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“WEAVERS, GARDENERS, AND GLADIATORS”: LABYRINTHS IN *TRISTRAM SHANDY*

Stephen Soud

Why weavers, gardeners, and gladiators—or a man with a pined leg
(proceeding from some ailment in the *foot*)

—*Tristram Shandy*, VIII.5

Many authors describing inextricable labyrinths write as if from a
privileged perspective: they see where the ambiguous circlings lead,
and they warn against labyrinthine perils.

—Penelope Reed Doob, *The Idea of the Labyrinth*

In Volume II, Chapter 3 of *Tristram Shandy*, Tristram describes the beginning of Uncle Toby’s encyclopedic reading of books on military science and tells us that Toby applies himself to the project “with the utmost diligence” because recovery from his wound depends “upon the passions and affections of his mind.” But as Toby becomes increasingly entwined in the thread of his reading, Tristram must beseech him to

—— stop! my dear uncle *Toby*, —— stop! —— go not one foot
further into this thorny and bewilder’d track, —— intricate are the
steps! intricate are the mases of this labyrinth! intricate are the troubles
which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring
upon thee. —— O my uncle! fly—fly—fly from it as from a serpent.¹

Although for Sterne the labyrinth does not seem to have the explicit, mythic overtones it often has in twentieth-century fiction, it is nevertheless part of the web of *Tristram Shandy*. The Shandean world is labyrinthine in more ways than one, whether one

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considers Trim and Toby's elaborate fortifications on the bowling green, Walter's abstruse philosophical musings in the parlor, the Widow Wadman's romantic machinations, or the book's convoluted maze of interpolated texts. Above all, Tristram appears caught in a textual and chronological maze as he attempts to record the ins and outs of his family history.

Tristram Shandy embodies Sterne's most fundamental insight into human nature: as temporal, mundane beings we are compelled to impose upon a labyrinthine world our self-made labyrinths that work, albeit unsuccessfully, to satisfy our urge for coherence amidst chaos. Toby discovers in his labyrinth that the "desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it" (II.3.102), and ultimately Tristram must declare of his uncle, "Endless is the Search of Truth!" But Tristram's warning to Toby specifically raises the question of the significance of the maze in Sterne's world. Toby's "thorny and bewilder'd track," for example, probably alludes to the many spiral turf mazes found in the English countryside, especially in Sterne's Yorkshire. Interestingly, many of these mazes had names identified with Troy—and therefore with sieges.² These mazes were also associated with a ritual of running through the spiraling pathways called "treading the maze," and thus may lie behind Sterne's description of the very first maze in *Tristram Shandy*, the path of the homunculi, who, "by treading the same steps over and over again, . . . presently make a road of it as plain and as smooth as a garden-walk" (I.1.2).³ The idea of the labyrinth probably had two other important connotations for Sterne, both of which help to weave the subtle fabric of its meaning in the work. First, in Sterne's day the word "maze" had a second definition: "a winding movement, especially in a dance" (*OED*; in use as late as 1742). As we shall see, this meaning links Toby's entry into the maze with the dance at the end of Book VII. Second, the labyrinth was a part of contemporary homiletics, which used the metaphor of the pilgrim caught in a spiritual labyrinth seeking the "right path" to salvation.⁴

Undoubtedly, however, the notion of the labyrinth that would have had the greatest currency for Sterne was the garden maze, which is demonstrably linked to Toby and his fortifications.⁵ Late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century culture in Europe harbored an urge for symmetry that was especially expressed in two areas, fortification and gardening, which represent, in contrasting ways, the desire to impose order on the world. During the sixteenth century, in the beginning of what has been termed the "Age of Symmetry" in gardens, English gardeners first began to use floral knots, which were designed along precise, intricate geometrical patterns. On a symbolic level, these patterns of unbroken, interlacing bands were emblematic of infinitude. But, for the eighteenth century, the knot was both evolutionally and etymologically related to the maze. Knots were historically the direct precursors of the garden labyrinth, which flourished in England from about 1650–1740, a period that includes the years in which Toby was staging his battles upon the bowling green. To the classically-trained mind, moreover, "knot" was etymologically related to the Latin *nodus*, or node, the junction of paths in a maze. As we shall see, this relation between knot and labyrinth has significant bearing upon *Tristram Shandy*.

In the science of fortification, the other area of pervasive symmetry, one figure towered over all others—the French Marshal Sébastien LePrestre de Vauban

(1633–1707). Recall that immediately prior to Tristram's admonition, Toby is reading Vauban, among others, and becoming particularly absorbed in the geometry of warfare. Vauban singlehandedly raised the craft of military architecture to such heights that people considered his fortress designs impregnable; Louis XIV even kept scale models of them in the Louvre as works of art to show off to the court elite. With Vauban, Louis "walked through the sites of projected sieges, as Vauban explained his projects *in situ*. They quite literally walked (and rode) through entire campaigns together."⁶ Surely Sterne, steeped in military history as he was, knew of Louis's miniatures, and it is worth considering to what degree Trim and Toby work as a satire of Vauban and Louis. At the very least, Louis's practice throws additional light on Walter's comment that "if any mortal in the whole universe had done such a thing [as the bowling green], except his brother *Toby*, it would have been looked upon by the world as one of the most refined satyrs upon the parade and prancing manner, in which *Lewis XIV.* from the beginning of the war . . . had taken the field" (VI.22.538).⁷

