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Viktor Shklovsky

THEORY OF PROSE

Translated by Benjamin Sher
with an Introduction by Gerald L. Bruns

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with a list of all of the principal characters. However, this is not so much reminiscence as parody:

"Enough," I said, entering, at long last, into the shop. "What nonsense are you babbling here. I can't make heads or tails. And is there any sense in getting so excited over such a petty thing?"

I picked up a large lamp with a dark blue lampshade and lit its bright flame, so that I could look intently at those present one last time before saying good-bye.

"You'll get what you deserve for this! you hack!" Frau Bach grumbled. "What gives you the idea that you can act as if you were at home?!"

"Pipe down, Frau Bach!" I said with full composure. "I need to say a few words to all of you before bidding farewell."

I got up on the chair, waved my arms and said: "Attention, please!" Instantly, the faces of all present turned to me:

"Attention! This is the final chapter, my dear friends. Soon we shall have to part. I have come to love each and every one of you, and this separation shall be very hard on me. But time goes on, the plot is used up, and nothing could be more boring than to revive the statue, to turn it around, and then to marry him to the virtuous . . ."

"May I be so bold as to observe," a stranger interrupted me, "that it would be very helpful, my dear writer, to explain a number of things first."

"Yes?" I said, lifting my eyebrows in surprise. "Did anything seem unclear to you at the end?"

"If I may be so bold as to inquire," the stranger continued with a courteous but cunning smile. "I mean, what about the charlatan, who . . ."

"Tsh!" I interrupted him with a cautious whisper. "Please, not a word about the charlatan. Mum is the word. In your place, my dear friend, I would have asked why the professor fell silent."

"You threw into the envelope some kind of a poisonous drug," said Bor.

"How silly!" I replied, "You are a tedious young man, Robert Bor. The professor fell silent, because . . ." At this very instant, Bach's old wife put out the lamp. In the darkness I carefully climbed down from the chair, shook tenderly the hands of all present and walked out. ("The Chronicle of the City of Leipzig for the Year 18—")

We see here the laying bare of the Dickensian device. As in the case of the English writer, all of the protagonists are brought together. It is not, however, the characters who explain the action but the author himself. What we have before us is not a denouement, as such. Instead, the device for its resolution is pointed out. There is no real denouement because the source of motivation here is parody.

Chapter 7

The Novel as Parody: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

I do not intend in this chapter to analyze Laurence Sterne's novel. Rather, I shall use it in order to illustrate the general laws governing plot structure. Sterne was a radical revolutionary as far as form is concerned. It was typical of him to lay bare the device. The aesthetic form is presented without any motivation whatsoever, simply as is. The difference between the conventional novel and that of Sterne is analogous to the difference between a conventional poem with sonorous instrumentation and a Futurist poem composed in transrational language (*zaumnyi yazyk*). Nothing has as yet been written about Sterne, or if so, then only a few trivial comments.

Upon first picking up Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, we are overwhelmed by a sense of chaos.

The action constantly breaks off, the author constantly returns to the beginning or leaps forward. The main plot, not immediately accessible, is constantly interrupted by dozens of pages filled with whimsical deliberations on the influence of a person's nose or name on his character or else with discussions of fortifications.

The book opens, as it were, in the spirit of autobiography, but soon it is deflected from its course by a description of the hero's birth. Nevertheless, our hero, pushed aside by material interpolated into the novel, cannot, it appears, get born.

Tristram Shandy turns into a description of one day. Let me quote Sterne himself:

I will not finish that sentence till I have made an observation upon the strange state of affairs between the reader and myself, just as things stand at present——an observation never applicable before to any one biographical writer since the creation of the world, but to myself——and I believe will never hold good to any other, until its final destruction——and therefore, for the very novelty of it alone, it must be worth your worships attending to.

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume——and no farther than to my first day's life——'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of

advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it——on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—— (285-86)*

But when you examine the structure of the book more closely, you perceive first of all that this disorder is intentional. There is method to Sterne's madness. It is as regular as a painting by Picasso.

Everything in the novel has been displaced and rearranged. The dedication to the book makes its appearance on page 25, even though it violates the three basic demands of a dedication, as regards content, form, and place.

The preface is no less unusual. It occupies nearly ten full printed pages, but it is found not in the beginning of the book but in volume 3, chapter 20, pages 192-203. The appearance of this preface is motivated by the fact that

> 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.

Sterne pulls out all the stops in his ingenious attempt to confound the reader. As his crowning achievement, he transposes a number of chapters in *Tristram Shandy* (i.e., chapters 18 and 19 of volume 9 come after chapter 25). This is motivated by the fact that: "All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, '*to let people tell their stories their own way*' " (633).

However, the rearrangement of the chapters merely lays bare another fundamental device by Sterne which impedes the action.

At first Sterne introduces an anecdote concerning a woman who interrupts the sexual act by asking a question (5).

This anecdote is worked into the narrative as follows: Tristram Shandy's father is intimate with his wife only on the first Sunday of every month, and we find him on that very evening winding the clock so as to get his domestic duties "out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pester'd with them the rest of the month" (8).

Thanks to this circumstance, an irresistible association has arisen in his wife's mind: as soon as she hears the winding of the clock, she is immediately reminded of something different, and vice versa (20). It is precisely with the question "*Pray, my dear, . . . have you not forgot to wind up the clock?*" (5) that Tristram's mother interrupts her husband's act.

This anecdote is preceded by a general discussion on the carelessness of parents (4-5), which is followed in turn by the question posed by his mother (5), which remains unrelated to anything at this point. We're at first under the impression that she has interrupted her husband's speech. Sterne plays with our error:

> *Good G—!* cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, —— "*Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?* Pray, what was your father saying? ——Nothing. (5)

*Page references are to James A. Work's edition (Odyssey Press, 1940). Shklovsky used a Russian translation of *Tristram Shandy* that appeared in the journal *Panteon literatury* in 1892.

This is followed (5-6) by a discussion of the homunculus (fetus), spiced up with anecdotal allusions to its right of protection under the law.

It is only on pages 8-9 that we receive an explanation of the strange punctuality practiced by our hero's father in his domestic affairs.

So, from the very beginning of the novel, we see in *Tristram Shandy* a displacement in time. Causes follow effects, the possibilities for false resolutions are prepared by the author himself. This is a perennial device in Sterne. The paronomastic motif of coitus, associated with a particular day, pervades the entire novel. Appearing from time to time, it serves to connect the various parts of this unusually complex masterpiece.

If we were to represent the matter schematically, it would take on the following form: the event itself would be symbolized by a cone, while the cause would be symbolized by its apex. In a conventional novel, such a cone is attached to the main plot line of the novel precisely by its apex. In Sterne, on the contrary, the cone is attached to the main plot line by its base. We are thus immediately thrust into a swarm of allusions and insinuations.

Such temporal transpositions are frequently met with in the poetics of the novel. Let us recall, for example, the temporal rearrangement in *A Nest of the Gentry*, which is motivated by Lavretsky's reminiscence. Or then again "Oblomov's Dream." Similarly, we encounter temporal transpositions without motivation in Gogol's *Dead Souls* (Chichikov's childhood and Tentetnikov's upbringing). In Sterne, however, this device pervades the entire work.

