



THE LIFE AND OPINION OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENTLEMAN.

By Laurence Sterne

Laurence Sterne (1713 – 1768)

- Born in Ireland , graduated from Cambridge University, became a vicar.
- He was a Whig.
- While married he had many other relationships.
- Attended an all male club called the Demoniacs.
- 1750 started writing *Tristram Shandy*.
- Published the first two books in 1759.
- Wrote 9 volumes in 10 years.
- Continued writing the book till he dies.
- 1762-1764 visited France and wrote *A Sentimental Journey to France and Italy (1768)*.

The Title

- From the title «Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,» we understand that the novel focuses on:
 1. LIFE ; that is a biography,
 2. OPINIONS; that is a series of digressions,
 3. IRONY; as the writes needs to put an emphasys on his truly being a Gentleman, as if there were doubts about it.

What kind of novel is it?

- Standard novels had plots, that is a sequence of events related by cause and effect.
- Use or chronological time was stressed by the use of :
 1. Letters
 2. Diaries
- Novels had a:
 1. Beginning
 2. Development
 3. Conclusion

Tristram Shandy's plot

- Volume 1. Tristram is conceived, while he witnesses his conception.
- Volume 2. Tristram is born and his nose is smashed by the doctor's forceps.
- Volume 3. Tristram has time to write the Preface. Tristram is baptized with the wrong name.
- Volume 4. Bobby, Tristram's elder brother, dies suddenly.
- Volume 5. Tristram's father writes a *Tristrapedia* to educate his son.
- Volume 6. Tristram is circumcised by a falling window.
- Volume 7. Now middle-aged, Tristram starts writing his autobiography.
- Volume 8. The older Tristram visits France to alleviate his illness.
- Volume 9. In failing health, Tristram ends his autobiography abruptly.

Main Characters

- **Tristram Shandy** An English gentleman whose life seems one long series of small misfortunes. He sets out to tell his own life story but finds himself drawn into recounting the adventures of family, friends, and neighbors.
- **Walter Shandy** Walter Shandy, Tristram's father, is a country gentleman who worked as an overseas merchant before retiring to Shandy Hall. He obsesses over his sons' upbringing, but his plans are almost always thwarted by unforeseeable accidents.
- **Toby Shandy** Captain Toby Shandy is an army veteran whose military career was cut short by an injury at the Siege of Namur. In retirement he develops a passion for studying military fortifications and reconstructing them on a model scale.
- **Elizabeth Shandy** Mrs. Elizabeth Shandy, born Elizabeth Mollineux, is the protagonist's long-suffering mother; she rarely appears in scene but is often alluded to by the other characters. Her common sense and lack of book learning make her a foil to her erudite but impractical husband Walter.
- **Dr. Slop** Dr. Slop is a "man-midwife" whom Walter hires to deliver his second child. He is arrogant, argumentative, and not very gifted as a physician, fumbling his instruments and botching his treatments. [Read More](#)

A Modern Novel

- Sterne makes fun of the concept of novels. No real plot.
- The novel is about trying to work out where even to begin to tell the story.
- Two different times :
 1. Chronological (Life/biography), clock time.
 2. Chaotic (Opinions), time of the mind where ideas flow freely . Past, present, future coexist in random order.
- Association of ideas . Every time I have an impression from the outside world, my mind starts working, creating ideas and these ideas may be related to the past or even a distant one (Locke).
- Events are narrated by many points of views.

Bourgeois Heroes

- Heroes were expression of **universal** values.
 1. Loyalty
 2. Honour
 3. Sacrifice
- Bourgeois heroes are expression of **individual** values:
 1. Profit
 2. Success
 3. Respectability
 4. Station

