Laurence Sterne
by Joshua Reynolds, 1760
Jesus College, Cambridge, 1730s
Shandy Hall, Coxwold, Yorkshire
1759: Sterne turns to fiction-writing
Tristram Shandy
volumes 1&2:
published York 1759, London 1760
What’s *Tristram Shandy* ‘about’?

‘the great humour of *Tristram Shandy* consists in the whole narration always going backwards’

(Horace Walpole)
Tristram’s story begins ‘ab ovo’

‘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….’.
Tristram’s conception, clock-winding and John Locke’s association of ideas

Mrs Shandy:
‘Pray, my dear ... have you not forgot to wind up the clock?’

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‘Life’ and/or ‘opinions’?

‘A history of what passes in a man’s own mind’.

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A cast of eccentric characters

Tristram Shandy (the narrator)

Walter Shandy

Uncle Toby

Corporal Trim

Parson Yorick

Mrs Wadman ('the Widow')

Dr Slop
Humour and Typography: ‘That dashite Sterne’
Asterisks:
Uncle Toby’s ‘four stars’

desty:—My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a man come so near her****. I will not say whether my
pity and esteem for him; — a foot-way crossing the church-yard close by the side of his grave, — not a passenger goes by without stopping to cast a look upon it, — and sighing as he walks on,

Alas, poor YORICK!
Marbled Pages: ‘motley emblem of my work!’
CHAP. XXXVII.

Nihil nos pauciter bajes nos? quoth Phormias: that is—"My nose has been the mark of me."—"Nihil est un penitent!" replies Ceeser; that is, "How the devil should such a nose at last?"

The doctrine, you see, was laid down by Erasium, as my father wished it, with the utmost plainness; but my father's disappointment was, in finding nothing more from his able pen, but the bare fact itself; without any of that speculative sophistry or ambidexterity of argumentation upon it, which heaven had bestowed upon man on purpose to intelligently, and fight for her on all sides. My father paid all and gave all, but most thoroughly, in his words to have a good name. As the dialogue was of Erasium, my father first came to himself, and read it over and over again; with great application, studying every word and every syllable of it thus and thus, in its most strict and literal interpretation—he could still make nothing of it, that way. Mayhap there is more meaning, than is said in it, quoth my father. Learned men, brother Toby, don't write dialogues upon so long notes for nothing. I'll study the myth and the allegoric scale—here is some room to turn a man's fool in, brother.

My father read on.

Now, I find it needful to inform your reverend and worshipful majesties of the many amiable uses of long noses, as enumerated by Erasium, the dialogue affirmeth, that a long nose is not without its domestic conveniences also; for that in a case of difficulty, and for want of a pair of bellows, it will do excellently well, ou excitandum fumum (to fire up the fire.)

Nature had been prodigal in her gifts to my father beyond...
Of all the truth my father was at the pains to procure and study in support of his hypothesis, there was not any one wherein he felt a more cruel disappointment at first, than in the celebrated dialogue between Pamphagius and Caesec, written by the chaste pen of the great and venerable Erasme upon the various uses and reasonable applications of long notes. — Now don't let Satan, my dear girl, in this chapter, take advantage of any one spot of rising-ground to get a spite of your imagination, if you can any ways help it; or if he is so nimble as to slip on, — let me beg of you, like an unback'd fiend, to spirk it, to spurt it, to jump it, to rear it, to bound it, and to kick it, with long kicks and short kicks, till like Ticklity's mare you break a strap or a crupper, and throw his worship into the dirt. — You need not kill him. —

— And pray who was Ticklity's mare? — 'tis just as discreditable and unchristian as a question, Sir, as to have asked what year (ab urb. civ.) the second Punic war broke out. — Who was Ticklity's mare? — Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! I read, or by the knowledge of the great saint Paradisamonus — I tell you beforehand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without much reading, by which your reverence knows I mean much knowledge, you will no more be able to penetrate the sense of the next marbled page (mostly emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unravel the many opinions, transactions and truths which still lie mystically hid under the dark veil of the black one.
1782

The Life and Opinions of

to set the world a-going again. A treasure, therefore, was he indeed! an institute of all that was necessary to be known of noos, and everything else;—at matin, noon, and vespers, was Hafen Slawkenbergius his recreation and delight: 'twas for ever in his hands—you would have sworn, Sir, it had been a canon's prayer-book,—so worn, so glazed, so centred and adhered was it with fingers and with thumbs in all its parts, from one end even unto the other.

