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# Narrative of Narrative (*Tristram Shandy*)



*Jeffrey Williams*

## **Preliminary Claims**

*Tristram Shandy* presents an extreme in novelistic interpretation, since the presumed events of the narrative, of Tristram's autobiography and the Shandy family history, are not only told out of order, but are frequently cut off and fragmentary. At times, the suggestion of a word causes the narrative to jump from an event in 1718, say, to Toby's battle experience at Namur in 1695. The plot is peculiar in its appearance of non-linearity and disorder. Also, related to this, Tristram frequently interrupts the narrated events and reflexively calls attention to the question of narration itself.

We will here propose that the attendant interpretive problems of this odd narrative are, for the most part, due to a confusion over the concept of plot. The tendency of much of the criticism is to take the events that the narrator says he is narrating unquestioningly as the plot of the novel. The narrator's statements about narrating (as journey, line, digression, etc.) and his recounting of what he is doing and when he is doing it are then seen as somehow above or beyond the plot, as if these were outside the domain of the narrative proper. Even recent critically sophisticated readings—for instance, Hillis Miller's using *Shandy* as an exemplar of the deconstruction of linear plot, and Dennis Allen's attending to the linguistic play of the novel—seem to privilege the comments of the narrator, distancing them from the rest of the narrative, and almost taking them as if they were literal, as critical comments on narrative rather than as part of the narrative itself.<sup>1</sup>

*Tristram Shandy* is a narrative of narrative. The so-called narrative intrusions and comments actually form a linear narrative whose subject is the composing of a narrative. This narrative of the writing is explicitly dated from 1759 to 1766. The central character is the narrator who tells the story and tries to muster the details of Shandy family history, roughly from 1695 through 1741. In other words, the plot is not limited to the jumbled series of the events of Tristram's history, but encompasses the ordered series of events of Tristram's account of narration. This account is not a privileged historical feature that is a statement of authorial intention; rather, it is just as much a fictional element as any other narrated event.

Perhaps *Tristram Shandy* is the most typical of novels, as Shklovsky put it, because it so overtly inscribes its own narrative, its own act of narrating.<sup>2</sup> Every novel, at some point, becomes a narrative of narrative, or an allegory of narration. Here, notably, the explicit commenting and interrupting narrator reflexively replays the difficulty of narration, of ordering events in words, of giving a comprehensive account. Akin to de Man's analysis of the reflexive self-inscription of reading in his essay on Proust called "Reading," we could call this investigation "Narrating."

## Narrative

First, we should set out with a preliminary definition of narrative and other pertinent critical terms. Gérard Genette, in his now classic *Narrative Discourse*, distinguishes three different kinds of narrative. *Récit*, which is translated as "narrative," he calls the most central and defines as "the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events."<sup>3</sup> This generally accords with the Russian formalists' distinction of plot or *sjuzet*, and loosely follows Aristotle's definition of plot as an imitation of actions. *Histoire*, or "story," he defines as the succession of events, which accords with the formalists' *fabula*. The events themselves, rather than the way they are told, comprise the story and are a kind of content of the narrative. The *récit* is the signifier of the narrative text, and the *histoire* then aligns with the signified of the narrative. Genette introduces a third term, *narration*, translated as "narrating," which he defines as "the act of narrating taken in itself" (ND 26). He further elaborates that it is "the producing narrative action and, by extension, the whole of the real or fictional

situation in which that action takes place" (ND 27). However, throughout *Narrative Discourse*, Genette proceeds to talk almost exclusively about the disarrangement of the story in the plot of *Remembrance of Things Past*, and he effectively excludes this category of *narration*. Theoretically, his analysis results in little more than a repetition of the Russian formalist distinction of plot and story.

Genette's distinctions do not hold when dealing with the question of explicitly reflexive narratives like *Tristram Shandy*, since it is precisely the narrating or act of narrative that forms the *récit* of *Shandy*. The act of narration is inseparable from the narrative, and, although frequently hidden, necessarily inscribed in any narrative, most obviously through narrative frames and digressions, but also implicit in linguistic structure (in control of tense, use of mood, change of voice, etc.).