If calculus and nuclear physics are the sciences of modern warfare, geometry was the military science of Vauban's—and Sterne's—day. Vauban's works are fraught with an almost obsessive symmetry of bastions, glacises, firing trajectories, and trench-works. For Vauban, as one subsequent military tactician would remark, a fortress "grew to be treated somewhat as a geometrical puzzle, a species of maze."⁸ But the fortifications were more than fearful symmetry; camouflaged and blending aesthetically into the surrounding landscape, they were not unlike gardens. Modern aerial photographs of many Dutch towns fortified during the era suggest this pastoral sense of the battlements merging smoothly into the countryside.⁹ Not surprisingly, when Louis set about building the gardens at Versailles, he called upon Vauban's engineers to design the waterworks that would run the vast fountain system. Louis's fascination with both warfare and gardens did not go unnoticed by English gardeners: "The *French King*," one landscape architect would write, "like several other Great Personages, join[ed] the *peaceable Love of Agriculture* to the *tumultuous Passions of War*."¹⁰

There are other correlations between fortifications and gardening that suggest Sterne may have been connecting the two. It is especially interesting that the language of siegecraft bears striking resemblance to that of gardening. Here, for instance, are Vauban's instructions to the field officer for laying out the perpendicular of a trench:

Inscribe this prolongation on the map as a sort of baseline, what I call the line of direction, extending it as far as necessary; from the rear of the trench and from each point where the separate segments of the trench (ab, bc, cd) meet to form angles, draw lines perpendicular to the line of direction [be, cf, dg], noting the length of each perpendicular and the distance between points where they intersect the line of direction.¹¹

Compare this passage with Batty Langley's "Problem VI" in his *New Principles of Gardening* (1728), wherein he gives instructions to the gardener for drawing a perpendicular:

From a given point (a or h) to let fall or raise a perpendicular (a h.)

PRACTICE. With any interval make ac equal to ab , and with the Distance bc on b describe the Arch ee , and on c the Arch ff , crossing at h , join ha , and 'twill be the Perpendicular required; for hb is equal to hc , and ab to ac , and ha common. Therefore the Angles at a are equal and right-angled, and ah perpendicular.¹²

The early eighteenth-century gardener had a rage for mathematical regularity akin to that of the fortress-builder. Indeed the entire first section of Langley's book is dedicated to the geometry of gardening (as are sections in many gardening manuals of the period), with sub-headings such as, "To draw a Tangent from a Point given," and "To describe a Serpentine Line about an Ellipsis."¹³ Langley's extensive set of illustrations includes a design that unites fortress and arbor (fig. 1).¹⁴ Even the vernacular of garden labyrinths resembled that of fortification: "The Walks of a Labyrinth ought to be kept roll'd . . . in the Shape of Half-moons."¹⁵ Or again: "This Outside . . . is by the French called *la Fossé* [with] . . . two Foot and a half the Height of the Parapet-Wall."¹⁶ The interchange went in both directions—there was a segment of skilled laborers in Vauban's trenches called "terrace-makers."¹⁷

This link between the symmetry and design of the garden maze and that of the fortress suggests that Toby's bowling-green fortifications are a form—a parody, perhaps—of the garden labyrinth. Comparing illustrations of eighteenth-century gardens and fortresses underscores their many similarities in design: their carefully plotted symmetry, zigzag arrangements, terraces, returning and salient angles. More specifically, garden and fortress are neatly conflated in two well-known designs completed during the reign of William III, the "Plan de Troy" at Hampton Court and "The Siege of Troy" at Kensington Palace, both of which Sterne may have had in mind when he created Uncle Toby.¹⁸ In his "Essay on Modern Gardening" (1771), Walpole describes the garden fortifications at Kensington:

[C]ut yew and variegated holly hedges were taught (as the royal ideas were all military) to imitate the lines, angles, bastions, scarps and counter-scarps of regular fortifications. This curious upper garden, known as the "Siege of Troy," was long the admiration of every lover of that kind of horticultural embellishment and vegetable pedantry.¹⁹

At least one other gardener, Stephen Switzer, recognized the militaristic character of William's avocation, calling Hampton Court the "noblest work of that kind in Europe. . . . done in the Reign (too short) of a Prince always at War in Defence of the Liberties of Europe; yet in the least Interval of Ease, Gard'ning took up a great part of his Time."²⁰ Switzer lacked, of course, our own psychoanalytic terminology, but it seems rather clear that William's gardening (like Toby's) was a sublimation of his more bellicose instincts.

William's chief gardener, Henry Wise, continued to incorporate fortress designs into his garden layouts even after the King's death. The original gardens at Marlborough's Blenheim Palace, for instance, included eight large bastions two hundred feet wide.²¹ In one of his own designs (at Paston Manor), Switzer, a Wise protégé, included as a center-piece a verdant citadel (fig. 2). In *Ichnographia Rustica* (1718) Switzer describes the plan:

