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Author(s): H. K. Russell
Source: *Studies in Philology,* Vol. 42, No. 3 (Jul., 1945), pp. 581-593
Published by: University of North Carolina Press
Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/4172719
Accessed: 19-04-2020 16:06 UTC

TRISTRAM SHANDY AND THE TECHNIQUE OF THE NOVEL

By H. K. Russell

By the time Laurence Sterne was writing *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, the novel had acquired its distinguishing traits as a literary type. E. A. Baker has summarized the mid-eighteenth century state of the novel:

> The novelists competing for public favour at the middle of the century were three—Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett. So well established by now was the new literary form that even writers of such wide orbits as Johnson and Goldsmith availed themselves of it, and half the fun of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* was in the way he turned the accepted structure upside down and inside out, or made the story go backwards instead of forward.[1]

Professor Baker's comment on the unconventional structure of *Tristram Shandy* is a point of departure for this paper. There is evidence that Sterne, more fully than has been realized, consciously examined the "standard" novel as represented by Fielding's work,[2] critically (not merely whimsically) indicated its shortcomings, and demonstrated what seemed to him preferable techniques.

Sterne's whimsicality has been sufficiently emphasized. Tristram's remark, "Ask my pen,—it governs me,—I govern not it" (Bk. VI, Ch. vi), is so ingenuous that we are likely to discount his request to his readers to "give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside . . ." (I, vi). As to Sterne's craftsmanship there is an occasional adverse judgment,[3] yet the general tendency is to credit him with knowing what he was doing:

[1] *The History of the English Novel* (London, 1930), IV, 197.

[2] "To Fielding is due the credit of establishing what may be regarded as the standard form, and of making the variations possible." (*Ibid.*, IV, 190-191.)

[3] For example: "In the novels of Laurence Sterne the marks of the decadence dimly observed in Smollett are fully perceived. The novel form, raised high by the careful workmanship of Richardson and Fielding, in the hands of Sterne was sacrificed to personal whim and deliberate eccentricity." (R. M. Lovett and H. S. Hughes, *The History of the Novel in England* [Boston, 1932], p. 85.)

But a reader at leisure could not fail to see that there might be a method in Sterne's madness: that every part of the book, every episode, every digression, whim, aside, or innuendo, was perhaps carefully premeditated, and the whole organized on a plan which the author was keeping a half secret.[4]

But the book was planned and written, for the most part, slowly and with care; and though no one would attempt or wish to reduce it to complete regularity, a just consideration of Sterne's purposes and of the work itself will remove the impression that it is compounded of naught but caprice. . . . There is . . . evidence of his foresighted planning of many of the incidents of his story.[5]

Perhaps an examination of the handling in *Tristram Shandy* of two of the major technical problems of the novelist—characterization and plot structure—may indicate that Sterne knew both what he was doing and why he was doing it, and that his treatment of these problems was not narrow and perverse but significant for the novel as a literary type.

The emphasis placed on character in *Tristram Shandy* indicates that Sterne believed the portrayal of character to be the prime job of the novelist, at least of the English novelist. Tristram Shandy quotes approvingly a statement that the English people show " a variety of odd and whimsical characters " which are for authors a " copious store-house of original materials " (I, xxi). Moreover, the moral purpose of literature is tied into the portrayal of characters: in his sermon, " Vindication of Human Nature," Sterne took occasion to say:

Before I reply directly to this accusation [that man is a selfish animal], I cannot help observing by the way, that there is scarce anything which has done more disservice to social virtue, than the frequent representations of human nature under this hideous picture of deformity, which, by leaving out all that is generous and friendly in the heart of man, has sunk him below the level of a brute, as if he was a composition of all that was mean-spirited and selfish. Surely, 'tis one step towards acting well, to think worthily of our nature: and, as in common life the way to make a man honest, is, to suppose him so, and treat him as such;—so here, to set some value upon ourselves, enables us to support the character, and even

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[4] W. L. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne* (New Haven, 1925), I, 185.