Here, we will attempt to diverge from Genette's limited focus on the concept of plot and extend our definition to encompass both categories of *récit* and *narration*.<sup>4</sup> Without pretense to absolute structural demarcation, we will use *plot* and *story*, for their simplicity and utility and since there is no compelling reason to supplant them. We will attempt to delimit plot as a local tactical term. Narratives can have many divergent plots. *Narrative*, on the other hand, we will use as a term that encompasses the various plots and other relations of the narrative text overall. Also, we will frequently use *narrative* in a more active sense (narration, narrating), to connote the *process* of narrative.

These terms obviously draw on Genette's schema, although it is crucial to realign them to take into account the complex of relations of narrative that Genette elides. Additionally, we must note one significant reservation. The canonical and practical distinction between plot and story is not absolute. The events of the story level do not exist outside narrative. The sequence according to "real time" or "story time" is just one other narrative, formed under the aegis of the sequential order of historical chronology. The "real time" of a novel could never have ontological validity, but we compare, almost automatically, narrative or plot time to the pervasive and powerful trope of chronological time. In other words, our terms can have no absolutely demarcated field of reference, but are relational. To be more exact, since the story is a chronological or historical sequence of events, we could merely call it the historical plot, as distinguished from the plot as it is narrated.<sup>5</sup> In our scheme, the narrative is not really a separable term either, but en-

compasses the complex of relations of all the terms, of the variety and scope of textual actions.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the narrative would be the book as a whole as we read it (events, plots, language, etc.), whereas the plot and story are convenient terms to mark off various salient local textual actions. The sequence of events that could be said to comprise the story begins roughly in 1695 and ends, according to the usual view of plot, in 1741, or, more accurately, including the description of the act of writing, in 1766. The order—and also the duration, frequency, etc.—of events chronologically, in “real” or historical time, as “facts,” is quite different from the order of events as they are presented in the narrative.

### Anachrony

The difference between story and plot produces a comparative ratio. Genette defines the ratio of the difference between plot time and story time as *anachrony* (“all forms of discordance between the two temporal orders of story and narrative” [ND 40]). A distinctive structural feature of *Tristram Shandy* is its apparently extreme anachronic form, with its frequent progressions, digressions, and regressions. Criticism that points out the non-linearity of *Tristram Shandy* is really talking about the discordance between the chronological order of events and the sequence of events that is recounted in the plot. The plotted events do not occur in a linearly progressive order, but seem to jump around in time. By comparison, a novel like *Tom Jones* moves in a fairly stable and constant fashion; the difference between plot and story times is not exact or mimetic (it does not take a year to recount a year), but proportionate and consistent, and the plot is sequentially ordered, in accordance with the chronological order of events. The ratio remains generally constant.

Genette calls a narration like Tristram’s “progression” a *prolepsis*, and defines it as a narrative maneuver which evokes in advance or calls forward beyond the normal chronologically progressive sequence. He defines an *analepsis* as an evocation of an event that has taken place earlier than the time of narration. However, in Genette’s system, digressions present an odd case that is not accounted for. In one sense, a digression is merely an event among the other events, except that its specific action is the act of narrating. Mr. Shandy’s detour on Slawkenbergius occurs in the sequence of

events of Tristram's early biography, but the coordinates of the content of the tale of Slawkenbergius do not fit into the temporal scheme or group of events of the story proper. If one takes the primary plot of the novel to be Tristram's biography, in a sense Toby's adventures at Namur and with the widow Wadman are then digressive and outside the course of that plot. However, they are analeptic and fill in material that directly bears on the story. Tristram's biography lies within the larger field of background of Shandy family history; conversely, from the standpoint of the narrative, the analepsis is subordinate to the plot of Tristram's biography. Another way of putting it is that the Shandy history is a supporting subplot within the central plot. In the case of a digression, there is no such temporal or causal plot relation. Digressions form sorts of pockets within the sequence of the plot. They are subordinate to the plot within which they occur, yet they are separate from that sequence of events. The act they depict is the act of narrative. They inscribe the narrative function. In *Tristram Shandy*, the narrative of narrating, indicated overtly by narrative intrusions and digressions, and less obviously by digressive tales (Slawkenbergius, LeFever, Andouillet, etc.), belies a sort of deep structure of narrative reflexivity.<sup>6</sup>

### Time of Narrating

Genette distinguishes four types of narration according to temporal position: 1) the *subsequent*, or usual past-tense narration, where the time of the plot is beyond that of the story; 2) the *prior*, which is rare, and is the predictive, as in dreams or science fiction; 3) the *simultaneous*, or "narrative in the present coterminous with the action" (ND 217), a mode common in current fiction; and 4) *interpolated*, which is between action. We can see from these distinctions that *Tristram Shandy*, as a narrative of the plot of Tristram's autobiography, is a subsequent or past tense narration. However, insofar as it recounts its act of narrating, it is actually a simultaneous narrative. In this sense, in general, all narratives are simultaneous.

