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*The Rhetoric
of Fiction*

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and a collection of commonplaces about literature: Literary characters "are in a great measure disliked, or approved, in proportion to the Acquaintance the Reader, or the Audience, have before had with them. My Lord Foppington, and Sir Fopling Flutter, by their Names on the Bills, could formerly, at any time, croud the Playhouse with Spectators; but that Species of Coxcombs are now as much out of Mode as the very Dresses in which they were represented." And she concludes a long paragraph on this subject with the hope that the "Character I am now about to introduce will not be in such an unfortunate Situation, as to be esteemed a Creature that *nobody* knows; but that he will be owned as an Acquaintance by some Part at least of the *World*" (Book II, chap. viii).

This claim to realism makes an interesting contrast with her brother's witty intrusions designed for the same effect. Commenting on Bridget Allworthy's sexual prudence, Fielding says, "Indeed, I have observed (tho' it may seem unaccountable to the reader) that this guard of prudence, like the trained bands, is always readiest to go on duty where there is the least danger. It often basely and cowardly deserts those paragons for whom the men are all wishing, sighing, dying, and spreading every net in their power; and constantly attends at the heels of that higher order of women, for whom the other sex have a more distant and awful respect, and whom, (from despair, I suppose, of success) they never venture to attack" (Book I, chap. ii). The boast is the same: My characters are based on accurate observation of real manners. But the voice is masterful, able to be ironic without losing its direct power.

What I am saying here may seem like mere tautology: interesting narrators are interesting. But there is much more to it than that: some interesting narrators perform a kind of function in their works that nothing else could perform. They are not simply appropriate to a context, though that is essential.¹¹ They originally

¹¹ The "author" of Sarah Fielding's *The Governess; or, the Little Female Academy, Calculated for the Entertainment and Instruction of Young Ladies in their Education* (1749) is appropriate enough: "The Design of the following Sheets is to prove to you, that Pride, Stubbornness, Malice, Envy, and, in short, all manner of Wickedness, is the greatest Folly we can be possessed of. . . . I depend on the Goodness of all my little Readers, to acknowledge this to be true. But there is one Caution to be used, namely, That you are not led into many Inconveniencies, and even Faults, by this

succeeded and still succeed by persuading the reader to accept them as living oracles. They are reliable guides not only to the world of the novels in which they appear but also to the moral truths of the world outside the book. The commentator who fails in this mode is the one who claims omniscience and reveals stupidity and prejudice.¹²

"TRISTRAM SHANDY" AND THE PROBLEM OF FORMAL COHERENCE

The third kind of failure is both more widespread and more difficult to grapple with: a failure of formal coherence. As I have tried to show in chapter v, certain qualities pursued for their own sakes can interfere with other qualities or effects, and in the tradition of the intruding narrator, omniscient or unreliable, we find hundreds of books in which an independent interest in this intrusive style interferes with other effects. The very qualities conferred by the great narrators can, when pursued for their own sake, transform or destroy the works which the narrators are ostensibly invented to serve.

To many of its critics, *Tristram Shandy* has seemed to be one of the worst offenders in this regard. The "mad," "merely odd,"

Love and Affection: For this Disposition will naturally lead you . . . into all manner of Errors, unless you take care not to be partial to any of your Companions, only because they are agreeable, without first considering whether they are good enough to deserve your Love" (pp. ix-x).

It is impossible to know how a young lady in the eighteenth century would react to this highly appropriate commentary, but it is not hard to recognize that for anyone in the twentieth century, adult or child, it has become intolerable.

¹² Just how seriously an author can undercut his effects by the wrong kind of self-portrait can be seen in the following Preface to *The History of Cleanthes, an Englishman of the highest Quality, and Celestine, the Illustrious Amazonian Princess* (1757): "The following Sheets are the Productions of a Person, who writes not for Interest, or the Desire of Applause, but merely for Amusement. My Situation is such, having no Sort of real Business, that many Hours would hang heavy upon my Hands, if I did not endeavour to find out divers Sorts of Recreation, in order to fill up that Space of Time." In case there is any reader who has not been completely discouraged by this, the heavy-footed author finishes himself off with a final blow: "At length I resolved to try my own Abilities: This I have done; and from the Mixture of Adventures in my Narration, it is plainly to be discovered, that my Reading has been both ancient and modern, as my Work is a Composition, founded upon both Plans. . . . I write not with a Design to acquire Fame; and as a Proof of it, shall subscribe no Name, hoping that I may never be even suspected of having been AN AUTHOR."

"salmagundi of odds and ends" that took England and the Continent by storm in 1760 was from the beginning seen as among other things a literary puzzle. Is it simply a scrambled comic novel, with the antics of Walter and Toby and Tristram more obscured by narrative commentary than any comic subject had ever been before? Is it a collection of playful speculative essays, like Montaigne's, but with more fictional sugar-coating than Montaigne felt necessary? Or is it a satire in the tradition of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*, taking in, as Sterne himself put it, "everything which I find Laugh-at-able in my way"? Even the many recent critics who have granted the work its own kind of unity, making their way confidently through the windings and turnings, the seeming digressions that turn out to be "progressive," the involutions and superpositions of time schemes, have been unable to agree about what kind of work it really is.¹⁸

Regardless of the position from which we try to apprehend such a book, the secret of its coherence, its form, seems to reside primarily in the role played by the teller, by Tristram, the dramatized narrator. He is himself in some way the central subject holding together materials which, were it not for his scatterbrained presence, would never have seemed to be separated in the first place. His double claim—that he knows yet does not know what he is about—simply makes explicit what is self-evident in our experience from beginning to end: that in some ways he is giving us a novel like other novels, and in some ways he is not. A very large part of the whole book is made up of talk about his writing chores and his rhetorical relation to the reader.

In less than five minutes I shall have thrown my pen into the fire . . . —I have but half a score things to do in the time—I have a thing to name—a thing to lament—a thing to hope . . . and a thing to pray for.—This chapter, therefore, I name the chapter of THINGS—and my next chapter to it, that is, the first chapter of my next volume, if I live, shall be my chapter upon WHISKERS, in order to keep up some sort of connection in my works.