[5] J. A. Work, ed., *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (New York, 1940), xlvi, xlix. Professor Work's edition is carefully footnoted and is a reprint of the first London edition of each of the volumes. The passages quoted in this paper are taken from his text.

inspires and adds sentiments of generosity and virtue to those which we have already preconceived. The Scripture tells, That GOD made man in his own image. . . . [The] resemblance he bore was undoubtedly in the moral rectitude, and the kind and benevolent affections of his nature. . . . [This resemblance] and the consideration of it should have in some measure been a protection to human nature, from the rough usage she has met with from the satirical pens of so many of the French writers, as well as of our own country, who with more wit than well-meaning have desperately fallen foul upon the whole species. . . .[6]

Characterization would thus be a major problem for Sterne, as it is for most novelists.

A basic guide in characterization is the artistic method of indirection. Sterne realized its effectiveness. We do not have "Momus's glass, in the human breast"; we cannot view "the soul stark naked . . . and set down nothing but what [we have] seen. . . . This is an advantage not to be had by the biographer in this planet. . . . Our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood; so that if we would come to the specifick characters of them, we must go some other way to work." The method is, of course, the indirect approach through an eccentricity—"I will draw my uncle *Toby's* character from his HOBBY-HORSE" (I, xxiii).

The moral purpose of the characterization is attained in the same way, for "the lesson of universal good-will" is learned from an "accidental impression" more effectively than from formal instruction (II, xii—The incident concerned is uncle Toby's treatment of the fly). Indeed, the whole approach should have the accidental or casual quality of conversation: "Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation," with the reader's imagination kept as active as the author's (II, xi). Even the title fits this indirect or tangential procedure, and though the reader may not realize it, the characterization of uncle Toby is more ingratiating because the book carries Tristram's name rather than such a title as *The Life and Opinions of Mr. Toby Shandy.*

The demonstration of this technical principle in the characterization of the Shandy brothers, Trim, and Yorick is sufficiently obvious.[7] There is another personage whose characterization, often

[6] *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick,* with an Introduction by W. L. Cross (New York, 1904), I, 112-114.

[7] The detailed gestures for which Sterne has been often praised are

overlooked or discounted, shows clearly that Sterne controlled the technical resources appropriate to his purpose. Tristram Shandy himself is as carefully portrayed as any of Sterne's people, and for as precise an effect. He is the view-point [8] for the entire novel.

The extreme positions novelists can tell their stories from are the internal, first-person view-point, including the epistolary form, and the external, the view-point of the author himself, who personally conducts the reader through his narrative. Defoe and Richardson show how believable incidents and characters can be made when the author keeps out of the story; Fielding's introductory chapters and interspersed comments show how the directly expressed personality of the author can add to the reader's pleasure and understanding. Among the disadvantages of turning the story over to a character for telling is of course the muzzling of the author as commentator and what Henry James called " the terrible fluidity of self-revelation " by the character; " one makes that surrender only if one is prepared not to make certain precious discriminations." [9] One of the dangers of the personally conducted narrative is that the presence of the author makes the events and the characters seem too much managed for verisimilitude.

In the whole range of fiction there is no view-point more effective for both verisimilitude and commentary than that of the first-person narrative by a minor character.[10] This compromise pre-

habitually incidental and are always externalizations of the character's thought. A minor but perfect example is Toby's action when Trim has told him the reason for Mrs. Wadman's interest in his wound:

" The Corporal had advanced too far to retire—in three words he told the rest—

" My uncle Toby laid down his pipe as gently upon the fender, as if it had been spun from the unravellings of a spider's web—

" —Let us go to my brother Shandy's, said he " (IX, xxxi).

[9] M[anuel] K[omroff] in Dictionary of World Literature, ed. J. T. Shipley (New York, 1943): " VIEW-POINT. The relation in which the narrator stands to the story, considered by many critics to govern the method and character of the work. It may be either internal or external.