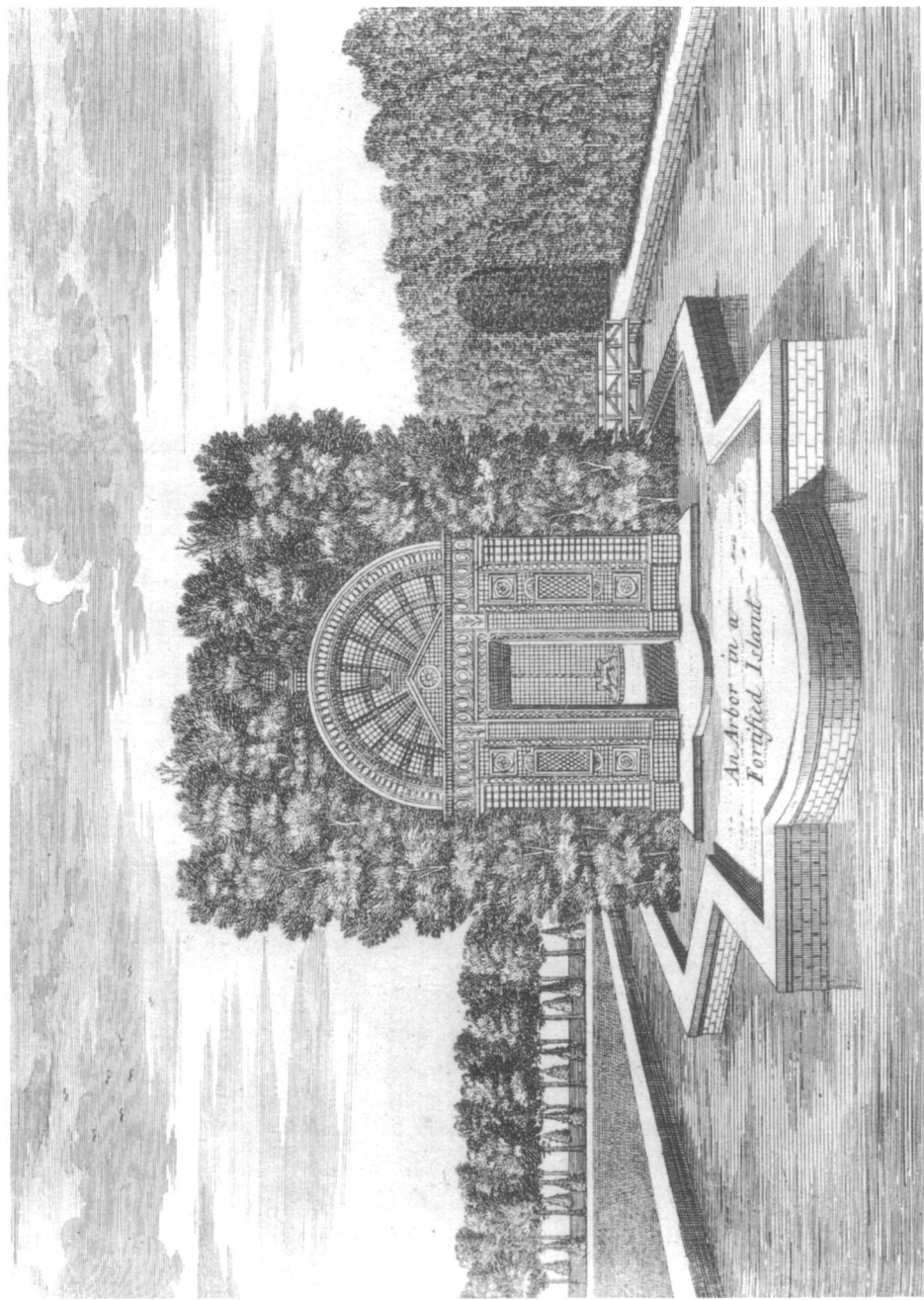


FIGURE 1. "An Arbor in a Fortified Island." Plate 18 of Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening* (1728) depicts a plan for merging the jagged lines and geometrical symmetry common to both fortress and garden designs of the early eighteenth century.

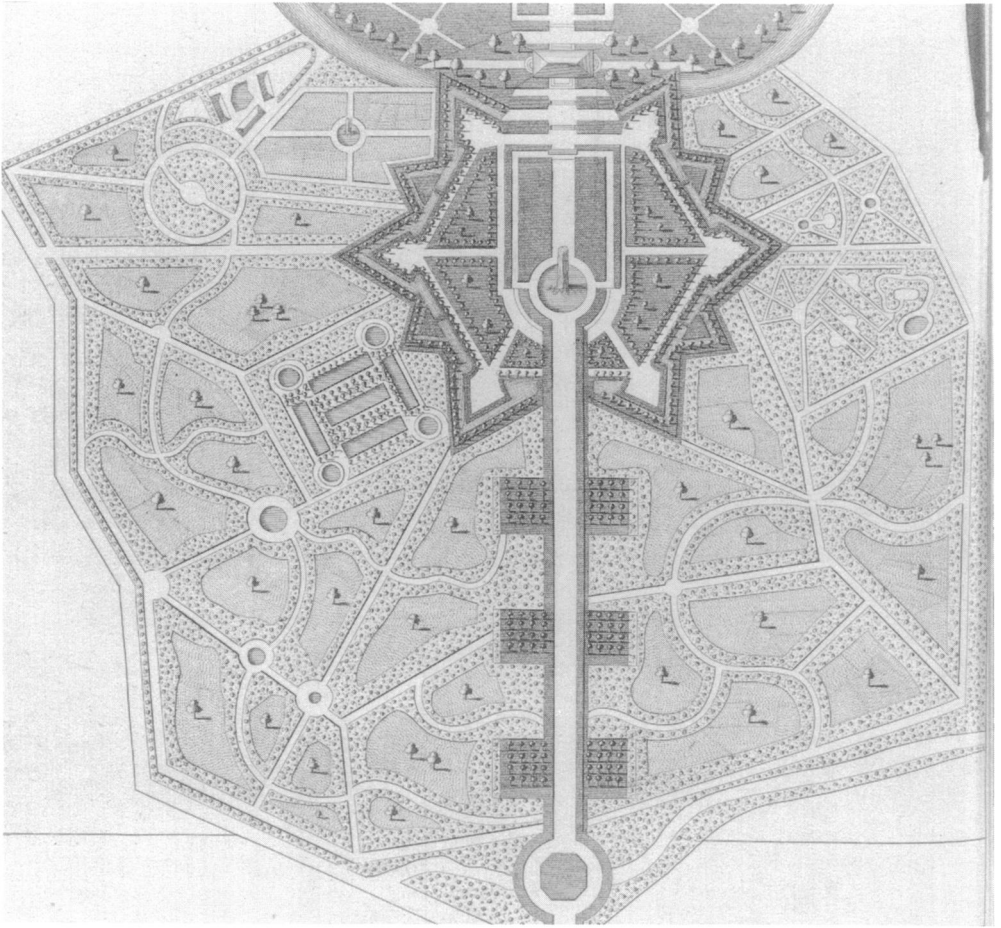


FIGURE 2. "The Manor of Paston divided and planted into Rural Gardens." The fortress at the center of Stephen Switzer's layout incorporates bastions, ravelins, and a "cover'd way," and the central axis includes battery positions—details which demonstrate his extensive knowledge of contemporary fortification science. Note also the meandering labyrinth adjacent to the fort (right), and the many nodes scattered throughout the design. (From *Ichnographia Rustica*, 1718.)

