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TRISTRAM SHANDY AND THE DISCURSIVE SELF

by

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Master of Arts in English

University of Richmond

1992

Raymond F. Hilliard, Ph.D., Thesis Director

Laurence Sterne's novel, Tristram Shandy, has often been treated as an eighteenth-century anomaly and criticized for its inconsistencies. Using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, the twentieth-century Russian theorist, Tristram Shandy can be explicated as a model of discursive self-definition. Bakhtin's model of psychological development (a process he calls "assimilation") can be applied to Tristram's fictional autobiography and used to explain the process taking place as Tristram creates his own distinctive voice organizing the heteroglossia of his world. In the novel Tristram displays the discourse of his world and applies it to new situations: a process that ultimately results in victory as Tristram successfully acquires control of his own language and uses this language to express himself, redefine himself, and ultimately to perpetuate himself. Looking at Tristram Shandy in light of Bakhtin's theories illuminates a number of problematic issues within the novel and effectively places it within the intellectual and novelistic traditions of the eighteenth-century.

I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope
and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

_____
Raymond F. Hilliard, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor

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Terryl Givens, Ph.D.

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TRISTRAM SHANDY AND THE DISCURSIVE SELF

By

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B.S., Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1981

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Volume VII of the novel <u>Tristram Shandy</u>, Tristram playfully deals with the question of identity:

> ----My good friend, quoth I----as sure as I am I--
> and you are you----
>
> ----And who are you? said he.----Don't puzzle me;
> said I.   (VII, xxxiii, 633)[1]

In <u>Imagining a Self</u>, Patricia Meyer Spacks states that "autobiographies affirm identity," and goes on to explain that "the autobiographer, attesting his existence by the fact of his writing, lives through his explanations, tacit or explicit, of how he came to be the person he is" (1). I wish to argue that it is this concept, the concept of self-identity, that Laurence Sterne's novel, <u>Tristram Shandy</u> focuses on. In fact, <u>Tristram Shandy</u>, as a fictional autobiography, records the process of the development of a self and language's essential role in this process.

In this study, using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, the twentieth-century Russian theorist, I propose to examine <u>Tristram Shandy</u> as a model of discursive self-definition. Applying Bakhtin's model of psychological development, a process involving the internalization of external discourse, to <u>Tristram Shandy</u>, I plan to examine the heteroglossia present in the novel and to demonstrate that Tristram creates his own distinctive voice by

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organizing this heteroglossia.

The mechanism of self-definition through language (a process Bakhtin calls "assimilation") results in victory for Tristram as he successfully acquires control over his own language and uses this language to express himself, redefine himself, and ultimately to perpetuate himself. Looking at the novel in light of Bakhtin's theories, we can watch as Tristram displays the discourse of his world, applies it to new situations, and makes it his own. Instead of concentrating on the incidents Tristram recounts, we are able to observe Tristram himself in the foreground in the process of constructing his own voice out of the heteroglossia of the world around him.

In Discourse in the Novel, Bakhtin cites Tristram Shandy as a classic representative of the "so-called comic novel" and goes on to explicate the comic novel's unique compositional method for "appropriating and organizing heteroglossia." According to Bakhtin, this unique form, "the comic-parodic re-processing of almost all the levels of literary language," results in "an artistic reworking" within the novel of "the heteroglossia of a time period" (Discourse in the Novel 301).

The concept of "heteroglossia," a basic one in Bakhtin's view of the world, is also an important component of Tristram's tale. Bakhtin variously describes heteroglossia as "authentic linguistic speech diversity" (DiN 327) and "fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-languagedness" (DiN 325-326). Michael Holquist defines it as "the base condition

governing the operation of meaning in any utterance" and notes
that heteroglossia is "that which insures the primacy of context
over text," and guarantees "that a word uttered in that place and
at that time will have a meaning different than it would have
under any other conditions." Holquist goes on to note that "all
utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix
of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore
impossible to resolve (The Dialogic Imagination Glossary 428).
As Bakhtin describes it, at any given moment "language is
heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of
socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the
past, between differing epochs of the past, between different
socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies,
schools, circles, and so forth, all given a bodily form" (DiN
291).[2]

According to Bakhtin, the novel is the only form to
accurately incorporate and use heteroglossia. Opposed to the
unitary "monologic" word of poetry where the "the records of the
passage remain in the slag of the creative process, which is then
cleared away (as scaffolding is cleared away once construction is
finished), so that the finished work may rise as unitary speech,
one co-extensive with its object, as if it were speech about an
'Edenic' world" (DiN 331), novelistic prose celebrates
heteroglossia by leaving the scaffolding intact. Heteroglossia
is always present in all language, and as Bakhtin points out, the
novelist actually celebrates this fact because he "does not strip

away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages--rather he welcomes them into his work" (DiN 299).

It is heteroglossia that forms the base of Tristram's voice, and it is heteroglossia that lets him carry forward the past, in the form of words, languages, and voices. In his story Tristram plays with the languages of his world, tests them, forces them to interact on the stage of the present, and finally uses them to prepare for the future. But it is important to note that the final product, Tristram's voice, is never a complete and unitary entity, but is always heteroglot. As Gary Morson and Caryl Emerson point out, "selfhood is not a particular voice within, but a particular way of combining many voices within" (Mikhail Bakhtin 221).

I should note that, while Bakhtin makes numerous references to Tristram Shandy in his works, he stops short of showing the "comic-parodic re-processing" of language at work in Tristram's tale and never actually applies his own concepts of "assimilation" and "unfinalizability" to Tristram's development. I have attempted to use these concepts to demonstrate the re-processing of language at work in Tristram Shandy in light of Tristram's development as a person.

In Chapter II, I take Bakhtin's concept of psychological development as a process of assimilation and use it to lay a theoretical foundation for Tristram's development of self. This

ongoing process of assimilation, which Bakhtin views as a struggle between various types of discourse--specifically between authoritative and internally persuasive discourse--can be easily viewed as Tristram recounts the incidents of his life. In addition, the process of assimilation forms the basis of Tristram's concept of linguistic heritage and informs his use of themes like parentage, mules, and Hamlet. Bakhtin's concept of dialogism also informs Tristram's development as Tristram looks at events and languages through the lens of other languages.

After laying a theoretical foundation, in Chapter III, I attempt to demonstrate the process of assimilation at work. Beginning with Tristram's "linguistic parents" in terms of the speaking characters of Tristram's world, I detail the effectiveness of each character's language and its influence on Tristram's language, using Bakhtin's concept of a language as a world-view (an idea remarkably similar to Tristram's metaphor of character, the "hobby-horse"). Each of the influential languages in Tristram's life--those of Yorick, Corporal Trim, Mrs. Shandy, Uncle Toby, and Walter Shandy--is a unique entity and effectively embodies the character's view of the world in words. I argue that each of these languages belonging to a character, with the exception of that of Mrs. Shandy, is internally persuasive for Tristram. Further, I detail Tristram's testing of each language, a necessary part of his process of assimilating the language.

In Chapter IV, I attempt to demonstrate the process of assimilation at work by using Tristram's "linguistic parents" in terms of the languages of his world not embodied in characters. This includes the language of religion--specifically the "Memoire presenté a Messieurs les Docteurs de SORBONNE" and the curse of Ernulphus; legal language, best represented by Mrs. Shandy's marriage contract; philosophical language, sported in parodies of Locke's theories; medical language, represented by Dr. Slop and a number of Walter's theories; and literary language, evidenced in numerous allusions to literary conventions and earlier works of literature. We can view examples of authoritative discourse, as well as examples of internally persuasive discourse, as they interact within Tristram's memory. In addition, I illustrate Bakhtin's concepts of laughter, framing, and parodic-reprocessing at work in Tristram's effort to bring the languages from his past, and from other arenas, to a level on which he can interact with them and test them.

In Chapter V, the final chapter, I attempt to demonstrate the importance of the activity of conversation in <u>Tristram Shandy</u>. Beyond a narrative device, conversation for Bakhtin necessitates the presence of an "other," and is a vital part of Tristram's process of development. The "other" in Tristram's tale is the reader and his or her participation in terms of structuring each utterance allows Tristram to work out his identity, and to go beyond and actually repopulate language with his own intentions, rendering inaccurate and void past

definitions of himself by others. Bakhtin's concept of "unfinalizability," as applied to the novelistic hero, illuminates Tristram's flight from death and his concern with the materiality of his work, and it also finally explains his ultimate triumph, the perpetuation of self through his unique voice.

This application of Bakhtin's theories to Tristram Shandy illuminates a number of problematic issues within the novel. Sterne's incessant borrowing is seen in a new light as the importance of heteroglossia is emphasized in relation to Tristram's development. In addition, Tristram's own inconsistencies are seen as a logical component of the story because the necessity of "testing" other languages becomes clear.

The application of Bakhtin's theories also effectively places Tristram Shandy within the intellectual and novelistic traditions of the eighteenth century. When the novel is seen as an account of psychological and linguistic development, the theme of parentage takes on a meaning beyond the biological as we see Tristram's parentage revealed through the development of his voice. The concept of parentage was, in fact, an important one in the context of the eighteenth-century novel, and a number of Tristram Shandy's predecessors, such as Tom Jones, hinge on the idea of true parentage revealed. The eighteenth century's struggles with the question of continuity of self (dealt with by both Locke and Hume for example) are explored in Tristram Shandy as we follow Tristram's ever-present, but ever-changing voice.

In fact, the impossibility of fixing the meaning of language that so frustrates Samuel Johnson and so infuriates Jonathan Swift, delights Sterne, and in the person of Tristram we can view him celebrating the scaffolding of language as it is ever poking through the finished facade. Tristram's unique voice, in fact, is a logical development in a period that has listened to "Boswell's passive voice," "Rousseau's active voice," (Kraft, Approaches to Teaching 123), Fielding's narrative voice, and many others. Tristram's unique voice is a logical development also in the sense that the sentimental or subjective mode, with its emphasis on individualism and on personal emotions, begins to make itself felt. In light of these developments, Tristram Shandy is not the oddball novel it first appears: Sterne's subjective rendering of consciousness through language reflects a broad range of contemporary issues.