### Narrative Levels

One of Genette's crucial distinctions is between a *diegetic* and a *meta-diegetic* level of narrative. This is how he defines a *metadiegesis*:

"Any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing this narrative is placed" (ND 228). As with his cordoning off *narration*, Genette tacitly assumes a stable plot—diegetic—level of narrative. He collapses the narrative text to that singularly privileged level. Genette calls the intrusion of an extra- or meta-diegetic narrator into the diegesis a *metalepsis*, and, specifically citing *Tristram Shandy*, claims that, "Sterne pushed the thing so far as to entreat the intervention of the reader, whom he beseeched to close the door or help Mr. Shandy get back to his bed" (ND 234). This is an odd—and symptomatic—statement, since Genette makes a very basic mistake in identification. It is of course Tristram who is narrating or doing the entreating. Even if it were an author "Sterne," such a characterization would of course only be a persona, a fictional representation. This succinctly indicates the general turn in Genette's criticism towards separating off and literalizing the narrator and the act of narrating, as if Tristram were somehow separate from the narrative, and as if his comments gave a gloss of the author's intention. Separating off this level gives it the status of literal commentary, when narratologically, it is a diegesis or plot of the action of narration. Tristram's comments are not separate from, outside or above the narrative, as the term *meta*-diegesis implies. On the contrary, Tristram is the central character in the plot of the narrating. What Genette calls the meta-diegetic is really only one other plot, that is not demonstrably any more literal or less fictional than any other plot. The reason why *Tristram Shandy* seems so turgidly anachronic is merely an explicit portrait of the problem and struggle of the act of narration, of marshalling sequential temporal order.

Revising Genette, we find no ontological difference between narrative levels. The fiction of most novels is to claim that the characters have empirical reality, or that they are mimetic. In explicitly reflexive works—*Six Characters in Search of an Author*, although not a novel, is a convenient example, as is *Tristram Shandy* and the narration of writing—the second level claims empirical reality that is highlighted by the announcement of contrast with the first level. The six characters in Pirandello's play are admittedly fictional, but they have no more or less substantial empirical validity than other characters. Rhetorically, they make the other characters seem more realistic since they are announced as fictional. The relation is similar in *Tristram Shandy*, although the characters are announced

as part of a family history. Tristram, the writer, points to the narrative existence of the Shandy family. *Tristram Shandy* is unusual in that it calls attention to the fictional nature of its text, although the layer that unmasks the fiction is not more real or less fictional than that which it unmasks. Mimesis is only a tropical level to establish a point of reference, but can never establish an absolute standard against which to measure levels of fictionality from outside the narrative. It is a relational value, determined solely within and by the narrative.

### General Order of the Novel

Theodore Baird's standard essay, "The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," argues against earlier criticism that sees no order in *Shandy*, and is probably the first article to establish authoritatively that there is an accurate historical time sequence in the novel: "There is a carefully planned and executed framework of calendar time in what is usually considered a chaos of whimsicalities and indecencies."<sup>7</sup> Baird paraphrases the events of the novel in chronological order, from 1689 to 1750, and concludes that "far from being a wild and whimsical work, *Tristram Shandy* is an exactly executed historical novel."<sup>8</sup> What Baird has reconstructed is what we have been calling the story or real time of the novel, which agrees with calendar or historical time. The polemic of Baird's argument, to re-establish the coherence of *Shandy*, may be well-taken, but it is limited in two ways. First, "the framework of calendar time" cannot be confused with plot, which yields quite different results. Baird imposes the order of chronological time to smooth out the narrative, which otherwise demonstrates a very disordered chronology. Second, Baird totally ignores the time of narration, which is dated from 1759 to 1766.