[T]he Boundary of the interior Part of our Garden, which is easily discover'd to be an Hexagone in Fortification Work, for digging of the Ditch makes the Terrace in the Inside, and helps to raise the Banks on the outside; so as to admit other Slopes, being what they call [in] Fortification the cover'd way.²²

Other garden designs probably followed suit, with Bridgeman's military-influenced work at Stowe an instrumental example of the new English garden. For Sterne, it would have been an easy transition from the labyrinthine fortress-gardens like those of Hampton Court and Paston Manor to Uncle Toby's fortifications on the bowling green.

If it is Toby's wound that forces him to enter the labyrinth on the bowling green, we must remember that the trench-works in which he incurred the

wound were themselves a labyrinth. The battlefield at Namur “was cut and cross-cut with such a multitude of dykes, drains, rivulets, and sluices, on all sides, — and he would get so sadly bewilder’d and set fast amongst them, that frequently he could neither get backwards or forwards to save his life” (II.1.94–5). At Namur, Toby is lost and “bewilder’d” (the word echoes the passage in II.3 and may also suggest the section of landscape gardens called the wilderness); like a wanderer in a well-designed maze, he must move “backwards and forwards,” toward and away from the center, to make any sort of progress. But Toby’s recurrent entry into labyrinths raises a basic question: what, for him, is their lure?

That Toby desires the honor and glory of battle is too facile an answer—and, given the paradoxes of his “Apologetical Oration” (VI.32), an incomplete one from Sterne’s viewpoint. Rather, to understand Toby’s hobby-horse, we must turn, I think, to the moment he and Trim decide to enact battles on the bowling green. Expelled from the womb-like trench-works of Flanders (“I had rather march up to the very edge of a trench ——— A woman is quite a different thing — said the corporal” [VIII.30.715]), Toby is born into the world with much of a child’s helplessness and impotence. This impotence is rendered in sexual terms by the wound on his groin, but even more significantly by the inadequacy of his language to define and order the world around him. Thus Toby must reject language for pictograms (his maps), and, finally, for the object, the unmediated “thing itself.” All formal gardening, which manipulates nature through the exercise of art, expresses the human will to control one’s environment, and Toby seems determined to reestablish his lost control, at least upon the miniature world of his bowling green. His fortress gardening is especially suffused with the vestiges of his lost sexuality: “Never did lover post down to a belov’d mistress with more heat and expectation, than my uncle *Toby* did, to enjoy this self-same thing [the bowling green] in private” (II.5.113). Thus the labyrinth in Yorkshire supplants the labyrinth in Flanders, as Toby attempts to regain his lost potency in the garden maze.

Quite possibly, Toby’s bowling green represents an implicit commentary on Sterne’s notion of the origin of warfare—a sublimation of the sex drive forced by the delicate balance between human weakness and a longing for empowerment. Historically, this opposition has been related to and borne out in the garden: “If a sense of human powerlessness before nature was first superseded by a sense that humans could coexist with, or even direct, that power, there eventually came a time when the original relationship became inverted. The garden became a symbol of human dominance over nature. We think of Versailles as its exemplar.”²³ By juxtaposing these two seemingly different occupations, gardening and warfare (suggestive as well of Louis and William), Sterne delivers an ironic commentary upon a particular (masculine) mode of expressing the human drive for empowerment and the traces of depravity (the Garden behind the garden) in human endeavors. Sterne may even have had in mind a 1746 statement by John Muller, Professor of Fortification at the Royal Military Academy: “The origin and rise of fortification, is undoubtedly owing to the degeneracy of mankind.”²⁴

Toby’s play with mazes has a further significance. Twice Tristram uses the word “bewilder’d” to indicate Toby’s mental state in the labyrinth. His be-

wilderment obviously suggests the distressful feelings of someone caught in a labyrinth, and yet Toby's entanglement in mazes seems essential to his sense of well-being. If building a maze represents a masculine will to power, the maze itself has feminine connotations. The contours of early ritual labyrinths, for example, were probably designed to duplicate the form of sacred labyrinthine caves, symbolically placing the labyrinth in the traditionally feminine earth.²⁵ Sterne may even have known that many maze dances had included a rope, symbolizing the umbilical cord.²⁶ Thus Toby's desire to re-enter the labyrinth may be understood as an unconscious desire for the feminine, or at least an acknowledgement of his own loss and incompleteness. If the "male owner's 'penetration' into the 'inner spaces' of his garden was," as Carole Fabricant has suggested, "a journey into and through a variety of enclosures and structures deliberately designed as part of a feminine landscape,"²⁷ then this desire is quite literally played out upon the bowling green, where Toby attempts to penetrate ("breach," also connoting a wound) the walls of his miniature citadels. I do not wish to pursue a psychoanalytic reading, but rather to suggest that Sterne recognized (as did Robert Burton, among others, before him) that human aggression has a great deal to do with human weakness, and that human love may be the only path, however labyrinthine, away from both.