" In view-points that are internal, the person that is telling the story is one of the actors; hence the story is a first-person story. The external view-point presents a mind outside, of one that has not taken part in the story; in this case the story is usually third-person."

[9] Preface to The Ambassadors (New York, 1909), pp. xviii-xix.

[10] The definition quoted in footnote 8, above, continues: " There is also an internal, or first-person story which is told by a minor character, not

serves at once the independence of the main character and the opportunity for management and exposition. It is the view-point of *Tristram Shandy*.

The force of this choice of view-point has been obscured by the common assumption, fostered by Sterne himself, that the author and the narrator of the novel are precisely the same man.[11] Early in his London success, Sterne came to be known as Tristram Shandy. This identification was useful to him financially and socially; it made him the exemplar of the Shandean wit and good heart that he wished sincerely to teach. Thus we have become accustomed to thinking of Mr. Tristram Shandy as the Reverend Laurence Sterne. He is like Sterne in many respects, as David Copperfield is like Dickens or, more accurately, as Gulliver is like Swift. Tristram is a consciously-created character. He was born in 1718 (Sterne was born in 1713); he was thirty years old when Yorick died, and forty-one when he began the writing of his *Life and Opinions*.[12] He is a true son of the Shandy family, who "were of an original character throughout" (I, xxi). His petty misadventures have made him observant of the caprices of For-

the hero. This at once presents a great advantage. This minor character is able to describe the hero from outside, and also to work with the hero and relate the adventure. Where the hero is a wonderful person, *e. g.*, Lord Jim, this view-point is almost necessary, for it would be egotistical and quite unlike Lord Jim to tell the reader how wonderful he is. In the police mystery novel, the Dr. Watson serves the same purpose."

[11] Sometimes a comment goes so far as to deny any independent adult existence whatever to Tristram Shandy, the character in the novel: ". . . So far as Tristram Shandy is concerned, Sterne never got beyond the boy's birth, baptism, and breeching. There were no opinions to be recorded of a lad who existed merely as an embryo or as an infant in his nurse's arms." (W. L. Cross, "Laurence Sterne in the Twentieth Century," *Yale Review*, New Series, XV [1925-26], 104.) But Sterne has, within the novel, portrayed Tristram as a man old enough to travel on the Continent, to be suspected of keeping a mistress, and to write his own life and opinions. Sterne has even taken care of the objection that Tristram was not present at many of the scenes he records. Of the first incident in the novel Tristram remarks, " To my uncle Mr. *Toby Shandy* do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote . . ." (I, iii). To be equally specific throughout would involve Sterne in the pedantry he liked to satirize.

[12] For a discussion of Sterne's treatment of time and the framework of calendar time in the novel, see Theodore Baird, " The Time-Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," *PMLA*, LI (1936), 803-820.

tune; in "this scurvy and disasterous world of ours . . . , this vile, dirty planet" (I, v) he has found that the best cure for melancholy and the meanness of humanity is laughter and benevolent tolerance (IV, xxii, xxxii; I, vii; II, xii).

It is only necessary to recall that Tristram became Sterne during, and as a feature of, Sterne's literary and social celebrity. It would be more accurate to say rather that Sterne became Tristram: he had written the role in his Yorkshire parsonage; he now created the role in the salons and coffeehouses of London. Similarly he wrote the part of Yorick, a role he had acted in Yorkshire and continued to portray before a larger audience in *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* and *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy. By Mr. Yorick.* The difference between Tristram and Yorick is clear when we stop to consider; Tristram is chiefly the sentimental and sometimes naughty *wit*, Yorick the sentimental *moralist*.