The exposition, the preparation of a given character comes only after we have already puzzled long and hard over some strange word or exclamation already uttered by this same character.

We are witnessing here a laying bare of the device. In *The Belkin Tales* (e.g., "The Shot"), Pushkin makes extensive use of temporal transposition. At first we see Silvio practicing at the shooting range, then we hear Silvio's story about the unfinished duel, then we meet the count, Silvio's adversary, and this is climaxed by the denouement. The various segments are given in the following sequence: 2 – 1 – 3. Yet this permutation is clearly motivated, while Sterne, on the contrary, lays bare the device. As I have already said, Sterne's transposition is an end in itself:

> What I have to inform you, comes, I own, a little out of its due course; ——for it should have been told a hundred and fifty pages ago, but that I foresaw then 'twould come in pat hereafter, and be of more advantage here than elsewhere. (144)

In addition, Sterne lays bare the device by which he stitches the novel out of individual stories. He does so, in general, by manipulating the structure of his novel, and it is the consciousness of form through its violation that constitutes the content of the novel.

In my chapter on *Don Quixote* I have already noted several canonical devices for integrating tales into a novel.

Sterne makes use of new devices or, when using old ones, he does not conceal their conventionality. Rather, he plays with them by thrusting them to the fore.

In the conventional novel an inset story is interrupted by the main story. If the main story consists of two or more plots, then passages from them follow alternately, as in *Don Quixote,* where scenes of the hero's adventures at the duke's court alternate with scenes depicting Sancho Panza's governorship.

Zelinsky points out something completely contrary in Homer. He never depicts two simultaneous actions. Even if the course of events demands simultaneity, still they are presented in a causal sequence. The only simultaneity possible occurs when Homer shows us one protagonist in action, while alluding to another protagonist in his inactive state.

Sterne allows for simultaneity of action, but he parodies the deployment of the plot line and the intrusion of new material into it.

In the first part of the novel we are offered, as material for development, a description of Tristram Shandy's birth. This description occupies 276 pages, hardly any of which deals with the description of the birth itself. Instead, what is developed for the most part is the conversation between the father of our hero and Uncle Toby.

This is how the development takes place:

> —— I wonder what's all that noise, and running backwards and forwards for, above stairs, quoth my father, addressing himself, after an hour and a half's silence, to my uncle Toby,——who you must know, was sitting on the opposite side of the fire, smoking his social pipe all the time, in mute contemplation of a new pair of black-plush-breeches which he had got on;——What can they be doing brother? quoth my father,——we can scarce hear ourselves talk.
>
> I think, replied my 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, 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 out-lines of which I shall just give you, and then the dialogue between him and my father will go on as well again. (63)

A discussion concerning inconstancy begins immediately thereafter. This discussion is so whimsical that the only way to convey it would be to literally transcribe it verbatim. On page 65 Sterne remembers: "But I forget my uncle Toby, whom all this while we have left knocking the ashes out of his tobacco pipe."

Conversations concerning Uncle Toby, along with a brief history of Aunt Dinah follow. On page 72 Sterne remembers: "I was just going, for example, to have given you the great out-lines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character;——when my aunt Dinah and the coachman came a-cross us, and led us a vagary. . . ."

Unfortunately I cannot quote all of Sterne and shall therefore leap over a large part of the text:

> . . . 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. (73-74)

So ends chapter 22. It is followed by chapter 23: "I have a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter very nonsensically, and I will not balk my fancy.——Accordingly I set off thus."

We have before us new digressions.

On page 77 the author reminds us that: "If I was not morally sure that the reader must be out of all patience for my uncle Toby's character, . . ."

A page later begins a description of Uncle Toby's "Hobby-Horse" (i.e., his mania). It turns out that Uncle Toby, who was wounded in the groin at the siege of Namur, has a passion for building model fortresses. Finally, however, on page 99, Uncle Toby finishes the task he had started on page 63:

> I think, replied my uncle Toby,——taking, as I told you, his pipe from his mouth, and striking the ashes out of it as he began his sentence;——I think, replied he,——it would not be amiss, brother, if we rung the bell.

This device is constantly used by Sterne and, as is evident from his facetious reminders of Uncle Toby, he's not only aware of the hyperbolic nature of such development but plays with it.

This method of developing the action is, as I've already said, the norm for Sterne. Here's an example from page 144: "I wish, . . . you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders." This is immediately followed by a development of the material concerned with the father's mania. The following manias are woven into the character of Tristram Shandy's father: the subject of the harmful effect of the pressure exerted on the baby's head by the mother's contractions during labor (149-54), the influence of a person's name on his character (this motif is developed in great detail), and the effect of the size of the nose on a person's faculties (this motif is developed with unusual magnificence from page 217 on). After a brief pause begins the development of the material concerned with the curious stories about noses. Especially remarkable is the story of Slawkenbergius. Tristram's father knows a full ten dozen stories by this man. The development of the theme of noseology concludes on page 272.

Mr. Shandy's first mania also plays a role in this development. That is, Sterne digresses in order to speak about it. The main plot returns on page 157:

"I wish, Dr. Slop," quoth my uncle Toby (repeating his wish for Dr. Slop a second time, and with a degree of more zeal and earnestness in his manner of wishing, than he had wished it at first)——"I wish, Dr. Slop," quoth my uncle Toby, *"you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders."*

Again, the developmental material intrudes.

On page 163 we again find: " 'What prodigious armies you had in Flanders!' "

This conscious, exaggerated development often takes place in Sterne even without the use of a repetitive, connective phrase:

The moment my father got up into his chamber, he threw himself prostrate across his bed in the wildest disorder imaginable, but at the same time, in the most lamentable attitude of a man borne down with sorrows, that ever the eye of pity dropp'd a tear for. (215-16)

There follows a description of a bodily posture, very characteristic of Sterne:

The palm of his right hand, as he fell upon the bed, receiving his forehead, and covering the greatest part of both his eyes, gently sunk down with his head (his elbow giving way backwards) till his nose touch'd the quilt;——his left arm hung insensible over the side of the bed, his knuckles reclining upon the handle of the chamber pot, which peep'd out beyond the valance,——his right leg (his left being drawn up towards his body) hung half over the side of the bed, the edge of it pressing upon his shin-bone.

Mr. Shandy's despair is called forth by the fact that the bridge of his son's nose was crushed during delivery by the midwife's tongs. This occasions (as I have already said) a whole epic on noses. On page 273 we return once more to the bedridden father: "My father lay stretched across the bed as still as if the hand of death had pushed him down, for a full hour and a half, before he began to play upon the floor with the toe of that foot, which hung over the bed-side."

I cannot restrain myself from saying a few words about Sterne's postures in general. Sterne was the first writer to introduce a description of poses into the novel. They're always depicted by him in a strange manner, or rather they are enstranged.

Here is another example: "Brother Toby, replied my father, 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, . . " (158).

Let us move right on to the next page: "It was not an easy matter in any king's reign, (unless you were as lean a subject as myself) to have forced your hand diagonally, quite across your whole body, so as to gain the bottom of your opposite coat-pocket."