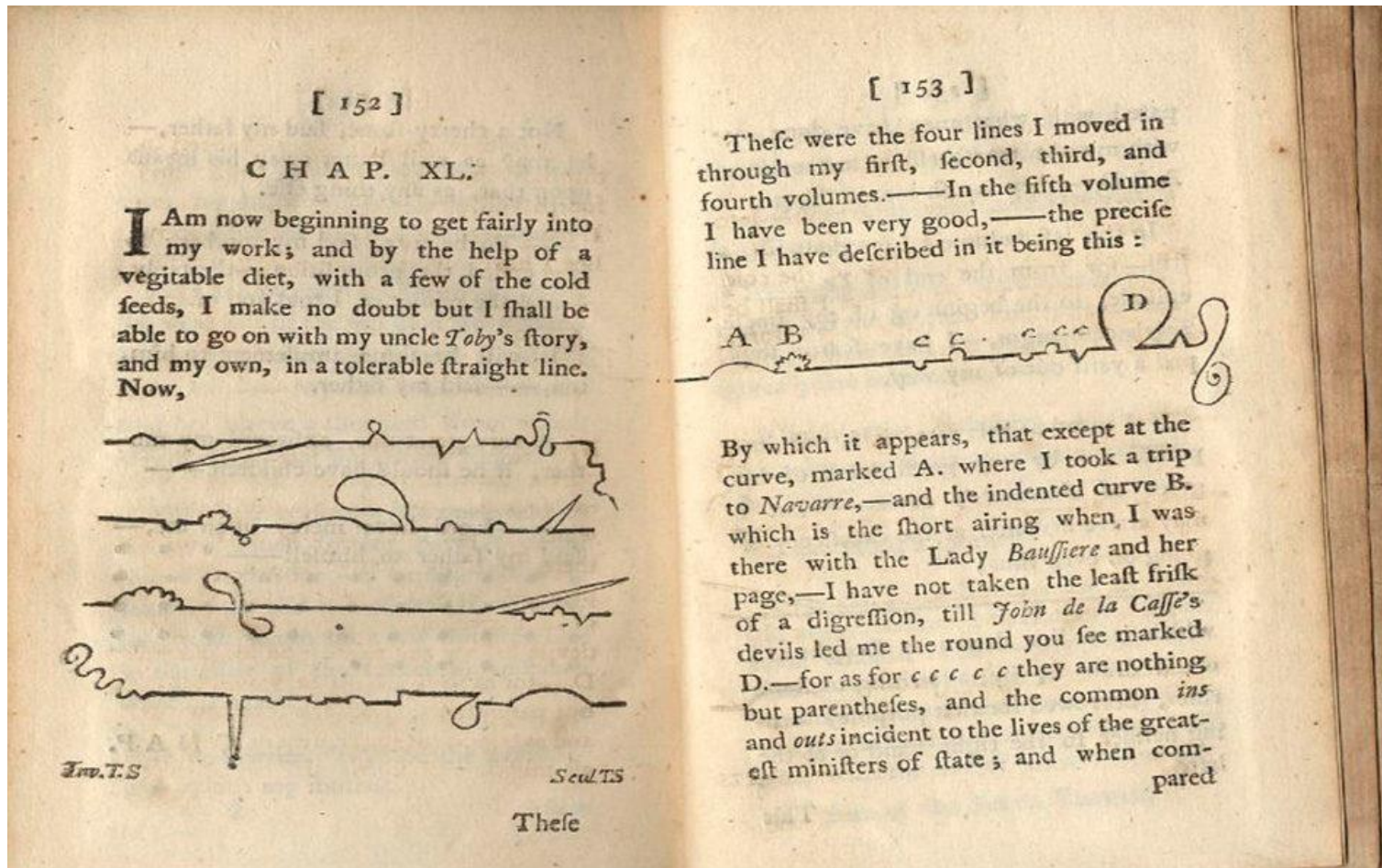
The Story of a Loser (nomen omen)

- Tristram comes from the Latin «tristis»:
 1. Tristram has come to this world unwanted. He is not a product of love but rather an accident;
 2. Tristram/ «tristis» as his parents didn't put love in his conceiving.
- Shandy means « weird » almost crazy.
- Walter Shandy has high expectations on his child. He means to call him Trismegistus:
 1. 3 times great,
 2. the name of the god Hermes (the god who protected communication)
 3. when registered, it was misspelt by uncle Toby and became Tristram (the opposite)
- Lack of communication is one of the themes of the novel.

