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责任者 Christensen, Inger. CAL n2005042906# 规范记录

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The cover illustration, Velázquez's «Las Meninas» (1656) is an example of meta-art. The painter focuses on himself and the scene of which he is a part, and he includes the spectator, the courtier, observing the situation from a distance. The supposed theme of the artist's portrait, the royal couple, is only presented as a reflection in the mirror on the wall.

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Preface

I first read John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* as an existential quest novel, but as such the work as a whole did not make sense to me. Thus my interest in metafiction was aroused. I was surprised to discover later that Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, written some two hundred years earlier, contained even more "modern" narrative devices than Barth's novel.

In this way, I became more and more aware of the importance of metafictional elements in the works of various novelists, and I developed a clearer notion of the nature and function of metafiction. It was thus natural for me to wish to explore such novels more systematically in order to clarify how various authors made use of metafictional elements. It was not my desire to categorize the works I selected for closer study, but rather to illuminate what I felt to be significant features of their narrative structure. In surveying modern metafictionists, I found that in the work of some novelists, such as, for instance, Thomas Pynchon, the metafictional element was not a major concern. I have therefore not considered such novelists in this study, although they are of some interest to my general theme.

Chapters of this work have been discussed in research seminars at the Department of English, the University of Bergen: I would like to thank my colleagues and other participants for stimulating criticism and helpful advice. Academic Librarian Maya Thee deserves special thanks for her conscientious assistance in reading and criticizing parts of the manuscript. Ms Penny Mietle and Ms Ragnhild Linchausen were of great help in typing the manuscript. I am also grateful to Ms Mietle and Ms Judy Kennedy for generous advice in linguistic matters.

Bergen, 1981

I. C.

Introduction

The works discussed in this study, the novels of Sterne, Nabokov, Barth and Beckett, belong to a trend which has come much to the fore in Western art in the latter half of the 20th century. Meta-art, which turns its attention upon the work of art itself, is prevalent in all media and art forms. To mention just some areas: In painting it is represented by the works of Georges Braque and in drama by Pirandello. Meta-art occurs in film (Fellini), music (J. W. Morthenson), and even in literary criticism (Thomas R. Whitaker). In fiction one finds among the practitioners of meta-art novelists like Borges, Grass, Lessing and Simon. A closer look at some representatives of metafiction may therefore create greater understanding for a general trend, not only in literature, but in contemporary art as a whole.

The novels of Sterne and the 20th century writers are here classified as metafiction. The term has been coined fairly recently, while this kind of literature has a much older tradition. One has to distinguish accordingly between the origin of the term, designating the phenomenon, and the origin of the phenomenon itself. Also one has to consider the occurrences of the attempts to define this kind of literature, and in that connection "metafiction" is just one of the terms used.

A discussion of the origin of metafiction falls outside the scope of this study. Obviously, *Tristram Shandy* does not mark the beginning of this kind of literature, which was, for instance, prominent in 17th century Spain, and was represented by writers like Lope de Vega and Cervantes.¹ To my knowledge, the term metafiction first occurs in an essay by William Gass where he refers to the works of Borges, Barth and O'Brien: "Indeed, many of the so-called antinovels are really metafictions."² Like Gass, I prefer metafiction to anti-novel as the more appropriate term. To approach a definition of metafiction other terms used about metafictional works have to be examined.

In Joseph T. Shipley's *Dictionary of World Literary Terms*, *Tristram Shandy* is referred to as an example of the anti-novel, which is explained as a "protest against the conventions of novelistic forms . . ." Also *Don Quixote* is mentioned as an anti-novel, because it was written as a reaction against books

*By hearing ye shall hear, and
shall not understand*

Matt., 13, xiv

of chivalry.³ The meaning of anti-novel seems too wide to serve as a description of metafictional works, because a not inconsiderable number of novels appear as protests against established artistic norms without possessing metafictional characteristics. Larry McCaffery, finding that anti-novel is too broad a term, because it includes all works that appear unconventional and experimental, points out the explicit features of metafiction: "the defining characteristic of metafiction, however, is its direct and immediate concern with fiction-making itself." Anti-novels may also deal with the making of fiction, but in an indirect way. In metafiction this has become the main subject.⁴

John Fletcher and Malcolm Bradbury use the phrase "the introverted novel" about the works of, among others, Vladimir Nabokov, Muriel Spark and Günter Grass: by the turn of the century the novel seems to have no other field left to develop and therefore "it turned in upon itself". Fletcher and Bradbury distinguish between "narrative introversion", which characterizes the 20th century novels, and "the mode of self-conscious narration", which belongs to the 17th and 18th century novels. Thus a book like *Tristram Shandy* wants to draw attention to "the autonomy of the narrator, while the later techniques drew attention to the autonomy of the fictive structure itself."⁵ To me, *Tristram Shandy* appears to bring into focus not only the autonomy of the narrator but also that of the narrative as well as of the narratee. I find greater likeness than dissimilarity between 18th and 20th century metafiction, and the expressions "the introverted novel" and "the self-conscious mode" seem equally as applicable to *Tristram Shandy* as to *Molloy*.

In his article "Metafiction" from 1970, Robert Scholes tries to explain "the nature of contemporary experimental fiction" by four directions in literary criticism, which he classifies as formal, structural, behavioural, and philosophical.⁶ Scholes links the various manifestations of metafiction to these critical schools, finding Barth's fiction mainly formal; Barthelme's behavioural, etc. Scholes is one of the first to employ the term metafiction, but he does not give an explicit definition of it. In a later article Scholes describes metafiction, or "self-reflective fiction" as he also calls it, as: "a fiction which, if it is 'about' anything, it is about the possibilities and impossibilities of fiction itself . . ."⁷ This is too sweeping a definition to be helpful in indicating the distinctive nature of metafiction.

Stanley Fogel presents an explicit and quite comprehensive definition of metafiction: "Metafiction entails exploration of the theory of fiction through fiction itself. Writers of metafiction . . . scrutinize all facets of the literary construct – language, the conventions of plot and character, the relation of the artists to his art and to his reader."⁸ This definition, nevertheless, leaves out what to me is an essential aspect of metafiction – the novelist's message. Fogel emphasizes the formal side of metafictional creation. This illustrates the general tendency of the reader to overlook the message of the metafictional work.

In this study metafiction is regarded as fiction whose primary concern is to express the novelist's vision of experience by exploring the process of its own making. This definition indicates that only those works are considered metafiction where the novelist has a message to convey and is not merely displaying his technical brilliance.

This examination will deal with selected novels of four representatives of metafiction. Of these, only Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* belongs to the 18th century, while the works of Nabokov, Barth and Beckett represent the 20th century. The choice of novels needs some justification and particularly two questions have to be dealt with: why this emphasis on 20th century fiction and Sterne as the only representative of the 18th century? And secondly, why is the 19th century left out?