I am not such a bigot to Slawkenbergius, as my father—there is a fund in him, no doubt; but, in my opinion, the best, I don't say the most profitable, but the most amusing part of Hafen Slawkenbergius, is his tales—

and, considering he was a German, many of them told not without fancy;—these take up his second book, containing nearly one half of his folio, and are comprehended in ten decades, each decade containing ten tales. Philosophy is not built upon tales; and therefore 'twas certainly wrong in Slawkenbergius to find them into the world by that name;—there are a few of them in his eighth, ninth, and tenth decades, which I own seem rather playful and sportive, than speculative—but in general they are to be looked upon by the learned as a detail of so many independent facts, all of them turning round some how or other upon the main hinges of his subject, and collected by him with great fidelity, and added to his work as so many illustrations upon the doctrines of noos.

As we have leisure enough upon our hands—if you give me leave, Madam, I'll tell you the ninth tale of his tenth decade.

END of the THIRD VOLUME.
—And pray who was Tickletoby's mare?
—'Tis just as discreditable and unscholar-like a question, Sir, as to have asked what year (ab urbe condita) the second Punic war broke out.—Who was Tickletoby's mare! —Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read — or by the knowledge of the great saint Paralipome-nom—I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without much reading, by which your reverence knows I mean much knowledge, you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motley emblem of my work!) than the world with all its fugacity has been able to unravel the many opinions, transac-tions, and truths which still lie mythi-cally hid under the dark veil of the black one.
Tristram's 'narrative lines'

CHAP. XL.

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

[A diagram is shown here.]

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

By which it appears, that except at the curve, marked A, where I took a trip to Navarre—and the indented curve B, which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady Bassire—and her page—I have not taken the least frisk of a digression, till Joha de la Caff's devils led me the round you see marked D—for as for e e e e they are nothing but parenthetically, and the common rules and very incident to the lives of the greatest ministers of state, and when compared.
‘Who is more thought of, heard of, talked of, by dukes, dutchesses, lords, ladies, earls, marquises, countesses, and common whores, than Tristram Shandy?’
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
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<tr>
<td>‘humorous’</td>
<td>‘unaccountable’</td>
<td>‘ridiculous’</td>
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<td>‘excellent’</td>
<td>‘insipid’</td>
<td>‘gross’</td>
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<td>‘eccentric’</td>
<td>‘immodest’</td>
<td>‘original’</td>
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<td>‘wicked’</td>
<td>‘rare’</td>
<td>‘odd’</td>
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<td>‘tedious’</td>
<td>‘striking’</td>
<td>‘ingenious’</td>
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<td>‘entertaining’</td>
<td>‘singular’</td>
<td>‘bawdy’</td>
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Is Tristram Shandy ‘original’?

John Kidgell, The Card (1755)
Sterne befriends the rich and famous

William Hogarth, David Garrick as Richard III
Sterne/Tristram becomes a celebrity

Sterne: ‘I Shandy it away…’.
‘the greatest outrage against Sense and Decency … since the first establishment of Christianity’
Success breeds creativity

*Tristram Shandy’s* serial publication: nine volumes, 1759-1767
Confound the critics

‘Genius may be exhausted – I see that Folly’s invention may be so too’.
(Horace Walpole)

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‘Tristram Shandy did not last’
(Samuel Johnson)
‘Nobody speaks now but in the Shandean style’:
creative responses to Tristram Shandy

Imitative pamphlets,
1760 onwards
'High Life at Noon', 1769
Imitating Shandean bawdry

YOU tell me, madam, you have read all the volumes of Tristram Shandy. True, sir, I have.—You understand them perfectly well I suppose,—all the ****, inuendoes, hobbyhorses, noses, &c. &c.? 