The thing I lament is, that things have crowded in so thick upon

¹⁸ The best recent summary of the problems, together with one of the sanest assessments of the formal brilliance and the historical influence of *Tristram Shandy*, is found in Alan D. McKillop, *Early Masters of English Fiction*, chap. v.

me, that I have not been able to get into that part of my work, towards which, I have all the way, looked forwards, with so much earnest desire; and that is the campaigns, but especially the amours of my uncle Toby, the events of which are of so singular a nature, and so Cervantick a cast, that if I can so manage it, as to convey but the same impressions to every other brain, which the occurrences themselves excite in my own—I will answer for it the book shall make its way in the world, much better than its master has done before it—Oh *Tristram! Tristram!* can this but be once brought about—the credit, which will attend thee as an author, shall counterbalance the many evils which have befallen thee as a man. . . . No wonder I itch so much as I do, to get at these amours—They are the choicest morsel of my whole story! [Vol. IV, conclusion].

Now what kind of a work are we reading here? Is this "telling" invented as rhetoric to aid in the realization of the dramatic elements? What, in fact, is the dramatic subject in James's sense (chap. iv, above)? If we try to find an analogue in *Tristram Shandy* for the character and story of Isabel Archer, say, in *The Portrait of a Lady*, what do we find? Is it the systematic time scheme of events, starting with the wounding of my uncle Toby at the siege of Namur in 1695 and ending with—well, with what? Already we are in difficulties. Do the events end with the final date named in the work, when Tristram describes himself as sitting before his desk in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, on "this 12th day of August, 1766," "a most tragicomical completion" of his father's prediction that he should neither think nor act like any other man's child? Can we say that this is an event in the writing of the book, while the siege of Namur is an event in the "subject" treated in that writing? The final event in the "dramatic object" is—what? The breeching in volume six? Certainly not the events of the final chapter, which take place four years before Tristram's birth. The trip through Europe of the adult Tristram? But this is really a digression in the writing of the work, part of the same sequence of events that leads to his sitting at his desk writing the odd book that results from his character, which in turn results from his father's theories, which. . . .

The dramatized narrator has ceased here to be distinguishable from what he relates. James's ideal of a seamless web of subject

and treatment has somehow been stumbled upon more than a century before its time—and in a work that gives an air of complete disorganization!

THREE FORMAL TRADITIONS: COMIC NOVEL,
COLLECTION, AND SATIRE

To decide what *Tristram* really is, we should look briefly at three of his ancestors. Though this book is not intended as a historical study, the history of narrators before Sterne happens to present to us, in three main literary traditions, the most crucial questions about the contrast between dramatic form and the rhetoric of narration. In a rough way the traditions correspond, as we might expect, to the three most popular hypotheses about the form of *Tristram Shandy*: the comic novel exploded; the sugar-coated collection of philosophical essays, and the miscellaneous satire.

Even if any of the novelists between 1749 and 1760 had been able to create the kind of monumental comic action Fielding had revealed, many of them would have submerged the potential comic plot with their careless extensions of his carefully controlled facetiousness. One of the most revealing works of this kind is *Charlotte Summers, the Fortunate Parish Girl*, published anonymously within a year of *Tom Jones*.¹⁴ The narrator claims to be the "first Begotten, of the poetical Issue, of the much celebrated Biographer of *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones*" (p. 3). But though he feels "under the strongest Impulse to mimic every Action of that Gentleman" (p. 4), and does indeed copy a great many of the explicit devices of *Tom Jones*, the relationship of the rhetoric to the comic plot of the parish girl is very different. The author is, in fact, exploiting a temporary fashion in intrusions, and though he does a relatively clever job of it, the result is disunity of the most radical kind: as critics used to say, the manner has begun to rival the matter.

Sometimes this drama of the telling consists of a dialogue between the "I" and a "Reader" with whom the true reader can more or

¹⁴ Not dated, but generally assigned to 1749 or 1750. It has been attributed, without much plausibility, to Sarah Fielding. For other works written in the fifties that either explicitly avow indebtedness to "The King of Biographers" or show clear signs of having been deeply impressed by his narrative manner, see Bibliography, Sec. V.

less comfortably identify. More often, it is a dialogue between the "I" and a ridiculous, hypothetical reader who is as much a comic character as any other in the book. "Beau Thoughtless" and "pretty Miss Pert" and "grayhair'd Mrs. Sit-her-time" and "Dick Dapperwit" are constantly intruding in a "passion" to complain about the story or the characters' behavior. The most curious instance of this independent drama of the telling is an audacious bit of tomfoolery concerning one pair of "readers," Miss Arabella Dimple and her Maid Polly. "Pray, Ma'am, where shall I begin, did your Ladyship fold down where you left off?—No, Fool, I did not; the Book is divided into Chapters on Purpose to prevent that ugly Custom." They struggle with their memories: "Now I think on't, the Author bid me remember, that I left off at the End of—I think it was the 6th Chapter. Turn to the 7th Chapter, and let me hear how it begins—Polly reads, 'Chapter the 7th,—The Death of my Lady Fanciful's Squirrel. . . .'" Miss Dimple interrupts: "Hold, Wench, you read too fast; and I don't understand one Word of what you are saying. . . . I must not have got so far—Look back to the End of that Chapter where the Blookhead [sic] of an Author bids us take a Nap, and remember where he left off.—O la, Ma'am, I have found it; here it is. As your Ladyship said, he says . . ." (I, 68–69). She reads the conclusion of chapter four, a passage the reader has already encountered some pages previously. She then goes on reading aloud for sixteen pages, and then the narrator intrudes: "But the Reader must remember *Polly*, Miss *Dimple's* Maid, is reading all this while. She had just come to this Length, when she looks about at her Mistress and finds her fast asleep. . . . It's time to put an end to the Chapter, when pretty Miss *Dimple* sleeps over it."¹⁵

Such mock readers are played off against the elaborate self-portraiture of the narrator, a half-clown, half-oracle who is only

¹⁵ For other instances of this mirror-within-a-mirror effect see the quotation from Gide's *Counterfeiters* given among the epigraphs to this chapter, and Mark Harris' *The Southpaw*, in which there is one chapter, labeled "11-A," giving an account of the narrator's reading of chapter xii to his friends. They object to section after section of chapter xii, and he expunges and expunges again until only one sentence is left. This sentence then begins chapter xiii; there is no chapter xii.

remotely related to any inferable author. It is as if the author had deliberately chosen to imitate his "Father F—g" only on the capricious side, taking seriously, as Fielding does not, the "Doctrine, that an Author, in spite of all critical Authority, has an absolute Right to digress when and where he pleases, and to amuse himself and his Readers with any thing that comes uppermost in his Head, whether it has any Connection with the Subject in Hand or not" (I, 28–29). Needless to say, in pursuit of this doctrine the poor parish girl is often forgotten, as Tom Jones never really is, for dozens of pages on end. What purports to be a comic novel has been torn into bits and fragments by facetious intrusions.¹⁶