In the context of the 18th century English novel, *Tristram Shandy* presents itself as an astoundingly unique work of metafiction. Its appearance becomes less mysterious when seen against the background of Sterne's literary influences; Cervantes, Rabelais and Robert Burton are the writers most frequently referred to by the critics.⁹ Wayne C. Booth ascribes Sterne's use of the intruding narrator and comments to the readers to comic novels like the anonymously published *Charlotte Summers*, *the Fortunate Parish Girl*, and he finds that Sterne drew on Montaigne's *Essays* for the device of the narrator's commenting on his composition during the very act of writing.¹⁰ However, in 18th century English literature *Tristram Shandy* stands out as the most weighty specimen of metafiction. Sterne's work is an obvious choice if one wants an 18th century work to set the 20th century novels in relief, as is my purpose. Seen against the background of the earlier novel, the contours of 20th century metafiction should become clearer.

The lack of a 19th century work is partly explained in the preceding paragraph: my analysis will focus on the 20th century metafictionists, and the examination of *Tristram Shandy* serves mainly to set off the features of the later novels. The answer is also that in 19th century narrative art, metafiction is not in vogue – a circumstance noted by several critics. Robert Alter refers to the "almost complete eclipse of the self-conscious novel during the nineteenth century" and he sees this as due to the "imaginative involvement with history."¹¹

The affinity between the fiction of the 18th and the 20th centuries has been pointed out by, among others, Bergonzi. He claims that while the 19th century English novelist is concerned with presenting his vision of life, the fiction of the 18th and 20th centuries discloses an interest in "craft and convention".¹² Jocipovici also remarks on the similarity between modern novels and fiction before the 19th century, which he ascribes to the dominant conception of art as artifact in contrast to the 19th century view of art as imitation.¹³ To some extent this may explain why metafiction, a rather form-oriented literary trend, occurs in these periods while it is neglected in the 19th century.

Nineteenth century fiction may take up themes typical of metafictional works. Some of Hawthorne's novels, for instance, centre on questions concerning the artist's isolation from mankind, his difficulties with communication. A comparison between Hawthorne's *The Blithedale Romance* (1852) and Barth's *The Floating Opera* (1956) will disclose the thematic relatedness as well as structural differences between metafiction and the 19th century "Künstler-roman".

Both Hawthorne and Barth's novels have the first person narrator and deal with the artist-writer's existential situation: in Hawthorne's novel, Coverdale, the narrator, presents himself as a poet. Barth's narrator, Todd Andrews, works as a lawyer, but in the novel his role as writer is given the main emphasis. In both novels the narrator-protagonists' relation to other people is damaged by the detachment due to their task as novelists or poets, which is inevitably bound up with a certain aesthetic distance.

The Blithedale Romance reveals Coverdale's detached attitude through descriptions of his behaviour towards, and his remarks about his companions, and in addition by symbolic devices. Thus Coverdale discloses his remoteness by constantly referring to his associates as actors in a play with Zenobia as the prima donna and by observations like "I began to long for a catastrophe."¹⁴ The artist as an individual removed from life is expressed symbolically by Coverdale's perch in the tree where he writes poetry and observes his fellows from a distance (p. 432) and further by the comparison of poetry to wine distilled from the grapes of reality (p. 432 and p. 595).

Barth employs similar symbolism in *The Floating Opera* but to a much lesser extent, depending more on structural devices and the narrator's direct comments to the reader.¹⁵ While Hawthorne stops after having described his narrator-protagonist's existential dilemma, Barth goes on to disclose Todd Andrew's difficulties in writing the very book in which he figures as the narrator. By revealing the technique of *The Floating Opera* in the novel, Barth stresses the parallelism between the narrator's difficulties as an artist and as a man.

Hawthorne discusses the narrator's problems as a human being but does not, like Barth, deal with them in terms of the technical or practical aspects of the narrator's craft. Even Coverdale's true situation, his self-chosen distance from life and the complications this choice brings with it, is expressed so obliquely in the novel that the reader may get nearly to the end without discovering that this is not chiefly a book about Zenobia and Hollingsworth. The last chapter containing Coverdale's confession of his secret love for Priscilla makes one realize his dilemma: how he has lived vicariously through the lives of the other characters.

In Barth's book, on the other hand, the narrator constantly stresses his intentions by turning directly to the reader. *The Blithedale Romance* does not in any way explore the process of its own making, an important requirement according to our definition.¹⁶

Before one enters into a closer discussion of *metafiction*, it is necessary first to question the fundamentals of *fiction*. A consideration of the "basic situation" of story-telling as delineated by Wolfgang Kayser seems here highly appropriate if one is not to get "lost in the funhouse" of metafiction: "Die epische Ursituation ist: ein Erzähler erzählt einer Hörerschaft etwas, was geschehen ist."¹⁷ The relation of narrator-story-audience delineated by Kayser exists in every narrative whether it is oral or written.

Kayser draws attention to some additional factors of the written narration in which fiction is included: the author and the historical or actual reader. He regards the narrator as a part the author puts on and warns against confusing the two or regarding the narrator as identical with the author.¹⁸

The distinction between narrator and author has been thoroughly debated in recent criticism.¹⁹ But Kayser's view of the reader as part of the fictional world has received much less attention: "Wie können wir . . . die ungezählten und völlig verschiedenen Leser Formelemente des Romans sein? . . . Der Leser ist etwas Gedichtetes, ist eine Rolle, in die wir hineinschlüpfen und der wir uns selber zusehen können."²⁰ In this way Kayser differentiates between the reader *within* the work of fiction to whom the narrator may address himself, the narratee, and the reader, the you and I *outside* the book who adopt the part of that other reader created for us in the novel.

The relation of narrator-story-reader is expanded in the fictional situation to encompass: author-narrator-story-fictional reader (audience) – actual reader. Kayser regards the author and the actual reader as external elements in the fictional world, to which the other three elements belong as integral parts.

Seen against the background of Kayser's description of the fundamentals of the narrative situation, the differences between a work of fiction and one of metafiction become obvious. In the latter the novelist focuses on "Die epische Ursituation": this functions as the theme of the book. Secondly, the author places himself inside the fictional world and figures as a structural element in the novel. The historical author will of course always exist outside and apart from the work itself, so that metafiction only operates with an additional factor: fictional author.

Metafiction deals with questions essential to any novelist: the narrator's conception of his own role and art, and of the reader. Writers are, to a greater and lesser extent, conscious of these relations, but the metafictionist differs by making these questions the subject of his work. Thus metafiction sheds light on fundamental issues in connection with fictional creation in general.