When the Treaty of Utrecht is signed, however, Toby again finds himself momentarily denied the control he so desperately seeks. Significantly, when romantic love offers itself in place of the bowling green, it does so again as a feminine labyrinth, or rather as a woman objectified as a labyrinth—the Widow Wadman. Tristram describes the situation in terms that clearly call the maze (and sieges) to mind:

There was, Madam, in my uncle *Toby*, a singleness of heart which misled him so far out of the little serpentine tracks in which things of this nature usually go on; you can — you can have no conception of it: with this, there was a plainness and simplicity of thinking, with such an unmistrusting ignorance of the plies and foldings of the heart of a woman; — and so naked and defenceless did he stand before you, (when a siege was out of his head) that you might have stood behind any one of your serpentine walks, and shot my uncle *Toby* ten times in a day, through his liver, if nine times in a day, Madam, had not served your purpose. (VI.29.550)

That Toby's "singleness of heart" *misleads* him out of his labyrinth implies, ironically, that a sense of bewilderment is somehow necessary to him. Thus he ventures to re-enter a labyrinth, the maze-like "plies and foldings" of the Widow's "heart."²⁸ Once again expelled from his labyrinthine, womb-like trenches, Toby is a "naked and defenceless" newborn who seeks security by standing before the "serpentine walks" of a woman. In addition to its normal connotations with landscape gardens, "serpentine" not only echoes the passage in II.3 ("fly—fly—fly from it as from a serpent"), but also complements Elizabeth W. Harries's assertion that the "image of woman as Eve, the eternal temptress and source of evil, is always latent" in *Tristram Shandy*—and especially for Toby.²⁹ The labyrinth that the Widow represents is, however, one of an altogether different order from that on the bowling green. Unlike the besieged miniatures, the Widow can "shoot" back if it serves her purpose ("She has

left a ball here —— added my uncle Toby —— pointing to his breast” [VIII.28.712]). At last the center of the labyrinth is tangibly feminine and can no longer be dealt with through displacement. Desirous of personal warmth and love, Toby again struggles to communicate with pictures: “You shall see the very place, Madam,” he tells the curious widow as he prepares to show her a map (IX.20.623). Toby, however, is unable to negotiate the sexual implications of the Widow’s interest in his wound; he returns instead to Shandy Hall, where he is once again relatively safe within the bastion provided by his brother’s war on women and language and anything else that threatens his own labyrinthine systematizing.

Where Toby’s labyrinth is physical and concrete, Walter’s is metaphysical and abstract, a symmetrical maze of language and speculative systems. If “metaphysics is rooted in an implicit geometry which—whether we will or no—confers spatiality upon thought,”³⁰ then Walter can certainly be said to have created symmetrical philosophies via his beds of justice, his theory of names, and the egregious theory of auxiliary verbs. Like “all systematick reasoners,” Walter “would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature [like a landscape gardener] to support his hypothesis” (I.19.61).³¹ More directly linking Walter’s philosophies with Toby’s siegeworks, Tristram tells us his father “would intrench and fortify [one of his opinions] round with as many circumvallations and breastworks, as my uncle *Toby* would a citadel” (III.34.264). But if Toby builds labyrinths, Walter weaves them; his labyrinth is not so much the fortress as a twisted and tortured knot.

We have seen that Toby’s descent into the labyrinth begins with his quest for a totalizing knowledge as a means of regaining the order lost in the trenches before Namur. Walter has his own encyclopedic attempt to encapsulate knowledge, the *Tristrapædia*, and it is “tied” to the knot: “My father spun his [knowledge], every thread of it, out of his own brain, —— or reeled and cross-twisted what all other spinners and spinsters had spun before him” (V.16.445). Walter’s efforts are doomed, because through delay, “the first part of the work, upon which my father had spent the most of his pains, was rendered entirely useless, —— every day a page or two became of no consequence” (V.16.448). Hence, as Walter tries to weave his labyrinth of knowledge, the backward and forward motions associated with maze wandering are at work, creating a Swiftian misdirection by which progress is regress. The Swiftian satire is directed at the “chief mirage” of the early encyclopedists, “the belief that it was possible to compile a work that would supersede all books and render them unnecessary”; that is, that the world’s knowledge was progressing teleologically.³² Sterne’s skepticism about the encyclopedic goal, so similar to Swift’s (a point which the Florida editors establish),³³ is reflected in the fate of Walter’s *Tristrapædia*. Walter’s goal, ironically, is to bring his work “into so small a compass, that when it was finished and bound, it might be rolled up in my mother’s hussive” (V.16.445–46). Like the symbology of the garden knot, the futility of Walter’s project is revealed in this cyclical, interminable image: weaving a thread that ends up in the hussif where it started.

Walter’s efforts to condense the totality of life into a single philosophic system end up in inextricable knots that can only be cut. The obvious image is of the Gordian knot, but cutting the knot may also signify cutting the umbilical cord

(the “umbilical knot” [I.23.83]), and hence of leaving one labyrinth to enter another. Both meanings may be at play in the debate in Volume IV between Walter and Toby, in which Toby rests his case on the authority of God. “That is cutting the knot,” Walter responds, “instead of untying it” (IV.7.332).³⁴ As Walter sees it, Toby is unwilling to cope with the vagaries of his secular philosophy. Walter, however, also seeks to cut through rather than untie the knots of life with his dreams of systematic order, especially his theory of auxiliary verbs, which he celebrates as a “North west passage to the intellectual world” (V.42.484). Indeed, all of Walter’s theories are similar “passages” that aim to evade or deny (and are therefore hopeless impositions upon) the labyrinth of the world. Paradoxically, however, his attempts to cut the knot become labyrinthine knots themselves. In describing the theory of auxiliary verbs to Yorick, Walter presents it as twisted around a core with millions of branching offshoots: “Now the use of the *Auxiliaries* is, at once to set the soul a going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions” (V.42.485). Using the theory properly, even a child may draw a “magazine of conceptions and conclusions” from it (V.43.486). The language here is telling. As Trim suggests, certain troops are called auxiliaries; at the heart of a fortress is a magazine (which, quite literally, fuels the “engines” of war); the use of “conception” links the image to the umbilical knot; all the paths (“tracks”) ramify outward and lead to other paths, the ultimate sense of one caught in a maze.