Sterne's method of depicting postures was inherited by Leo Tolstoi (Eikhenbaum), but in a weaker form and with a psychological motivation.

Let us now return to the development. I shall offer several examples of

development in Sterne, and I shall select a case in which the device turns upon itself, so to speak, that is, where the realization of the form constitutes the content of the work:

What a chapter of chances, said my father, turning himself about upon the first landing, as he and my uncle Toby were going down stairs——what a long chapter of chances do the events of this world lay open to us! (279)

A discussion with an erotic tinge, of which I shall speak more later:

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. (281)

This entire chapter is dedicated by Sterne to a discussion of chapters.

Vol. 4, chap. 11: We shall bring all things to rights, said my father, setting his foot upon the first step from the landing. . . . (283)

Chap. 12: ——And how does your mistress? cried my father, taking the same step over again from the landing, . . . (284)

Chap. 13: Holla!——you chairman!——here's sixpence——do step into that bookseller's shop, and call me a *day-tall* critick. I am very willing to give any one of 'em a crown to help me with his tackling, to get my father and my uncle Toby off the stairs, and to put them to bed. . . .

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume——and no farther than to my first day's life——'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it——on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back. . . . (285-86)

This orientation towards form and towards the normative aspect of that form reminds us of the octaves and sonnets which were filled with nothing but a description of the fact of their composition.

I would like to add one final example of Sterne's development:

My mother was going very gingerly in the dark along the passage which led to the parlour, as my uncle Toby pronounced the word *wife.*——'Tis a shrill, penetrating sound of itself, and Obadiah had helped it by leaving the door a little a-jar, so that my mother heard enough of it, to imagine herself the subject of the conversation: so laying the edge of her finger across her two lips——holding in her breath, and bending her head a little downwards, with a twist of her neck——(not towards the door, but from it, by which means her ear was brought to the chink)——she listened with all her powers:——the listening slave, with the Goddess of Silence at his back, could not have given a finer thought for an intaglio.

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) to the same period. (357-58)

Vol. 5, chap. 11: I am a Turk if I had not as much forgot my mother, as if Nature had plaistered me up, and set me down naked upon the banks of the river Nile, without one.

However, these reminders are followed again by digressions. The reminder itself is necessary only in order to renew our awareness of the "forgotten mother," so that its development would not fade from view.

Finally, on page 370, the mother changes her posture: "Then, cried my mother, opening the door, . . ."

Here Sterne develops the action by resorting to a second parallel story. Instead of being presented discursively, time in such novels is thought to have come to a stop or, at least, it is no longer taken into account. Shakespeare uses inset scenes in precisely this way. Thrust into the basic action of the plot, they deflect us from the flow of time. And even if the entire inset conversation (invariably, with new characters) lasts for only a few minutes, the author considers it possible to carry on the action (presumably without lowering the proscenium curtain which in Shakespeare's theater most likely did not exist), as if hours had passed or even an entire night (Silverswan). By mentioning them and by reminding us of the fact that his mother has been left standing bent over, Sterne fulfills the device and compels us to experience it.

It is interesting in general to study the role of time in Sterne's works. "Literary" time is pure conventionality whose laws do not coincide with the laws of ordinary time. If we were to examine, for example, the plethora of stories and incidents packed into *Don Quixote,* we would perceive that the day as such hardly exists at all, since the cycle of day and night does not play a compositional role in the alternation of events. Similarly in Abbé Prévost's narration in *Manon Lescaut:* the Chevalier de Grieux relates the first part of the novel in one fell swoop, and then after taking a breather, he relates the remainder. Such a conversation would last about sixteen hours, and only if the Chevalier read them through quickly.

I have already spoken about the conventionality of time onstage. In Sterne this conventionality of "literary" time is consciously utilized as material for play.

Volume 2, chapter 8:

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was order'd to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. Slop the man-midwife;——so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come;——tho', morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots.

If the hypercritick will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum, and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell, and the rap at the door; ——and, after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths,——should take upon him to insult over me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability, of time;——I would 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 scholastick pendulum,——and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter,——abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever.

I would, therefore, desire him to consider that it is but poor eight miles from Shandy-Hall to Dr. Slop, the man mid-wife's house;——and that whilst Obadiah has been going those said miles and back, I have brought my uncle Toby from Namur, quite across all Flanders, into England:——That I have had him ill upon my hands near four years;——and have since travelled him and Corporal Trim, in a chariot and four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire;—— all which put together, must have prepared the reader's imagination for the entrance of Dr. Slop upon the stage,——as much, at least, (I hope) as a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts.

If my hypercritick is intractable, alledging, that two minutes and thirteen seconds are no more than two minutes and thirteen seconds,——when I have said all I can about them;——and that this plea, tho' it might save me dramatically, will damn me biographically, rendering my book, from this very moment, 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 Obadiah had not got above threescore yards from the stable-yard before he met with Dr. Slop. (103-4)

From the old devices, and with hardly a change, Sterne made use of the device of the "found manuscript." This is the way in which Yorick's sermon is introduced into the novel. But the reading of this found manuscript does not represent a long digression from the novel and is constantly interrupted mainly by emotional outbursts. The sermon occupies pages 117-41 but it is vigorously pushed aside by Sterne's usual interpretations.

The reading begins with a description of the corporal's posture, as depicted with the deliberate awkwardness so typical of Sterne:

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon;——which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence; . . . (122)

Later he again writes:

He stood,——for I repeat it, to take the picture of him in at one view, with his body sway'd, and somewhat bent forwards,——his right leg firm under him, sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight,——the foot of his left leg, the defect of which was no disadvantage to his attitude, advanced a little,——not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line betwixt them; . . .

And so on. The whole description occupies more than a page. The sermon is interrupted by the story of Corporal Trim's brother. This is followed by the dissenting theological interpolations of the Catholic listener (125, 126, 128, 129, etc.) and by Uncle Toby's comment on fortifications (133, 134, etc.). In this way the reading of the manuscript in Sterne is far more closely linked to the novel than in Cervantes.

The found manuscript in *Sentimental Journey* became Sterne's favorite device. In it he discovers the manuscript of Rabelais, as he supposes. The manuscript breaks off, as is typical for Sterne, for a discussion about the art of wrapping merchandise. The unfinished story is canonical for Sterne, both in its motivated as well as unmotivated forms. When the manuscript is introduced into the novel, the break is motivated by the loss of its conclusion. The simple break which concludes *Tristram Shandy* is completely unmotivated:

L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?——
A cock and a bull, said Yorick——And one of the best of its kind, I ever heard.

Sentimental Journey ends in the same way: ". . . So that when I stretch'd out my hand, I caught hold of the Fille de Chambre's—"

This is of course a definite stylistic device based on differential qualities. Sterne was writing against a background of the adventure novel with its extremely rigorous forms that demanded, among other things, that a novel end with a wedding or marriage. The forms most characteristic of Sterne are those which result from the displacement and violation of conventional forms. He acts no differently when it is time for him to conclude his novels. It is as if we fell upon them: on the staircase, for instance, in the very place where we expect to find a landing, we find instead a gaping hole. Gogol's "Ivan Fyodorovich Shponka and His Auntie" represents just such a method of ending a story, but with a motivation: the last page of the manuscript goes for the wrapping of baked pies. (Sterne, on the other hand, uses the ending of his manuscript to wrap black currant preserves.) The notes for Hoffmann's *Kater Murr* present much the same picture, with a motivated absence of the ending, but they are complicated by a temporal transposition (that is, they are motivated by the fact that the pages are in disarray) and by a parallel structure.