A very different effect is produced by a similar air of caprice in the works of a second tradition, that of the unifying rather than disruptive self-portraits best exemplified by Montaigne. In a long line of works leading up to and away from Montaigne's *Essays*, Sterne had encountered elaborate and whimsical commentary as an end in itself, more or less divorced from any other narrative interest. Montaigne's book, a rambling collection of opinions about this and that, owes whatever dramatic coherence it has to the consistently inconsistent portrait of the author himself, in his character as a writer, and the "Montaigne" who emerges is as fascinating as any fictional hero could be. Like Tristram, he tells us a great deal about his moral and physical characteristics, enough, perhaps, to justify his claim to "paint himself." But he gives us much more; a running account of the writing of the book as it is written, and thus a running portrait of his character as a writer. "I presented my self to my Self for Argument and Subject. 'Tis the only Book in the world of its kind, and of a wild and extravagant Design; there is nothing worth Remark but the Extravagancy in this Affair: for in a Subject so vain and frivolous, the best Workman in the World could not have given it a form fit to recommend it to any manner

¹⁶ I have given a fuller account of this as well as other pre-Shandean comic novels of the fifties in "The Self-conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*," *PMLA*, LXVII (March, 1952), 163–85.

of Esteem" (II, 85).¹⁷ He discusses in great detail his qualifications as an unskilled man undertaking to write a book that will be truer than other men's books. His "Fancy and Judgment do but grope in the dark," and he writes "indifferently of whatever comes into my Head" (I, 214). He has "naturally a Comick, and familiar Stile; but it is a peculiar one, and not proper for Publick business, but like the Language I speak, too Compact, Irregular, Abrupt and Singular" (I, 398). Like Tristram Shandy following his pen wherever it leads, he works "without premeditation, or design, the first word begets the second, and so to the end of the Chapter" (I, 400). He defends his digressions with precisely Tristram's manner: "This medly is a little from my Subject. I go out of my way, but 'tis rather upon the account of licence than oversight. My Fancies follow one another, but sometimes at a great distance; and look towards one another, but 'tis with an oblique glance. . . . I love a Poetick March by leaps and skips . . ." (III, 348–49). He predicts, foreshadowing Tristram's prophecy of forty volumes, that he will proceed "incessantly and without labour . . . so long as there shall be Ink and Paper in the World" (III, 263). And like Tristram he argues frequently and at length with his postulated readers: "Well, but some one will say to me, this design of making a man's self the subject of his writing, were indeed excusable [only] in rare and famous Men. . . . It is most true, I confess it, and know very well, that a Tradesman will scarce lift his Eyes from his work to look at an ordinary man. . . . Others have been encourag'd to speak of themselves, because they found the Subject worthy and rich; I, on the contrary, am the bolder, by reason the Subject is so poor and steril, that I cannot be suspected of Ostentation" (II, 541, 542).

The full effect of all this discussion of his character as a new kind of writer cannot be grasped unless one rereads the book with an eye on this matter alone; it can certainly not be given by quotation. But it is important to recognize that Montaigne's only claim to formal coherence is provided by the very material which many self-respect-

¹⁷ Because it was most influential on English fiction, particularly through John Dunton and Sterne, I use the Charles Cotton translation. My page numbers are to the second edition, London, 1693.

ing modern novelists would automatically reject as disruptive and inartistic. Perhaps as much as one-fifth of this work is made up of mere commentary.

It is true that it is not a novel; there is no sustained narrative in the *Essays*. But it presents for that very reason an excellent opportunity to study commentary when it has no function other than to be itself. What is more, if we look closely at the "Montaigne" who emerges from these completed pages, we cannot help rejecting any simple distinction between fiction and biography or essay. The Montaigne of the book is by no stretch of the imagination the real Montaigne, pouring himself onto the page without regard for "aesthetic distance." Despite his endlessly repeated claim to "present me to your Memory, such as I naturally am" (II, 718), we find him often confessing to self-transformations. Phrases like "as far as a respect to the public has permitted me" are to be found in almost every statement of his intention to portray himself. "In moulding this Figure upon my self, I have been so oft constrain'd to temper and compose my self in a right posture, that the Copy is truly taken, and has in some sort form'd it self. But painting for others, I represent my self in a better colouring than my own natural Complexion" (II, 543). "Now, as much as Decency permits, I here discover my Inclinations and Affections . . ." (III, 329). "And withal a man must curl, set out and adjust himself to appear in publick . . ." (II, 75). Curl and adjust himself he certainly does: we need no research into the facts of his life to know it, we who have learned to read behind the curling and adjusting of the self-conscious narrators of Proust, Gide, Huxley, and Mann.

It is this created fictional character who pulls the scattered thoughts together. Far from dispersing otherwise coherent materials, as intrusive commentary does in *Charlotte Summers*, in this work it confers unity—though still of a casual kind—on what would otherwise be intolerably diffuse. And in a long stream of works after Montaigne, Sterne could have found similar effects.¹⁸

The third Shandean influence, which I must treat more briefly, is to be found in innumerable satires and burlesques, from Rabelais

¹⁸ See Bibliography, Sec. V, C.

through Erasmus and Swift to a host of minor folk in the decades immediately before *Tristram Shandy*. Since the rhetorical intent of these works is evident to every reader, the function of the dramatized spokesmen, whether fools, knaves, or sages, is usually quite clear; no one accuses them of mad incoherence. Yet in some respects works in this tradition come even closer than *Charlotte Summers* and the *Essays* to what we find in the "radically new" *Tristram Shandy*. While in the comic novels using a self-conscious narrator, the organization of the story itself was ordinarily independent of the narrator's intrusions, in works like *A Tale of a Tub*, the narrator is much more central: as in *Tristram Shandy*, his character alters the very design of the work, the fundamental nature of the progression from one chapter to the next. When Swift's grubstreet hack "intrudes," the quality of the intrusion is radically different from anything we have seen so far; even if precisely the same words were used by the narrators of *Charlotte Summers* and *A Tale*, in the one case there would be a genuine intrusion into more fundamental matters, and in the other the "intrusions" would themselves be integral to the effect. Just as *Tristram Shandy* is the mad kind of book it seems because of the life and opinions of the man it is about, so the hack's *Tale of a Tub* (as distinct from Swift's) is the atrociously poor thing it seems because of the assumed literary opinions and intellectual habits which the book is attacking.¹⁹ The "author" is, in fact, the chief object of the satire.