Further, writers of metafiction focus on questions of primary importance not only to novelists, but to man in general. Daily, the average human being acts out the basic situation of story-telling drawn up by Kayser in the way that he makes use of words to impart his thoughts and past experiences to others. In this situation man will find how words very often do not give an adequate expression to what he wants to say. In addition, every user of words knows

how frequently others misunderstand one's utterances. The metafictionist deals with these fundamental issues of communication by directing attention to the narrator, the narrative, and the narratee in his work.

On the basis of Kayser's fundamental elements of the narrative situation, the analyses of the individual novels will in each chapter focus on: I. The narrator's conception of his own role; II. Notions of the narrative as expressed in the novel; III. The significance of the narratee. The attitude towards narrator, narrative, narratee expressed in the novel has its foundation in the author's view of existence. Thus an analysis of these elements will in the last instance reveal not only the writer's relation to art, but to reality as a whole. Ultimately, the meaning of metafiction depends on the novelist's vision of experience.

I. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: A Plea for Communication

The Russian critic Victor Shklovsky was the first to draw attention to the metafictional¹ qualities of *Tristram Shandy*. In his essay on the novel, which appeared in 1921, he claims that "awareness of form constitutes the subject matter of the novel . . ."² and that a prominent feature of Sterne is to " 'lay bare' his technique."³ Further he points to his way of opposing "literary" to ordinary time, and device of "defamiliarizing" or "making strange" familiar objects and events in order to draw the reader's attention towards the form of the novel. In Shklovsky's opinion, Sterne's intentions with his book were purely aesthetical: "Sterne thought such [aesthetic] motivation an end in itself."⁴

Most recent criticism recognizes Sterne as a writer of metafiction, but this is generally considered one aspect of *Tristram Shandy*.⁵ J. M. Stedmond's substantial contribution to Sternean criticism does not concern itself chiefly with *Tristram Shandy* as a work of metafiction, though this critic makes it clear that Sterne, like Joyce, Flaubert, and Beckett, stresses "the book as book" exploring the rules and limits of novel writing, chiefly through his manipulation of the time aspect.⁶

In contrast to previous criticism – with the exception of Shklovsky – Robert Alter considers *Tristram Shandy* solely from the point of view of metafiction.⁷ As his definition of the "self-conscious novel" indicates, Alter's analysis of Sterne's book concentrates on the author's concern with mimesis. The present examination will also consider the aesthetic and formal aspects of *Tristram Shandy* but intends to probe deeper into Sterne's purpose with his display of structural devices. This study centres on the exploration of Sterne's vision or message, which I hope to show concerns the problems of human intercourse in its ethical and aesthetic consequences.

1. Narrator as Entertainer

The picture entitled "Thos. Bridges and Lawrence Sterne as Mountebanks"⁸ gives some indication of the opinions which the public in Sterne's time formed of the author of *Tristram Shandy*: Sterne is portrayed as a quack, offering his goods for sale, hat in hand and smiling slyly. Richard A. Lanham argues that in Sternean criticism two conceptions of the novelist prevail: some of the critics see him as "venial jester" and the others cherish him as "existential philosopher" while Lanham himself suggests a reconciliation of these opposite views: Sterne has both seriousness and humour in store for his reader.⁹ The last approach to Sterne seems most reasonable and comes close to the view of the narrator that will be presented here.

Before one considers the narrator's role and motivation, it is necessary first to stress the distinction between author and narrator to be found in the novel. Wayne C. Booth draws attention to the fact that "in *all* written works there is an implied narrator or 'author' . . ." but in *Tristram Shandy* the narrator's role is underlined and his self-consciousness developed to the extent that his intruding comments to the reader concern himself not only as one of the characters, but in his specific role as the teller of the tale.¹⁰

Sterne insists that Tristram is not to be confused with himself. This is revealed for instance in the footnote with corrections of "Mr. Tristram Shandy" 's spelling,¹¹ which may be taken as a kind of editor's comment and an attempt to satirize a conventional device. But the point of interest here is that the distance between narrator and actual author is underlined at the same time as one more element – the fictional editor – is placed between them.

The disparity between narrator and author is also emphasized by Tristram, who points out the fictional quality of his nature. The narrator exists only inside the covers of the book and on an equal footing with the characters of the novel. When he has finished his task of narrating the story, his existence must come to an end as well: "as long as I live or write (which in my case means the same thing)" (p. 121). In the same way as Tristram speaks of "that future and dreaded page" (p. 343; *italics mine*) when Toby is gone, he tells the reader: "Let us leave, if possible, *myself*: – But 'tis impossible, – I must go along with you to the end of the work" (p. 336).

Tristram, then, does not in any way figure as Sterne's *alter ego*; on the contrary, it is emphasized that he has a part to play like the other characters of the novel. He only wears a somewhat special mask, that of the narrator. How is this role presented in the novel? What is Tristram's own concept of his role?

Henri Fluchère finds that Tristram adopts "the mythical role of court jester . . ."¹² Repeatedly, he refers to himself as a clown: "I triumph'd over him as I always do, like a fool" (p. 162). Thus Sterne's image among his contemporaries as a smiling charlatan does not differ much from Tristram's picture of himself. And in accordance with his role as the fool, he wears the harlequin's

dress: "Here – pray, Sir, take hold of my cap, – nay, take the bell along with it, and my pantoufles too" (p. 139).

By bestowing the name of the fool in *Hamlet* upon the warm-hearted but eccentric clergyman in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne gives a pointer to his estimation of the fool's calling. According to Melvyn New, Yorick serves as a foil to the members of the Shandy family; he has his weaknesses but unlike the others he is aware of them.¹³ Tristram holds Yorick in high esteem: "I have the highest idea of the spiritual and refined sentiments of this reverend gentleman" (p. 17). Yorick embodies the traditional fool: the wise clown behind whose jokes a serious intent is hidden. This is how Tristram portrays Yorick and how he sees his own role as a narrator.

Tristram expresses his intention with the words: "I sat down to write my life for the amusement of the world, and my opinions for its instruction" (p. 159). The novel is meant to provide its readers with something more than mere entertainment. In Sterne's *Letters* one gets a glimpse of his purpose behind the jokes and humour of the book. He expresses his "hopes of doing the world good by ridiculing what I thought deserving of it . . ."¹⁴

Sterne also admits that the writing affords him pleasure: "so much am I delighted with my uncle Toby's imaginary character, that I am become an enthusiast."¹⁵ One may therefore draw the conclusion that besides possessing a satiric intent, his narration serves as an antidote to the cares of life, which stem, in Sterne's case, chiefly from his incurable consumption. The dedication makes this explicit (cf. p. 2). Though the novel contains criticism, satirizing for instance in "Slawkenbergius's Tale" (pp. 183 ff), the alleged learned dispute over nothing; it is primarily written to make its author – and consequently also its readers – forget the sore realities with the help of laughter.