There is in addition a tactical appropriateness in the view-point Sterne used. The direct portrayal of an eccentric cannot be effectively managed by the eccentric himself. We must see him through sympathetic eyes: Cervantes and Fielding (for Parson Adams) are examples of the sympathetic author; in a modern instance, P. G. Wodehouse has used Bertie Wooster as the narrator for the extraordinary Jeeves.[13]

Tristram Shandy, then, is a fictional creation. As first-person narrator and minor character he is accurately designed to provide the maximum of both verisimilitude and commentary; he is technically the most appropriate view-point for a novel which, like Sterne's earlier narrative, *The History of a Good Warm Watch-Coat*, portrayed, with some Rabelasian and Cervantic satire, a group of local eccentrics,[14] with emphasis upon characterization and im-

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[13] See note 10, above. What is said there of the "wonderful" character applies equally to the eccentric, who, as soon as he describes his own actions, seems to be putting on a show for the reader. This is precisely the effect Tristram has in the novel. He saves himself by three means: first, he is less eccentric than, and is fully aware of the eccentricity of, the Shandy brothers; second, he deliberately makes a "show" of his eccentricity; and third, he assures the reader that he has more wisdom than appears upon his outside.

[14] Cross, *op. cit.*, I, 183-184. Professor Cross points out that on the advice of his friends Sterne revised the manuscript of Books I and II toward universality and a more disciplined wit. (*Ibid.*, I, 175.) If Sterne first thought of his book as a satirical Grand Tour for Tristram, but

plication rather than events, and demonstrating the superiority of benevolence over worldly calculation.[15] Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, whose wit has been kept sweet by sentiment, might well hope, if not by his *Life*, surely by his *Opinions*, to do men good, for, in the motto Sterne chose for Tristram's book, Epictetus said, " It is not deeds, but men's opinions about deeds that stir men up."

Sterne handles a second major technical problem of the novelist— plot structure—so as to support the characterization. When he began the planning of his novel, the use of a chronological organization of events in fiction was well established. Fielding, with his discussion of the prosai-comi-epic, had given this kind of plot structure the prestige of the epic tradition; readers expected, as we usually expect today, to find events arranged according to clock or calendar time. This procedure is a presentation of human life with structural emphasis on the events, the deeds of the characters. But Sterne was convinced that " it is not deeds, but men's opinions about deeds " that ought to receive the emphasis.

Tristram Shandy expresses considerable contempt for an emphasis on events, on plot, at the expense of reflective reading. He has told one of his readers to repeat the preceding chapter—

'Tis to rebuke a vicious taste which has crept into thousands besides herself,—of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures, than of the deep erudition and knowledge which a book of this cast, if read over as it should be, would infallibly impart with them.—The mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections, and draw curious conclusions as it goes along. . . .

It is a terrible misfortune for this same book of mine, but more so to the Republick of Letters . . . that this self-same vile pruriency for fresh adventures in all things, has got so strongly into our habit and humours,— and so wholly intent are we upon satisfying the impatience of our con-

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found " this design . . . uncongenial . . . as with increasing experience and sureness he felt his own genius develop " (Work, *op. cit.*, p. xlvi), we may have a clue to his discovery of the effectiveness of Tristram as view-point. His success with the first-person view-point of an interested reporter in *A Good Warm Watch-Coat*, and his evident awareness of the value of indirection in characterization would lead him, in revision at any rate, to decide upon the first-person view-point of a minor character.

[15] Sterne seems to have found his own good nature ill matched with the cold maneuvering of York politicians. In *A Good Warm Watch-Coat* he discovered, as others have, that a sensitive man can through imaginative writing meet the world without the indignity of using the world's weapons.

cupiscence that way,—that nothing but the gross and more carnal parts of a composition will go down. . . .

I wish . . . all good people . . . may be taught to think as well as read (I, xx).