The tale of Le Fever is introduced by Sterne in a thoroughly traditional way. Tristram's birth occasions a discussion concerning the choice of a tutor. Uncle Toby proposes for the role the poor son of Le Fever, and thus begins an inset tale, *which is carried on in the name of the author:*

Then, brother Shandy, answered my uncle Toby, raising himself off the chair, and laying down his pipe to take hold of my father's other hand,——I humbly beg I may recommend poor Le Fever's son to you;——a tear of joy of the first water sparkled in my uncle Toby's eye,——and another, the fellow to it, in the corporal's as the proposition was made;——you will see why when you read Le Fever's story:——fool that I was! nor can I recollect, (nor perhaps you) without turning back to the place, what it was that hindred me from letting the corporal tell it in his own words;——but the occasion is lost,——I must tell it now in my own. (415-16)

The tale of Le Fever now commences. It covers pages 379-95. A description of Tristram's journeys also represents a separate unit. It occupies pages

436-93. This episode was later deployed step for step and motif for motif in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey.* In the description of the journey Sterne has interpolated the story of the Abbess of Andoüillets (459-65).

This heterogeneous material, weighed down as it is with long extracts from the works of a variety of pedants, would no doubt have broken the back of this novel, were it not that the novel is held together tightly by leitmotivs. A specific motif is neither developed nor realized; it is merely mentioned from time to time. Its fulfillment is deferred to a point in time which seems to be receding further and further away from us. Yet, its very presence throughout the length and breadth of the novel serves to link the episodes.

There are several such motifs. One is the motif of the knots. It appears in the following way: a sack containing Dr. Slop's obstetrical instruments is tied in several knots:

'Tis God's mercy, quoth he [Dr. Slop], (to himself) that Mrs. Shandy has had so bad a time of it,——else she might have been brought to bed seven times told, before one half of these knots could have got untied. (167)

In the case of *knots,*——by which, in the first place, I would not be understood to mean slip-knots,——because in the course of my life and opinions,——my opinions concerning them will come in more properly when I mention. . . . (next chapter)

A discussion concerning knots and loops and bows continues ad nauseam. Meanwhile, Dr. Slop reaches for his knife and cuts the knots. Due to his carelessness, he wounds his hand. He then begins to swear, whereupon the elder Shandy, with Cervantesque seriousness, suggests that instead of carrying on in vain, he should curse in accordance with the rules of art. In his capacity as the leader, Shandy then proposes the Catholic formula of excommunication. Slop picks up the text and starts reading. The formula occupies two full pages. It is curious to observe here the motivation for the appearance of material considered necessary by Sterne for further development. This material is usually represented by works of medieval learning, which by Sterne's time had already acquired a comical tinge. (As is true also of words pronounced by foreigners in their peculiar dialects.) This material is interspersed in Tristram's father's speech, and its appearance is motivated by his manias. Here, though, the motivation is more complex. Apart from the father's role, we encounter also material concerning the infant's baptism before his birth and the lawyers' comical argument concerning the question of whether the mother was a relative of her own son.

The "knots" and "chambermaids" motif appears again on page 363. But then the author dismisses the idea of writing a chapter on them, proposing instead another chapter on chambermaids, green coats, and old hats. However the matter of the knots is not yet exhausted. It resurfaces at the very end on page 617 in the form of a promise to write a special chapter on them.

Similarly, the repeated mention of Jenny also constitutes a running motif throughout the novel. Jenny appears in the novel in the following way:

. . . it is no more than a week from this very day, in which I am now writing this book for the edification of the world,——which is March 9, 1759,——that my dear, dear Jenny observing I look'd a little grave, as she stood cheapening a silk of five-and-twenty shillings a yard,——told the mercer, she was sorry she had given him so much trouble;——and immediately went and bought herself a yard-wide stuff of ten-pence a yard. (44)

On page 48 Sterne plays with the reader's desire to know what role Jenny plays in his life:

I own the tender appellation of my dear, dear Jenny,——with some other strokes of conjugal knowledge, interspersed here and there, might, naturally enough, have misled the most candid judge in the world into such a determination against me. ——All I plead for, in this case, Madam, is strict justice, and that you do so much of it, to me as well as to yourself,——as not to prejudge or receive such an impression of me, till you have better evidence, than I am positive, at present, can be produced against me:——Not that I can be so vain or unreasonable, Madam, as to desire you should therefore think, that my dear, dear Jenny is my kept mistress; ——no,——that would be flattering my character in the other extream, and giving it an air of freedom, which, perhaps, it has no kind of right to. All I contend for, is the utter impossibility for some volumes, that you, or the most penetrating spirit upon earth, should know how this matter really stands.——It is not impossible, but that my dear, dear Jenny! tender as the appellation is, may be my child.——Consider,——I was born in the year eighteen.——Nor is there any thing unnatural or extravagant in the supposition, that my dear Jenny may be my friend.——Friend! ——My friend. Surely, Madam, a friendship between the two sexes may subsist, and be supported without——Fy! Mr. Shandy:——Without any thing, Madam, but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference of sex.

The Jenny motif appears again on page 337:

I shall never get all through in five minutes, that I fear——and the thing I *hope* is, that your worships and reverences are not offended——if you are, depend upon't I'll give you something, my good gentry, next year, to be offended at——that's my dear Jenny's way——but who my Jenny is——and which is the right and which the wrong end of a woman, is the thing to be *concealed*——it will be told you the next chapter but one, to my chapter of button-holes,——and not one chapter before.

And on page 493 we have the following passage: "I love the Pythagoreans (much more than ever I dare to tell my dear Jenny)."

We encounter another reminder on page 550 and on page 610. The latter one (I have passed over several others) is quite sentimental, a genuine rarity in Sterne:

I will not argue the matter: Time wastes too fast: every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it, more precious, my dear Jenny! than the rubies about thy neck, are flying over our heads like light clouds of a windy day, never to return more——every thing presses on——whilst thou art twisting that lock,——see! it grows grey; and every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, and every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make.——

——Heaven have mercy upon us both!

Chapter 9

Now, for what the world thinks of that ejaculation——I would not give a groat.

This is all of chapter 9, volume 9.

It would be interesting to take up for a moment the subject of sentimentality in general. Sentimentality cannot constitute the content of art, if only for the reason that art does not have a separate content. The depiction of things from a "sentimental point of view" is a special method of depiction, very much, for example, as these things might be from the point of view of a horse (Tolstoi's "Kholstomer") or of a giant (Swift).