In this attempt to deal with the novel in terms of the operation of discourse in the development of a personal voice, I am aware of a number of critical issues which remain unsettled. It could be argued that I have ignored or missed the very relationship which Bakhtin regards as paramount: that between the author and the hero. Rather, I have chosen instead to concentrate on another relationship that seems to have been largely neglected. In fact, I need to declare, using Patricia Spacks's words, that throughout this study "I am accepting...the novel's explicit claim that the imagination at work belongs to Tristram rather than to Sterne" (Imagining a Self 137).

In addition, several critical views of <u>Tristram Shandy</u> will not receive direct answers. John Preston's view of the novel as "a conversation about the failure of conversations" (146), and John Traugott's image of Tristram "positioned on the brink of existential despair (because human communication seems impossible and the world is rendered meaningless), to be saved only by the feeling heart" (New, <u>Approaches to Teaching</u> 14), will not be refuted explicitly. Rather, on an implicit level I will challenge these "dark" readings of the novel by tracing the success of Tristram's conversation with the reader and his triumph in overcoming language's alleged failures. Similarly, the multiple accusations regarding impotence and the sexual fantasies enacted by Tristram at various levels will not be directly addressed, but instead superseded by demonstrating the procreation taking place within the novel at another level--that of language.

To borrow Ortega y Gasset's metaphor of the window and the garden: instead of looking through the window to the characters beyond, I would like to look at the very composition of the pane of glass itself. I believe it is there--within the substance of the glass, within the language that comprises the story--that Tristram's story of "how he came to be the person he is" takes place.

CHAPTER II

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A VOICE

Although on the surface <u>Tristram Shandy</u> depicts Tristram
telling the story of his life through past events, on another
level it depicts Tristram's life story as the development of his
own voice. In his tale, Tristram uses words to portray and
ultimately recreate himself. His story depicts his recognition
of and struggle with his linguistic heritage as he ultimately
establishes his own distinctive discourse. In other words, he
details a panorama of his life in terms of the background of
voices and languages of his world, eighteenth-century England.

It is no mistake that Tristram entitles his work, "The Life
and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman," and that he
categorizes his project as "the history of myself" (I, iv, 5).
It is meant to be an autobiography dealing not only with his
life, but with his opinions also (I, vi, 9). But Tristram's is a
strange type of autobiography; for example, as critics have often
noted, the hero is not even born until volume III.   Tristram
himself promises he will confine himself neither to Horace's
rules "nor to any man's rules that every lived" (II, iv, 5).
But, lack of rules notwithstanding, <u>Tristram Shandy</u> is a history
of Tristram, and, though he uses little physical description and
only tells of major events, the reader emerges with a clear idea
of Tristram as a character.

The major emphasis in Tristram Shandy is on language's essential role in the construction of self. It is no mere coincidence that Tristram is conceived by his parents in mid-conversation. Toby has his life "put in jeopardy by words" (II, ii, 101), and it is Tristram's father, Walter, who reasons that "there is a North west passage to the intellectual world" and who believes "the whole entirely depends . . . upon the *auxiliary verbs*" (V, xlii, 484). We come to know Tristram himself through words. He exemplifies Bakhtin's belief that "the human being in the novel is first, foremost and always a speaking human being" (DiN 332). Critics have often noted, as does Ian Watt, that "the primary principle of unity of Tristram Shandy" is "Tristram's voice" ("Comic Syntax" 330). But language for Tristram also has meaning on another level, for as James Swearingham observes, it is "part of the continuum of his [Tristram's] conscious being," and not merely "a medium for conveying that life to others" (140).

Tristram tells the events of his life mostly through the words of other characters--we hear and see their voices interact on the stage of his mind as expressed through his pen. These words, these voices, are the building blocks of his world. In his story, Tristram is not only reporter and subject, but also end-result. This view of Tristram as the product of the languages of his world brings us to the concept of parentage.

Parentage is a pervasive theme in Tristram Shandy. In true Shandy form, of course, the idea of parentage is the basis for a

number of jokes. Tristram claims to be the "most tragicomical

completion of his [father's] prediction, 'That I should neither

think, nor act like any other man's child. . . .'" (IX, i, 737).

Various remarks between Walter and Toby, as well as the "bend

sinister" on the Shandy's coach door (IV, xxv, 373), invite

questions as to the legitimacy of Tristram's birth. At one point

we witness obtuse reasoning that concludes thus: "temporal

lawyers-- . . . the church-lawyers--the juris-consulti--the

juris-prudentes--the civilians--the advocates--the commissaires"

etc. etc. are "all unanimously of opinion, That the mother was

not of kin to her child--" (IV, xxix, 391). Even the discussions

of Tristram's own parents raise questions:

> --He is very tall for his age, indeed,--said my
> mother.--
> --I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine,
> quoth my father, who the deuce he takes after.--
>   I cannot conceive, for my life,--said my
> mother.--
>   Humph!--said my father. (VI, xviii, 437)

Related to this question of parentage are two revealing

"subthemes": mules and Hamlet. Tristram's abiding fascination

with mules, and his characteristic presentation of them, connect

the mules suggestively to both the theme of parentage and the

theme of language, and imply a relationship between them.

Strange hybrid creatures of mixed parentage, mules seem to figure

prominently throughout Tristram Shandy. The union of horses and

asses seems to be one of the most fertile in the novel, and

though mules are often not the expected offspring, they are

offspring nonetheless.

In Tristram's tale of his father and his favorite mare, we see the results of two exchanges. The products of both exchanges--the mule on the biological level and the repartee on the linguistic level--are unexpected offspring. Yet in both instances, offspring are produced and the themes of parentage and language are linked:

> My father had a favourite little mare, which he had consigned over to a most beautiful Arabian horse, in order to have a pad out of her for his own riding: he was sanguine in all his projects; so talked about his pad every day with as absolute a security, as if it had been reared, broke,--and bridled and saddled at his door ready for mounting. By some neglect or other in *Obadiah*, it so fell out, that my father's expectations were answered with nothing better than a mule, and as ugly a beast of the kind as ever was produced.

> My mother and my uncle *Toby* expected my father would be the death of *Obadiah*--and that there never would be an end of the disaster.----See here! you rascal, cried my father, pointing to the mule, what have you done!--It was not me, said *Obadiah*.--How do I know that? replied my father.

> Triumph swam in my father's eyes, at the repartee --the *Attic* salt brought water into them--and so *Obadiah* heard no more about it. (V, iii, 420-421)

Elsewhere in the story, Tristram seems to identify with the mules' peculiar parentage. He describes the Abbess's mules as being:

> creatures that take advantage of the world, inasmuch as their parents took it of them--and they not being in a condition to return the obligation <u>downwards</u> (as men and women and beasts are)--they do it side-ways, and long-ways, and back-ways--and up hill, and down hill, and which way they can. (VII, xxi, 609-610)

This identification highlights Tristram's physical impotence and explains some of his motivation in telling his story. It is also noteworthy that the mule's parents, the horse and ass, both have their own signification in Tristram's tale. The horse is Tristram's personification of a ruling passion, and we watch it gallop off with various characters, and asses variously represent reviewers, physical desires (à la Hilarion the hermit), and creatures to talk with.

In addition, as the result of genetically incompatible parents, mules are always recognizable hybrids visibly exhibiting their parentage. Tristram's interest in mules illuminates many of the questions relating to his parentage. Though his parents can't imagine whom he takes after, we can reconstruct Tristram's parentage, at least in terms of language. While mules, as biological hybrids, carry visible signs of their heritage, so Tristram, as a linguistic hybrid, carries audible signs of his heritage within his voice.

The importance of Tristram's parentage is further extended in the subtheme of Hamlet. It is first brought up in the name of Yorick, the country parson, one of Tristram's "linguistic parents." As Robert Chibka points out, "personal and literary history here coincide strangely; as Tristram recalls his friend Yorick, we recall Hamlet and Hamlet's friend Yorick" (130). The idea of parentage is thus extended to literary forefathers. Chibka further highlights the connection between the themes, noting that "Hamlet's foremost responsibility is the paternal

imperative, "Remember me!" "Remember thee?" he replies, "Ay,
thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat / in this distracted
globe" (I.v.95-97)." Chibka concludes that "Tristram's most
pressing need is identical (to remember whence he came . . .)"
(149).

These themes lead us to conclude that Tristram sees himself
as a child of mixed parentage, a type of hybrid child, like the
mule. And like Hamlet, he feels he must remember whence he came.
It is this parentage, this heritage in terms of language, that he
traces in his autobiography. Tristram seems to see himself as
the result of a dialogic coming together of various discourses--
an intersection point, a hybrid, if you will, of the languages of
his world. His story, the novel he's created, is in effect, an
analysis of the words, languages, and dialogues that have created
him, and the process of telling it to us is a natural part of
Tristram's process of becoming--a sort of finding, portraying,
and recreating himself in his own words.

Bakhtin's theory of becoming through language, a process
that involves the words of others, is directly applicable to
Tristram Shandy. Bakhtin understands the making of the self as a
function of language, and "the ideological becoming of a human
being" as "the process of selectively assimilating the words of
others" (DiN 341). According to Bakhtin, "consciousness awakens
to individual life precisely in a world of alien discourses
surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate
itself" (DiN 345). As Morson and Emerson point out, Bakhtin's

circle theorized that new words and forms come to us as part of a "stream of language" and "exist in us . . . not as 'naked corpses' but as 'living impulses,' with a memory and an activity" (MB 145). Prior to "appropriation," the word "exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one's own" (DiN 294). As a story of Tristram's becoming, Tristram Shandy presents an anatomy of the discourses that have shaped Tristram's life and shows how Tristram's own distinctive discourse is "gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated" (DiN 345n31).

This liberation of one's own discourse, one's own ideological development, is for Bakhtin "an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view" (DiN 346). He divides the types of discourse into two categories: authoritative and internally persuasive discourse.

According to Bakhtin, the authoritative word comes "with its authority already fused to it" (DiN 342). And as Morson and Emerson point out, while "one can disobey authoritative discourse, so long as it remains fully authoritative, one cannot argue with it" (MB 219). Bakhtin goes on to note that "quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally," the authoritative word "binds us" and "demands that we acknowledge it" (DiN 342). Morson and Emerson describe

authoritative discourse as "words that must be 'recited by heart'" (MB 219). Tristram offers only a few examples of authoritative discourse, which he seems to be in the process of discarding.