To examine the difference between the story(line) and its linear sequence in time, and the plot and its sequence as narrated, we will use the following notational abbreviations. *Tristram Shandy* can be divided into five narrative blocs, given in chronological order: the first (A) from about 1695 to 1697, when Toby was at Namur and was wounded, and came to stay with his brother Walter; the second (B) occurs primarily around 1713, and culminates in Toby's adventures with the widow Wadman; the third (C) centers on 1718, where the autobiographical narrative properly begins, and is marked by Tristram's birth on November 5, 1718, or rather

by his begetting in March 1718, and extends to the slam of the window sash; the fourth (D) occurs for the most part in 1741, and accounts for Tristram's European tour, which takes up the seventh book; the fifth (E), which is rarely taken into account, occurs from 1759 to 1766, and incorporates the account of Tristram's narration. To summarize broadly, the general time sequence of the novel in its entirety goes something like this: volume I takes place primarily at the time of Tristram's conception and birth, which could be further separated into C and Ca, C being November 1718, and Ca March 1718. The bulk of the first volume is his father's and uncle Toby's conversation and the events downstairs, and sometimes refers to Toby's time at Namur and his wound, and also to Mrs. Shandy's marriage settlement. We will mark these as A and Aa. These events occur under the general auspices of Tristram's narration, marked by the first person pronoun ("I wish . . ."), and by commentary, interjection, and explanation. We find out where he gets the story he tells about his conception ("To my uncle Toby Shandy do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote . . .," in chapter 3), and he addresses his readers about his narrating (chapter 4, etc.). He even dates his own narrating (March 9, 1759, March 26, 1759).<sup>9</sup> The other events are governed by Tristram's writing, and the text is permeated with references to it. This fifth level, and its relationship to the other events, we will represent like this: E (C, Ca (A, Aa)). This is a much reduced representation, but it should prove useful in describing the novel.<sup>10</sup> For the moment, we will not note the many references to the plot of Tristram's narration, since they are so frequent; we will first attend to the various subplots in each volume.

The second volume starts with narrative intrusions (E), but, again, bracketing that plot, what Tristram describes is Toby at Namur (about maps, his cure, his charge, etc. [A, B]), although the primary focus is still the time of Tristram's birth (C), and what the women and Slop do. The third volume is mostly concerned with Obadiah's knots, the complications of the birth, the use of forceps and the question of Tristram's nose (C). There are also references to Flanders (A), and Wadman (B), and we should note the substantial intrusions of the preface and the digression on noses. The fourth volume records more of the digression (Slawkenbergius—C, in that it is told by Tristram's father, so we will mark it Cd to signify the special nature of digressions, mentioned above), and Mr. Shandy's recovery, and it harks back to Bobby's death (Ba).

There are notable narrative intrusions about the proposed chapters on sleep, buttonholes, and the question of chapters. Volume five recounts Tristram's mother's overhearing his father, the question of Tristapaedia, and the slammed sash (C, or since it is beyond his birth, Cs for the time of the slammed sash and Tristram's early life). Volume six digresses on LeFever (Cd), recounts Slop and Susannah (C), Tristram's breeches (Cs), and refers to Toby's land and campaigns, Utrecht (A) and the widow Wadman (B). The seventh volume primarily tells of the French tour through Paris, Lyons, etc. (D), and digresses on Andouilletts (Dd). Volume eight fills in details about Toby with the widow Wadman (B), and nine, in uncharacteristically continuous fashion, continues about Toby's siege and Trim's assistance (B). This sequence could then be given: E (C (Ca, A, Aa)- C (A, B)- C (A, B)- C (B, Cd)- Cs- C (Cs, A, B)- D (Dd)- B- B). The plot(s) could be reductively summarized: E (C-C-C-C-Cs-C-D-B-B), factoring out the level of narration.

From these notations, we should be able to see that the overall shape of the novel is fairly simple. Bracketing the account of the narration, it generally centers on Tristram's birth, with a slight extended analeptic turn at the close, filling in details of Toby's story. This order obviously disagrees with the purely chronological sequence of the story. The plot is not linear or sequential in this view, but instead seemingly static, since it centers on the scenes of the men downstairs during Tristram's birth. It gives the effect of a long and rambling conversation, that meanders through recollections of past events, and then returns to the present situation.