By its very essence, art is without emotion. Recall, if you will, that in fairy tales people are shoved into a barrel bristling with nails, only to be rolled down into the sea. In our version of "Tom Thumb," a cannibal cuts off the heads of his daughters, and the children who listen rapturously to every detail of this legend never let you skip over these details during the telling and retelling of the story. This isn't cruelty. It's fable.

In *Spring Ritual Song,* Professor Anichkov presents examples of folkloric dance songs. These songs speak of a bad-tempered, querulous husband, of death, and of worms. This is tragic, yes, but only in the world of song.

In art, blood is not bloody. No, it just rhymes with "flood." It is material either for a structure of sounds or for a structure of images. For this reason, art is pitiless or rather without pity, apart from those cases where the feeling of sympathy forms the material for the artistic structure. But even in that case, we must consider it from the point of view of the composition. Similarly, if we want to understand how a certain machine works, we examine its drive belt first. That is, we consider this detail from the standpoint of a machinist and not, for instance, from the standpoint of a vegetarian.

Of course, Sterne is also without pity. Let me offer an example. The elder Shandy's son, Bobby, dies at precisely the moment when the father is vacillating over whether to use the money that had fallen into his hands by chance in order to send his son abroad or else to use it for improvements on the estate:

. . . my uncle Toby hummed over the letter.

—— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— ——
—— —— —— —— —— —— ——he's

gone! said my uncle Toby.——Where——Who? cried my father.——My nephew, said my uncle Toby.——What——without leave——without money——without governor? cried my father in amazement. No:——he is dead, my dear brother, quoth my uncle Toby. (350)

Death is here used by Sterne for the purpose of creating a "misunderstanding," very common in a work of art when two characters are speaking at cross-purposes about, apparently, the same thing. Let us consider another example: the first conversation between the mayor and Khlestakov in Gogol's *The Inspector General.*

Mayor: Excuse me.

Kh.: Oh, it's nothing.

Mayor: It is my duty, as mayor of this city, to protect all passersby and highborn folk from fleecers like you . . .

Kh. (stammering at first, then speaking loud towards the latter part of his speech): What can I–I . . . do? . . . It's not my fault . . . I'll pay for it, really! I'm expecting a check from home any day now. (Bobchinsky peeps from behind the door.) It's his fault! He is to blame! You should see the beef he's selling, as hard as a log. And that soup of his, ugh! Who knows where he dredged it up. I dumped it out of the window. Couldn't help it. He keeps me on the very edge of starvation for days at a time . . . And while you are at it, why not get a whiff of his—ugh!—tea. Smells more like rotten fish than tea. Why the hell should I . . . It's unheard of!

Mayor (timidly): Excuse me, sir, I'm really not to blame. The beef I sell on the market is always first class, brought into town by merchants from Kholmogorsk, sober, respectable people, if ever such existed, I assure you, sir. If only I knew where he's been picking up such . . . But if anything is amiss, sir, . . . Permit me to transfer you to other quarters.

Kh.: No, I won't go! I know what you mean by "other quarters"! Prison! that's what you mean, isn't that right! By what right? How dare you? . . . Why, I . . . I am in the employ of . . . in Petersburg. Do you hear? (with vigor) I, I, I . . .

Mayor (aside): Oh, my God! He is in a rage! He's found me out. It's those damned busybody merchants. They must have told him everything.

Kh. (bravely): I won't go! Not even if you bring the whole police force with you! I'm going straight to the top. Yes, right up to the Prime Minister! (He pounds his fist on the table) How dare you?! How dare you?!

Mayor (trembling all over): Have mercy, please spare me, kind sir! I have a wife and little ones . . . Don't bring me to ruin!

Kh.: No, I won't! No way! And what's more! What do I care if you have a wife and kids. So I have to go to prison for their sake? Just splendid! (Bobchinsky, peeking through the door, hides in fear.) No, sirree! Thanks but no thanks!

Mayor (trembling): It's not my fault, sir. It's my inexperience, my God, that's all, just plain inexperience. And, you know, I am really anything but rich. Judge for yourself: The salary of a civil servant will hardly cover tea and sugar. Well, maybe I did take some bribes, Your Excellency, but, mind you, sir, just a ruble here and there, and only o-nnce or t-wwice, if you know what I mean . . . Just something for the table or maybe a dress or two. As for that NCO's widow, who runs a shop . . . I assure, sir, I never, I assure you, Your Excellency, never stooped so low as to flog her, as some people have been saying. It's slander, nothing but slander, fabricated

by scoundrels with evil in their hearts! They would stoop to anything to do me in! I assure you, Your Noble Excellency, sir! . . .

Kh.: So what? What does all this have to do with me? . . . (reflecting) I can't imagine why you are dragging in these scoundrels or the widow of a noncommissioned officer. . . . The NCO's wife is one thing, but don't you dare try to flog me. You'll never get away with it . . . And, besides, . . . just look here! I'll pay the bill, I assure you, sir, I'll get the money if it kills me, but not just now. That's why I am sitting here, because I am broke. Really, sir. I am clean broke.

Here is another example from Griboedov's *Woe from Wit:*

Zagorestsky: So Chatsky is responsible for the hubbub?

Countess Dowager: What? Chatsky has been horribly clubbed?

Zagorestsky: Went mad in the mountains from a wound in the head.

Countess Dowager: How is that? He wound up with a bounty on his head?

We see the same device used (with the same motivation of deafness) in Russian folk drama. However, because of the looser plot structure, this device is used there for the purpose of constructing a whole pattern of puns. The old grave-diggers are summoned before King Maximilian:

Max.: Go and bring me the old grave-diggers.

Footman: Yes, Your Majesty, I shall go and fetch them.

(Footman and Grave-diggers)

Footman: Are the grave-diggers home, sir?

1st Grave-digger: What do you want?

Footman: Your presence is requested by His Majesty.

1st Grave-digger: By whom? His Modesty?

Footman: No, His Majesty!

1st Grave-digger: Tell him that no one is home. Today is a holiday. We are celebrating.

Footman: Vasily Ivanovich, His Majesty wishes to reward you for your services.

1st Grave-digger: Reward me for my verses? What verses?

Footman: No! Not verses, services!

1st Grave-digger (to 2nd grave-digger): Moky!

2nd Grave-digger: What, Patrak?

1st Grave-digger: Let's go see the king.

2nd Grave-digger: What for?

1st Grave-digger: For the reward.

2nd Grave-digger: For what gourd? It's winter. Where in the world will you find a gourd in winter?

1st Grave-digger: No, not gourd, reward!

2nd Grave-digger: And I thought you were talking about a gourd. If it's reward you've in mind, then by all means, let's go!

1st Grave-digger: Well, let's go.

2nd Grave-digger: Tell me, what kind of reward?

1st Grave-digger: Let's just go. I'll tell you when we get there.

2nd Grave-digger: No! Tell me now!

1st Grave-digger: Let's go. I'll tell you on the way.

2nd Grave-digger: Absolutely not! If you won't tell me now, I won't go.