It is Bakhtin's second category, "internally persuasive discourse," that describes most of the discourse in Tristram's history, the basis for his own voice. Internally persuasive discourse may hold no authority, but it means something to us personally. Yet it does not become ours without a struggle. As Bakhtin describes a "conversation with an internally persuasive word": "it is questioned, it is put in a new situation in order to expose its weak sides, to get a feel for its boundaries, to experience it physically as an object" (DiN 348). As Tristram tells his story, we can watch him testing various types of discourse. The discourse that proves itself meaningful and or useful to him personally is then "affirmed through assimilation" (DiN 345).

As Morson and Emerson explain, "'assimilation' is Bakhtin's general term for the processes by which the speech of others comes to play a role in our own inner speech" (MB 220). But assimilation is a complex process as "these words of others carry with them their own expression, their own evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework and re-accentuate," and the end result is that "our speech . . . is filled with other's words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness,' varying degrees of awareness and detachment" ("Speech Genres"

89). Assimilation involves "'reaccenting the word,' giving it a new aura, developing potential meanings in it, placing it in dialogue with another voice that it may adumbrate as its antagonist, or, for that matter, entirely distorting it" (Morson and Emerson, MB 220).

In assimilation, the words become "half-ours and half-someone else's," and the word "is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions" (DiN 345). Morson and Emerson point out that for Bakhtin, "the self is portrayed as an interanimation of discourses that one shapes and reshapes, remembers and reaccentuates, throughout life" (MB 225). According to Morson and Emerson, successful assimilation of internally persuasive discourse corresponds to "retelling in one's own words" (MB 219).

Tristram's working with the languages of his life can be further elucidated by Bakhtin's concept of "dialogism." In Tristram's life story, "in place of a single, unitary, sealed off Ptolemaic world of languages" there appears "the open Galilean world of many languages, mutually animating each other" (Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse 65). According to Bakhtin, this "Galilean perception of language" has as its first component a realization that it is only one of many languages; that is, it "denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language," and "refuses to acknowledge its own language as the sole verbal and semantic center of the ideological world" (DiN 366). As Michael Holquist explains, "a word, discourse, language or culture

undergoes 'dialogization' when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, aware of competing definitions for the same things" (<u>Dialogic Imagination</u> Glossary 427). This realization requires a relationship with other languages, a conception of the comprehensive survey of languages that make up the world.[3]

The second component of dialogism, this "Galilean perception of language," is what Bakhtin describes as "a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness" (<u>DiN</u> 367). It goes beyond simple awareness of the heteroglossia inherent in the world. This "decentering of the ideological world" is an important aspect of Tristram's process of assimilation as he tries on other languages for size, tests them out, looks at things through other voices, through other discourses, or in Bakhtin's words, "expounds another's thought in the style of that thought even while applying it to new material" and "conducts experiments and gets solutions in the language of another's discourse" (<u>DiN</u> 347). Morson and Emerson explain Bakhtin's concept of "active-dialogic understanding" as "<u>more</u> than an acknowledgement of existing context; it is implicitly creative, and presumes ever-new, and surprisingly new, contexts" (<u>MB</u> 99).

This "decentering" plays a major role in Tristram's process of assimilating the languages of his world. Critics have long commented on the inconsistencies in Tristram's voice--his incessant role playing and rhetorical posturing. Watt notes that "Tristram's attitude to his audience is in part that of the

ventriloquist . . . Where he is recounting the actions and dialogues of the Shandy household, multiple impersonation is called for; and Tristram is as expert in vocal mimicry as in the external description of the dialogues between his characters" ("Comic Syntax" 322). Pat Rogers categorizes Tristram's role as that of a "rhetorical agent" who is "now adopting the tone of an extension lecturer, now the garrulous raconteur, at one moment launching into thunderous apostrophe, at another slipping into formal invocation or obsequious dedication, his whole literary bearing is transformed at every juncture" (Rogers, "Sterne and Journalism" 138-139). I submit that Tristram's impersonations and transformations are a necessary part of exploring the languages of his world.

Tristram's plagiarism of Burton's section in the Anatomy of Melancholy on plagiarism takes on new meaning in light of his exposition of his own parentage:

> Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring one out of one vessel into another?
>
> Are we for ever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track--for ever at the same pace?
>
> Shall we be destined to the days of eternity, on holy-days, as well as working-days, to be shewing the *relicks of learning*, as monks do the relicks of their saints--without working one--one single miracle with them? (V, i, 408)

In his autobiography Tristram highlights his role as a new vessel in which a mixture of old elements is made new. It is in him

that we see the "relicks of learning" come together to work a
miracle in the creation of a new voice.

CHAPTER III

OLD MIXTURES MADE NEW

The creation of a new voice is a complex process. In assimilating the voices of his world, Tristram must watch them at work, try each one on, test each one--looking at the world through its eyes--and finally apply each voice to new situations. To examine the process of assimilation at work, we must listen as Tristram tells his story and be sensitive to his transformations and impersonations.

In the process of presenting the full spectrum of the voices of his world and his linguistic parents, Tristram begins with the people in his life--primarily his family. Swearingham notes that "the social life of Shandy Hall occupies stage center for much of the book in which Tristram's main subject is himself," and concludes that Tristram's reflections "reveal an awareness that this community of minds exists <u>in</u> him" (78). Eric Rothstein concludes that Tristram is a "joint creation" of his family because "his personality develops no possibility that they do not offer" (63). This family community--these possibilities that Tristram carries with him--is encapsulated in words and embodied in the voices of those he knows.

For Bakhtin each individual voice "possesses its own belief system," and is "verbally and semantically autonomous" (<u>DiN</u> 315). Bakhtin sees individual languages as "specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific

world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values" (<u>DiN</u> 291-292), and creating what he calls "verbal-ideological linguistic belief systems" (<u>DiN</u> 312).

It cannot go without saying that in many ways a "verbal ideological linguistic belief system" corresponds to Tristram's metaphor of characterization--the "hobby-horse." Since we earthly inhabitants are "wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood" instead of a "transparent body of clear glass" like the inhabitants of Mercury, and since we go without a viewing glass in our breast (I, xxiii, 82-85), Tristram holds up the hobby-horse as the key to a man's character. Tristram describes a hobby-horse as "a ruling passion" (II, v, 106) and notes that so allied to a man is his hobby-horse that "if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other" (I, xxiv, 86). In describing each of the Shandy men, Eric Rothstein defines a hobby-horse as "a system of reference that interprets facts and defines priorities in his mental world" (64). This system of reference, or ruling passion, like an individual language in Bakhtin's theory, includes a specific world view. And since, as we've already determined, Tristram's is a world of speaking characters, a person's language, his discourse in various situations, cannot help corresponding to and further exposing his hobby-horse and his own personality.

In dealing with the voices of his parents, his uncle, and friends, Tristram not only observes these languages as objects, and watches them at work; he interacts with them. As Morson and Emerson describe it, "to take on responsibility with respect to a discourse," it is necessary "to enter into dialogue with it--that is, to test, assimilate and reaccentuate it" (MB 220).

As a group of speaking characters, the Shandy family reveal themselves in various continuing streams of dialogue, or in some instances, in an absence of dialogue. Each character can be defined by his or her language and language-related factors including: 1) the characteristics of the language itself; 2) its mode of operation; 3) its relation to reality; 4) its relation to other languages; and finally and most importantly for this study, 5) its influence on Tristram's particular language.

In the first volume of Tristram Shandy Yorick's discourse proves to be an interesting influence on Tristram. A parson who bears the name of Hamlet's jester, "exactly so spelt for near,----I was within an ace of saying nine hundred years" (I, xi, 25), Yorick speaks a language that is straightforward and transparent to a fault. Yorick has little trouble assimilating other discourse into his own, as his sermon, with its biblical allusions and his notations with musical terms, illustrates. No, his difficulties seem to lie in the relationship of his discourse to the languages of other characters.

The problem is not that Yorick is unaware of other languages. He sees through Walter's strange discourse and humors

Toby in his idiosyncratic world. His problem lies instead in the very honesty and transparency of his own language. Tristram describes him as "a man unhackneyed and unpractised in the world" and "altogether as indiscreet and foolish on every other subject of discourse where policy is wont to impress restraint" (I, xi, 29). An important component of dialogue is the necessity of taking into account the receiver on the other end, but

> *Yorick* had no impression but one, and that was what arose from the nature of the deed spoken of; which impression he would usually translate into plain *English* without any periphrasis,----and too oft without much distinction of either personage, time, or place; . . . And as his comments had usually the ill fate to be terminated either in a *bon mot*, or to be enliven'd throughout with some drollery or humor of expression, it gave wings to *Yorick's* indiscretion. (I, xi, 29)

His language is so rooted in reality that he forgets the person on the other end. In short, Yorick is a failure at conversation because he tells the truth.

The value Yorick places on transparency is reinforced in Volume II, where Tristram reproduces a copy of Yorick's sermon on the subject of conscience. According to Yorick, self-knowledge is an ideal seldom attained. Jonathan Lamb comments that Yorick "shows us that men are not only strangers to the motives of others, but also to their own: that the world is a great pantomime of deceivers and self-deceived through which the light of conscience is a guide that we may only <u>trust</u> we possess" ("Sterne's Use of Montaigne" 6).

Despite his personal difficulties, Yorick's discourse is an internally persuasive one for Tristram, who takes on Yorick's language in an attempt to render his own discourse transparent. As Lamb points out, "Tristram's Preface is partly a restatement of Yorick's analysis of the world and an attempt to show what a literary conscience might be. He depicts the world as a place where, although imperfection of mind is endemic, there is a general pretense at wisdom and virtue." Lamb goes on to state that "Tristram's resolution in the fact of gravity's 'many and vile impositions' is to adopt a version of Yorick's nakedness," and that "his book will therefore be a process of self-judgement and self-exhibition insofar as he will hide nothing from the reader and nothing from himself" (Lamb, "Sterne's Use of Montaigne" 6-7). In addition to the Preface, Tristram's promises of "nakedness" can be seen throughout his work as he promises to comply with those readers "who find themselves ill at ease unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last, of every thing which concerns you" (I, iv, 4-5). He claims his intent "was to write a good book; and as far as the tenuity of my understanding would hold out,--a wise, aye, and a discreet,--" (III, Preface, 227).