### Narrative Instance

To examine the plot and the shifts in action more closely, we will schematize a short passage, from Volume I, chapter 21 (I, 21), when Tristram's father asks, "I wonder what's all that noise" (*TS* 63), to II, 6, which returns to his father's, "What can they be doing," and Toby's knocking the ashes off his pipe. This is a convenient passage to look at since, chronologically, there is of course no separation between the events. They occur between a smoke of Toby's pipe. The sequence of this action is not only broken, but a multitude of narrative events occurs in between.

The passage begins in the central scene, of Tristram's birth, in November 1718 (C), but after two paragraphs the narrator inter-

rupts, "for I write in such a hurry," and not only calls attention to his writing but gives the exact date (March 26, 1759), time (9 to 10 in the morning), and weather ("very rainy"). The action clearly and explicitly centers on the time of the writing (E), which in its specificity and elaboration is very unusual, making us conscious of the fictional nature of the narrative. Then the narrator comments with his famous line: "But I forget my uncle Toby, whom all this while we have left knocking the ashes out of his tobacco pipe" (still E [TS 65]). Further, the narrator digresses about Toby and aunt Dinah, while addressing his "Madam," which raises a complex effect (of digression, d, but also to the past, A and Bb). However, since it is a direct address of the narrator ("My father, as I told you," "You will imagine, Madam"), it occurs in the present of the narration (E). There is also a reference to Namur and Toby's wound (A [TS 67]), to Lillabullero, and to the Shandean system (Bb). The next chapter (22) is a digression about the digressive-progressive nature of his work, leaving the subject of Toby ("I was just going to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's whimsical character" [TS 72]) and speaks directly about the (problem of) narrative ("This is vile work" [TS 73]) (E). Chapter 23 discusses the question of drawing a man's character (E), 24 begins about hobby horses (Ed), and goes on to a fairly straightforward description of Toby's wound and confinement (A, Aa). Volume II starts with narrative action ("I have begun a new book . . ." [TS 81]), but is interspersed with an account of Toby (Aa). Chapter 2 is most concerned with critics' questioning ("So, Sir Critick . . ." [TS 85]) (E). Chapter 3 is most about Toby's map and projectiles and Namur (Aa), and chapter 4 returns primarily to the discussion of narration (E) ("I would not give a groat for that man's knowledge in pencraft . . ." "Writers of my stamp . . ." [TS 91]), although it also discusses Toby's cure (Aa). It ends with this reflexive, prophetic passage: "'Tis the subject of the next chapter to set forth what that cause and crotchety was. I own, when that's done, 'twill be time to return back to the parlour fire-side, where we left my uncle Toby in the middle of his sentence" (TS 92). Chapter 5 talks more of Toby and Trim and their hobby-horsical adventures (Aa). There, Trim's suggestion to build a bastion is in fairly typical descriptive style, although the section begins and ends with the narrator's comments which again transgress the line of fiction ("At present the scene must drop,—and change for the parlour fire-side" [TS 99]). And, as promised, chapter 6 returns to the scene in

the parlour (“—what can they be doing, brother? said my father . . .”) and the snapping of the pipe.

Our shorthand notation for this section comes out as follows: C-E (-E-A-Bb-E-A-Bb)- E- E- E- (A-)Aa- E (-Aa)- E- Aa- E (-Aa)- Aa (-E)- C (-E). As this helps to show, there is no linear development in the plot of *Tristram’s* autobiography. The narrative of *Tristram’s* birth is broken, but what interrupts is not continuous or sequential. It shuttles back and forth, generally from the narrator’s comments and accounts of what he is doing (E) to Toby’s and other past events (A). Hillis Miller’s argument for the deconstruction of linear plot is borne out in this constant shuttling action. Not only is it out of sequence, but it rarely repeats or sustains an individual plot. The narrative, from the base of the scene in the house in 1718, as well as from the base of the narrating, is extremely anachronic.

Typically, other novels (e.g. *Tom Jones*) have a stable and consistent line of narration that is rarely broken, except by an occasional analepsis to give background. *Tristram Shandy* is strange, even unique, in its frequent shifts in time, backwards and forwards, without sustaining a temporal ground. Locally, *Shandy* is anything but static. Why it appears static from a distance, in an overall schematization, derives from an effect similar to looking at a rapidly vibrating object, that moves to a blur and looks as if it were still. Up close, the case is very different. To expand our former description, we will call this shuttling motion *oscillatory*. *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates an oscillating plot.