1st Grave-digger: All right. Do you remember how we distinguished ourselves in the Battle of Sevastopol?
2nd Grave-digger: Yes. I remember very well.
1st Grave-digger: Well, there you are! That's what His Majesty probably has in mind. It's probably the fortieth anniversary of the Crimean War.
2nd Grave-digger: I see. Well, in that case, let's get going. . . . (Onchukov, *Folk Drama of the North*)

This device, canonical for folk drama, completely supplants, at times, novelistic plot structures. This subject has been analyzed by Roman Jakobson and Pyotr Bogatyrev in their studies of the Russian folk theater.

However, Sterne's own pun on death (see above) does not surprise us half so much (or does not surprise us at all) as do the father's puns. Bobby Shandy's death serves for Sterne, above all, as a motivation for development: "Will your worships give me leave to squeeze in a story between these two pages?" (351).

Sterne interposes an excerpt from a letter of condolence written by Servius Sulpicius to Cicero. Its incorporation into the text is motivated by the fact that it is delivered by Mr. Shandy himself. This is followed by a selection of anecdotes from the classics on the subject of contempt for death. It is worth noting what Sterne himself has to say concerning Mr. Shandy's eloquence:

My father was as proud of his eloquence as MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO could be for his life, and for aught I am convinced of to the contrary at present, with as much reason: it was indeed his strength——and his weakness too.——His strength——for he was by nature eloquent,——and his weakness——for he was hourly a dupe to it; and provided an occasion in life would but permit him to shew his talents, or say either a wise thing, a witty, or a shrewd one——(bating the case of a systematick misfortune)——he had all he wanted.——A blessing which tied up my father's tongue, and a misfortune which set it loose with good grace, were pretty equal: sometimes, indeed, the misfortune was the better of the two; for instance, where the pleasure of the harangue was as *ten,* and the pain of the misfortune but as *five*——my father gained half in half, and consequently was as well again off, as it never had befallen him. (352)

The difference between human (i.e., actual) "happiness" or "unhappiness" on the one hand, and "happiness" and "unhappiness" as material for art is underscored here with extraordinary clarity.

It remains for the mother to learn of her son's death. This is accomplished by having Mrs. Shandy eavesdrop by the door, as a parallel action unfolds in the kitchen. In doing this, Sterne asked himself the solemn question: How long can a poor mother stand in such an uncomfortable pose?

A conversation is taking place at this moment in the study about the son's death. This death has already become woven into the discussions concerning death in general. After the deliberations concerning the possible ways of disseminating knowledge of the classics (369), it is imperceptibly woven into Socrates' speech at his trial.

. . . though my mother was a woman of no deep reading, yet the abstract of Socrates' oration, which my father was giving my uncle Toby, was not altogether new to her. ——She listened to it with composed intelligence, and would have done so to the end of the chapter, had not my father plunged (which he had no occasion to have done) into that part of the pleading where the great philosopher reckons up his connections, his alliances, and children; but renounces a security to be so won by working upon the passions of his judges.——"I have friends——I have relations,——I have three desolate children,"——says Socrates.——

——Then, cried my mother, opening the door,——you have one more, Mr. Shandy, than I know of.

By heaven! I have one less,——said my father, getting up and walking out of the room. (370)

A very important source for development in Sterne is represented by erotic enstrangement, taking the form, for the most part, of euphemisms. I have already discussed this phenomenon in chapter 1. In Sterne we encounter an extraordinary variety of such cases of erotic enstrangement. There are numerous examples to draw from. Here are a few of them.

Let us begin with the identification of types of character:

I am not ignorant that the Italians pretend to a mathematical exactness in their designations of one particular sort of character among them, from the *forte* or *piano* of a certain wind instrument they use,——which they say is infallible.——I dare not mention the name of the instrument in this place;——'tis sufficient we have it amongst us,——but never think of making a drawing by it;——this is ænigmatical, and intended to be so, at least, *ad populum:*——And therefore I beg, Madam, when you come here, that you read on as fast as you can, and never stop to make any inquiry about it. (75-76)

Or, for example:

Now whether it was physically impossible, with half a dozen hands all thrust into the napkin at a time——but that some one chestnut, of more life and rotundity than the rest, must be put in motion——it so fell out, however, that one was actually sent rolling off the table; and as Phutatorius sat straddling under——it fell perpendicularly into that particular aperture of Phutatorius's breeches, for which, to the shame and indelicacy of our language be it spoke, there is no chaste word throughout all Johnson's dictionary——let it suffice to say——it was that particular aperture, which in all good societies, the laws of decorum do strictly require, like the temple of Janus (in peace at least) to be universally shut up. (320)

Very typical of this erotic enstrangement and the play provoked by it are two episodes in *Tristram Shandy* that very much resemble each other. Yet, while one episode is really no more than an episode, the other is developed into a plot line and forms one of the criss-crossing plot lines of the novel.

Chief among these plot lines is Uncle Toby's wound. Uncle Toby had suffered a severe wound in the groin. He is being wooed by a widow, who would very much like to know whether or not he had in fact been castrated by that wound. Yet, at this time she cannot bring herself to ask the fateful question. This greatly complicates the novel:

There is not a greater difference between a single-horse chair and madam Pompadour's *vis-à-vis*, than betwixt a single amour, and an amour thus noble doubled, and going upon all fours, prancing throughout a grand drama. (209)

The novel is continually interrupted and takes on the form of innuendos and allusions. Finally, these allusions begin to consolidate (i.e., around volume 6, chapter 34).

At this point, though, we encounter an intrusion of the "travel" motif. This new material seems to have reached a dead end at the conclusion of volume 7:

I danced it along through Narbonne, Carcasson, and Castle Naudairy, till at last I danced myself into Perdrillo's pavillion, where pulling a paper of black lines, that I might go on straight forwards, without digression or parenthesis, in my uncle Toby's amours—— (538)

And so the groin wound, with the widow's reluctance to confront this issue directly, is introduced into the text as a device for the purpose of impeding the Toby–widow romance.

I shall now demonstrate in several excerpts just how Sterne brings about this retarding of the action.

After a solemn promise to tell the story of Toby's amorous adventures without digression, Sterne brakes the action by introducing digressions into digressions, which are then linked to each other by the repetition of one and the same phrase: "It is with love as with Cuckoldom" (540, 542).

This is followed by metaphors of love. Love is a warm hat, love is a pie (504-5). Then follows a history of the widow Wadman's attacks on Uncle Toby. Yet, this description is again interrupted by a long, "importunate story," told by Trim, called "The Story of the King of Bohemia and His Seven Castles."