Do you dispute my understanding, sir? Pardon me, madam, I meant no such thing; but Shandy is certainly, at least,
‘The Four Stars’ .... ‘Wind up the Clock’
The ‘afterlives’ of Sterne’s characters
TRISTRAM SHANDY,
A NEW COUNTRY DANCE.

Swing right hands, and cast down a couple. Swing left hands, and cast up. Cross over a couple, lead to the top, and cast off hands a-cross, and back again. Lead to the bottom and cast up. Right and left at top.
Continuations and Sequels

Spurious ‘volume IX’, 1766
Just attention-grabbing?

George Stayley, *The Life and Opinions of an Actor*, 1762
Tristram Shandy’s Illustrations: Books, Prints, Paintings

William Hogarth’s ‘witty chissel’, 1760
Tristram’s baptism and misnaming

‘Melancholy disyllable of sound!’
Popular Themes: Tristram’s Uncle Toby

Henry William Bunbury, 1773
Robert Dighton, 1785
C. R. Leslie, ‘Uncle Toby and Widow Wadman’, 1830s
Dramatic Adaptations

Tristram Shandy: A Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle

Covent Garden, 1783

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

Mr. SHANDY, Mr. HULL
Capt. SHANDY, Mr. WILSON
TRIM, Mr. EDWIN
Dr. SLOP, Mr. WEWITZER
OBADIAH, Mr. FEARON

Mrs. WADMAN, Mrs. MORTON
SUSANNAH, Mrs. WILSON

TRISTRAM SHANDY.

ACT I.

SCENE—A CHAMBER, ornamented
with Views of Fortifications, Arms hanging up.

SHANDY sitting at a Table, large Folios on it—
TRIM and SUSAN attending.

Sban. WELL, you tell me love has made a
...
‘Shandean’ and ‘Sentimental’?
*Tristram Shandy* and Sensibility

‘The Death of Le Fever’

‘Maria, Moulines’
A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, By Mr Yorick (1768)
‘Travelling for the heart’ and ‘Touching Encounters’

‘Parson Yorick’ visits *Tristram Shandy*’s Maria
A Sentimental Journey's Adaptations: An International Success
Maria: In Illustration, Poems, Songs

Angelica Kauffman, ‘Maria’

Song

’Twas near a thicket’s calm retreat,
Under a poplar tree,
Maria chose her wretched seat,
To mourn her sorrows free:
Her lovely form was sweet to view,
As dawn at op’ning day;
But, ah! she mourn’d her love not true,
And wept her cares away.

The brook flow’d gently at her feet,
In murmurs smooth along;
Her pipe, which once she tun’d so sweet,
Had now forgot its song:
No more to charm the vale she tries,
For grief has fill’d her breast;
Those joys which once she us’d to prize,
But love has robb’d her rest.

Poor hapless maid! who can behold
Thy sorrows so severe,
And hear thy love lorn story told,
Without a falling tear:
Maria, luckless maid, adieu,
Thy sorrows soon must cease,
For heav’n will take a maid so true,
To everlasting peace.
Alternative Visualisations:

John Doyle, ‘A Study for Sterne’s Maria’, 1833
Royal Hobby's.

De gustibus non est disputandum:—
that is, there is no disputing against
Hobby - Horse; —

Ibrahim Steed.
James Gillray, 1790
Adaptations: Twentieth Century Onwards

MRS DALLOWAY
VIRGINIA WOOLF

ULYSSES
by
JAMES JOYCE

SHAKESPEARE AND COMPANY
12, Rue de l'Odéon, 12
PARIS
1922
Tristram Shandy
Hunky Funky Woman
Don't Be Too Hard On Me
Martin Rowson’s graphic novel of *Tristram Shandy*, 1996
Tristram Shandy on film
Tristram Shandy’s ‘final’ punch-line?

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whistle— and so, brother Toby, this poor Bull of mine, who is as good a Bull as ever p—ss’d, and might have done for Europa herself in purer times—had he but two legs less, might have been driven into Doctors’ Commons and lost his character—which to a Town Bull, brother Toby, is the very same thing as his life—

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.

The END of the NINTH VOLUME.