### Narrative of Narrative

We have been fairly careful thus far to distinguish what Baird and other critics usually consider to be the events of the novel—the events of *Tristram’s* birth and upbringing, and the background of the Shandy family (particularly uncle Toby). But, to the extent that the narrator so often interrupts and explicitly tells what he is doing, even giving the date he is writing, *Tristram Shandy* recounts a present tense narrative of narrative. In I,18, *Tristram* recounts, “I am now writing this book for the edification of the world—which is March 9, 1759” (TS 44). In I,21, mentioned above, he says he is writing between 9 and 10 in the morning of a rainy day, March 26, 1759 (TS 64). In IV,13, in a famous passage that calls attention to the difference between narrative and real time, he tells

that he is a year older but has only “got . . . almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no farther than to my first day’s life . . .” (TS 286). In V,19, he names the day (“and I am this day [August the 10th, 1761]” [TS 376]). In VII,1, he speaks of his lodgings and his goal to write two volumes a year. Finally, in the last dated reference, in IX,1, he tells how he is rather informally dressed: “And here am I sitting, this 12th day of August 1766, in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, without either wig or cap on . . .” (TS 600). From these references to Tristram’s writing in his room, we can conclude that the events of the most temporally immediate plot of *Tristram Shandy* are not those of Tristram’s (past) autobiography, but of his composing the narrative of his autobiography in his room.<sup>11</sup> In this respect, despite seeming confusion, *Tristram Shandy* is a straightforward linear narrative that exactly follows chronological time, from 1759 to 1766.

In addition to these explicit references to the sequence of his writing, there are numerous descriptions of and comments on the nature of narrative, some of which we have briefly noted above. The text spins out metaphors for narrative, as progressive movement, as a trip or excursion, as a line or thread, as an attack, as machine, as debt, and significantly for our purposes, as differing from real time (TS 103, 286, 322, 510, etc.). In fact, *Tristram Shandy* demonstrates a kind of narrative metaphorrhea, and part of its humor drives from this frequent intoning of figures for narrative. Indeed, the text is permeated with a running monologue of narratorial activity, yielding a constant plot of narrating in the record of the writing as well as in the seemingly omnipresent discussion of narrative. Also, as we have mentioned, on the level of action of the other plots (say, of 1718 or so), Toby and Tristram’s father frequently digress to tell stories. In these various ways, *Tristram Shandy* thematizes the figuration of narrative.

To return to our initial concerns, Genette’s structural schema is comprehensive and illuminating when applied to the level he calls the diegetic (i.e. the “primary” plot), but it does not adequately account for this hinge of narrative reflexivity, when narrative represents itself. As we have seen in *Tristram Shandy*, the meta-diegetic level—the events of the plot of the narration—is a significant and salient level of action of the novel. The novel demonstrates a kind of narratorial excess. In general, reflexive features, such as a narrator’s comments, so-called narrative intrusions, frames, etc., foreground the question of narration. By making these features con-

spicuous and so prominent, *Tristram Shandy* maximally thematizes narrative. *Tristram Shandy* gives overt signals of its status as an allegory of narrative, even if those signals are difficult to decipher, and even if they have been obscured by conventional theories of narrative, at least until now.

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## NOTES

- 1 J. Hillis Miller, "Narrative Middles: A Preliminary Outline," *Genre* 11 (1978): 375-87, and Dennis Allen, "Sexuality/Textuality in *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in English Literature* 25 (1985): 651-70. Miller cites Tristram's use of a wiggly line to exemplify his own critical statement about the deconstruction of linear order. Miller is not then reading the novel but culling from it for use as paraphrase. He ignores the narrative situation in the novel, and what it might mean for a narrator to use this figure. Rhetorically, Tristram's comments seem akin to a politician's slickly admitting a mistake: by his admission, he gains a reputation for integrity. One cannot take the narrator at his word.

If there is a deconstructive moment in *Tristram Shandy*, it occurs regardless of the narrator's recognition of it. It would be a constitutive feature of language. Allen's article, although it invokes Derrida, really talks about polysemous or plural uses of words (sex, etc.), which is not deconstruction, at least in any rigorous sense of the term.

- 2 "*Tristram Shandy* is the most typical novel in world literature"—Victor Shklovsky, "Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Stylistic Commentary," *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1965) 57. Shklovsky's classic essay discusses the various ways that Sterne defamiliarizes standard form.