This tale is similar to the one told by Sancho Panza to his lord, Don Quixote, on the night of his adventure with the textile mill, when he tied up Rocinante by its legs. It is continually interrupted by Uncle Toby's comments on military affairs, technology and literary style. I've already analyzed this device of Cervantes' in *Don Quixote*. Like every "importunate story," it is based on its conscious use as a braking device and must therefore be interrupted by a listener. In this particular case, its role is to impede the main plot line of the novel. A little later, Trim abandons the story of the King of Bohemia and takes up the story of his love (568-75). Finally, the widow Wadman makes her appearance once again. This is occasioned by the wound motif:

I am terribly afraid, said widow Wadman, in case I should marry him Bridget ——that the poor captain will not enjoy his health, with the monstrous wound upon his groin——

It may not, Madam, be so very large, replied Bridget, as you think——and I believe besides, added she——that 'tis dried up——

——I would like to know——merely for his sake, said Mrs. Wadman——

——We'll know the long and the broad of it, in ten days——answered Mrs. Bridget, for whilst the captain is paying his addresses to you——I'm confident Mr. Trim will be for making love to me——and I'll let him as much as he will——added Bridget——to get it all out of him—— (581-82)

Once again, the author introduces new material, in this case, in the form of a realized metaphor (which, generally speaking, is quite common in Sterne): (a) he realizes the lexical (linguistic) metaphor "hobbyhorse" (in the sense of "whim, caprice") and speaks of it as if it were a real horse; and (b) he realizes the metaphor "ass" (in the sense of the buttocks). The source for this metaphor may well be St. Francis of Assisi's characterization of his body as "my brother, the ass." The ass metaphor is also developed. Besides, it is also the basis for a misunderstanding.

When Shandy Senior asks Uncle Toby about the ass, the latter thinks that the posterior part of the body is euphemistically meant (539). A detail from the development that follows is of some interest. Shandy Senior's speech to Uncle Toby is nothing less than a parody of Don Quixote's speech to Sancho Panza on governorship.

I shall not parody them in turn by quoting these two speeches in parallel texts, all the more so since we'd thereby be keeping the widow Wadman waiting. Uncle Toby and Trim are going to see her. Shandy Senior and his wife are also on their way there. They are observing the first pair from the corners of their eyes, meanwhile chatting about the forthcoming marriage.

Again, we encounter the leitmotiv of the impotent husband, who sleeps with his wife only on the first Sunday of every month. This motif, appearing first in the very opening of the novel, now emerges once again (vol. 9, chap. 11):

Unless she should happen to have a child——said my mother——

——But she must persuade my brother Toby first to get her one——

——To be sure, Mr. Shandy, quoth my mother.

——Though if it comes to persuasion——said my father——Lord have mercy upon them.

Amen: said my mother, *piano*.

Amen: cried my father, *fortissime*.

Amen: said my mother again——but with such a sighing cadence of personal pity at the end of it, as discomfited every fibre about my father——he instantly took out his almanack; but before he could untie it, Yorick's congregation coming out of church, became a full answer to one half of his business with it——and my mother telling him it was a sacrament day——left him as little in doubt, as to the other part ——He put his almanack into his pocket.

The first Lord of the Treasury thinking of *ways and means*, could not have returned home, with a more embarrassed look. (613-14)

I've permitted myself this lengthy excerpt in order to show that Sterne's inset material does not play a merely peripheral role in the novel. On the contrary, every passage belongs to one of the novel's compositional lines.

Once again, we encounter digressions from other plot lines, e.g., the knot

motif (617). Finally, the wound motif takes the stage. It is presented, as is usual in Sterne, in medias res:

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* * * * * * *——

—You shall see the very place, Madam; said my uncle Toby.

Mrs. Wadman blush'd——look'd towards the door——turn'd pale——blush'd slightly again——recovered her natural colour——blush'd worse than ever; which for the sake of the unlearned reader, I translate thus——

"L—d! I cannot look at it——
What would the world say if I look'd at it?
I should drop down, if I look'd at it——
I wish I could look at it——
There can be no sin in looking at it.
——I will look at it." (623)

Yet, something quite different takes place.

Uncle Toby thinks that the widow wants to know the place where he was wounded (i.e., the geographical locality) when, in fact, she seems to have in mind the anatomical place on his body. By the way, neither is the reader quite sure at this juncture what is meant. The whole point of this shift in the plot, however, is clearly to impede the action.

Well, so Trim brings the disappointed widow a map of Namur (the locality where Uncle Toby was in fact wounded). Once again, we are witnessing a play on Uncle Toby's wound. This time Sterne himself picks up the theme in his digressions (625-29). Then comes the famous transposition of time. Chapter 25 (of volume 9) is succeeded by the previously missing chapters 18 and 19. The action resumes only with chapter 26:

It was just as natural for Mrs. Wadman, whose first husband was all his time afflicted with a Sciatica, to wish to know how far from the hip to the groin; and how far she was likely to suffer more or less in her feelings, in the one case than in the other.

She accordingly read Drake's anatomy from one end to the other. She had peeped into Wharton on the brain, and had borrowed Graaf upon the bones and muscles: but could make nothing of it. . . .

To clear up all, she had twice asked Doctor Slop, "if poor captain Shandy was ever likely to recover of his wound——?"

——He is recovered, Doctor Slop would say——

What! quite?

——Quite: madam——

But what do you mean by a recovery? Mrs. Wadman would say.

Doctor Slop was the worst man alive at definitions. (636-37)

Mrs. Wadman interrogates Captain Shandy himself about the wound:

"——Was it without remission?——
——Was it more tolerable in bed?
——Could he lie on both sides alike with it?
——Was he able to mount a horse?" (637)

Finally, the matter is resolved in the following manner: Trim is speaking to the widow's servant girl (Bridget) concerning Captain Shandy's wound:

. . . and in this cursed trench, Mrs. Bridget, quoth the Corporal, taking her by the hand, did he receive the wound which crush'd him so miserably *here*——In pronouncing which he slightly press'd the back of her hand towards the part he felt for——and let it fall.

We thought, Mr. Trim, it had been more in the middle——said Mrs. Bridget——

That would have undone us for ever——said the Corporal.

——And left my poor mistress undone too——said Bridget. . . .

Come——come——said Bridget——holding the palm of her left-hand parallel to the plane of the horizon, and sliding the fingers of the other over it, in a way which could not have been done, had there been the least wart or protuberance——'Tis every syllable of it false, cried the Corporal, before she had half finished the sentence——(639)

It is worth comparing this hand symbolism with the same device of euphemistic eroticism found elsewhere in *Tristram Shandy.*

A brief, preliminary comment.

For the protagonists of this novel, this euphemistic manner of speaking represents proper speech. For Sterne though—when this same phenomenon is considered from an artistic point of view—this becomes material for enstrangement.

It is a curious point that this same device of hand symbolism is encountered in the specifically masculine, "obscene" anecdotes of folklore, where, as is well known, there are no rules of decency, other than, of course, the desire to speak as obscenely as possible. Yet, even here we encounter material of a euphemistic character, in particular hand symbolism, though employed as a device of enstrangement.

Let us now return to Sterne. I must again quote nearly an entire chapter. Fortunately, it is rather short:

——'Twas nothing,——I did not lose two drops of blood by it——'twas not worth calling in a surgeon, had he lived next door to us. . . . The chamber-maid had left no ******* *** under the bed:——Cannot you contrive, master, quoth Susannah, lifting up the sash with one hand, as she spoke, and helping me up into the window seat with the other,——cannot you manage, my dear, for a single time to **** *** ** *** ******?

I was five years old.——Susannah did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,——so slap came the sash down like lightening upon us;——Nothing is left,——cried Susannah,——nothing is left——for me, but to run my country. (376)

She flees to Uncle Toby's house and he takes the blame, for his servant

Trim had removed the sash weights from the window to make some model cannons.