A correspondence exists between Tristram's and Toby's situations because they both obtain relief from their cares through substitution – the one on the bowling green; the other at the writing-desk.¹⁶ The books on sieges and demolitions of towns Toby "would read with that intense application and delight, that he would forget himself, his wound, his confinement, his dinner" (p. 68). His wound makes him unfit both as a lover and in warfare, and he concentrates his activities in a play war.

Tristram finds a means in his writing – and what juicy bits does it not contain – to compensate for his impotence and lack of involvement in real life.¹⁷

However, he is well aware that he lives vicariously in his writing: "I who must be cut short in the midst of my days, and taste no more of 'em than what I borrow from my imagination" (p. 377). By writing in the way he does he may keep his woes at a distance. But he cannot fool himself to the extent that he confuses the laughter evoked by his writing about life with the joy stemming from actual living. In his situation the role as clown-narrator becomes the only possible escape if he is not to go insane like "poor Maria" (cf. pp. 483ff.).

Volume VII of *Tristram Shandy* illustrates rather aptly how Tristram writes

both for instruction and amusement but concentrates on the latter. According to Lewis Curtis, this part of the novel was written as a parody on the French guidebook in vogue at the time,¹⁸ and it satirizes also the usual way of making the grand tour through Europe. At the same time Tristram makes it a description of his flight from death, and this he significantly enough “turns into a festive dance”.¹⁹ In addition he applies the travelling motif as a metaphor both of the passage of life itself and of writing:²⁰

How far my pen has been fatigued like those of other travellers, in this journey of it, over so barren a track – the world must judge – but the traces of it . . . tell me 'tis the most fruitful and busy period of my life; for as I had made no convention with my man with the gun as to time – by stopping and talking to every soul I met who was not in full trot – joining all parties before me – waiting for every soul behind . . . arresting all kinds of beggars, pilgrims, fiddlers, fryars . . . In short, by seizing every handle, of what size or shape soever, which chance held out to me in this journey – I turned my *plain* into a *city* . . . (p. 409)

By this account of his way of travelling, Tristram gives a rather exact delineation of his method of writing and a description of the novel as a whole. He keeps an eye open for seemingly insignificant details, recommending the inn-keeper's daughter in Montreuil as the “one thing . . . in it at present very handsome” (p. 373). Tristram concerns himself with people, and one consequence is that the writer's task never grows dull, but becomes a source of variety and pleasure.

The other characters, to the extent that they try to express themselves orally or in writing, throw Tristram's way of narration into relief. Concerning his fellow travellers through France on his grand tour, especially Walter's situation is illuminated, and also in his case there is a correspondence between his method of travelling and the way he conducts his life (cf. p. 391).

Walter goes to see the sights recommended in the travel books. Ironically enough, the only part of the travel described in some detail is his visit to some saintly mummies in an abbey. What interests Walter is not the saints or the stories of their lives. The *name* of one of them, “Saint *Optat*” (p. 393), fires his imagination and he notes it down with great glee. Walter's visit to the dead, his excitement at names and disconcert for the individuals that the names after all denominate, shows a great difference in life style and interest between himself and his son.

Walter reveals the same peculiarities in the field of writing. His narrative differs, especially in intention and method from Tristram's. Walter's *Tristrapaedia* is meant as a source of instruction for his son. Tristram states that it was written “so as to form an INSTITUTE for the government of my childhood and adolescence” (p. 281). His intention does not correspond to Tristram's who considers *his* work first and foremost as an entertainment. Walter approaches his task “with the most painful diligence, proceeding step by step in every line,

with the same kind of caution and circumspection” and his work becomes “torture to him” (p. 282).

While Tristram lets himself be distracted into pursuing every whim that occurs to him, Walter makes a point of withstanding the temptations that will make him diverge from his true intentions, and he compares his writing to warfare (cf. p. 283). This underlines the difference between Walter on the one hand and Tristram and Toby on the other. Walter's war with words causes him pain, as it is a losing battle. Toby enjoys his play war to the full as does Tristram *his* hobby-horse, the narrator's role.

Tristram emphasizes further the difference between Walter and Toby and himself by revealing their attitudes to matters of sex, which in the novel connotes another creative process, the activity of writing.²¹ Here again Walter puts up a resistance: “My father, as appears from many of his papers, was very subject to this passion, before he married – but . . . whenever it befell him, he would never submit to it like a christian; but would pish, and huff, and bounce, and kick, and play the Devil, and write the bitterest Philippicks against the eye that ever man wrote” (p. 446). Toby does not fight against the attacks of love: “My uncle *Toby*, on the contrary, took it like a lamb – sat still and let the poison work in his veins without resistance” (p. 446).

Tristram's narrative shows that in matters of love he takes after his father only in the way that for him too love leads to sublimation, to the act of writing. However, Tristram considers his writing as a game and a source of pleasure. He has no scruples about yielding to his inclinations, regarding both writing and the passion of love. Thus, on his tour through France he could not pass “by a woman in a mulberry-tree with out commending her legs, and tempting her into conversation with a pinch of snuff” (p. 409).

The following passage also indicates how the disparity between father and son in their views on writing is bound up with different attitudes to sex: Walter

never used the word *passions* once – but *ass* always instead of them . . . I must here observe to you, the difference betwixt

My father's ass
and my hobby-horse – in order to keep characters as separate as may be, in our fancies as we go along.

For my hobby-horse . . . 'Tis the sporting little filly-folly which . . . a man makes a shift to get a stride on, to canter it away from the cares and solitudes of life . . . But for my father's ass . . . 'tis a beast concupiscent – and foul befall the man, who does not hinder him from kicking. (p. 450)

By loading the words *ass* and *hobby-horse* with the double connotation of passion and writing and expressing his preference for the last-mentioned animal, Tristram gives here a vivid illustration of how he regards the narrator's task. In contrast to his father, he has indeed been “*wrote-galloping*” (p. 367) with great enjoyment to himself.

Playing the role of the entertainer, whose task it is to keep himself and the reader happy, the narrator removes himself somewhat from his object. Without a proper distance, the observer would not be able to see the humorous side of things. His laughter would inevitably give way to tears. Such a remote attitude in the narrator bears great likeness and may be compared to the position of a god. Stedmond finds this to be the case in *Tristram Shandy*: "From a god's eye view, man is comic, as Swift's Lilliputians are comic."²² Thus by acting the part of an entertainer, the narrator also plays the role of a god, because laughter places him above his object and makes him in a way independent in relation to what he laughs at.