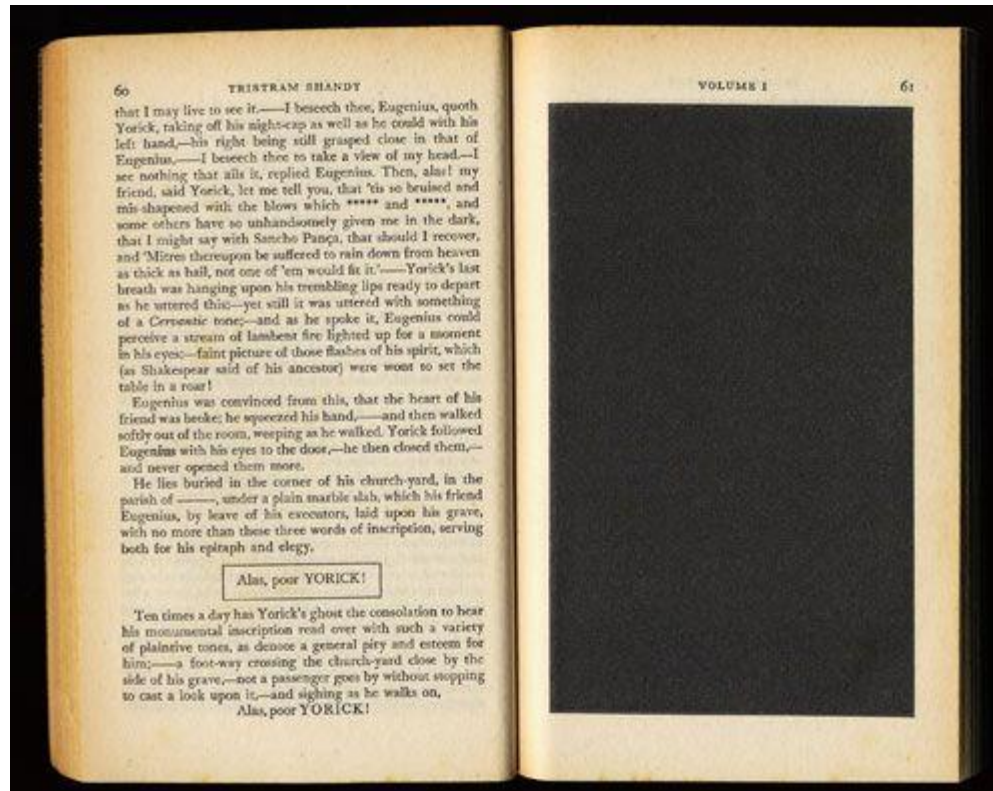
Denifitely a Loser(is a family of losers)

- The previous event seems to predict that Tristram will have a miserable life.
- Accidentally doctor Slop harmed his nose before he was born and made it flat (another expectation gone bad). Noses made the character.
- Accidentally circumcised by a window, another episode that convinces Walter that he has given life to a failure
- Uncle Toby had an accident wounded in the lower part. Made him sexually unable. Obsession for Locke's hobby horse. Something which runs through man's mind over and over again, an obsession,
- They are all obsessed with the physical damage they had received
- Shattered expectations, The 3 characters have one thing in common, they are miserable. They expected more from life.