Once again we encounter a device typical of Sterne: the effects are presented prior to the causes. The description of this cause occupies pages 377-78. The incident is related with the aid of the hand symbolism:

> Trim, by the help of his forefinger, laid flat upon the table, and the edge of his hand striking a-cross it at right angles, made a shift to tell his story so, that priests and virgins might have listened to it;——and the story being told, the dialogue went on as follows. (379)

This is followed by a development of the rumors concerning the incident, then by digressions and by discussions concerning digressions, etc.

Interestingly enough, Shandy Senior runs to see his son the moment he finds out about the incident—with a book in his hands, whereupon begins a discussion concerning circumcision in general. It is worth noting at this point how Sterne parodies the motivation for interpolated passages:

> —was Obadiah enabled to give him a particular account of it, just as it had happened.——I thought as much, said my father, tucking up his night-gown;——and so walked up stairs.
>
> One would imagine from this——(though for my own part I somewhat question it) ——that my father before that time, had actually wrote that remarkable chapter in the *Tristrapaedia,* which to me is the most original and entertaining one in the whole book;——and that is the *chapter upon sash-windows,* with a bitter Philippick at the end of it, upon the forgetfulness of chamber-maids.——I have but two reasons for thinking otherwise.
>
> First, Had the matter been taken into consideration, before the event happened, my father certainly would have nailed up the sash-window for good an' all;——which, considering with what difficulty he composed books,——he might have done with ten times less trouble, than he could have wrote the chapter: this argument I foresee holds good against his writing the chapter, even after the event; but 'tis obviated under the second reason, which I have the honour to offer to the world in support of my opinion, that my father did not write the chapter upon sash-windows and chamber-pots, at the time supposed,——and it is this.
>
> ——That, in order to render the *Tristrapaedia* complete,——I wrote the chapter myself. (383-84)

I have not the slightest desire to continue this study of Sterne's novel to the very end. This is so because I am far less interested in the novel itself than in the theory of plot structure.

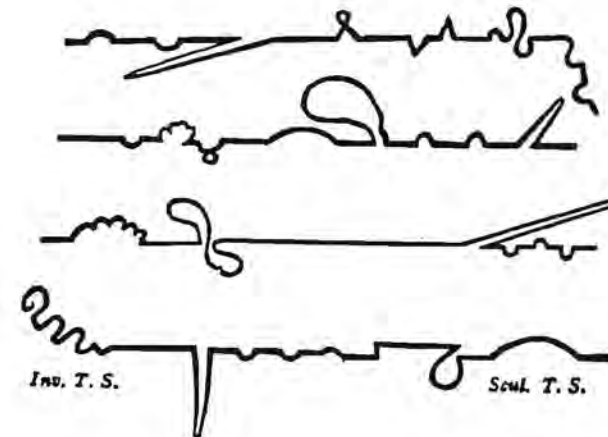
I shall now say a few words concerning the abundance of citations in my book. Naturally, I could have made fuller use of every passage and excerpt in this book, since there is hardly a device that appears anywhere in its pure form. However, this would have transformed my work into a "pony," which, by obstructing the text with grammatical annotations, would have hindered the reader from interpreting it on his own.

Nonetheless, in analyzing this novel, I consider it my duty to demonstrate its thoroughgoing "lack of consistency." It is precisely the unusual order of

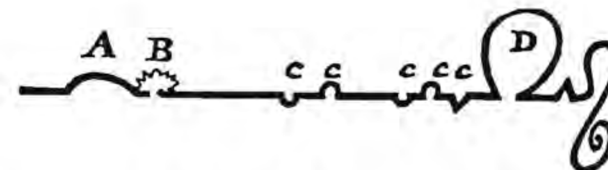
even common, traditional elements that is characteristic of Sterne.

As an end-piece and at the same time as proof of Sterne's conscious manipulation and violation of traditional plot schemata, I'd like to cite his own graphic illustration of the story line in *Tristram Shandy:*

> I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegitable diet, with a few of the cold seeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line. Now,



> These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes.——In the fifth volume I have been very good,——the precise line I have described in it being this:



> By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A. where I took a trip to Navarre,——and the indented curve B. which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady Baussiere and her page,——I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till John de la Casse's devils led me the round you see marked D.——for as for c c c c c they are nothing but parentheses, and the common *ins* and *outs* incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state; and when compared with what men have done,——or with my own transgressions at the letters A B D——they vanish into nothing. (473-74)

Sterne's schemata are more or less accurate, but he fails to take into account the interruption of the motifs.

*

The concept of plot (*syuzhet*) is too often confused with a description of the events in the novel, with what I'd tentatively call the story line (*fabula*).

As a matter of fact, though, the story line is nothing more than material for plot formation.

In this way, the plot of *Eugene Onegin* is not the love between Eugene and Tatiana but the appropriation of that story line in the form of digressions that interrupt the text. One sharp-witted artist, Vladimir Milashevsky, has proposed to illustrate this novel in verse by focusing chiefly on the digressions (the "little feet," for instance) and, from a purely compositional point of view, this would be quite appropriate.

The forms of art are explained by the artistic laws that govern them and not by comparisons with actual life. In order to impede the action of the novel, the artist resorts not to witches and magic potions but to a simple transposition of its parts. He thereby reveals to us the aesthetic laws that underlie both of these compositional devices.

It is common practice to assert that *Tristram Shandy* is not a novel. Those who speak in this way regard opera alone as true music, while a symphony for them is mere chaos.

Tristram Shandy is the most typical novel in world literature.

Chapter 8

Bely and Ornamental Prose

I

The particular elements constituting literary form are more likely to clash than to work in concert. The decline or decay of one device brings in its train the growth and development of another device.

The celebrated progression in literary history from the epic to the lyric and, finally, to the drama is not so much a succession of organic forms as a succession of canonizations and displacements.

A writer's philosophical worldview is his working hypothesis. However, if we address the issue more precisely, we might wish to add that a writer's consciousness is nonetheless determined by literary form. The crises of a writer coincide with the crises of literary genres. A writer moves within the orbit of his art.

When an ideology, lying as it must outside the boundaries of the work of art, invades the writer's domain without that craftsmanship which alone can justify it, then the results cannot be considered art.

Such was the case when Andrei Bely set out to create his anthroposophical epopee, or epic. The attempt to create a literary work which would correspond to some extrinsic worldview can succeed only with much difficulty, if at all. This is so because a work of art distorts such a correspondence in accordance with its own laws.

Not surprisingly, the author himself may have a hard time recognizing his own work.

Blok, on the other hand, began *The Twelve* with street talk and racy doggerel and ended up with the figure of Christ. Unacceptable to many, this Christ was for Blok rich in content. Though taken aback himself, Blok insisted to the end of his days that *The Twelve* came off exactly as it was supposed to.

The "Christ" finale serves as a kind of closing epigraph, in which the riddle of the poem is unexpectedly solved.

"I don't like the ending of *The Twelve* either," said Blok. "I wanted a different ending. After finishing it, I was myself astonished and wondered: Why Christ, after all? Do I really need Christ here? Yet, the more I looked at it, the more clearly I saw Christ. And so I jotted down in my notebook: Looks like I'll have to go with Christ. With Christ and none other."