THE UNITY OF "TRISTRAM SHANDY"

When we look at *Tristram Shandy* in the light of these traditions, we see that elements from all three help to hold it together: it has a kind of comic plot, though an "exploded" one; it gives us a consistent over-all portrait of the inconsistent mind of one man; and it is the ridiculous product, in its entirety, of a capricious narrator like the grubstreet hack. In only one of these aspects is the commentary disruptive; in the other two, the dramatic presentation of the act of writing is the chief element of cohesion.

But in combining the three traditions, Sterne has created some-

¹⁹ See Bibliography, Sec. V, C.

thing genuinely new: since Tristram, unlike Montaigne, is really trying to tell a story, his struggle as a writer has itself a kind of plot form impossible in Montaigne. Though this action disrupts the comic action that he pretends to be relating, the two are really interdependent, like Swift's story of the three brothers and the grubstreet narrator who tells that story. And yet, unlike what we find in *A Tale of a Tub*, the action of writing a book does not seem here to be shown simply for the sake of making fun of other writers or their opinions; despite the great amount of incidental satire, the action of Tristram in writing this book seems, like the great comic actions of Tom Jones or Don Quixote, to rise above any satirical intent, to exist ultimately as something to be enjoyed in its own right: the satire is for the sake of the comic enjoyment, and not the other way round.

The complexity of this comic action can best be seen by distinguishing two aspects of Tristram's nature, the ridiculous and the sympathetic. On the one hand, since many of Tristram's difficulties are of his own making, his action is like any traditional comic action viewed by spectators who know better than the character. It produces the kind of dramatic irony that we experience when we see Tartuffe making love to Orgon's wife, knowing, as Tartuffe does not, that Orgon is under the table: that is, we laugh at him, and we look forward to his comic unmasking. On the other hand, since Tristram is in many respects admirable, we are on his side. He is up against insurmountable obstacles that we all face—the nature of time, the nature of our unpredictable minds, and the nature of human animality as it undercuts all of our efforts to attain to the ideal.

In the first of these aspects Tristram is a hopeless incompetent. Sterne places his bumbling forty-one-year-old hero at his desk in his study, as if on a stage, dressed in whimsical garb and flinging ink about him as he writes. His life has been hopelessly botched by the clumsiness of his begetting, the crushing of his nose at birth, the confusion of his naming, and a variety of other disasters peculiar to the Shandy household. With such a man in charge, our expectation of comic catastrophe is of course far different from that in comic novels like *Tom Jones*, or even *Charlotte Summers*. Though we

hope to see ever more embarrassing disasters for the young Tristram and his uncle Toby, we expect even more to see the adult Tristram caught in ever increasing narrative difficulties. It is always highly probable that his story will not get told, his failures are so many. Yet it is also more and more probable that the story he wants to tell will be told, since it is obvious that from his own viewpoint he is enjoying success after success. When he concludes, we make the discovery that we half expected all along. "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." A pitifully comic anticlimax indeed, after all the brave promises. And yet the longer we look at his concluding volume, the more signs we see that he has succeeded very well in telling the story he had in mind, ridiculous as that story may be.

The telling of his story is in itself comic chiefly because there is nothing in the nature of his subject, when viewed as material for a conventional comic novel, that should require all of this complexity. The chaos is all of his own making. Sterne and the reader are always aware of the existence of a clear, simple chronology of events that could be told in a hundred pages without difficulty. We have, in fact, only two simple story threads: Tristram's conception, birth, naming, circumcision, and breeching, and uncle Toby's courtship of the Widow Wadman. The two are juggled adroitly throughout the nine volumes, and the ninth volume nicely finishes off what Tristram has told us again and again is his "choicest morsel," the story, which he has "all the time" been "hastening" to tell, of how uncle Toby got his modesty by courting the Widow.²⁰ The ironies that operate against Tristram depend on the contrast between this

²⁰ See Theodore Baird, "The Time-Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," *PMLA*, LI (1936), 803–20; James A. Work's edition of *Tristram Shandy* (New York, 1940), Introduction, pp. xlviii–li; and my "Did Sterne Complete *Tristram Shandy*?" *Modern Philology*, XLVII (February, 1951), 172–83. For an intelligent expression of skepticism about my claim that Sterne had "all the time" been planning to complete his book with this "choicest morsel," see McKillop, *Early Masters*, pp. 213–14. It is true, as McKillop says, that there are "innumerable other ways of not telling of Tristram's life and opinions" besides telling uncle Toby's story. But my claim rests on the fact that none of these other possible ways is rhetorically heightened by repeated promises from Volume I on, and particularly by such promises given at the end of each separately published instalment.

essential simplicity and the fantastic chaos that Tristram makes of it. In the service of this contrast, it is obvious that the greater the actual simplicity and the greater the seeming complexity, the funnier Tristram's narration will seem. We have, in fact, found a work of which we can say the more commentary the better.

But there are aspects of his struggle to write his book which force the reader—perhaps especially the modern reader—to take his side. His two story-threads are simple, after all, only when they are considered as if they were material for a traditional novel. If an honest writer really tries to render, as Tristram does, the inner reality, the full truth about how his life and opinions are related to each other and to truth itself, then he is in trouble; in fact, his battle is a hopeless one from the beginning. Yet we are made to think that the effort is a meaningful one, even though hopeless. Compared with all of the artifices used in conventional novels to ignore the problem of how the fictional world relates to the real world, Tristram's effort seems a noble one; we who have learned the lessons about the supreme value of reality taught by Ford and others (chap. ii, above) may even overrate Tristram's effort and miss some of the ridicule Sterne intends. But in any case we cannot help sympathizing with him in his struggle, however humorously expressed, to get at the inner reality of events, always elusive, always just beyond the artist's grasp. If we read with sympathy Henry James's talk about these problems, how can we deny the same sympathy to Tristram? "Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so."²¹ Nobody knows what James means better than Tristram, and at times his description of his problem reads like a comic version of James. It is interesting, for example, to stand back and watch the two masters of amplification struggle with the rendering of time:

This eternal time-question is accordingly, for the novelist, always there and always formidable; always insisting on the effect of the great lapse and passage, of the "dark backward and abysm," by the terms of truth, and on the effect of compression, of composition and form,

²¹ Preface to *Roderick Hudson*, in *The Art of the Novel*, ed. R. P. Blackmur (New York, 1947), p. 5.

by the terms of literary arrangement. It is really a business to terrify all but stout hearts into abject omission and mutilation, though the terror would indeed be more general were the general consciousness of the difficulty greater.²²

That stout heart, Tristram, as conscious of the difficulties as James, puts the problem somewhat more concretely:

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—was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this—And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description—And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write—It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. . . . write as I will, and rush as I may into the middle of things, as *Horace* advises,—I shall never overtake myself—whipp'd and driven to the last pinch, at the worst I shall have one day the start of my pen—and one day is enough for two volumes—and two volumes will be enough for one year.—[Vol. IV, chap. xiii.]