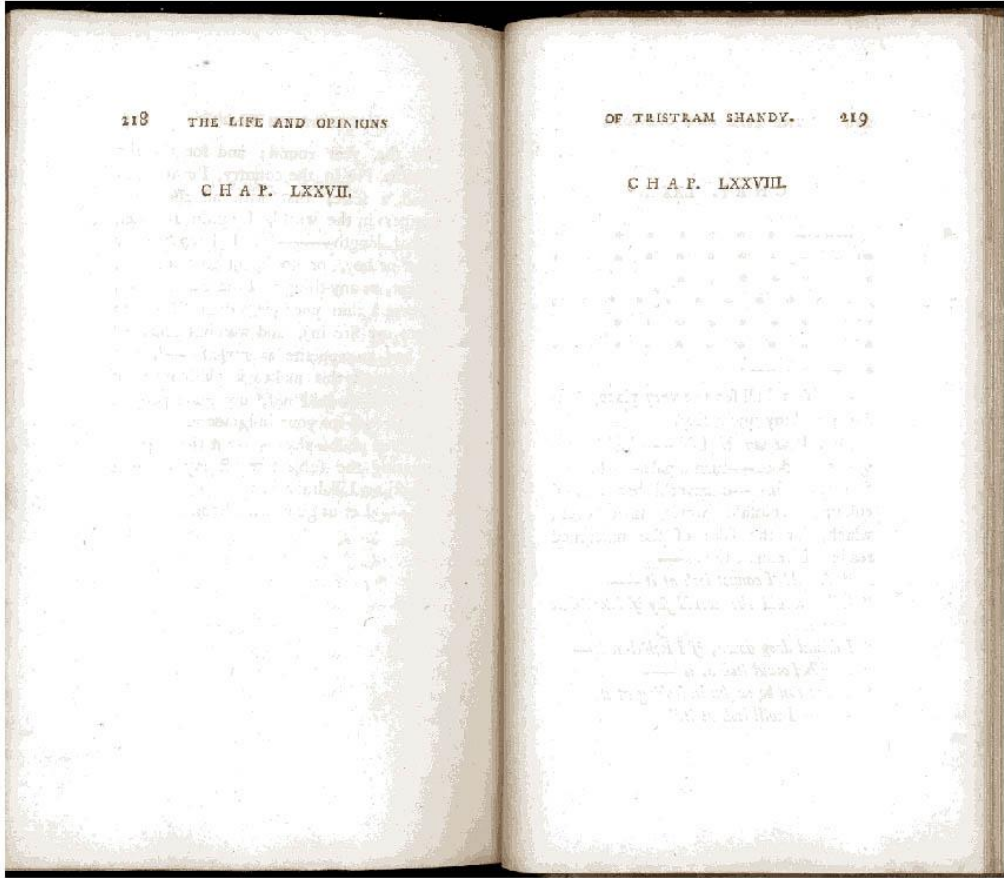
An Unusual Novel



The Black Page



The Blank Pages



Do it Yourself!

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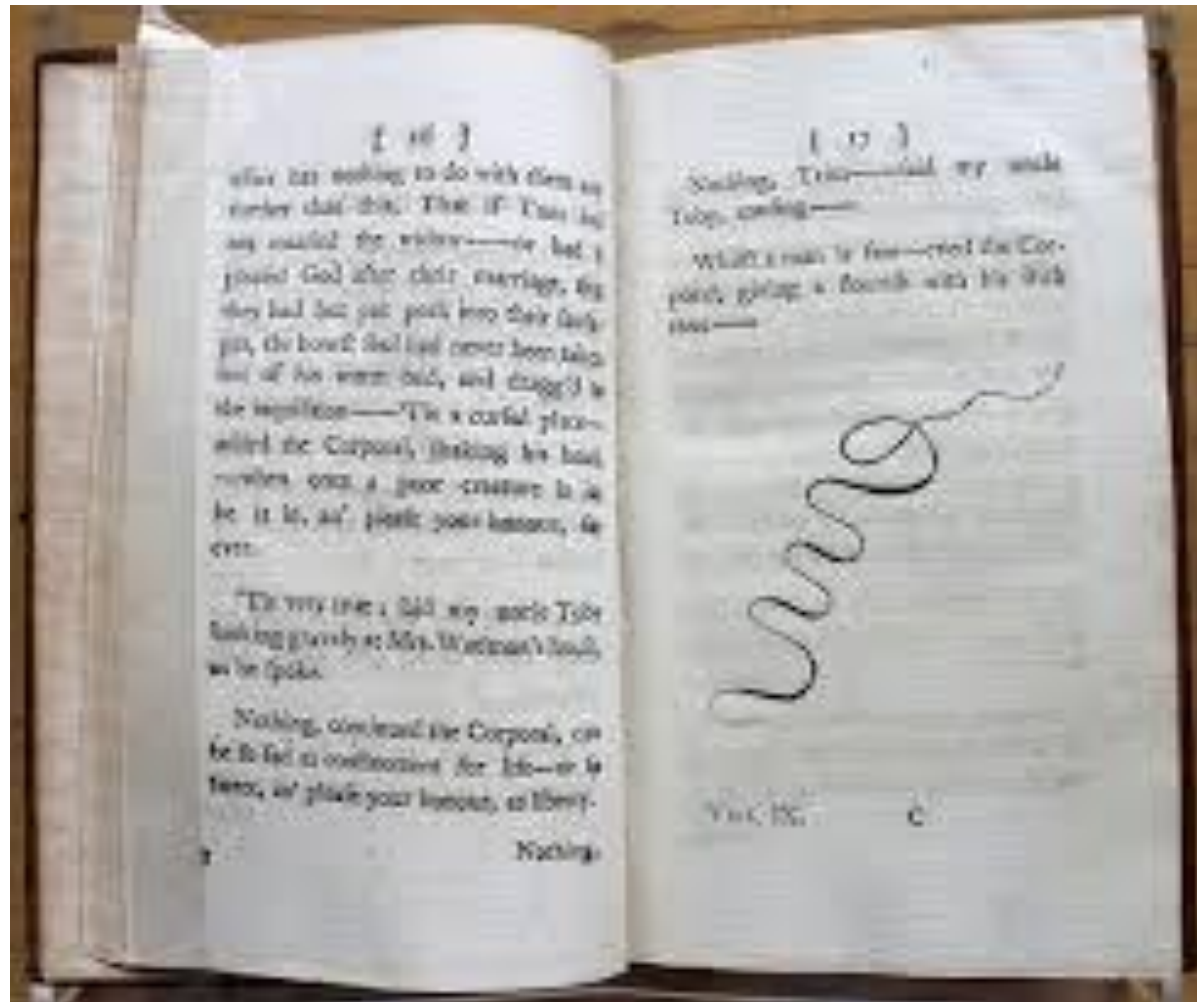
—And possibly, gentle reader, with such a temptation—so wouldst thou: For never did thy eyes behold, or thy concupiscence cover any thing in this world, more concupiscible than widow *Wadman*.