He has tried to arrange the plot structure of his book so that people will be induced to think as they read.[16]

How people think—an important consideration in this connection—Sterne discovered from observation of his own mental processes, but chiefly from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), "a history-book, Sir, . . . of what passes in a man's own mind . . ." (II, ii). He frankly quotes or paraphrases Locke, and the indebtedness has been thoroughly discussed.[17] The important concern here is his adaptation of a part of Locke's psychology to the problem of plot structure in the novel. If people are to "be taught to think as well as read," any rearrangement of time should shift emphasis from events, or plot, to sentiments and characters. Sterne's purposes would thus lead him to be dissatisfied with the clock or calendar time which had been accepted as the basis for plot structure in the "standard" novel, with its

[16] Johnson, it will be recalled, said that anyone who read Richardson for the story would hang himself—"you must read him for the sentiment." (Boswell's *Life*, Ch. xxvi.) The point Sterne makes in *Tristram Shandy* is close to the familiar doctrine of "sentiments." It might be said that Sterne revised Aristotle by placing "Characters" and "Thoughts" before "Plot."

[17] See Kenneth MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1936), *passim*. David Beaty, in an unpublished honors essay, "Sterne's Interpretation of John Locke in *Tristram Shandy*" (University of North Carolina, 1938), concludes that Sterne's method was more completely his own, that of skillfully managed conversation. W. B. C. Watkins has an illuminating discussion of the "Sternian conception of time, as relative, dependent upon the imagination and the point of view of the individual consciousness . . . the psychological principle underlying Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* and the time-dominated novels of Thomas Mann and Virginia Woolf." (*Perilous Balance: The Tragic Genius of Swift, Johnson, and Sterne* [Princeton, 1939], pp. 134-139.) There seems to be no evidence for any specific influence of Sterne on recent authors. Lodwick Hartley, in *This Is Lorence: A Narrative of the Reverend Laurence Sterne* (Chapel Hill, 1943, p. 86), describes the relationship accurately when he mentions James Joyce and Virginia Woolf as novelists "working in our own day under the influence of Bergson's psychology very much in the same way that Sterne wrote in the eighteenth century under the influence of Locke's."

events organized around obvious references to years, weeks, days; such are the headings of Books IV-XVIII of *Tom Jones.* Sterne believed that time in a novel should correspond to time in the reader's mind; it should be gauged by the succession of ideas.[18]

In this light, the incident of the arrival of Dr. Slop at Shandy Hall is not mere nonsense. It is a definite exposition of Sterne's belief that clock time in fiction should be subordinated to "thought" time; the succession of ideas in the reader's mind is the true measure of duration:

> It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle *Toby* rung the bell, when *Obediah* was order'd to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. *Slop*, the man-midwife;—so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed *Obediah* time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come;—tho', morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots.
>
> If the hypercritic will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum, and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell, and the rap at the door;—and, after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths,—should take upon him to insult over me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability, of time;—I would remind him, that the idea of duration and of its simple modes, is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas,—and is the true scholastic pendulum,—and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter,—abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever.

This is the proper handling of the problem. The conventional solution can be managed too, if the "hypercritic is intractable," insisting that, as Tristram says, this idea of duration

will damn me biographically, rendering my book . . . a profess'd ROMANCE, which, before, was a book apocryphal:—If I am thus pressed—I then put an end to the whole objection and controversy about it all at once,—by acquainting him, that *Obediah* had not got above three-score yards from the stable-yard before he met with Dr. *Slop* . . . (II, viii).[19]

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[18] Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Bk. II, Ch. xiv, Sect. 4: ". . . Men derive their ideas of duration from their reflections on the train of the ideas they observe to succeed one another in their own understandings; without which observation they can have no notion of duration, whatever may happen in the world."

It is interesting to recall that in the first scene of the novel Mrs. Shandy's inopportune reference to a *clock* is described as Tristram's first misfortune.

[19] Tristram was inaccurate in saying that an hour and a half's reading

The problem of time in the novel, then, is to be handled in terms of the succession of ideas. This succession is determined by association, and Locke's principle of the association of ideas suggests a solution for the most troublesome technical difficulty in plotting—the order of events. If a novelist begins his narrative or an episode within the narrative in the midst of things, how and when shall he work in the omitted antecedent events? And if he has more than one line of action, how shall he manage to get everything told?