Yet Yorick realizes that nakedness has its own responsibility, as his apology for a sermon he's written illustrates:

> I was delivered of it at the wrong end of me--it
> came from my head instead of my heart . . . To
> preach, to shew the extent of our reading, or the
> subtleties of our wit--to parade it in the eyes of

> the vulgar with the beggarly accounts of a little
> learning, tinseled over with a few words which
> glitter, but convey little light and less warmth--
> is a dishonest use of the poor single half hour in
> a week which is put into our hands--'Tis not
> preaching the gospel--but ourselves--For my own
> part, continued *Yorick*, I had rather five words
> point blank to the heart--   (IV, xxvi, 376-377)

We hear Yorick's discourse echo in Tristram's language as he too

recognizes this facet of his responsibility: "But courage! gentle

reader!----I scorn it----'tis enough to have thee in my power----

but to make use of the advantage which the fortune of the pen has

now gained over thee, would be too much--" (VII, vi, 584).

In direct contrast to Yorick stands Corporal Trim, Uncle

Toby's ever-able and willing second in command. Trim is eloquent

in his own way and Tristram describes as the only "dark line" in

his character the fact that he "lov'd to advise,--or rather to

hear himself talk" (II, v, 109). Ever acutely aware of his

audience and the posture required, it is Trim who moves with

skill and ease between the worlds of Widow Wadman's lust and

Toby's modesty. Trim's discourse can best be defined as the

"common language," with an important addition--that of gesture

where needed.

His oration on Bobby's death stands out in the novel as an

example of effective communication:

> -----"Are we not here now;"--continued the
> corporal, "and are we not"--(dropping his hat
> plumb upon the ground--and pausing, before he
> pronounced the word)---"gone! in a moment?" The
> descent of the hat was as if a heavy lump of clay
> had been kneaded into the crown of it.---Nothing
> could have expressed the sentiment of mortality,
> of which it was the type and fore-runner, like it,
> --his hand seemed to vanish from under it,--it

> fell dead,--the corporal's eye fix'd upon it, as
> upon a corps,--and *Susannah* burst into a flood of
> tears. (V, vii, 432)

In describing Tristram's encounter with the window sash, "*Trim*, by the help of his forefinger, laid flat upon the table, and the edge of his hand striking a-cross it at right angles, made a shift to tell his story so, that priests and virgins might have listened to it" (V, xx, 453).

Trim's discourse of gesture is an internally persuasive one for Tristram, as Tristram's esteem for Trim illustrates: "Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius,----for he was your kinsman" (VI, xxv, 544). Trim's discourse works well in reality and offers Tristram an avenue to express the inexpressible with nonverbal means.

What Robert Alan Donovan labels "the Shandean quirks of typography," including "the pointing fingers, the lines, diagrams, and rows of asterisks" (93), represent, I would argue, an example of Tristram's use of Trim's language, along with the marbled page, which Tristram calls a "motley emblem of my work" (III, xxxvi, 268), and the black page, which he claims has "many opinions, transactions and truths . . . mystically hid under the dark veil" (III, xxxvi, 268). These nonverbal gestures of typography express things where words fail.

Mrs. Shandy's language, on the other hand, is defined by its absence. To her husband she is a "consuming vexation," as she "never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand" (VI, xxxix, 569). She is oriented totally toward reality, is careless

"about everything else in the world which concerned her;--that is,--indifferent whether it was done this way or that,--provided it was but done at all" (VI, xx, 533). It is as if, as one of the few females represented in Tristram's life, she has not assimilated male discourse at all. She has little or no commerce with other languages, reacting only when she is directly spoken to or when a thing directly affects her--for instance, when she overhears the word "wife" in Walter's funeral oration. As Tristram notes, "she contented herself with doing all her godfathers and godmothers promised for her--but no more; and so would go on using a hard word twenty years altogether--and replying to it too . . . without giving herself any trouble to enquire about it." He goes on to note that "this was an eternal source of misery to my father, and broke the neck, at the first setting out, of more good dialogues between them, than could have done the most petulant contradiction" (IX, xi, 758-759). Ruth Faurot suggests that we may be meant to see "Mrs. Shandy as clever enough to have worked out her own protective device against the Shandyism of her husband--even to have developed that technique to the art of counterthrust" (585).

But whatever the outcome, Mrs. Shandy's roots in reality, in pure incidents, are important ones in Tristram's world. When Tristram has his accident with the sash-window and his father goes downstairs, "my mother imagined he had stepped down for lint and basilicon; but seeing him return with a couple of folios under his arm, and *Obadiah* following him with a large reading

desk, she took it for granted 'twas an herbal, and so drew him a chair to the bed side, that he might consult upon the case at his ease." As Walter consults *Spencer de Legibus Hebroeorum Ritualibus* and *Maimonides*, it is Mrs. Shandy who is concerned with the injury: "Only tell us, cried my mother, interrupting him, what herbs." While Walter goes on reading, she sends for Dr. Slop (V, xxvii, 459-460).

Tristram never takes on his mother's discourse, but he does seem to interact with it in different forms. As William Dowling points out, "the similarities between Madam and Mrs. Shandy are obvious enough to demand little comment" (288). Mrs. Shandy's acceptance of things at face value and her refusal to ask questions are what Tristram seems to be complaining of as he chastises Madam throughout the novel: "How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter?" Tristram forces "Madam" to reread the last chapter, and claims he imposes such a penance in order "to rebuke a vicious taste . . . of reading straight forwards," and to encourage the mind "to make wise reflections, and draw curious conclusions as it goes along" (I, xx, 65-66). These attempts to make the reader think seem directed against the very carelessness and indifference about language that characterize his own mother.

Like his sister-in-law, Uncle Toby also has difficulty with language. Toby's language can best be described as an example of Bakhtin's "unconscious hybrid." Bakhtin defines "hybridization" as "an encounter, within the arena of an utterance, between two

different linguistic consciousnesses" (DiN 358). In Toby is
brought to life the unlikely encounter of soldiering and
sentimentality, with a dash of religion thrown in. Toby's mind
and language are full of "ravelins, bastions, curtins, and
hornworks" (I, iii, 110), with help from "Gobesius's military
architecture and pyroballogy, translated from Flemish, to form his
discourse with passable perspicuity" (I, iii, 101). Added to
this mixture are "Ramelli and Cataneo, translated from the Italian;----
likewise Stevinus, Morolis, the Chevalier de Ville, Lorini, Coehorn, Sheeter,
the Count de Pagan, the Marshal Vauban, Mons Blondel" (I, iii, 102)--
and the list goes on and on. This language of warfare is yoked
to that of eighteenth-century "sentimentalism" with its emphasis
on extreme empathy and compassion.

Toby's use of this language is a source of great humor, as
he seems unable to assimilate and reconcile the many, often
conflicting types of discourse in his head. In response to
Trim's query: "Why therefore, may not battles, an' please your
honour, as well as marriages, be made in heaven?", we see that
the conflict of Toby's languages renders him unable to reply:
"Religion inclined him to say one thing, and his high idea of
military skill tempted him to say another; so not being able to
frame a reply exactly to his mind----my uncle Toby said nothing
at all" (IX, vii, 751).

This muddle in Toby's head resulting from his inability to
assimilate various discourses has another component, for he also
has great difficulty relating words to reality. Tristram

describes his uncle's difficulty with words. Toby's confusion
first appears in "the many discourses and interrogations about
the siege of *Namur*, where he received his wound" (II, i, 93), and
Tristram reveals the real source of Toby's problem:

> What it did arise from, I have hinted above,
> and a fertile source of obscurity it is,---and
> ever will be,---and that is the unsteady use of
> words which have perplexed the clearest and most
> exalted understandings.
>
> . . . 'Twas not by ideas,----by heaven! his life
> was put in jeopardy by words. (II, ii, 100-101)

It is very significant that to finally explain things to others,
Toby must actually leave the world and retreat to the bowling
green, where the language of fortification can be worked out in
objects of earth and clay. Toby's attempt to stabilize words and
communicate reality results in a discourse that fails to confront
reality at all. In fact, any possibility of dialogue or
conversation is prohibited as the words are turned to objects and
essentially removed from the realm of personal interaction.

Toby is also unable to relate to (and in some cases, even to
recognize) other languages, an incapacity which sets the scene
for some of the most comic encounters in the novel. In one case,
we can watch Dr. Slop's bawdy innuendos collide full-force with
Toby's heavily fortified modesty:

> Your sudden and unexpected arrival, quoth my uncle
> *Toby*, addressing himself to Dr. *Slop*, (all three of
> them sitting down to the fire together, as my
> uncle Toby began to speak)----instantly brought
> the great *Stevinus* into my head, who you must know,
> is a favourite author with me.-----Then, added my
> father, making use of the argument *Ad Crumenam*,---I

> will lay twenty guineas to a single crown piece,
> (which will serve to give away to *Obadiah* when he
> gets back) that this same *Stevinus* was some engineer
> or other,----or has wrote something or other,
> either directly or indirectly, upon the science of
> fortification.
>
> He has so,--replied my uncle *Toby*.--I knew it,
> said my father;--tho', for the soul of me, I
> cannot see what kind of connection there can be
> betwixt Dr. *Slop's* sudden coming, and a discourse
> upon fortification;--yet I fear'd it.--Talk of
> what we will, brother,--or let the occasion be
> never so foreign or unfit for the subject,---you
> are sure to bring it in: I would not, brother
> *Toby*, continued my father,--I declare I would not
> have my head so full of curtins and horn-works.--
> That, I dare say, you would not, quoth Dr. *Slop*,
> interrupting him, and laughing most immoderately
> at his pun. (II, xii, 127-128)

Toby is totally trapped within his own language and is unable to

relate to the outside world, to reality, except as an extension

of this language. Tristram's tale abounds with other instances

of Toby's misunderstanding caused by his limited linguistic

conception: he can only envision a draw-bridge when the bridge of

Tristram's nose is mentioned, and a train of artillery when

Walter speaks of a train of thought.