Sterne and the reader, it is true, share this plight with Tristram only in reduced form; part of the comedy is that even here Tristram has chosen to go beyond what Sterne or James would think reasonable. But Sterne faces, like the reader, the world of chaos in fleeting time as it threatens the artist's effort to be true to that world without lapsing into chaos itself. It is hardly surprising that modern critics have tried to account for the whole book as a battle with time, or as an effort to ascend from the world of time into a truer world. It is more than that, but in the valiant figure of the little eccentric we do have a prefiguring of the many modern narrators—in Joyce, Proust, Huxley, Gide, Mann, Faulkner, among others—who dramatize James's message by fighting the reader's hopeless battle against time.

²² *Op. cit.*, p. 14.

Obviously to talk of eliminating commentary from the narrator's arsenal as he conducts this battle would be absurd. The battle is shown in the commentary; telling has become showing. Every comment is an action; every digression is "progressive" in a sense more profound than Tristram intends when he boasts about getting on with his story.

SHANDEAN COMMENTARY, GOOD AND BAD

After Sterne had extended commentary in quantity and quality until it dominated the whole book and created a new kind of unity, various aspects of *Tristram Shandy* were imitated in work after work, at first in overwhelming numbers and then trailing off to a steady trickle of works on down to the great outburst of self-conscious narrators in the twentieth century.²³

The difference between good and bad again here, as in reliable narration, cannot be easily illustrated with excerpts. A foolish intrusion in a wise work can yield its own kind of delight; a foolish intrusion in a foolish work merely compounds boredom.

Some of the intrusions of Thomas Amory's *John Buncl* (1756), for example, might not seem badly out of place in *Tristram Shandy*: "I have little right to pretend to any thing extraordinary in understanding, as my genius is slow, and such as is common in the lower classes of men of letters; yet, my application has been very great: my whole life has been spent in reading and thinking: and nevertheless, I have met with many women, in my time, who, with very little reading, have been too hard for me on several subjects" (p. 274). Throw in a dash here and some livelier diction there, and it would pass for Tristram's. But when we know from the context that this is not in any sense ironic, that it is intended as straightforward praise for the understanding of women, it becomes amusing in a sense not intended by Amory. On the other hand, many of the intrusions of Swift's grubstreet hack into *A Tale of a Tub* are in themselves stupid in the extreme. Though careful reading reveals Swift's genius at work everywhere, it would not be hard to find fairly extensive quotations which, if read straight, would be as dull as Amory's:

²³ See Bibliography, Sec. V, C and D.

I hope, when this Treatise of mine shall be translated into Foreign Languages, (as I may without Vanity affirm, That the Labor of collecting, the Faithfulness in recounting, and the great Usefulness of the Matter to the Publick, will amply deserve that Justice) that the worthy Members of the several Academies abroad, especially those of *France* and *Italy*, will favourably accept these humble Offers, for the Advancement of Universal Knowledge. . . . And so I proceed with great Content of Mind, upon reflecting, how much Emolument this whole Globe of Earth is like to reap by my Labors.

The narrator here is a dull and foolish man, but the book he "writes" is a great one partly because of the contrast between his role and that of the implied author.

Two requirements for success are, then, appropriateness to a context and usefulness within that context.²⁴ But though necessary, these will not insure success. One could name dozens of failures in which the commentary is appropriate and functional in exactly the same sense as in *Tristram Shandy*. In all of them a dramatized narrator pretends to give one kind of story but really gives another; in many of them there is a good deal of comic detail about how the hero came into the world, and about how his character determines the kind of book he writes. All of the narrators intrude into their ostensible stories "whenever they please" to discuss their own opinions, and all pride themselves on their wit and eccentricity. One could write an accurate description of their mental habits that would make them sound identical. We might then claim to have found a true literary genre, and we could formulate rules of style for the intruding author that all prospective commentators must follow. But what would we then do with the fact that the very words spoken by one narrator to great effect will seem footling and inad-

²⁴ In general the successful imitations have been based on a discovery of new uses for this kind of narrator. Diderot and Bage, for example, both succeeded with genuinely new works. Diderot, in *Jacques le fataliste* (1796; written 1773), created a narrator who illustrated, in the fatalistic principles that governed his writing, the fatalistic principles which govern the book and life itself. Bage, in *Hermesprong* (1796), embodied his satirical message, somewhat in the manner of Swift, in his narrator's imperfections. On the other hand, when there is little reason for such narration other than fashion (*The Man of Feeling* [1771]), or when the imitation is so patent as to seem mere plagiarism (*Yorick's Meditations* [1760]), or when the commentary seems to serve mainly an immature exhibitionism in the author (*Hemingway's Death in the Afternoon*) the result is of course unsatisfactory.

missible when spoken by another narrator who seems to be trying for precisely the same kind of effect? What rules can we formulate to show us which of the following three passages comes from one of the "great books"—it really is on the Chicago list—and which are from books that are almost completely and properly forgotten? I have altered a few proper nouns.

1. And, now I pray all critics existing and possible, since I have let them into the secret of my genius and humour, to muster up all the animadversions they are capable of, on the *Life and Opinions* I am going to write. I no more know myself yet than the man of the Moon, what sort of *Life*, and what sort of *Opinions* they are likely to turn out: but supposing (to avoid the imputation of self-sufficiency,) that they will deserve something more than a supercilious treatment from the critics, I think it proper to give them here notice, that the moment they read this paragraph, they may judge themselves, by my special permission, authorized and privileged, to prepare their arms, ordinary and extraordinary, for exterminating them, if they have power to effect it; as for their good will, I make no doubt of it. . . .