O ye POWERS! (for powers ye are, and great ones too)—which enable mortal man to tell a story worth the hearing,—that kindly shew him, where he is to begin it,—and where he is to end it,—what he is to put into it,—and what he is to leave out,—how much of it he is to cast into shade,—and whereabouts he is to throw his light!—Ye, who preside over this vast empire of biographical freebooters, and see how many scrapes and plunges your subjects hourly fall into;—will you do one thing?

I beg and beseech you, (in case you will do nothing better for us) that wherever, in any part of your dominions it so falls out, that three several roads meet in one point, . . . —that at least you set up a guide-post, in the center of them, in mere charity to direct an uncertain devil, which of the three he is to take (III, xxiii).

For antecedent events the standard technique is a narrative in retrospect, more or less obviously introduced.[20] The method of

time had elapsed since Toby rang the bell. Uncle Toby began his sentence, "I think," in Book I, Chapter xxi. He finished it, "I think it would not be amiss, brother, if we rung the bell," in Book II, Chapter vi. The rap at the door came toward the end of Chapter vii. It is an hour and a half's reading time since Toby began the sentence; but it is only a few minutes' reading time since he rang the bell. Thus reading time and the clock time of Obediah's errand correspond very closely. Even though the errand was unexpectedly short, Tristram's scholastic pendulum measured it accurately; he satisfied the hypercritic, but without discrediting the succession of ideas as the true measure of duration. This is a tricky detail; perhaps Sterne was not aware of what he made Tristram write, but this extra twist is the sort of joke he enjoyed.

[20] *Odyssey*, IX—Odysseus to Alcinous: "'But come, let me tell thee too of the troubles of my journeying, which Zeus laid on me as I came from Troy.'" *Paradise Lost*, V, 555-557—Adam to Rafael: "'. . . If thou consent,/ The full relation, which must needs be strange,/ Worthy of sacred silence to be heard.'" *Tom Jones*, XVIII, vii—"'Have patience, sir,' said Mrs. Waters, 'and I will unfold to you the whole story.'" *Vanity Fair*, ii—"Miss Sharp's father was an artist. . . . Rebecca's mother had had some education somewhere. . . ."

Tristram Shandy does not subordinate antecedent events to an arbitrary rearrangement of calendar time; it integrates them with the portrayal of character, carefully leading the reader's train of ideas. The procedure is fully explained in the novel. The reader should, as we have noticed, think as well as read: this thinking is largely the following up of implications, of suggested trains of ideas, that is, of digressions. "Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading. . . ." The usual management of digressions is unsatisfactory for the reader, but especially for "the author, whose distress, in this matter, is truely pitiable: For, if he begins a digression,—from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock-still;—and if he goes on with his main work,—then there is an end of his digression.—This is vile work." In contrast, Tristram says, ". . . My work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time" (I, xxii). The method, of course, is to choose for the digression a moment when some minor act is in progress ("uncle *Toby*, taking his pipe from his mouth, and striking the head of it two or three times upon the nail of his left thumb" [I, xxi]) and to keep the act on the periphery of the reader's consciousness by occasional references to it. The digression which gives the antecedent events of uncle Toby's career and in part for the Shandy family is sustained in this manner for ten chapters.

The same method is used where there are two lines of action which require to be narrated simultaneously. One line of action concerns a conversation between the Shandy brothers while Mrs. Shandy listens at the door; the other is Trim's oration upon death in the kitchen. As Mrs. Shandy listens—"In this attitude I am determined to let her stand for five minutes: till I bring up the affairs of the kitchen (as Rapin does those of the church)[21] to the same period" (V, v). This method, which Sterne uses consciously, and to which he calls the reader's attention, has, like his progressive-digressive technique for antecedent events, the advantage of keeping the main action on the edge of consciousness while the minor action is developed. The usual somewhat heavy-handed way of meeting this problem is undoubtedly logical;[22] but the

[21] In Rapin's history of England the books conclude with separate narratives entitled "The State of the Church," without, however, the connection of a suspended minor act.