See also J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition: Seven English Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1982) 4. Miller cites Marcel Mauss' comment on how he chooses to describe those primitive societies that exhibit maximal or excessive qualities, to see them better. In a similar way, one could say that *Tristram Shandy* thematizes or inscribes the act of narration maximally.

- 3 Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1980). Hereafter referred to as *ND* with page references placed parenthetically in the text. Genette offers a comprehensive rhetoric of narrative structures, particularly of the temporal relations of plot; his work has had a foundational influence on narratology and narratologists, such as Seymour Chatman, Mieke Bal, Gerald Prince, and others.
- 4 Don Bialostosky, "Narrative Diction in Wordsworth's Poetics of Speech," *Comparative Literature* 34 (1982): 308. Bialostosky, from a Bakhtinian perspective, criticizes Genette's definition of narrative or plot as an imitation of events. Genette follows Aristotle's definition but ignores the question of imitation of speech or voice, as in lyric. Bialostosky pits Plato's *mimesis* against Aristotle's and finds it superior, since it encompasses the world of speech. For our purposes, we will try to define narrative as encompassing both the fields of action and language; language is not separable, distanced, or a mimetic window pane, but narrative reflexively recounts acts of language and narration.
- 5 This analysis of Genette's scheme accords with Culler's critique of Chatman's division of story and discourse. See Jonathan Culler, "Story and Discourse in

the Analysis of Narrative," *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1981) 179.

- 6 On this question of reflexivity, see James E. Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1977) and Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1975). Swearingen does not really talk about narrative reflexivity; rather, he is concerned with Tristram's reflexive consciousness. His focus is the phenomenology or psychology of a character. For us, reflexivity is a function of narrative structure, not of the psychology or consciousness of a character.

Alter is one of the few to discuss "self-conscious" or reflexive narratives, but we would diverge from his approach in two significant ways: 1) the narrative features are reflexive in an almost grammatical sense (as *se laver* is reflexive), rather than conscious (who's conscious? does this attribute consciousness to the text?); and 2) Alter generally points out a novel's "consciously" calling attention to its fictionality, to its breaking the illusion of fiction; he does not delimit various reflexive narrative features, when narrative inscribes its own functioning.

See also Lucien Dallenbach, *The Mirror in the Text*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley with Emma Hughes (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1989) for a general typology of the *mise en abyme* or mirror structure in narrative. Dallenbach very broadly defines *mise en abyme* as "any aspect enclosed within a work that shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (8). This is no doubt a very large category. We will attempt to be more precise and to examine salient reflexive features or structures of narrative (e.g. a narrative frame).

- 7 Theodore Baird, "The Time Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source," *PMLA* 51 (1939): 804. I use Baird because his article is the standard one on the historical aspect of *Tristram Shandy* and because it represents what seems to be a trend in the early criticism: to argue for the order of *Shandy*. Recent criticism, like Hillis Miller's "Narrative Middles" (which argues for the non-linearity of the novel and makes it an allegory of the deconstruction of linear coherence), and Elizabeth Harries' "Sterne's Novels: Gathering Up the Fragments" *ELH* 49 (1982): 35-49 (which schematizes four types of fragmentation), goes in the opposite direction. Oddly enough, the criticism seems to have come full circle over this question of order vs. disorder; hence, our attention here to an already familiar issue.
- 8 Baird, 819.
- 9 Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James Aiken Work (New York: Odyssey, 1940) 44, 64. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text as *TS*, with page references in the text.
- 10 A more accurate or exact formula would probably look like this: (Chapter 1) E-(Ca-E)-E-C- (chap. 2) Ed—homunculus- (chap. 3) E-C-Ca-ad infinitum, which would result in a long and prohibitively cumbersome notation.
- 11 Although the general claims here for narrative are much more extreme, and the rhetorical orientation entirely different, this fundamentally agrees with Wayne Booth's "Tristram Shandy and the Problem of Formal Coherence" in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1961) 221-240. Booth argues that *Tristram Shandy* has formal coherence in its "dramatic presentation of the act of writing." The authorial commentary is not disruptive, but comes to underscore the dominant role of the teller. This role of course points to some sort of ethical position of the author for Booth, whereas for us it points to issues of narrative reflexivity, and precisely not an author.