2. Upon looking back from the end of the last chapter and surveying the texture of what has been wrote, it is necessary, that upon this page and the five following, a good quantity of heterogeneous matter be inserted, to keep up that just balance betwixt wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year: nor is it a poor creeping digression (which but for the name of, a man might continue as well going on in the king's highway) which will do the business—no; if it is to be a digression, it must be a good frisky one, and upon a frisky subject too, where neither the horse or his rider are to be caught, but by rebound. The only difficulty, is raising powers suitable to the nature of the service; FANCY is capricious—WIT must not be searched for—and PLEASANTRY (good-natured slut as she is) will not come in at a call, was an empire to be laid at her feet.—The best way for a man, is to say his prayers—

3. *My Life is a continued Digression, from my Cradle to my Grave; was so before I was born, and will be so after I am dead and rotten—the History of which I have been sweating at the best part of this seven Years; and having now with great Pains and Industry, charge and care render'd compleat, and ready for the Press, I first send out this First Volume by way of Postilion, to slap-dash, and spatter all about him, (if the Criticks come in his way) in order to make*

Elbow-room for all the rest of his *little Brethren* that are to come after. My Name is TRISTRAM SHANDY, alias—'Twas just upon my Tongues end, if 'thad been out, I'd ha' bit it off. . . .

As great a Coward as I am, there may have gone I know n't how many *particles* of a Lyon into my Composition, and as small as my Body is, my great Grandfather might be made out of a Whale or an Elephant. You remember the Story of the Dog that kill'd the Cat, that eat the Rat,—for I love to Illustrate *Philosophical Problems*, with common Instances for the use of the less knowing part of the World,—why just so here . . . but I am apt to think (between Friends) if there be any thing in't, that most of the Lyoness Particles rambled somewhere else, to another Branch of the Family; and that more of the Sheep, the gentle Lamb, or such harmless innocent Creatures Rambled into my Composition.

Even the reader who knows Tristram's style well enough to recognize that his is the second of these three might have trouble in defending not simply its superiority over the other two, but its claim to greatness in contrast to their deserved oblivion. Yet the source of the first, *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet, Esq.* (1761), is a wretched imitation almost impossible to read for five pages on end. The third, John Dunton's *Voyage Round the World; or, a Pocket-Library* (1691), though far superior to *Montfichet*, is intolerably tedious when compared either with Montaigne's *Essays*, which it frequently copies at length, or with Sterne's work, which borrows from it heavily.

It is hard to formulate a general description of the purposes or techniques of *Tristram Shandy* that will not fit both other works precisely. Why, then, is Sterne's work so much better, not only in its over-all effect but even in the texture from line to line, from comment to comment, when we put the comments back into context? Sterne knew the answer, at least in part. "I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.—*O diem præclarum!*—then nothing which has touched me will be

thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling" (Vol. I, chap. vi).

Our knowledge of his character does, indeed, make everything that has touched him seem worth talking about. Our friendship is in one sense more complete than any friendship in real life, because we know everything there is to be known about Tristram and we see the world as he sees it. Our interests correspond with his interests, and his style is thus used in a larger context that helps to give it life; in this respect our relationship is more like identity than friendship, despite the many respects in which we "keep our distance" from him. Montfichet tries rather half-heartedly for this same effect, but with his wretched Aunt Dinah and Uncle Dick, Parson Yorrick (*sic*), and Doctor Rantum, he surrounds his commentary with signs that it comes from a despicable man. While "nothing that has touched" Tristram "will be thought trifling in its nature," everything that has touched Montfichet, whether his ambiguously sexed uncle or the philosophies of Descartes and Locke, is defiled; we thus find ourselves judging each detail in its own right, unillumined by any general radiance. "Don Kainophilus," Dunton's narrator, succeeds somewhat better, but his character will not sustain the burden placed upon it; his wit is feeble, his wisdom often foolish, his claims to be one jump ahead of the cleverest reader often belied by our ability to predict his moves far in advance.

But Tristram is Tristram.

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost:—Had they duly weigh'd and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly, —I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me.—Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsid-

erable a thing as many of you may think it;—you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son. . . . Well, you may take my word. . . .

Take his word we do, but only part of the time, and the resulting delightful ambiguities permanently enlarge our view of the possibilities of fiction.

But Sterne enlarges our view of its problems as well. We take his word only part of the time; of all the many problems the reader of *Tristram Shandy* shares with the reader of modern fiction, that of the narrator's indeterminately untrustworthy judgment is most important here.

With his own confusions, he makes our path a troubled, insecure one. The history of unreliable narrators from *Gargantua to Lolita* is in fact full of traps for the unsuspecting reader, some of them not particularly harmful but some of them crippling or even fatal.

Consider the difficulties in the following simple passage, written by Tristram's ancestor, "Don Kainophilus, alias Evander, alias Don John Hard-Name," in *Voyage Round the World*:

—but O! my Mother, O! my dearest Muz! why did you leave me? Why did you go so soon, so very soon away,—Nurses are careless, sad careless Creatures; and alas the young Evander may get a knock in his Cradle if you dye. . . . Your Death leads me to the House of weeping;—it spoils all my Pastimes, dissipates all my Remains . . . persecutes me, destroys me, makes a Martyr of me, and sets my very Brains a Rambling agen, as much as my Feet have been:—But what does all this avail,—could I get all the Irish Howlers . . . to hoot and hollow over her Grave, they'd never bring her to Life agen,—for she was dead. . . . —If you ask what she was, that I'll tell you,—she was a Woman, yet no Woman, but an Angel.

Is this sentimentality intentionally comic? Perhaps. But it is hard to be sure. There is no direct clue to guide us. The context is itself equivocal, though the full page of panegyric that follows seems at many points to be serious. Even if we take the trouble to look up the biography of Dunton, and discover from his *Life and Errors* and other sources that Evander's Mother as described in the *Voyage* corresponds point for point with Dunton's own, with dates and characteristics matching as well as they would in an ordinary serious

autobiography, we still cannot be sure. Our problems in determining the author's distance in such a comic work are, in short, similar to our problems in reading much serious fiction since James. Once the author has decided to go away and send no letter,²⁵ the reader's task in trying to determine just how far away he has gone can be a troubling one indeed. Though the narrator may frequently trip himself up, the reader will know that he has done so only if his own sense of what is sane and sound is better—that is, more nearly like the departed author's—than is the narrator's. By drawing such ambiguous practices into the mainstream of fiction, Sterne developed a kind of reliance on the reader's superior judgment that had formerly been required only in esoterica and in some forms of ironic satire.²⁶

The most extreme form of this new burden on the reader comes whenever there is tension between the compassionate effect of intimacy with a narrator or reflector and the distancing effect of characteristics we deplore. As we have seen in *Tristram Shandy*, whenever a narrator reveals a fault, the fault itself tends to repel us, or at least to make us laugh at him, while the act of honest self-revelation tends to attract us.