[22] *Tom Jones*, X, vii-viii—"Thus ended the many odd adventures which

Shandy technique is more sensitively adapted to the nature of the reader's mind.[23]

These are Sterne's ways of managing some of the major technical problems of the novelist. His accomplishment becomes clearer when we see him against the background of his own century. In the first great age of English fiction he applied his genius and his technical skill to the novel of character, which meant to him as to his contemporaries the portrayal of those " odd and whimsical characters " provided by England, the " copious store-house of original materials." These original materials could not be freely exploited in the novel of Richardson;[24] in Smollett (whom Sterne

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Mr. Jones encountered at his inn at Upton. . . . Before we proceed any farther in our history, it may be proper to look a little back, in order to account for the extraordinary appearance of Sophia and her father at the inn at Upton." *The Heart of Midlothian,* xvi—" Like the digressive poet Ariosto, I find myself under the necessity of connecting the branches of my story, by taking up the adventures of another of the characters, and bringing them down to the point at which we have left those of Jeanie Deans. It is not, perhaps, the most artificial way of telling a story, but it has the advantage of sparing the necessity of resuming what a knitter . . . might call our ' dropped stitches '; a labour in which the author generally toils much, without getting credit for his pains." Scott has left Jeanie Deans, not in a minor act, but waiting " in terror and amazement the hasty advance of three or four men towards her. . . ." *Vanity Fair,* xxv—" Our history is destined in this chapter to go backwards and for-wards in a very irresolute manner seemingly, and having conducted our story to to-morrow presently, we shall immediately again have occasion to step back to yesterday, so that the whole of the tale may get a hearing. . . . We have only now advanced in time so far beyond Chapter XXII [when the regiment was ordered to Belgium] as to have got our various characters up into their dressing-rooms. . . ." Thackeray's problem is difficult; Tristram Shandy professed to be helpless when faced by more than two lines of action.

[23] The description of Yorick's death at the beginning of the novel (I, xii) is a subsequent event rather than an antecedent or simultaneous event, but it illustrates the same emphasis upon character instead of chronology; the manner of Yorick's death is fully characteristic and sets the tone for his portrayal throughout the novel.

[24] " Caution and Discretion, for example—the virtues of Samuel Richard-son and his heroines—were to Sterne only the evil propensities of human nature, inasmuch as they are always intruding upon a man's conduct to prevent the free and spontaneous expression of his selfhood." (Cross, *op. cit.,* II, 219.)

named Smelfungus) the treatment tended toward harsh satire or a
general picture of manners; [25] and with Fielding, who, like Aris-
totle, ranked plot before character, there was danger that they
might be obscured by the vigorous activity and the emphasis on
the plotting of the events. The novel in England needed pointing
toward characterization; it needed a re-examination, after Fielding,
of the place and the technical management of plot structure in
relation to characterization.

This was Sterne's contribution. Because he had studied the
nature of the reader's mind, he understood not merely the appro-
priate techniques but the reasons these techniques are appropriate.
He described and demonstrated as soundly as any of the great
critic-creators the technical resources of the novel as a literary type.

University of North Carolina.

[25] " When *Tristram Shandy* began to appear, there was real danger that
the English novel would remain little more than a mirror of contem-
porary life: a reproduction, often photographically accurate, of the social
conditions of the time. Defoe, Fielding, Smollett, each in his own way
and according to the measure of his genius, had yielded to the impulse;
Richardson alone, by striking into tragedy, had partially escaped. Sterne
defiantly throws himself athwart the tradition of the elders." (*CHEL*,
X, 53.)