Tristram repeatedly stresses his autonomy as writer or teller of the tale. His practice of doing "all things out of rule" (p. 211) forms a contrast to those adhering to rules either in their behaviour like Walter or in their writing like Slawkenbergius, who "tied down every tale" (p. 199) in accordance with Aristotle's rules. Tristram demonstrates his independence by, for instance, writing chapters 20 to 25 *before* the 18th and 19th in volume IX. He explains that this is meant simply as an example of his privilege as narrator to write as he pleases: "All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, 'to let people tell their stories their own way'" (p. 485).

Though Tristram's liability to regard reality in a humorous light removes him from his creation and makes him feel his autonomy as a narrator, his independence is in no way absolute: "But this is neither here nor there – why do I mention it? – Ask my pen, – it governs me, – I govern not it" (p. 316). Kayser has pointed out the paradox of the writer's situation: "der Dichter schafft die Welt seines Romans – aber es gilt auch: diese Welt schafft sich durch ihn, verwandelt sich zu, zwingt ihn zum Spiel der Verwandlungen, um dadurch wirklich zu werden . . ."²³ Tristram illustrates to some extent Kayser's paradox. He may, like Toby "make himself so far master of his subject, as to be able to talk upon it without emotion" (p. 67). But the creational process presupposes *some* kind of involvement, even if he feels himself superior to literary conventions.

Because it is Tristram's intention to provide entertainment, his commitment exists on an intellectual level. His emotional detachment as a narrator corresponds to a similar independence as a man. An incident in Toby's life makes this clear:

Whilst a man is free – cried the corporal, giving a flourish with his stick thus –

A thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms could not have said more for celibacy.

My uncle Toby look'd earnestly towards his cottage and his bowling green. (p. 465)

Even unsuspecting Toby realizes that a marriage to Widow Wadman may very likely curtail further campaigns on the bowling green.

As discussed above, Toby's play war corresponds to and has the same function as Tristram's narrative. His role as narrator substitutes other possible roles, other kinds of involvement in life. He possesses a freedom as a man, a non-commitment to his surroundings without which he could not carry through his task as an entertainer. And his novel represents a manifestation of his freedom, his ability to laugh in the face of distress. The corporal's flourish does not only persuade Toby of the bachelor's advantages; it becomes a visible symbol for the reader of the narrator's independence and originality.

Tristram's emotional detachment, which characterizes him as a man and as a narrator, brings with it various problems. Repeatedly, he refers to his difficulties: "What! are not the unavoidable distresses with which, as an author and a man, thou art hemm'd in on every side of thee – are they, *Tristram*, not sufficient, but thou must entangle thyself still more?" (p. 419). What he deplores is his tendency to lose himself in digressions.

Tristram explains his weakness as originating in his mother's impulsive question to his father at the moment of his conception: "Pray, my dear . . . have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" (p. 4). His mother's momentary "unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature" (p. 7) implants in her son a life-long similar inclination.

Without refuting Tristram's explanation, one may at least point to another connection to account for his digressional method of writing. This is related to his tendency to approach the world from an intellectual point of view. Not to let anything drive you off the beaten track indicates a mental restrictedness:

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule, – straight forward . . . he might venture to foretell you to an hour when he should get to his journey's end; – but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. . . . All which both the man and his mule are quite exempt from. (p. 28)

By driving straight on the muleteer exhibits a singleness of purpose and a complete commitment to his task. Indirectly, he is compared to his beast; the point for both of them is to get to the end. With his ready mind Tristram cannot withstand the temptation to look into matters as he goes along.

However, Tristram finds it necessary to justify the frequent occurrence of digressions in his narrative. "Digressions," he asserts, "incontestably, are the sunshine; – they are the life, the soul of reading; – take them out of this book for

instance, – you might as well take the book along with them” (p. 55). But the ideal book should contain a balance between the story and the digressions, between the “digressive and progressive movements” (p. 55). This, he argues, may be found in his narrative where the “two contrary motions are introduced . . . and reconciled” (p. 54).

To some extent the opposing factors of digression and progression in a narrative correspond to the dichotomy between wit and judgement in the narrator. Tristram finds that these qualities should also exist in equal proportions in a narrative, and he hopes that the reader will discover that this is so in his book (cf. p. 146). In his discussion of the terms *wit* and *judgement*, Alter finds the view predominant in *Tristram Shandy* that the function of wit is to procure entertainment – a conception Alter asserts Sterne inherited from Locke.²⁴ When Tristram calls for equal proportions of wit and judgement as well as digressions and progression, it may be possible to see this in relation to his motivation, his intention to amuse and instruct.

But however much Tristram may wish to create a balance, the digressive side of his narrative outweighs the progressive one, and his work amuses far more than it instructs. Tristram sometimes laments the “thousand distresses and domestic misadventures” (p. 175) which he has to come to terms with, thanks to his special inclination. However, he carries through his role as entertainer with immense delight. The resulting work shows that he has obtained at least part of what he intended: “to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth” (p. 2).

2. Fiction as Artifact

The relation between art and reality is indeed a usual novelistic concern. However, the extent to which their work may try to reproduce the external world varies from novelist to novelist. Realistic writers find it important to create an imitation as objectively and accurately as possible. Other authors wish to make their art expressive of their personal feelings and impressions. Where should one place a work of metafiction on a scale reaching from an objective to a subjective presentation of reality? The question is somewhat irrelevant, because metafiction does not concern itself with its ability *per se* to imitate reality. It focuses on the difference between art and reality and displays its consciousness of this distance.

In a work of metafiction the concept prevails that art can never become a true copy of reality. This fact the novelist takes into account, and instead of hiding the disparity between fiction and the external world, the writer exposes it:

A different way to come to terms with the discrepancy between art and the Real Thing is to *affirm* the artificial element in art (you can't get rid of it anyhow), and make the artifice part of your point instead of working for higher and higher fi . . . That would be my way.²⁵

These are Barth's words, but a similar conception may be found in Sterne's novel.

Tristram Shandy displays the difference between “art and the Real Thing” first in its concept of language in general. The Greek motto on the title page of the first volume of the novel indicates Sterne's awareness that the source of men's disagreement may very often be ascribed to the fact that an object gives rise to various and conflicting meanings: “It is not things themselves that disturb men, but their judgments about these things” (p. 1). To arrive at one meaning seems an impossible task and this pertains not least to the significance of words.

In *Tristram Shandy* innumerable misunderstandings arise out of the characters' disparate interpretations of each others' utterances: The word *bridge* holds different meanings for Toby and Dr. Slop: the one the doctor is making he intends for Tristram's nose and not for Toby's play town. Critics ascribe Sterne's preoccupation with the meaning of words to the influence of Locke: “In fact – and this is a Lockian theme *par excellence* – words do not represent reality, they are merely ‘the signs of men's ideas’, signs often impure . . . and unstable . . . of such ideas of reality as we can make for ourselves.”²⁶

In *Tristram Shandy* the disparity between art and reality is expressed not only through different uses of language, but also by the characters' approaches towards the interpretation of reality. Toby has been present at the siege of Namur, but when he has to recount what really happened, how the battle went, he meets with difficulties “as to make his company fully comprehend where and what he was about” (p. 63). Tristram underlines that what complicates Toby's account is “the unsteady uses of words” (p. 67).