This double, and sometimes contradictory, effect is one of the major subjects of Part III. But before we turn to the modern impersonal novelists who have wrestled with it, we should look closely at one earlier triumph in the control of distance. Since it should be a work in which a self-revealing protagonist is to be loved as well as judged, Jane Austen's *Emma* is a natural choice.

²⁵ Rebecca West, *Henry James* (London, 1916), p. 88.

²⁶ See William Bragg Ewald, Jr., *The Masks of Jonathan Swift* (Cambridge, Mass., 1954): "One cannot, as in *A Tale of a Tub*, ironically condemn Homer for . . . his failure to understand the Church of England . . . unless one's readers are aware that Homer has excellences which cannot be touched by such criticism. Mistakes have been made when critics have tried to interpret Swift in the light of their own idea of a norm rather than his" (p. 188). It should be noted that the decision about this type of distance can seem less important in comic fiction than it is in satire or serious fiction. Sterne and Dunton can survive vast quantities of downright misunderstanding of their intentions, without the reader's suspecting that anything is wrong. This indeterminacy and seeming permissiveness can of course serve as a protective device for the weak author. If, for example, Sterne's grammar is weak, he needn't worry: we will surely attribute the grammatical errors to Tristram.

tain Greenland, *Written in Imitation of All Those Wise, Learned, Witty, and Humorous Authors Who Either Already Have, or Hereafter May Write in the Same Stile and Manner* (1752); (i) [Kidgell, John], *The Card* (1755); (j) *The Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates, Commonly Called Corporal Bates, a Broken-Hearted Soldier* (1756). For a much fuller listing on this and the following topics, see Nos. 362 and 363.

362. BOOTH, WAYNE C. "Tristram Shandy and Its Precursors: The Self-Conscious Narrator." Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1950.

363. ———. "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*," *PMLA*, LXVII (1952), 163–85.

A less complete listing.

2. Examples of works (before 1760) held together by the self-conscious portrait of the commentator: (a) Montaigne, *Essays*; (b) Bouchet, *Serées* (*Les Serées de Guillaume Bouchet, Sieur de Brocourt*), ed. C. E. Roybet [Paris, 1873–1882], first published 1584–1598; (c) [Béroalde de Verville], *Le Moyen de Parvenir/œuvre contenant la raison de tout ce qui esté, et sera avec demonstrations certaines et necessaires selon la rencontre des effets [sic] de vertu Et adviendra que ceux qui auront nez à porter lunettes s'en serviront, ainsi qu'il est escrit au Dictionnaire a Dormir en toutes langues . . .* (1610); (d) Bruscombille, *Discours Facetieux et tres-recreatifs, pour oster des esprits d'un chacun, tout ennuy & inquietude . . .* (1609); (e) Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621); (f) Francis Kirkman, *The Unlucky Citizen Experimentally described in the various Misfortunes of an Unlucky Londoner, Calculated for the Meridian of this City but may serve by way of Advice to all the Cominalty of England, but more perticularly to Parents and Children / Masters and Servants / Husbands and Wives / Intermixed with severall Choice Novels. Stored with variety of Examples and advice / President and Precept* (1673); (g) John Dunton, *A Voyage Round the World: or, a Pocket-Library, Divided into several Volumes. The First of which contains the Rare Adventures of Don Kainophilus, From his Cradle to his 15th Year. The Like Discoveries in such a Method never made by any Rambler before. The whole Work intermixt with Essays, Historical, Moral and Divine; and all other kinds of Learning. Done into English by a Lover of Travels. Recommended by the Wits of both Universities* (1691); (h) Farrago, by "Pilgrim Plowden" (1733); (i) Vitulus Aureus: *The Golden Calf; or, A Supplement to Apuleius's Golden Ass. An Enquiry Physico-Critico-Patheologico-Moral into the Nature and Efficacy of Gold. . . . With the Wonders of the Psychoptic Looking-Glass, Lately Invented by the Author—Joakim Philander, M.A.* (1749). There were many other works of this kind between Montaigne and Sterne, to say

nothing of the innumerable collections of jests, periodical essays, brief tales, etc., held together by the character of the dramatized "editor"; it is known that Sterne was acquainted with a great number of them. For a detailed discussion of this tradition, see No. 362, pp. 169–231.

3. Examples of satires using unreliable and self-conscious narration: see No. 362, pp. 134–50, for a discussion, among others, of (a) *The Praise of Folly* (1509); (b) *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1537); (c) *A History of the Ridiculous Extravagancies of Monsieur Oufle . . .* (1711); (d) [Thomas D'Urfey?], *An Essay Towards the Theory of the Intelligible World. Intuitively Considered. Designed for Forty-nine Parts. Part III. Consisting of a Preface, a Post-script, and a little something between. By Gabriel John. Enriched with a Faithful Account of his Ideal Voyage, and Illustrated with Poems by several Hands, as likewise with other strange things not insufferably Clever, nor furiously to the Purpose. The Archetypally Second Edition Printed in the Year One Thousand Seven Hundred, &c.* (n.d.); (e) *Like will to Like, as the Scabby Squire Said to the Mangy Viscount . . .* (1728); (f) John Arbuthnot (and others?), *Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741).

4. Examples of imitations of *Tristram Shandy* and other works influenced by Sterne: (a) [George Alexander Stevens], *The History of Tom Fool* (1760); (b) *Yorick's Meditations upon various Interesting and Important Subjects. Viz. Upon Nothing. Upon Something. Upon the Thing . . .* (1760); (c) [John Carr], *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760); (d) *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy. . . . By Jeremiah Kunastrokius, M.D.* (1760); (e) *The Life and Opinions of Miss Sukey Shandy of Bow Street, Gentlewoman . . .* (1760); (f) *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfiche, Esq.* (1760); (g) *A Funeral Discourse, Occasioned by the much lamented Death of Mr. Yorick, Prebendary of Y-K By Christopher Flagellan* (1761); (h) *The Life, Travels, and Adventures, of Christopher Wagstaff, Gentleman, Grandfather to Tristram Shandy . . . written in the OUT-OF-THE-WAY WAY* (1762)—actually a very witty satire, accusing Sterne of plagiarism from John Dunton's *Voyage Round the World*, this work is often listed as an "imitation"; (i) [Richard Griffith], *The Triumvirate or the Authentic Memoirs of A. B. and C.* (1764); (j) *The Peregrination of Jeremiah Grant, Esq. . . .* (1763); (k) [Francis Gentleman], *A Trip to the Moon By Sir Humphrey Lunatic, Bart.* (York, 1764–65); (l) [Samuel Paterson], *Another Traveller! . . . By Coriaç, Jr.* (1767); (m) *Sentimental Lucubrations*, by Peter Pennyless (1770); (n) [Richard Griffith], *The Koran: or, the Life, Character, and Sentiments of Tria. Juncta in Uno, M.N.A. or Master of No Arts. The Posthumous Works*