In providing his particular example for the “great engine,” Walter chooses the white bear, which may echo—in some Shandean manner—the white bull that fathered the Minotaur of Daedalus’s Cretan labyrinth. In thus ridiculing Walter, Sterne once again implies his fundamental skepticism about the possibilities of human knowledge and the notion that the world’s labyrinth can be circumvented. It is almost certainly not accidental that when the Widow confronts Toby Shandy about his wound, she puts into action Walter’s auxiliary verbs (IX.20), his “white bear” becoming Toby’s “it.” By the end of this, the final volume, the “it” has metamorphosed into the impotent Shandy bull, which “might have done for Europa herself in purer times” (IX.33.808). Europa: mother of Minos, whose wife Pasiphae gave birth to the labyrinth-locked Minotaur.

The image of the labyrinth is also important to Sterne’s conception of Tristram, who at the end of Volume VI offers his readers the most deceptive labyrinth of all, that of the single straight line. Mocking expectations of a standard narrative with the Aristotelian unities, and hence a direct route to the center of the maze, Tristram provides several labyrinth-like diagrams that outline the digressive nature of his writing in the first volumes. (In “Slawkenbergius’s Tale” the unfolding of Aristotle’s stages of narrative is called “unwinding the labyrinth” [IV.317].) Visually, these diagrams delineate the various twists and turns of his narrative, but more importantly, the letters he includes to demarcate the last of them resemble the diagrams of fortifications found in the contemporaneous literature about military architecture.³⁵ Tristram, however, informs us he will mend his ways and “may arrive hereafter at the excellency of going on even thus;

which is a line drawn as straight as I could draw it This *right line* — the pathway for Christians to walk in! say divines ——— ” (VI.40.571–72).³⁶ There is a parallel passage at the end of Volume VII: “I danced myself into Perdrillo’s pavillion, where pulling a paper of black lines, that I might go on straight forwards [as opposed to backward and forward], without digression or parenthesis, in my uncle *Toby*’s amours ——— ” (43.651). The dance is itself a form of maze (as noted above), but the image of the straight line in both cases is a variation on the theme of cutting the knot—striking directly through to the heart of the labyrinth, only to discover another in its place.

If Tristram is having a joke at our expense—and he usually is—this one turns upon him as well. In weaving a labyrinth, he is paradoxically at the same time entrapped by it. There are several suggestions in the early portions of the book that Tristram is himself a-mazed. *Tristram Shandy* begins with Tristram’s *ab ovo* narration in the “knotted” labyrinth of the mother’s womb, moves through Dr. Slop’s attempts to cut Obadiah’s maze of knots (“with such a multiplicity of round-about and intricate cross turns, with a hard knot at every intersection or point where the strings met” [III.8.196]) to release his “instruments of delivery,” to Tristram’s misnaming, which calls forth one of Sterne’s most poignant allusions to the labyrinth of human life: “But mark, madam, we live amongst riddles and mysteries — the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature’s works” (IV.17.350).³⁷ Eventually, however, it is Tristram, the author, who is most significantly implicated in the labyrinth. Increasingly entangled in his maze-like narrative, attempting to construct his own account of his life and opinions and impose it upon reality, he inevitably creates a labyrinth to which—with equal inevitability—he becomes susceptible himself.³⁸

Toward the end of Volume VI, just prior to introducing his diagrammatic labyrinths, Tristram confesses that “when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards . . . and now, you see, I am lost myself!” (VI.33.557–58). A few pages later he discovers “I can get on no further, — and find myself entangled on all sides of this mystick labyrinth” (35.565). On the one hand, we are asked to feel sympathy for the hapless Tristram who has never had control over the key events of his life: his conception, birth, naming, and education. He elicits this sort of sympathy from us in Volume VIII: “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?” (6.663). On the other hand, we know that human beings do not control these events in their lives, that Tristram the jester has reveled in sending us down the false paths and dead ends of his “mystick labyrinth”:

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 (motly emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unraval the many opinions, trans-

actions, and truths which still lie mystically hid under the dark veil of the black one. (III.36.268)

Tristram here warns us in a passage that is reminiscent of his warning to Uncle Toby (II.3), that if we wish to leave the labyrinth of knowledge, we must either put down the book(s), or—cognizant of our own finitude—realize that the quest for truth is itself infinite. There is no Northwest passage to knowledge, and any compartmentalization of truth yields only a fallible, human labyrinth. “Endless is the Search of Truth!” indeed, and the ultimate maze of *Tristram Shandy* may well be the marbled page, with its mystic truth obscured by the carefully designed swirls of color calculated to resist our systematizing, a “motly emblem” of both the labyrinth and of *Tristram Shandy*.

NOTES

I am indebted to Melvyn New for his thoughtful advice on this article. Thanks are also due to Patricia Craddock and Alistair Duckworth.

1. *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne: “Tristram Shandy,”* ed. Melvyn New and Joan New (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1978), II.3.103. Hereafter cited in text. The linkage between knowledge and the serpent surely is meant to invoke the Garden foremost in the mind of eighteenth-century readers. Sterne’s choice of wording in the passage also suggests the Greek etymology of “ichnography”: “track” and “footstep.” Cf. II.5.110: “As summer is coming on, continued Trim, your Honour might sit out of doors, and give me the nography — (call it ichnography, quoth my uncle).”