To put matters straight, Toby gets hold of a map of Namur, which leads to his study of military books and later to the creation of the model town on the bowling green. This saves him from “a world of sad explanations” (p. 65), and he overcomes his difficulties in making clear to himself and his audience what really took place. What matters to him is to arrive at a truthful representation of reality, and this can be obtained only through a study of facts. His method, then, must be described as empiric, and his work – the model on the green – constitutes a piece of realism if ever there was one.

Toby and Trim go to nearly ridiculous extremes in making the world on the lawn as exactly like the original as possible. And it is important to note that they take the play war as seriously as if it were a real war:

When the town, with its works, was finished, my uncle Toby and the corporal began to run their first parallel – not at random, or any how – but from the same points and distances the allies had begun to run theirs; and regulating their

approaches and attacks, by the accounts my uncle *Toby* received from the daily papers, – they went on, during the whole siege, step by step with the allies. (p. 338)

Toby and Trim confuse their constructed world with reality.

Trim displays the same tendency on another occasion when he is reading from Yorick's sermon. One part of it deals with the evils of the Inquisition, and Trim mistakes this for an actual report about Portugal, even believing it to be an account of his brother's misfortunes in that country. Walter tries to point out to him that his supposition is wrong: "I tell thee, *Trim*, again, quoth my father, 'tis not an historical account, – 'tis a description. – 'Tis only a description, honest man, quoth *Slop*, there's not a word of truth in it. – That's another story, replied my father" (p. 105). With his last remark, Walter has a fling at Dr. Slop as a Roman Catholic, but his comment also discloses that he recognizes that a written text may be true in a sense other than a factual one.

Compared to Toby and Trim, Walter has just the opposite idea of how to grasp the truth of things. Toby is suspicious of the ability of words to give an adequate interpretation of reality; he turns to "the first springs" (p. 479) of knowledge, to the world of facts itself. Walter has a great trust in words, which he shows, for instance, by his grief when his son is christened Tristram instead of Trismegistus. "His opinion, in this matter, was, That there was a strange kind of magick bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impress'd upon our characters and conduct" (p. 38). Toby, whose reasoning is always practical and down to earth, admits: "For my own part, *Trim* . . . I can see little or no difference betwixt my nephew's being called *Tristram* or *Trismegistrus*" (p. 220).

The truth exists for Walter in the words or names themselves, not in what they designate: "of the influence of Christian names . . . he was systematical, and, like all systematick reasoners, he would . . . twist and torture every thing in nature to support his hypothesis" (p. 41). In Walter's case, his not inconsiderable learning forms a barrier between himself and the world. He interprets reality through a mass of set hypotheses. In the same way as "his rhetoric and conduct were at perpetual handcuffs" (p. 150), his writing has little affinity to the external world, though it is in accordance with the rules of rhetoric and discloses Walter's knowledge of the classical authorities on science.

The difference between Trim's empiric approach to reality and Walter's *a priori* knowledge is indicated in Volume V, where Trim (ch. XL) and Walter (ch. XXXVI) give a discourse upon the same topic, "the radical heat and radical moisture within us" (p. 300). Walter, reading from his *Tristrapaedia*, quotes Aristotle, while Trim draws on his experience at the siege of the city of Limerick where the "setting [of] fire every night to a pewter dish full of brandy . . . took off the damp of the air" (p. 304). Dr. Slop satirizes Trim's speech, finding it "emperic" (p. 304). His opinion is fully supported by the rest of the audience who regard this as an indisputable fact.

Walter, on the one hand, and Toby and Trim, on the other, have different approaches to reality which their interpretations and recreations of it disclose. The latter turn to the world of facts, and their view of life stems from their experience and observations. For Walter there exists a short cut to knowledge through systems, and he has great faith in the power of words to get at the truth of reality. But none of them is aware of the disparity between reality and their respective copies of it. Toby and Trim mistake their substitute world for the real one. Walter thinks he has discovered the "North west passage to the intellectual world" (pp. 305-306) in his theory of the auxiliary verbs, and thus he seems to be subject to the same error as his brother and the corporal. They do not recognize that their grasp of the truth can never be absolute, and that a difference between life and art will always remain.

In his narrative, Tristram demonstrates his consciousness of the distance between art and reality, and he discards both Walter's way of approaching reality through words and systems and Toby's empiric method and attempt at a faithful reproduction. Sterne suspects *a priori* knowledge in general. In a letter he points out part of his plan for *Tristram Shandy*: "taking in . . . the Weak part of the Sciences . . ." ²⁷ One may be justified in seeing Sterne's view here as corresponding to Tristram's, because the novel heaps much ridicule not only on Walter's quasi-scientific reasoning, but also on the scientists by profession. He shows how the real world contains just as much ridiculous "learned" dispute by inserting in the novel the authentic "*Memorandum* presented to the Gentlemen Doctors of the *Sorbonne*" (p. 46), which debates baptism "by injection" (p. 44) of the unborn child.

Tristram levels his criticism not least against the connoisseurs of art whose "heads, Sir, are stuck so full of rules and compasses, and have that eternal propensity to apply them upon all occasions, that a work of genius had better go to the devil at once, than stand to be prick'd and tortured to death by 'em" (p. 134). Tristram, then, pays little attention to rules and conventions in his narrative. He even anticipates the criticism levelled against him on this point:

And what of this new book the whole world makes such a rout about? – Oh! 'tis out of all plumb, my Lord, – quite an irregular thing! – not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle. – I had my rule and compasses, &c. my Lord, in my pocket. (p. 134)

Tristram spurns convention in several ways, for instance by placing his dedication not at the beginning, but in the middle of the third chapter of the first volume. ²⁸ Of greater interest here is his satire on literary practices that aim at giving the fiction in question an appearance of reality. Thus he makes a point of finding the exact date of his conception and showing that the time can be no other than the one he mentions (cf. p. 7). The fact that the date concerns his conception and not his birth suggests that the point here is to ridicule the

scrupulous presentation of details in fiction as a means of proving its own authenticity.²⁹

Tristram is further poking fun at the idea of the narrator as the teller of truths in his discussion of Yorick's name (cf. p. 18). Tristram here ridicules the device of referring to documentary sources, and thereby pretending that the story is true in a factual sense.