C H A P. XXXVIII.

TO conceive this right,—call for pen and ink—here's paper ready to your hand.—Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind—as like your mistress as you can—as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—'tis all one to me—please but your own fancy in it.

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Getting Bored?



[16]
what has nothing to do with them as
they had that day. That if they had
any wanted the money—no but I
passed God after their marriage, they
they had but got past into their busi-
ness, the house had had never been taken
out of his own hand, and stayed in
the possession—The a careful plan-
nished the Corporal, thinking he had
written out a poor creature he is
he is it, and please your honors, de
voted.

The very first day my dear wife
looking greatly at Mrs. Watson's house
when she spoke.

Nothing, she said the Corporal, can
be so far as confidence for his—no he
fears, and please your honors, as liberty.
Nothing.

[17]
Nothing, then—said my dear
wife, saying—

What's more to see—could the Cor-
poral, please a fourth with his old
house—

[Large vertical scribble]

You C. H. C. C

Bobby's Death

- he leaned forwards upon the table with both elbows, as my uncle *Toby* hummed over the letter.

--- --- --- --- ---
--- --- --- --- ---
--- --- --- --- ---
--- --- --- --- --- he's gone !
said my uncle *Toby*. -- Where -- Who ?
cried my father. -- My nephew, said my
uncle *Toby*. ---- What -- without leave --
without money ---- without governor ?
cried my father in amazement. No : --
he is dead, my dear brother, quoth my
uncle *Toby*. -- Without being ill ? cried
my father again. -- I dare say not, said
my uncle *Toby*, in a low voice, and fetch-
ing a deep sigh from the bottom of his
heart, , he has been ill enough, poor lad !
I'll answer for him -- for he is dead.



Tristram's conception

- I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, **had minded what they were about** when they begot me; had they duly consider'd **how much depended upon what they were then doing**;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the **happy formation** and temperature of his body, perhaps his **genius** and the very cast of his mind;

Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,——I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world from that in which the reader is likely to see me.—**Believe me, good folks**, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it;(.....)

“Pray, my Dear”, quoth my mother, “have you not forgot to wind up the clock?”——Good G——! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time,——”Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?” “ Pray, what was your father saying?”——Nothing.

Mr Shandy

- I was begot in the night, betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was.—But how I came to be so very particular in my account of a thing which happened before I was born, is owing to another small anecdote known only in our own family, but now made publick for the better clearing up this point.
- My father, you must know, who was originally a Turkey merchant, but had left off business for some years, in order to retire to, and die upon, his paternal estate in the county of —, was, I believe, one of the most regular men in everything he did, whether 'twas matter of business, or matter of amusement, that ever lived.

As a small specimen of this extreme exactness of his, to which he was in truth a slave,—he had made it a rule for many years of his life,—on the first Sunday-night of every month throughout the whole year,—as certain as ever the Sunday-night came,—to wind up a large house-clock, which we had standing on the backstairs head, with his own hands:—And being somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age at the time I have been speaking of,—he had likewise gradually brought some other little family concernments to the same period, in order, as he would often say to my uncle Toby, to get them all out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pestered with them the rest of the month.

It was attended but with one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that from an unhappy association of ideas, which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up,——but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popped into her head——and vice versa:——Which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious Locke, who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever.

But this by the bye.