2. W. H. Matthews, *Mazes and Labyrinths: A General Account of Their History and Developments* (1922; rpt. Detroit: Singing Tree Press, 1969), 77, 92. See also Penelope Reed Doob: “there may be a connection between the *lusus Troiae* [Trojan Ride] . . . and the abundant turf-mazes and stone circles of northern Europe known as ‘Troy-Town’” (*The Idea of the Labyrinth from Classical Antiquity through the Middle Ages* [Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990], 28). Doob reprints a photograph of a turf maze (114).

3. Sterne’s customary punning comes into play here as well: “to tread” is also a fowling term for “to copulate.”

4. Doob, 213ff. Doob points out that specific homiletic usages of the labyrinth originated in Augustine, who suggested that a good sermon should be like a labyrinth.

5. Two brief articles linking Toby’s bowling green to garden layouts appeared while this article was awaiting publication. See James Fenton, “War in the Garden,” *New York Review of Books*, 24 (June 1993): 23–26 and Pat Rogers, “Ziggerzagger Shandy: Sterne and the Aesthetics of the Crooked Line,” *English* 42 (1993): 97–107.

6. Joan DeJean, *Literary Fortifications: Rousseau, Laclos, Sade* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1984), 21, 30.

7. Cf. David McNeil, *The Grotesque Depiction of War and the Military in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1990). In addition to making a similar assertion regarding Toby and Vauban, McNeil has noted that “toy soldiers and artillery” were being “mass-produced for the public about the same time Sterne was writing *Tristram Shandy*” (154–55).

8. Major George Sydenham Clarke (1848–1933) as quoted in Ian V. Hogg, *Fortress: A History of Military Defense* (New York: St. Martins, 1975), 49.

9. See for example, the view of Naarden, Holland, in Hogg, 42–3.

10. Stephen Switzer, *Ichographia Rustica: Or, the Nobleman, Gentleman, and Gardener’s Recreation*, 3 vols. (London: D. Browne et al., 1718), I:43.

11. Sébastien LePrestre de Vauban, *A Manual of Siegecraft and Fortification*, trans. George A. Rothrock (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1968), 44.

12. Batty Langley, *New Principles of Gardening* (1728; rpt. Westmead: Gregg International, 1971), 4.

13. While the serpentine line might evoke the picturesque to some readers, it is worth keeping in mind that for Hogarth and others it was a "precise" line of beauty, the figure that, with mathematical regularity, produced the most beautiful form. Sterne parodies this precision in his figure of Trim reading the sermon (II.17.140), a figure he asked Hogarth to draw in order to illustrate their "systems." As he wrote Richard Berenger on 78 March 1760, "The loosest sketch [of Hogarth's] . . . [would] mutually illustrate his System and mine" (*The Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935], 99). In any case, I wish to highlight a fairly consistent linking of garden, labyrinth, and serpent.

14. Without straying too far from my argument, it is worth pointing out that Charles Bridgeman's pioneering work at Stowe (ca. 1713) on the English ha-ha, the sunken wall that enabled the formal garden and countryside to blend visually together and that usually is seen as the innovation leading away from the formal geometrical style to the planned spontaneity of the latter portion of the century, was influenced by military architecture. See G. B. Clarke, "The History of Stowe—VIII: Military Gardening: Bridgeman and the Ha-Ha," *The Spectator* 24 (1969): 11–15; and Christopher Thacker, *The History of Gardens* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1979), 182–84.

15. Francois Gentil, *The Retir'd Gard'ner*, trans. George London and Henry Wise, 2 vols., ed. John Dixon Hunt (1706; rpt. New York: Garland, 1982), 743.

16. Switzer, II:164. "Half-moon," "fossé," and of course "parapet" were terms used in fortification; see the Glossary in the *Notes to Tristram Shandy*, ed. Melvyn New, Richard Davies, and W. G. Day (Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida, 1984), 553–60.

17. Vauban, p. 51. See also Yi-Fu Tuan, "Gardens of Power and Caprice" in *Dominance and Affection: The Making of Parks* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984): "The [gardening] skills needed to move earth, build retaining walls, terraces, pools, and avenues were also those needed in the military constructions of the period." Hence many architects "worked on both military fortifications and princely gardens" (28).

18. Matthews suggests that the Hampton Court maze "in all probability displaced an older maze, a relic of [Cardinal] Wolsey's time. . . . The circular Troy-town . . . formerly coexisted with the present maze" (129). See also David Jacques and Arend Jan van der Horst, *The Gardens of William and Mary* (London: Christopher Helm, 1988): "There was a Troy Town in the wilderness at Hampton Court, and the [gravel] pit at Kensington . . . was referred to as the 'Siege of Troy'" (164). *Spectator* #477 refers to this pit, but not as the "Siege": "Wise and London [the garden's designers] are our Heroick Poets, and if, as a Critick, I may single out any Passage of their Works to commend, I shall take Notice of that Part in the upper Garden at Kensington, which was at first nothing but a Gravel-Pitt. It must have been a fine Genius for Gardening, that could have thought of forming such an unsightly hollow into so beautiful an Area" (*The Spectator*, ed. Donald F. Bond, [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965], IV:190).

19. Horace Walpole, "On Modern Gardening" in *The History of the Modern Taste in Gardening*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (1828; rpt. New York: Garland, 1982), 256n. Interestingly enough, Hunt believes the essay was written in the decade prior to its publication, the same years that Sterne was publishing *Tristram Shandy*.