Yet, despite Toby's problems with his own discourse, it is,

in many ways, internally persuasive for Tristram. Tristram seems

to share Toby's frustrations with words and advocates Toby's

methods:

> I hate set dissertations,----and above all
> things in the world, 'tis one of the silliest
> things in one of them, to darken your hypothesis
> by placing a number of tall, opake words, one
> before another, in a right line, betwixt your own
> and your readers conception,----when in all
> likelihood, if you had looked about, you might
> have seen something standing, or hanging up, which

would have cleared the point at once.   (III,
Preface, 235)

In particular, Tristram finds Toby's language of sentimentality a
persuasive one.   In retelling his Uncle Toby's encounter with a
fly, Tristram notes that "the lesson of universal good-will then
taught and imprinted by my uncle *Toby*, has never since been worn
out of my mind" (II, xii, 131).   As Tristram begins to assimilate
Toby's discourse, his language begins to reverberate with Toby's
own style.   He seems to be testing the language, trying it on for
size.   In Tristram's tribute to Toby, we can hear the words sound
with Toby's own discourse of sentimentality:

> Here,----but why here,----rather than in any
> other part of my story,----I am not able to tell;-
> ---but here it is,----my heart stops me to pay to
> thee, my dear uncle *Toby*, once for all, the tribute
> I owe thy goodness.---Here let me thrust my chair
> aside, and kneel down upon the ground, whilst I am
> pouring forth the warmest sentiments of love for
> thee, and veneration for the excellency of thy
> character, that ever virtue and nature kindled in
> a nephew's bosom.-----Peace and comfort rest for
> evermore upon thy head!--Thou envied'st no man's
> comforts,----insulted'st no man's opinions.----
> Thou blackened'st no man's character,-----
> devoured'st no man's bread: gently with faithful
> *Trim* behind thee, didst thou amble round the little
> circle of thy pleasures, jostling no creature in
> thy way;----for each one's service, thou hadst a
> tear,----for each man's need, thou hadst a
> shilling.   (III, xxxiv, 265)

Moreover, in telling the story of Toby's affair with the Widow
Wadman, Tristram uses Toby's language of warfare.   Again, he
seems to be testing and reaccentuating Toby's own language, for
the words are half Toby's and half his own.   Tristram describes
the skirmishes, maneuvers, and attacks by the generals on both

sides, and the final outcome: "After a series of attacks and repulses in a course of nine months on my uncle *Toby's* quarter, . . . my uncle *Toby*, honest man! found it necessary to draw off his forces, and raise the siege somewhat indignantly" (III, xxiv, 246).

Next to Toby's discourse, it is the discourse of Tristram's father, Walter Shandy, that most influences Tristram. Walter's language, like Toby's, is an example of a "hybrid construction," but it more closely illustrates Bakhtin's concept of "stylization." While also double-voiced, stylization is less a mix of two separate languages than it is one language spoken through the voice of another. In the process of transmitting a language, a character "highlights some elements" and "leaves others in the shade" (<u>DiN</u> 362), thereby inserting "a new semantic intention into a discourse which already has, and which retains, an intention of its own" (<u>Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics</u> 189). Walter's stylized language has two defining characteristics: 1) his use of rhetoric and 2) his use of "learned wit."

Tristram claims his father was "born an orator," (I, xix, 59) and notes that:

> Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of Logick and Rhetorick were so blended up in him,-- and, withall, he had so shrewd guess at the weaknesses and passions of his respondent,----that NATURE might have stood up and said. --"This man is eloquent." (I, xix, 59-60)

But Walter's rhetoric has little connection to the day-to-day operation of the world, to reality. As Tristram notes with

regard to the affair of the squeaky hinges:

> there was not a subject in the world upon which my
> father was so eloquent, as upon that of door-
> hinges----And yet at the same time, he was
> certainly one of the greatest bubbles to them, I
> think that history can produce: his rhetoric and
> conduct were at perpetual handy-cuffs. (III, xxi,
> 239)

As Graham Petrie sums it up, "Walter never manages to get
anything done because he is always talking about how he is going
to do it." Petrie goes on to point out that Walter "cannot even
communicate his ideas to other people because there too his
rhetoric interferes and either leads him completely off the theme
or induces his hearers to think of other, less relevant, matters"
(494).

The other defining characteristic of Walter's language is
his use of what D. W. Jefferson calls "learned wit." Constantly
expounding on any and all subjects, Walter picks up scraps of
information, strange stories, out of the way quotes, and uses
them. Tristram aptly describes his father's modus operandi: "He
pick'd up an opinion, Sir, as a man in a state of nature picks up
an apple.--It becomes his own,--and if he is a man of spirit, he
would lose his life rather than give it up" (III, xxxiv, 262-
263). Paraphrasing Locke's chapter on property in "An Essay
Concerning the True Original Extent and End Of Civil Government"
in his Two Treatises on Government, Tristram later extends the
metaphor even further:

> That the sweat of a man's brows, and the
> exsudations of a man's brains, are as much a man's
> own property, as the breeches upon his backside;--
> --which said exsudations, &c. being dropp'd upon

>the said apple by the labour of finding it, and
>picking it up; and being moreover indissolubly
>wafted, and as indissolubly annex'd by the picker
>up, to the thing pick'd up, carried home, roasted,
>peel'd, eaten, digested, and so on;----'tis
>evident that the gatherer of the apple, in so
>doing, has mix'd up something which was his own,
>with the apple which was not his own, by which
>means he has acquired a property;--or, in other
>words, the apple is *John's* apple. (III, xxxiv,
>263-264)

But the digestion, or assimilation, is never complete, and Walter

is unable to integrate these other languages into everyday life

effectively.

In Walter's discourse on his son Bobby's death, we can

clearly see both characteristics. Tristram notes that

"Philosophy has a fine saying for every thing.---For *Death* it has

an entire set," and Walter "took them as they came" (V, iii,

421). Walter takes rhetorical discourse borrowed from the great

rhetoricians of the past: Cicero, Seneca, Lucian, and Servius

Sulpicius (most via Burton's <u>Anatomy of Melancholy</u>), to mention a

few. He reuses words and phrases of Bishop Hall, Bacon,

Montaigne, and even fragments reprinted as Yorick's own sermons.

The words of the great rhetoricians satisfy Walter's need to

speak and posture. But the discourse of Cicero and the others,

like picked up apples, is digested and reprocessed through

Walter's frame of reference (not to mention colliding with Toby's

discourse on the way), and therefore takes take on a whole new

meaning and a whole new life within Walter's world. Yet, the

rhetoric and words of the past are not really integrated into the

everyday events of Walter's life. Part of the problem may be his
relation to reality.

Walter attempts to use rhetoric and "learned wit" to control
reality. He tries to endow language with a power to regulate and
modify events. Walter's opinion that "there was a strange kind
of magick bias, which good or bad names, as he called them,
irresistibly impress'd upon our characters and conduct" (I, xix,
57-58), is an example of his belief that language, in this case a
name, can modify reality. Another example is his system of
"auxiliary verbs." He seems to believe that by systematizing all
the possibilities expressed in *"am; was; have; had; do; did; make; made; suffer;*
shall; should; will; would; can; could; owe; ought; used; or *is wont"* (V, xliii, 486),
he can gain some control over events. This attempt is, of
course, as singularly unsuccessful as his other attempts. But,
as Henri Fluchère notes, Walter "never wearies of trying to
impose a rational order on the vexing, provocative incoherence
that assails him on all sides" (58).

Walter's attempts to control and even replace reality with
language is an example of Bakhtin's conception of "mythological
thought," which he defines as "a language generating out of
itself a mythological reality that has its own linguistic
connections and interrelationships--then substitutes itself for
the connections and interrelationships of reality itself" (DiN
369). The interrelationships of language that Walter tries to
substitute for reality, his "Shandean systems," are colossal
failures and the basis for much of the story's comedy. Time

after time we observe that "now is the storm thicken'd, and going to break, and pour full upon his head" (III, xxviii, 254), and time and time again it does: his son is misnamed with one of the worst names imaginable, the Tristrapoedia is useless before it is written, and auxiliary verbs seem to have no real power at all.

Yet, as ineffective as it is for Walter, his discourse is an internally persuasive one for Tristram, who acknowledges his father's influence on his own character:

> 'tis my father's fault; and whenever my brains
> come to be dissected, you will perceive, without
> spectacles, that he has left a large uneven
> thread, as you sometimes see in an unsaleable
> piece of cambrick, running along the whole length
> of the web. (II, xxxiii, 558)

Tristram takes on his father's rhetorical language and uses it for comical commentary at every turn. He labels rhetorical arguments from the *Argumentum Fistulatorium*" to the *Argumentum ad Crumenam*" (I, xxi, 79). Like his father, he is ever aware of his audience and uses rhetorical devices for effect in telling his own story. Petrie lists several rhetorical figures Tristram uses, including the "Apostrophe, Exclamation, Anthypophora (answering one's own questions), Epitropis (reference to another authority) . . . Epiphonema (summing up and approving an argument), Epanorthosis (altering a word used for a better one)"--and the list goes on (489).

A question arises as to how compatible this rhetorical posturing is with Tristram's attempt at "nakedness." The answer is, not very. This rhetoric, part of Tristram's constant

interplay with the audience, stands in direct contrast to Yorick's language dealing with the object itself. But, as I have tried to explain, Tristram is trying on voices, trying on points of view and ways of relating to his audience and to the world.

And finally, Tristram finds his father's use of "learned wit" internally persuasive. Like his father Tristram makes a habit of picking up apples and making them his own. His tale is full of them, constituting what Booth refers to as "a chaotic collection of scraps of esoteric erudition picked up from innumerable sources" ("Tristram Shandy and its Precursors" 35). But Tristram has more success than his father in assimilating these scraps, these "relicks of learning," as we shall see.