of a late Celebrated Genius, Deceased (1770); (o) Herbert Lawrence, *The Contemplative Man; or, The History of Christopher Crab, Esq.* (1771); (p) [Henry Mackenzie], *The Man of Feeling* (Edinburgh, 1771); (q) [Richard Graves], *The Spiritual Quixote* (1773); (r) Yorick's Skull; or, *College Oscitations. With some remarks on the Writings on Sterne, and a Specimen of the Shandean Stile* (1777); (s) [George Keate], *Sketches from Nature; taken and coloured, in a Journey to Margate* (1779); (t) *Continuation of Yorick's Sentimental Journey* (1788); (u) *Flight of Inflatu: or, the Sallies, Stories, and Adventures of a Wild-Goose Philosopher. By the author of the Trivler* (1791); (v) *The Observant Pedestrian* (1795); (w) William Beckford, *Modern Novel Writing, or the Elegant Enthusiast . . . A Rhapsodical Romance . . .* (1796).

After 1800 perhaps a majority of all novels have some "Shandean" intrusion, and there are still many works that are obviously imitative throughout, e.g., (x) [Eaton Stannard Barrett], *The Miss-Led General; a Serio-Comic, Satiric, Mock-Heroic Romance* (1808); (y) John Galt, *The Provost* (1822); (z) [W. H. Pyne], *Wine and Walnuts; or, After Dinner Chit-Chat, by Ephraim Hardcastle, Citizen and Dry-Salter* (1823); (zz) *Duodecimo, or The Scribbler's Progress. An Autobiography, Written by an Insignificant Little Volume, and Published Likewise by Itself* (1849). See also the many Shandean devices in better-known authors: in Thackeray, especially his contributions to *The Snob* as an undergraduate at Cambridge; in Balzac (e.g., *Le peau de chagrin*); in Poe (see especially the short story, "Lionizing," which even has a treatise on Nosology); in Dickens, in Melville, and of course in Trollope. Needless to say, this listing is radically incomplete. For a good, though somewhat inaccurate, bibliography of Sterne's influence in France, see F. B. Barton, *Étude sur l'influence de Laurence Sterne en France au dix-huitième siècle* (Paris, 1911), especially the bibliography reprinted from Pigoreau, pp. 154-57. For additional imitations and burlesques, see Wilbur L. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne* (New Haven, 1929), pp. 230-231, 271, 282-85.

D. A GALLERY OF UNRELIABLE NARRATORS AND REFLECTORS

In general I have excluded works discussed in the text. Though I have weighted the list, for obvious reasons, toward the more difficult kinds of unreliability, the presence of works like "The Spectacles" should remind the reader that the kind of irony I have called unreliability can range all the way from unstated but palpable brutality or stupidity to the baffling mixtures of some contemporary fiction. I should add that, although the presence or absence of unreliability says nothing about literary quality, my list is in part based on judgments of merit: I have ex-

cluded many shoddy imitations of Sterne in the nineteenth century and almost as many novels about novelists in the twentieth. To save space I must list only one work for each author, though most of them have succumbed again and again to the heady wines of secret communication. For further titles especially from recent years, see *Cumulated Fiction Index: 1945-60*, ed. G. B. Cotton and Alan Glencross (London, 1960); most of the novels listed as "First Person Stories" (pp. 198-217) and "Experimental Novels" (pp. 178-79) provide examples of unreliable narration.

Kingsley Amis, *Lucky Jim*. Sherwood Anderson, "The Egg." Jane Austen, *Lady Susan*. Robert Bage, *Hermesprong*. James Baldwin, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood*. Samuel Beckett, *Molloy*. Saul Bellow, *The Victim*. Stella Benson, "Story Coldly Told." Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*. Michel Butor, *L'emploi du temps*. Erskine Caldwell, *Journeyman*. Albert Camus, *The Plague*. Joyce Cary, *The Horse's Mouth*. Jean Cayrol, *On vous parle*. Jacques Chardonne, *Eva*. John Cheever, "Torch Song." Anton Chekhov, "Wild Gooseberries." Ivy Compton-Burnett, *A Heritage and Its History*. Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*. Walter de la Mare, *Memoirs of a Midget*. Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*. Dos Passos, USA. Dostoevski, "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man." Georges Duhamel, *Cry out of the Depths*. Marguerite Duras, *Le square*. Lawrence Durrell, *Mountolive*. Maria Edgeworth, *Castle Rackrent*. Hans Fallada, *Little Man What Now?* Faulkner, *The Wild Palms*. Gide, *Les Caves du Vatican*. William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*. Henry Green, *Loving*. Graham Greene, *The Quiet American*. Albert J. Guerard, *The Bystander*. Mark Harris, *The Southpaw*. Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*. Joseph Hergesheimer, *Java Head*. Hermann Hesse, *Steppenwolf*. Thomas Hinde, *Happy as Larry*. Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*. Henry James (see chap. xii). James Joyce (see chap. xi). Valery Larbaud, *A. O. Barnabooth: His Diary*. Ring Lardner, "A Caddy's Diary." Wyndham Lewis, *The Childermass*. Mary McCarthy, *Cast a Cold Eye*. Carson McCullers, *The Ballad of the Sad Café*. Thomas Mann, *Dr. Faustus*. Katherine Mansfield, "A Dill Pickle." J. P. Marquand, *The Late George Apley*. Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*. Henry de Montherlant, *Les jeunes filles*. Wright Morris, *Love among the Cannibals*. Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Flannery O'Connor, "The Geranium." Frank O'Connor, "Mac's Masterpiece." Edgar Allan Poe, "The Spectacles." Katherine Anne Porter, "That Tree." J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*. Jean-Paul Sartre, *La nausée*. Irwin Shaw, "The Eighty-Yard Run." Alan Sillitoe, "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner." Tobias Smollett, *Humphrey Clinker*. Robert Louis Stevenson, *The Master of Ballantrae*. Italo Svevo (Ettore Schmitz), *Confessions of Zeno*. Frank Swinnerton, *A Month in Gordon Square*. Elizabeth