20. Switzer, I:76–77.

21. David Green, *Blenheim Palace* (London: Country Life, 1951), 68–69.

22. Switzer, III:84. We know that Sterne had at least a passing interest in gardening (Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* [London and New York: Methuen, 1986], 67–68). And while the catalogue of books attributed to Sterne's library (*A Facsimile Reproduction of a Unique Catalogue of Laurence Sterne's Library* [New York: AMS Press, 1973]) is sometimes misleading (see W. G. Day, "Sterne's Books," *Library*, 5th series, 31 [1976]: 245–48), it is interesting to note that it includes a copy of "Switzer's General System of Hydrostaticks and Hydraulicks" (entry #574). Switzer's volume contains a diagram of a landscape design with a slope of greensward labeled "glacis" (*An Introduction to a General System of Hydrostaticks and Hydraulicks, Philosophical and Practical*, 2 vols., ed. John Dixon Hunt [1729; rpt. New York: Garland, 1982], plate 3, opp. I:130), leaving us to conjecture if Sterne initially made the connection between gardens and fortifications through Switzer's work.

23. Robert B. Riley, "Flowers, Power, and Sex" in *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action*,

ed. Mark Francis and Randolph T. Hester, Jr. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 61. See also Ian Donaldson, "Weavers, Gardeners, Gladiators, and the Lame: *Tristram Shandy*, viii.5" *Notes and Queries* 228 (1983): 61–63, who explores some classical and Renaissance sources that link physical disability with sexuality.

24. John Muller, *A Treatise Concerning the Elementary Part of Fortification* (1746; rpt. Ottawa: Museum Restoration Service, 1968), 19. In the *Notes to Tristram Shandy*, the editors refer to Muller's comment in their note to a passage (467.1–4) that brings together archetypal gardens, fortification, and procreative power. In the passage (in V.31), Uncle Toby opines, "For when the ground was tilled . . . and made worth inclosing, then they began to secure it by walls and ditches, which was the origin of fortification." Significantly, this is Toby's riposte to Walter's borrowed theorizing on the "original of society," which he misremembers as "a man,—a woman—and a bull" (466). That Sterne should associate these ideas—the garden, fortification, the bull, and procreation—in a single chapter is, in light of my argument here, fortuitous. I discuss below the relation between the Shandy bull and the labyrinth, but surely to Western readers the labyrinth and the Minotaur are inextricably intertwined.

25. Wendy B. Faris, *Labyrinths of Language: Symbolic Landscape and Narrative Design in Modern Fiction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1988), 6.

26. Janet Bord, *Mazes and Labyrinths of the World* (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 12.

27. Carole Fabricant, "Binding and Dressing Nature's Loose Tresses: The Ideology of Augustan Landscape Design" *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 8 (1979): 122. In addition to her trenchant analysis of Stephen Switzer on these grounds, Fabricant reminds us that the "overriding conception" behind eighteenth-century gardens was the "myth of restoration" (127), a point that certainly applies to Toby.

28. The language in this passage recalls the serpentine furrows of an English turf maze; the sexual implications of "plies and foldings" cannot be avoided. The association of a woman's heart (or at least that of the coquette) with the labyrinth seems to have been a popular notion in the early eighteenth century, as in *Spectator* #281: "Our operator, before he engaged in this Visionary Dissection, told us, that there was nothing in his Art more difficult, than to lay open the Heart of a Coquet, by reason of the many Labyrinths and Recesses which are to be found in it, and which do not appear in the Heart of any other Animal" (II:594).

29. "The Sorrows and Confessions of a Cross-Eyed 'Female Reader' of Sterne," in *Approaches to Teaching Sterne's "Tristram Shandy,"* ed. Melvyn New (New York: MLA, 1989), 113. In Volume VIII, Tristram actually does dismiss the Widow as "A daughter of Eve, for such was widow Wadman, and 'tis all the character I intend to give of her" (8.664).

30. Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (New York: Orion, 1964), 212.

31. Denis Cosgrove has demonstrated the connection between the symmetrical landscapes and mystical philosophies in "The Geometry of Landscape: Practical and Speculative Arts in Sixteenth-Century Venetian Land Territories" in *The Iconography of Landscape*, ed. Denis Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988), 254–76.

32. Robert Collison, *Encyclopaedias: Their History Throughout the Ages* (New York: Hafner, 1966), 2.

33. There is a parallel passage in I.21.72: "When that happens [the pinnacle of knowledge attained] . . . it will put an end to all kind of writings whatsoever; — the want of all kind of writing will put an end to all kind of reading; — and that in time, *As war begets poverty, poverty peace*, — we shall have all to begin over again; or, in other words, be exactly where we started." The Florida *Notes* establish a link between Sterne's thought in this passage and Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*. It is worth noting at this juncture that one of the most prominent early encyclopedists, Charles Perrault, was the designer of the labyrinths at Versailles.

34. Cf. Leigh A. Ehlers, "Mrs. Shandy's 'Lint and Basilicon': The Importance of Women in *Tristram Shandy*," *South Atlantic Review* 46 (1981): 71–72. Ehlers suggests that the "knot represents the accidents and misfortunes of life, like Tristram's crushed nose or his misnaming; faith and trust in God enable the Christian to cope with these afflictions, to cut through the illusions and obstructions of earthly existence" (72). Ehlers's language here recalls the homiletic rhetoric of the labyrinth noted earlier; interestingly, the Florida editors trace Sterne's phrasing in this passage to two of his sermons (see n. to 332.22–23).

35. See, for example, Plate III in the *Notes of the Florida Edition*. The plate, taken from *Chambers'*

Cyclopædia, is particularly noteworthy for the top center diagram, which looks surprisingly like the narrative diagrams at the end of Volume VI.

36. Again, this passage reflects the homiletic labyrinth that Doob mentions.

37. Although two of Sterne's sermons make use of the language here (see n. to 350.11–19 in the *Florida Notes*), the phrasing is ultimately derived from Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV.3.22. See the scholium to this passage in *The Scriblerian* 19.1 (1986):93.

38. Faris writes: "The writer's exploration of the labyrinth of the world leads him to create a mirroring labyrinth—the work of art" (167).