CHAPTER IV

RELICKS OF LEARNING

One of the most obvious characteristics of Tristram's developing voice is a legacy of his father: the use of "learned wit." As J. Paul Hunter describes it, "the omnivorous maw of Tristram Shandy devours whatever it finds, and nothing remains undigested" ("Response" 132). Melvyn New suggests that "no small part of Sterne's [Tristram's] own meaning is that he weaves the pattern of his work from other writers' threads" (Approaches to Teaching 26). But Max Byrd suggests there is more to Tristram's borrowing than simple reproduction: "few studies of Sterne's [Tristram's] petty larceny have gone beyond the sharp-eyed citation of parallels and phrases to recognize how even his simplest 'copying' reshapes material into new and significant patterns" (24). In his tale Tristram uses the discourse of his predecessors and contemporaries as working models as he attempts to do what his father has been unable to do, assimilate them. These borrowed languages do not remain inert, protected within quotation marks. Through Tristram's voice we hear the voices of his world as he quotes them, argues with them, makes fun of, stylizes, and parodies them. And through all this he is watching them work, exposing them to reality and to each other, trying them on, questioning, and reshaping them. All are participants. In investigating other voices, Tristram is investigating other ways to look at the world and experimenting with them.

Again we must note the importance of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in relation to Tristram's work with languages. As noted before, the idea of decentering is important, for, as Bakhtin points out "languages throw light on each other: one language can, after all, see itself only in the light of another language" (Epic and Novel 12). Morson and Emerson elaborate on Bakhtin's view, explaining that "to realize and develop the potential of a language, 'outsideness'--the outside of another language--is required" (MB 310), and that what a language has to say "can be provoked when it is addressed dialogically from the alien perspective of another language of heteroglossia" (MB 310). In the novel, things begin to happen when words, languages, and ideas come into contact with other words, languages, and ideas. Tristram uses a number of different techniques to examine and try out these languages, including framing and parody. The result of these techniques is the reaccentuation and exposure of languages as they are set against the backdrop of a "contradictory reality that cannot be contained within their narrow forms" (Bakhtin, Prehistory 56).

The very act of transmission and repetition of a language makes changes in and questions it. As Bakhtin notes, "the speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is, no matter how accurately transmitted, always subject to certain semantic changes." Bakhtin goes on to explain that "another's discourse, when introduced into a speech context, enters the speech that frames it not in a mechanical bond, but in a chemical union (on

the semantic and emotionally expressive level)," and that this relation determines "the entire nature of its transmission and all the changes in meaning and accent that take place in it during transmission" (DiN 340). As Bakhtin further explains:

> The words of the author that represent and frame another's speech create a perspective for it; they separate light from shadow, create the situation and conditions necessary for it to sound; finally, they penetrate into the interior of the other's speech, carrying into it their own accents and their own expressions, creating for it a dialogizing background. (DiN 358)

The "Memoire presenté a Messieurs les Docteurs de SORBONNE," or "baptism, by injection" (I, xx, 67-69), is an interesting example of Tristram's discrediting authoritative discourse by framing it with reality. As mentioned earlier, "the authoritative word comes with its authority already fused to it" (DiN 342). Located in "a distanced zone," it is a "prior discourse," "the word of the fathers" (DiN 342). And because it is "indissolubly fused with its authority," it "stands or falls together with that authority" (DiN 343). Authoritative discourse does not merge with other discourse, but instead "it is sensed as something that is inherited and unquestionable, as a voice from a zone infinitely distant" (Morson and Emerson, MB 219).

Separated from the rest of the text by its presentation in French and typeface in italics, the Memoire stands out as a discourse apart. It does not physically "merge" with the surrounding discourse; instead, it remains "sharply demarcated, compact and inert," demanding "not only quotation marks but a

demarcation even more magisterial, a special script, for instance" (DiN 343)--in this case italics and a foreign language. But, in fact, this language is modified by the words surrounding it, and as Tristram interprets the meaning for us, in footnotes no less, as "baptism" by "a *squirt*" (I, xx, 66), he effectively discredits not only the discourse, but all the authority behind it as well.

The curse of "excommunication, (writ by ERNULPHUS the bishop)" (III, x, 200), plays with the idea of authoritative discourse. Set up in Latin on one page and in English on the other, the curse resembles authoritative discourse, but it has long since become separated from its authority. To bring this language into the realm where he can interact with it, Tristram uses laughter, which Bakhtin accords special properties:

> Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out, peer at it from above and below, break open its external shell, look into its center, doubt it, take it apart, dismember it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically. As it draws an object to itself and makes it familiar, laughter delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment. (EaN 23)

While the curse starts off straightforwardly, with Slop calling on numerous celestial authorities, including "the celestial

virtues, angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, powers, cherubins and seraphins, and of all the holy patriarchs, prophets, and of all the apostles and evangelists, and of the holy innocents, who in the sight of the holy Lamb, are found worthy to sing the new song" (III, xi, 205), etc., etc., all to curse Obadiah, it soon goes downhill. Toward the middle the language starts to deteriorate and soon Dr. Slop is intoning:

> "May he (Obadiah) be damn'd where-ever he
> be,--whether in the house or the stables, the
> garden or the field, or the highway, or in
> the path, or in the wood, or in the water, or
> in the church . . . May he be cursed in
> eating and drinking, in being hungry, in
> being thirsty, in fasting, in sleeping, in
> slumbering, in walking, in standing, in
> sitting, in lying, in working, in resting, in
> pissing, in shitting, and in blood-letting"
> (III, xi, 207-208)

Using laughter, the discourse has been "brought low," brought from a distanced plane into the present and down to the level of common language, where Tristram can interact and play with it.

Parody is another technique that Tristram uses to explore various languages. According to Bakhtin, in parody "language is transformed from the absolute dogma it had been within the narrow framework of a sealed-off and impermeable monoglossia into a working hypothesis for comprehending and expressing reality" (Prehistory 61). Bakhtin describes "parodic stylization" as an "internally dialogized interillumination of languages" where "the intentions of the representing discourse are at odds with the intentions of the represented discourse" (DiN 363-364).

Bakhtin goes on to note that in parody "the languages that are crossed in it relate to each other as do rejoinders in a dialogue; there is an argument between languages, an argument between styles of language." He points out that parody "is not a dialogue in the narrative sense, nor in the abstract sense; rather it is a dialogue between points of view, each with its own concrete language that cannot be translated into the other" (<u>Prehistory</u> 76). But, as Bakhtin points out, "in order to be authentic and productive, parody must be precisely a parodic <u>stylization</u>; that is, it must recreate the parodied language as an authentic whole, giving it its due as a language possessing its own internal logic" (<u>DiN</u> 364).

Some of the most interesting parodies in <u>Tristram Shandy</u> are those of the languages of "professions." Morson and Emerson point out that, according to Bakhtin, such languages are more than just "professional jargon" that can be found in a dictionary. Instead, "what constitutes these different languages is something that is itself extralinguistic: a specific way of conceptualizing, understanding, and evaluating the world," and this "complex of experiences, shared (more or less) evaluations, ideas, and attitudes 'knit together' to produce a way of speaking" (<u>MB</u> 141).

Tristram takes these unique "ways of speaking" and tries them on, parodying them and highlighting their more comic characteristics. As Bakhtin notes:

> It is the nature of every parody to transpose the values of the parodied style, to highlight certain

> elements while leaving others in the shade: parody
> is always biased in some direction, and this bias
> is dictated by the distinctive features of the
> parodying language, its accentual systems, its
> structure--we feel its presence in the parody and
> we can recognize that presence. (<u>Prehistory</u> 75)

Bakhtin notes that "parodic stylizations of generic, professional and other languages" exist against "the backdrop of the common language" (<u>DiN</u> 302).

Tristram's mother's marriage contract is one of the many comic parodies of legal language. The contract, as Howard Anderson points out, "parodies legal language that says the same thing as many different ways as possible in an attempt to keep slippery life under control" (Anderson, <u>Tristram Shandy</u> 27n4). Tristram is at pains to tell us that it "is so much more fully express'd in the deed itself, than ever I can pretend to do it, that it would be barbarity to take it out of the lawyer's hand" (I, xv, 42). Not only does he claim to reproduce the language, but he even reproduces the strange typeface. In it, he highlights the necessity of saying everything in every possible way to cover all contingencies:

> *Walter Shandy* and *Elizabeth Mollineux* aforesaid . . . doth
> grant, covenant, condescend, consent, conclude,
> bargain ,and fully agree to . . . That in case it
> should hereafter so fall out, chance, happen, or
> otherwise come to pass . . . as the said *Elizabeth
> Mollineux* shall happen to be enceint with child or
> children severally and lawfully begot, or to be
> begotten upon the body of the said *Elizabeth Mollineux* .
> . . he the said *Walter Shandy* shall, at his own proper
> cost and charges, and out of his own proper monies
> . . . pay . . . the said sum . . . to carry and
> convey the body of the said *Elizabeth Mollineux* and the
> child or children which she shall be then and
> there enceint and pregnant with,--unto the city of
> *London* . . . And the said *Elizabeth Mollineux* shall have

> free ingress, egress, and regress through her
> journey . . . without any let, suit, trouble,
> disturbance, molestation, discharge, hinderance,
> forfeiture, eviction, vexation, interruption, or
> incumberance whatsoever. (I, xv, 42-45)

Tristram further heightens the comedy of the language with his terse summation: "In three words,---'My mother was to lay in, (if she chose it) in *London*'" (I, xv, 45).

Jefferson terms the parodies of legal language "the art of the legal quibble" and notes that they showcase "the power to use logic to give a show of plausibility to an absurd or unreasonable argument" (230-231). He goes on to note the long history of the legal quibble tradition, including its use by Donne, Dryden, Johnson, and Rabelais, and its appearance in Shakespeare's <u>The Merchant of Venice</u> and Swift's <u>Tale of a Tub</u> (231). The convoluted logic and language of the legal profession held up for ridicule in the light of reality can be seen throughout the novel, most notably in the argument over the legality of Tristram's name and in the attempt to prove that a mother is not kin to her child.