Tristram dismisses Walter's method of going by set rules, and he does not follow Toby's and Trim's example in trying to make his art a faithful imitation of reality (cf. pp. 69-70). Especially in his treatment of time, Tristram shows the impossibility of making the fictional representation equal to the actual experience. Shklovsky describes how Sterne manipulates time in *Tristram Shandy* by impeding the action, and the novelist directs the reader's attention towards the difference between literary and ordinary time, using "the arbitrariness of 'literary time' as material for a game . . ."³⁰

The following passage makes clear that Sterne operates with several kinds of time experience and that he uses this to ridicule the "truthful" presentation in conventional narratives of his period:

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle *Toby* rung the bell, when *Obadiah* was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr. *Slop* . . . so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed *Obadiah* time enough, poetically speaking . . . both to go and come . . . If the hypercritick will . . . 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 . . . 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 . . . is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas, – and is the true scholastic pendulum, – and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter, – abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever . . . [despite the risk of] rendering my book, from this very moment, a profess'd ROMANCE, which, before, was a book apocryphal. (pp. 78-79)

Fluchère points out the difference in this passage between poetic time, time experienced by the characters (*Obadiah*, etc.), by the reader, and "Time of the history of humanity, whose moments add up to eternity."³¹

The essential disparity, however, exists as Shklovsky has shown, between reading time, which goes by the clock, and Tristram's, the narrator's, idea of time, experienced as duration; an expansion of the moment into eternity. Because of his way of presenting time, Tristram compares his book to a romance, a kind of fiction that was often regarded as false or untrue, due to its imaginary character.³²

A comparison between Walter's and Toby's ideas of time reveals how the brothers are representatives of the two notions of time: passing, clock-regulated time and time as eternal duration. Walter asserts:

in our computations of *time*, we are so used to minutes, hours, weeks, and months, – and of clocks (I wish there was not a clock in the kingdom) to measure out their several portions to us . . . that 'twill be well, if in time to come, the *succession of our ideas* be of any use or service to us all.

Now . . . in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas . . . which follow each other in train just like – A train of artillery? said my uncle *Toby*. – A train of a fiddle stick! – quoth my father . . . (p. 141)

Toby has few or no ideas about time whatsoever; "of all men in the world, [he] troubled his brain the least with abstruse thinking; – the ideas of time and space" (p. 140). But one may perhaps infer from his intrusive remark, "A train of artillery", that after a life of subjection to military drill, clock-regulated time dominates his existence and his thinking. Toby represents the matter-of-fact, the conventional view of time. In the same way his model town symbolizes the kind of conventional fiction that aims at a close reproduction of reality.

Walter shows that he distinguishes between the two ideas of time. Despite his awareness of and his longing for an existence without the dominance of clocks, Walter has slavishly submitted to a clock-bound regulation of his own life. However, in his writing he finds that clock-time does not work: "He imagined he should be able to bring whatever he had to say, into so small a compass, that when it was finished and bound, it might be rolled up in my mother's hussive. – Matter grows under our hands" (p. 282). In his book of instruction for Tristram, Walter tries to keep step with life, but Tristram grows at a greater rate than his father's book about him. Walter is not willing to compromise with his notions about *Tristrapaedia* in his actual writing of it. He struggles on, loyal to the ideal of his thoughts. Consequently he is unable to complete his work, a task performed by his son: "That, in order to render the *Tristrapaedia* complete, – I wrote the chapter myself" (p. 290).

Tristram is willing to "trespass against truth" in his narrative. He is writing a kind of *Tristrapaedia*, but ridicules the idea of keeping his narrative in step with his life which forms the subject matter of his novel (cf. pp. 214–215). The "common writer" referred to by Tristram would at least make an attempt not to let his work be outstripped by life or pretend that no difference exists. Tristram makes explicit his awareness of the disparity between life and art, and that he will not try to reconcile the two in his narrative.

Unlike Walter, Tristram makes terms with life in his art. He settles for less than the ideal, admitting: "There is but a certain degree of perfection in every thing; and by pushing at something beyond that, I have brought myself into such a situation, as no traveller ever stood before me" (p. 393). He here refers to the circumstance that he may visit three places at the same time in his imagination. However, he soon finds that this sort of travelling has to be abandoned: "Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey" (p. 394). He may play with the thought of reaching for perfection, but all the time knowing that such an aim has to be given up. Instead of a complete correspondence between

life and art, Tristram advocates a medium position for his narrative, half-way between reality and pure fancy.

Similarly, he maintains that a novel should contain a “just balance betwixt wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year” (p. 472). Though he may wish for a maximum quantity of wit and judgement for himself (and his reader) so that he might be able to create a work of the greatest merit, he sees that this would not be the result: “Bless us! – what noble work we should make! . . . but oh! – ’tis too much . . . ’tis more than nature can bear! – lay hold of me . . . I’m dying, – I am gone. – Help!” (p. 144). Such an amount of wit and judgement the writer cannot stomach; he dies and leaves his work incomplete. Thus Tristram again underlines how the creation of ideal art, possessing the utmost of wit and judgement or having a perfect correspondence to reality, does not fall to the lot of any man.

3. Reader as Narratee

The reader constitutes the third element of Kayser’s basic situation³³ and in metafiction he usually plays a prominent part. The author of a work of metafiction exhibits his awareness of the reader’s participation in the creative process. The reader is not considered merely a passive receiver of the narrative, but shares in the making of the work. To the extent that he is drawn inside the work, appealed to and taken notice of, his role changes from the more passive one of *reader* to that of the *narratee*,³⁴ sharing at times in the compositional task. Kayser distinguishes between the reader outside the work and the reader, playing a part inside the fiction. In his discussion of *Tristram Shandy*, John Preston has pointed to Sterne’s differentiation between “these imagined readers, the lady and the critic” and the reader outside the fiction.³⁵ By designing the term *narratee* for the reader inside the work, it becomes easier to distinguish between the two.

Tristram takes considerable notice of the narratee. He recounts how his writing has been used as curl papers by the mistress of a house where he has been staying:

... so without any idea of the nature of my suffering, she took them from her curls, and put them gravely one by one into my hat – one was twisted this way – another twisted that – ay! by my faith; and when they are published, quoth I, – They will be worse twisted still. (p.405)

Tristram manages here to joke about a matter that concerns him deeply; the reader’s conception of his novel. However, when describing Yorick’s situa-

tion, he displays more directly that he regards the audience’s or readers’ often distorted opinions as not merely a matter for jests, but of painful consequences to the author (cf. p. 18). Tristram’s situation does not fully correspond to Yorick’s; he has managed to establish a better relationship with *his* audience, but he takes care that what he wants to say is really brought home to the reader (cf. p. 145).

Tristram’s deep concern for the reader’s comprehension of his work may perhaps originate in the fact of Sterne’s profession as vicar in the Church of England. Central to a preacher is the problem of transmitting a message to the audience. This question will be prominent during the preparatory work with a sermon and influence its writer in deciding its formulation and structure.³⁶ A preacher is in a unique position compared to that of a writer of narratives; he is present and may watch the congregation’s reception of what he has written.

