replacing letters, words, or even entire paragraphs), while others are employed to approximate the sound of several voices speaking simultaneously (VII, 9) or alternately (VII, 25); some devices designate in ways that language cannot (the flourish of Trim's stick [IX, 4]), while others bear a puzzling relationship to the words of the text (the bizarre lines representing the storylines of the first five volumes [VI, 40]); some operate in conjunction with narrative devices (in Volume IX, Chapters 18 and 19 consist of blank pages, but two chapters under the headings "Chapter 18" and "Chapter 19"--printed in Gothic type--are inserted between Chapters 25 and 26); one seeks to complement the printed word (the black page in the chapter in which Yorick dies is a grotesquely oversized full stop [I, 12]), while another has a pictorial function (the reader is invited to provide a drawing of widow Wadman on the page provided [VI, 38]) and yet another an emblematic function (the marbled page--"motly emblem of my work!" [III, 36:268]--suggests that *Tristram Shandy* is a kind of Rorschach test: confronted with the disorder of the written page, each reader is left to work out for himself the configurations of the text).

William V. Holtz, to whom I am partially indebted for my understanding of the visual aspect of Sterne's novel, argues that the work represents an important exception to Lessing's reservations about the pictorial value of verbal structures, and he observes, plausibly enough, that it employs a variety of metaphors for the journey in order to incorporate time into the text along with metaphors for the picture to incorporate space.<sup>32</sup> Where I differ from Holtz, however, is in his referring Sterne's use of time and space back to texts which are "shaped" so as to imitate their subjects, such as George Herbert's poem "Easter Wings" (1633), appearing on the page in the form of a dove. Rather than to the isomorphism of form and content upon which such texts rely, I myself find it more appropriate to link *Tristram Shandy* to the discrepancy between written text and image so brilliantly exploited by Magritte in his painting *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* and whose filiation with the calligramme has been so perceptively commented upon by Michel Foucault:

32. *Image and Immortality: A Study of Tristram Shandy* (Providence: Brown UP, 1970), p. 81ff. and passim.

Le calligramme a résorbé [l']interstice [entre les mots et les formes]; mais une fois rouvert, il ne le restitue pas; le piège a été fracturé sur le vide : l'image et le texte tombent chacun de son côté, selon la gravitation qui leur est propre. Ils n'ont plus d'espace commun, plus de lieu où ils puissent interférer, où les mots soient susceptibles de recevoir une figure, et les images d'entrer dans l'ordre du lexique.<sup>33</sup>

*Tristram Shandy* is not a work of visual art or a calligramme, of course, nor does it pretend to incorporate vestiges of the calligramme into its discursive structures. However, the irreparable fracture between text and image which Foucault has studied in the painting by Magritte can serve to open up significant new vistas on the novel's use of metalepsis as a device that extends beyond the limits of the verbal to become an intersemiotic phenomenon.

The three aspects of *Tristram Shandy* upon which this article has focussed--the central event which constitutes the work as a text with a subject, the rhetorical figures which contribute to the structuring of the discourses of two of the principal characters, the metaleptic quality of the narrator's discourse--prove to be, if not inseparable, in any case interrelated in such a way as to bear upon many of the text's essential narrative and discursive features. Far from resolving themselves into any sort of formal model of the work, however, and in no way intended as illustrations of how *Tristram Shandy* represents a "deviation" from some particular narrative model or norm, the features of the book that have been taken into consideration in these pages suggest that Sterne's work is a text that is in a state of perpetual rupture with itself, its hydra-headed compositional means deploying themselves on ever-changing grounds.

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33. *Ceci n'est pas une pipe. Deux Lettres et Quatre Dessins de René Magritte* (n.p.: Fata Morgana, 1973), p. 34.