Tristram produces similar parodies by using different types of "scientific discourse," thereby testing them and exposing them against the backdrop of reality. His description of the "Homunculus," which "consists, as we do, of skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments, nerves, cartileges, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations" (I, ii, 3), is, according to New, based on current biological investigations ("Notes" <u>Tristram Shandy</u> 44). Yet, framed on one

side by his mother's question about clock winding and on the other by Horace's recommendation on writing heroic epics, this language of science takes on the aspect of comedy.

The science of engineering, reprocessed through Toby's muddled language, is reduced to nonsense. While the science of obstetrics, represented by reputation and a jangle of metal instruments in Slop's green bag that only succeeds in preventing Obadiah from hearing himself whistle and taking the skin off Toby's knuckles, has little credibility. Tristram also reprocesses what Jefferson terms "the Galenic physiology," which while "it did not explain the workings of the human organism correctly . . . explained them plausibly" (228-229). We see Walter explaining how the "whole secret of health" depends "upon the due contention for mastery betwixt the radical heat and the radical moisture" (V, xxxiii, 471) in medical terminology, which is then translated by Toby's practical application at the Siege of Limerick into "ditch-water" and "burnt brandy" (V, xl, 481).

Even philosophy becomes but one language among many to be examined. We've seen Tristram reprocess Locke's theory of property to explain Walter's use of ideas. Locke's theory of the "association of ideas" is a discourse that Tristram applies to a number of situations. Locke's explanation of time and duration and the succession of ideas appears as but another attempt of Walter's to control reality:

> *For if you will turn your eyes inward upon your mind,* continued my father; *and observe attentively, you will perceive, brother, that whilst you and I are talking together, and thinking and smoking our pipes: or whilst we receive successively ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist, and so*

> *we estimate the existence, or the continuation of the existence of ourselves, or*
> *any thing else commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds,*
> *the duration of ourselves, or any such other thing co existing with our*
> *thinking.* (III, xviii, 224)

We watch this theory crash and burn as it collides with Toby's train of artillery.

As Tristram creates his own discourse from that of others, his realization that all language comes with a past history is the basis for much of the comedy. He realizes that there are no "virgin words," and that as Bakhtin points out,

> any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the
> object at which it was directed already as it were
> overlain with qualifications, open to dispute,
> charged with value, already enveloped in an
> obscuring mist--or, on the contrary, by the
> "light" of alien words that have already been
> spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through
> with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value
> judgments and accents. The word directed toward
> its object, enters a dialogically agitated and
> tension-filled environment of alien words, value
> judgments and accents, weaves in and out of
> complex interrelationships, merges with some,
> recoils from others, intersects with yet a third
> group: and all this may crucially shape discourse,
> may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may
> complicate its expression and influence its entire
> stylistic profile. (DiN 276)

Tristram is very aware that "language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated--overpopulated--with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin, DiN 294), and thus Tristram details the destruction of the word "whiskers":

> T'was plain to the whole court the word was
> ruined: *La Fosseuse* had given it a wound, and it was
> not the better for passing through all these
> defiles----it made a faint stand, however, for a
> few months; by the expiration of which, the Sieur
> *de Croix*, finding it high time to leave *Navarre* for

> want of whiskers--the word in course became
> indecent, and (after a few efforts) absolutely
> unfit for use. (V,i, 414)

Tristram, of course, makes use of the entanglements of language. He acknowledges the past accents of words and puts them to use for his own purposes. When Tristram protests that by a nose he means only "the external organ of smelling, or that part of man which stands prominent in his face" (III, xxxiii, 262), we, having been exposed to the descent of language at work, have our doubts. We can bemoan with the curate of d'Estella the fate of numerous words like "beds and bolsters, and night-caps and chamber-pots" which have "stood upon the brink of destruction ever since," as well as "trouse, and placket-holes, and pump-handles--and spigots and faucets," which are "in danger still, from the same association" (V, i, 414), and which are threatening to go the way of "whiskers."

Tristram takes this concept of the influence of past utterances even further, to the literary level. Tristram's tracing of his birth *"ab Ovo"* (I, iv, 5), against Horace's recommendations, sets the event up for comparison with epic conventions of heroic birth. Yorick's epitaph "Alas, poor YORICK!" (I, xii, 35) is a reproduction of Hamlet's address to Yorick's skull in Act V of <u>Hamlet</u>. Tristram's use of Hamlet's words allows him to examine Hamlet's discourse from the inside, and to bring its associated history and meaning into his own world. The words are no longer Hamlet's, but half-Hamlet's and half-Tristram's, applied to a new situation in Tristram's world.

The words of the past bring with them shades of meaning that give them significant power, and Tristram is trying them on, looking at the world through other voices and bringing these voices into the present to be reworked and tried in new situations. He bemoans the difficulty of telling his own story, but by bringing to mind other storytellers--Rabelais, Cervantes, and Montaigne, to name a few--he evokes their voices and their words. His mention of a horse named Rosinante evokes the voice of a lone knight battling reality with the language of chivalry. Similarly, Tristram's reference to Tickletoby's mare and Walter's concern with cuckoldom and white bears echo the bawdy voice of Rabelais and the universe of his tales. And references to Montaigne conjure the picture of "a running account of the writing of the book as it is written" (Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction 226), an unpredictable and unplanned process. Yet, like the well-worn proverbial phrase Tristram uses to summarize his work, that of the story of "a COCK and a BULL" (IX, xxxiii, 809), nothing remains as he finds it. Tristram takes the "relicks of learning," the words and voices from professions, from the past, and he explores them, exposes them, and changes them as he takes them into new territory with him and gives them new life through his own voice.

CHAPTER V

WRITING PROPERLY MANAGED

As Tristram takes the words of the past into new territory, his constant voice, as mentioned earlier, is one of the defining characteristics of his story. It is with this voice that he takes the old mixtures and the "relicks of learning" into new realms. Tristram does not leave words and languages as he finds them, but transforms them, rearranging the pieces to form new structures. As part of the process of rearranging, Tristram reaches out to the audience and into the future, and, in addition to reshaping the material of the past, he also redefines himself.

Wresting control of the words and languages of his past, Tristram uses the vehicle of conversation not only as a means of expression, but also as a means of reconstruction. The importance of the "other" as another point of view is highlighted by Tristram's acts of redefinition. Finally, Tristram, as an example of what Bakhtin calls a "novelistic hero," is endowed with the property of "unfinalizability," which he exploits as he takes his language into the future.

We have watched Tristram destroy barriers and distances with parody and break open and reframe the languages of his world with laughter--all to bring discourses from other arenas, much encrusted with previous meanings, into the light of the present and into contact with the everyday of his world so that he can interact with them, use them, and play with them. Tristram sees

himself as the hybrid creature he is, the result of the dialogic coming together of a variety of languages, and he accepts his discursive parentage, but his story does not end here.

Before we go forward, it is important to note that Tristram's words will never be totally <u>his own</u>; there will never be a complete synthesis. Tristram's words will always be partly someone-else's. As the mule, a biological hybrid, will always carry visible signs of its heritage, so Tristram's language will always contain audible signs of his heritage. Tristram's voice will always contain many voices as he carries his linguistic parents with him in his words. As Morson and Emerson point out, "consciousness takes shape and never stops taking shape, as a process of interaction among authoritative and innerly persuasive discourses" (<u>MB</u> 221). Assimilation is never complete, but a process that continues through a lifetime as languages enter new situations.

Tristram's taking of his linguistic heritage into new situations is for Bakhtin a defining feature of the novel as a genre and an important step as Tristram assimilates the discourse of his world and works to create his own language from the languages surrounding him. Here we see Tristram go beyond simply showcasing the heteroglossia of his world, revealing his own linguistic heritage, and trying on the languages around him-- speaking and viewing the world through other voices--into yet another realm as he repopulates language with his own intentions. Bakhtin calls the "essence of the internally persuasive word" its

"capacity for further creative life" as we "take it into new contexts, attach it to new material, put it in a new situation in order to wrest new answers from it, new insights into its meaning and even wrest from it new words of its own" (DiN 346). Morson and Emerson point out that, according to Bakhtin, "innerly persuasive discourse thrives when it grows and changes in response to experience and to other innerly persuasive voices. Above all, it is never a dead thing, never something finished; rather it is a kind of impulse toward the future" (MB 221).

It is interesting to note that this impulse toward the future is what Walter Shandy attempts (and fails) to achieve with his use of auxiliary verbs. As Walter sets forth his plan he claims:

> 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, xlii, 485)

He envisions the "verbs auxiliary" taking thought into new realms as they allow one to ask, among other things, "*Is it? Was it? Will it be? Would it be? May it be? Might it be?*" (V, xliii, 486). Walter hopes that "by the right use and application of these . . . there is no one idea can enter his brain how barren soever, but a magazine of conceptions and conclusions may be drawn forth from it" (V, xliii, 486). In short, he is attempting to devise a way to allow discourse of the past to move into the future.

Tristram's voice, despite his father's ill-laid plans, does move forward. The vehicle that allows this movement is conversation. In between retelling the events of his life and recounting the words of other characters, Tristram carries on a constant conversation with the audience. The events of the story are woven together with his voice.

Couched as digressions, what Tristram calls "unforeseen stoppages" (I, xiv, 42), this running conversation seemingly accompanying the story is, of course, a quintessential part of the story. At one point Tristram acknowledges the importance of digressions as a revelation of his own character:

> Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine;----
> they are the life, the soul of reading;--take them
> out of this book for instance,--you might as well
> take the book along with them;--one cold eternal
> winter would reign in every page of it; restore
> them to the writer;---he steps forth like a
> bridegroom,--bids All hail; brings in variety and
> forbids the appetite to fail. (I, xxii, 81)

Tristram's tale without his digressions would be dry indeed, and in fact, no tale at all.

The very pace of Tristram's story is conversational. As Virginia Woolf describes it, "the jerky, disconnected sentences are as rapid and it would seem as little under control as the phrases that fall from the lips of a brilliant teller." She goes on to state that "the very punctuation is that of speech, not writing, and brings the sound and associations of the speaking voice in with it" (79). Byrd sees in Tristram's dashes "the impulsive gestures of a man in animated conversation" (71).