A dramatist’s situation corresponds somewhat to that of a preacher in the way that during the process of writing he will take into consideration the effects his play may have on the audience. Tristram compares himself to a playwright: “I have dropp’d the curatin over this scene for a minute . . . the curtain shall be drawn up again” (p. 109). This shows that Tristram considers his task not unlike that of a dramatist, keeping an eye on the audience. However, the congregation in a church may play a more active role than people in a theatre, changing the shape of the sermon in the course of its deliverance. This depends on the preacher’s ability to perceive the audience’s reactions. A conscientious preacher will at least be able to draw experience from his trials and failures in the same way as Yorick “for it was *Yorick*’s custom . . . on the first leaf of every sermon which he composed . . . to add some short comment or stricture upon the sermon itself” (p. 324).

In the episode where Trim reads Yorick’s sermon (vol. II, ch. XVII) the audience, consisting of Toby, Walter and Dr. Slop, plays an active part, interrupting and commenting on Trim’s performance and on the sermon itself. Especially the two last mentioned serve as a parallel to the narratee’s role in *Tristram Shandy* as a whole, forming two opposing parties. Dr. Slop finds the writer of the sermon too frivolous and not at all in agreement with his own conception of what a priest may allow himself. On one occasion he deplores “the liberty of the press” (p. 95) that gives free scope to such a person. Then he states that the author could need some chastisement from the Inquisition: “in such a case as this, he would soon be taught better manners” (p. 94).

During Trim’s reading, Dr. Slop falls asleep – perhaps the most serious proof of his negative attitude. He finds the sermon dull. However, Dr. Slop’s behaviour and opinions reflect upon himself: with his sloppy brain, fixed opinions and closed mind, the physician becomes a caricature of the unsympathetic critic whom Tristram fears so much. Walter, together with his brother, represents the opposite party, the positive readers. They listen eagerly, trying to understand what the author has in mind, and on the whole Walter defends

him against Dr. Slop's attacks. Thus Walter and Dr. Slop illuminate how the perception of a narrative largely depends on the reader, his qualities and background.

Another aspect of the reader's situation is the narrator's qualifications and abilities to reach him with his message. In the novel this is illustrated not only through Tristram's case. Besides Yorick, Walter and Trim represent the most conspicuous orators in the novel. Their capacities in the field of communication have received considerable critical attention. It has been pointed out that Walter has little success in getting other people to understand him; this difficulty is expressed by his sexual failures.³⁷ When the news of his son's death reaches him, he makes a speech that defers to conventional oration, but is not at all expressive of his feelings.³⁸ On the same occasion, Trim moves his kitchen audience to tears with simple words and gestures. He speaks from the heart and awakens the others' compassion.³⁹ Walter uses an intellectual language and nobody understands him.

Critics agree that the central message of the novel is a call for sentiment or sympathy as the basis for human intercourse and understanding.⁴⁰ Robert Alter mentions wit as another means by which communication may take place.⁴¹ Involuntarily Walter demonstrates this. He tries to communicate on an intellectual level, but his speech has one effect not aimed at by himself – laughter. In one episode he reads a passage from *Tristrapaedia* about the use of auxiliaries to instruct children and he chooses a white bear for his example (cf. pp. 307-311). His audience reacts in two ways: Toby, as far as he understands his brother's speech, rejects it. Yorick also expresses his doubts about Walter's method, but he cannot help smiling. So too with the readers outside the work, the you and I. Walter's gestures and words are so studied, such a discrepancy exists between his feelings and their expression that in any observer but his emotionally involved brother, his behaviour and manner of speaking provoke laughter.

Like his father, Tristram appeals to the intellect of his audience. But he does this consciously; with his narrative he intends to make the reader laugh. This effect he wants to enlist from the actual readers outside the novel. A closer look at Tristram's comments to the narratee reveals how he regards the relationship between the actual reader and himself and what qualities an ideal reader should possess from a narrator's point of view:

Was I left like *Sancho Pança*, to chuse my kingdom, it should not be maritime . . . no, it should be a kingdom of hearty laughing subjects . . . I should add to my prayer – that God would give my subjects grace to be as WISE as they were MERRY; and then I should be the happiest monarch, and they the happiest people under heaven – . . . (pp. 255-256)

Tristram wishes the relationship between narrator and readers to be similar to that existing between a king and his subjects, because in the position of a king

he would be endowed with more or less absolute power over the welfare of his subjects. He would be more able to ensure the happiness of the inhabitants of his kingdom than what he may hope as a narrator to create for his readers.

Walter also has designs upon the throne, and he too is concerned about the happiness of his imaginary people, but his means differ from Tristram's:

"Was I an absolute prince," he would say, pulling up his breeches with both his hands, as he rose from his arm-chair, "I would appoint able judges, at every avenue of my metropolis, who should take cognizance of every fool's business who came there; – and if . . . it appeared not of weight sufficient to leave his own home . . . they should be all sent back, from constable to constable . . . to the place of the legal settlements." (p. 36)

One may infer that Walter, by enforcing laws and regulations, would not only have less chance of making his subjects happy than Tristram, but would arrive at the opposite result to what he intended.

In the relationship between reader and narrator, Tristram considers the latter the dominant part. He is responsible to the reader who has shown him confidence by listening to what he has got to say:

But courage! gentle reader! – I scorn it – 'tis enough to have thee in my power – but not make use of the advantage which the fortune of the pen has now gained over thee, would be too much – No –! . . . ere I would force a helpless creature upon this hard service, and make thee pay, poor soul! for fifty pages which I have no right to sell thee . . . I would browse upon the mountains . . . (pp. 370-371)

The narrator must not misuse the reader's confidence by boring him with tiresome and learned talk. The reader will constitute the receptive and consequently the more passive party, swayed by the narrator's fancy. Tristram finds that the ideal reader trustfully and of his own free will places his imagination at the mercy of the narrator: "I would go fifty miles on foot . . . to kiss the hand of that man whose generous heart will give up the reins of his imagination into his author's hands, – be pleased he knows not why, and cares not wherefore" (p. 135).

Wolfgang Iser asserts that Fielding and the other 18th century English novelists laced their books with apostrophes to the readers to secure their co-operation. Otherwise the newness of the novel genre might offend and become a barrier to the readers' understanding of it.⁴² When the first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* appeared in 1759, the new genre seems already well established by the works of Defoe, Fielding, Smollett and Richardson. In Tristram's comments to the narratee one cannot trace any real anxiety that his book might be misunderstood because the public is not used to fiction.

Tristram worries more about the reader's willingness and ability to appreciate his particular originality and inventiveness. *Tristram Shandy* was pub-