Michael Vande Berg claims Tristram's punctuation is based on
"rhetorical" considerations "signalling the rhythm, or the
pauses, within written discourse--with a comma, for instance,
directing the reader to take a short breath"--as opposed to a
system based on structure (23). In what may be the most quoted
paragraph of his tale, Tristram himself calls our attention to
his conversational mode:

> Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be
> sure I think mine is) is but a different name for
> conversation: As no one, who knows what he is
> about in good company, would venture to talk all;-
> -so no author, who understands the just boundaries
> of decorum and good breeding, would presume to
> think all: The truest respect which you can pay to
> the reader's understanding, is to halve this
> matter amicably, and leave him something to
> imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. (II,
> x, 125)

And Tristram does leave something for us to imagine. As Walter
wonders why his wife prefers the midwife to Dr. Slop, Toby
replies: "My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a
man come so near her****" (II, vi, 115), and the word is left to
our imagination. We observe various quarter pages of asterisks
indicating the private reasons the queen and her ministers did
not begin to demolish Dunkirk (VI, xxxiv, 560), and Walter's
thoughts on Mrs. Shandy's suggestion that Uncle Toby may have
children of his own (VI, xxxix, 570). Tristram leaves us a blank
page and invites us to imagine the Widow Wadman: "----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" (VI, xxxviii,
566-567).

But the half left to the audience is much more than simply
blank spaces waiting to be filled in. The implications of
audience participation are much more complex. We are drawn into
the tale as Tristram directly addresses us, hailing us variously:
"Why, Madam" (I,iv, 7), "besides, Sir" (I, vi, 9), "I need not
tell your worship, that all this is spoke in confidence" (I,
xiii, 40). He instructs us:
" --------------------- Shut the door. ---------------------"
(I, iv, 6) and scolds us: "How could you, Madam, be so
inattentive in reading the last chapter?" (I, xx, 64). The
conversational structure, addressed to the reader, is much more
than a narrative or an organizational technique. In Bakhtin's
model of discourse, conversation holds a preeminent place because
"thought itself--philosophical, scientific, and artistic--is born
and shaped in the process of interaction and struggle with
others' thought" ("Speech Genres" 92). Tristram's story of his
life in conversation is not what Morson and Emerson call a
"monologic statement 'summarizing' its contents," but rather an
"open-ended dialogue" with the audience" (MB 60).

It is in this on-going dialogue that we as the readers
fulfill our function. Bakhtin points out that "the word in
living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a
future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and
structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in

an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word" (DiN 280). Gary Morson elaborates: "each utterance is a response to other utterances and is formulated in expectation of a response to it" (Bakhtin 3). And Morson and Emerson point out that, for Bakhtin, "utterances are shaped by the anticipation of a response, by the 'not-yet-spoken'" (MB 137). Tristram himself illustrates the workings of conversation in his encounter with the ass:

> . . . meet him where I will--whether in town or country--in cart or under panniers--whether in liberty or bondage----I have ever something civil to say to him on my part; and as one word begets another (if he has as little to do as I)----I generally fall into conversation with him; and surely never is my imagination so busy as in framing his responses from the etchings of his countenance--and where those carry me not deep enough----in flying from my own heart into his, and seeing what is natural for an ass to think--as well as a man, upon the occasion. In truth, it is the only creature of all the classes of beings below me, with whom I can do this: for parrots, jackdaws, &c.----I never exchange a word with them----nor with the apes, &c. for pretty near the same reason; they act by rote, as the others speak by it, and equally make me silent: nay my dog and my cat, though I value them both----(and for my dog he would speak if he could)--yet some how or other, they neither of them possess the talents for conversation----I can make nothing of a discourse with them, beyond the *proposition*, the *reply*, and *rejoinder*, which terminated my father's and my mother's conversations, in his beds of justice----and those utter'd--there's an end of the dialogue----But with an ass, I can commune for ever. (VII, xxxii, 630-631)

In essence, if conversation is structured as a real dialogue, there is give and take. Responses are responded to. Answers are

expected and received.

Tristram's illustration corresponds closely to Bakhtin's
model:

> Imagine a dialogue of two persons in which the
> statements of the second speaker are omitted, but
> in such a way that the general sense is not at all
> violated. The second speaker is present
> invisibly, his words are not there, but deep
> traces left by these words have a determining
> influence on all the present and visible words of
> the first speaker. We sense that this is a
> conversation, though only one person is speaking,
> and it is a conversation of the most intense kind,
> for each present, uttered word responds and reacts
> with its every fiber to the invisible speaker,
> points to something outside itself, beyond its own
> limits, to the unspoken words of another person.
> (PDP 197)

Morson claims that all discourse is "words with a sidelong
glance" because "it's always shaped by the audience, whose
potential reactions must be taken into account from the onset."
But he makes a clear distinction between Bakhtin's model and so-
called "reader-reception theory," which he claims "only discusses
the active role of the audience after an utterance is made,"
though, according to Bakhtin, "the audience shapes the utterance
as it is being made, making it, "as Bakhtin puts it, a 'two-sided
act,' 'the product of the reciprocal relationship between the
addresser and addressee,' 'territory-shared'" (Morson, Bakhtin 3-
4).[4]

This anticipation of a response, this speaking with a
"sidelong glance," has further significance in the life of a
novel, and for this we must return to Bakhtin's notion of

dialogism. The "Galilean perception of language" realizes the existence of, and even requires, other languages. It is "aware of competing definitions for the same things" (Dialogic Imagination "Appendix" 427) and even depends on them. For Bakhtin dialogism is fundamental to the novel:

> At the base of the genre lies the Socratic notion of the dialogic nature of truth, and the dialogic nature of human thinking about truth. The dialogic means of seeking truth is counterposed to official monologism, which pretends to possess a ready-made truth, and it is also counterposed to the naive self-confidence of those people who think that they know something, that is, who think that they possess certain truths. Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction. (PDP 110)

This "dialogic interaction" also has far-reaching implications for Tristram's developing voice. Morson and Emerson point out that for Bakhtin, "dialogue is essential to self-hood" (MB 218), for he insists on "the essential role of otherness in shaping and defining the self" (MB 200). In describing Dostoevsky's novels, for example, Bakhtin emphasizes the importance of dialogue in a person's development:

> It is fully understandable that at the center of Dostoevsky's artistic world must lie dialogue, and dialogue not as a means but as an end in itself. It is not a means for revealing, for bringing to the surface the already ready-made character of a person; no, in dialogue a person not only shows himself outwardly, but he becomes for the first time that which he is--and, we repeat, not only for others but for himself as well. To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends. Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end. . . . Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence. (PDP 252)

By this logic, as Tristram is trying on and reaccentuating the voices of his world, it is necessary that he carry on a dialogue. He needs a relation with another language not only to reveal himself, but, even more fundamentally, to become himself.

Bakhtin states elsewhere: "I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another. The most important acts constituting self-consciousness are determined by a relationship toward another consciousness (toward a thou)." Bakhtin goes on to explain that this development "takes place on the boundary between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the threshold. And . . . every internal experience ends up on the boundary, encounters another . . . . To be means to be for another, and through the other, for oneself. A person has no internal sovereign territory, he is wholly and always on the boundary; looking inside himself, he looks into the eyes of another or with the eyes of another" (PDP "Appendix II" 287).

For a developing self, the other also serves as another pair of eyes, another point of view to agree or disagree with, to react against. Morson and Emerson point out that for Bakhtin, "selves are creative in response to images of themselves given by others. The other bestows form, an aesthetic act, and, as part of my inner life, I react to that form. I-for-myself is never identical with but always learning from the image of I-for-others, transcending that image, and so giving rise to yet other

aesthetic acts that bestow on me new kinds of form" (<u>MB</u> 191).

Tristram is very aware of reactions toward him. He reacts to both the reader's perceived thoughts about him and the thoughts of other characters. He answers back, as in the case of misconceptions about his marital state:

> I must beg leave, before I finish this chapter, to enter a caveat in the breast of my fair reader;-- and it is this:----Not to take it absolutely for granted from an unguarded word or two which I have dropp'd in it,----"That I am a married man." (I, xviii, 56)

The novel is full of other characters' views of Tristram. From his father we hear, "Unhappy *Tristram*! child of wrath! child of decrepitude! interruption! mistake! and discontent!" (IV, xix, 354). And Dr. Slop "made ten thousand times more of *Susannah's* accident than there was any grounds for; so that in a week's time, or less, it was in every body's mouth" (VI, xiv, 521).

Yet Tristram goes beyond the descriptions of him by others. He claims his own territory and, using the voices of his world he has made his own as building blocks, sets out to construct his own view of himself: "From this moment I am to be considered as heir-apparent to the *Shandy* family--and it is from this point properly, that the story of my LIFE and my OPINIONS sets out; with all my hurry and precipitation I have but been clearing the ground to raise a building----and such a building do I forsee it will turn out, as never was planned, and as never was executed since *Adam*" (IV, xxxii, 400).

As Tristram moves beyond others' reactions to him and
actually redefines himself, we see him wrest authority away from
church, the law, his father--in essence from all his linguistic
parents--and take control of his own voice. He moves from
retelling other people's stories using their language, to telling
his own story using their language now made his own, for his own
purposes. To return to the comparison with Hamlet, Walter Reed
observes that "Hamlet is a character who must defend himself
against the external roles that others would cast him in" (90).
Tristram too mounts such a defense, but he goes even further. To
rephrase and expand Chikba's observation quoted earlier outlining
Hamlet's and Tristram's pressing need: Tristram's purpose is not
only to "remember whence he came," and to determine who he is,
but also to direct where he's going and decide who he is going to
be.

This movement toward self-definition is clearly evidenced in
the incident of the window sash. As the event unfolds, Tristram
is not allowed to tell it himself: "Now though I was old enough
to have told the story myself,--and young enough, I hope, to have
done it without malignity; yet *Susannah*, in passing by the
kitchen, for fear of accidents, had left it in short-hand with
the cook" (V, xxvi, 458). But in the present Tristram declares
"'Tis my own affair: I'll explain it myself" (V, xviii, 450), and
he takes it even further, going back and rewriting the story, as
we see him musing upon "that remarkable chapter in the
Tristrapoedia," which is for him "the most original and entertaining

one in the whole book;--that is the *chapter upon sash-windows*, with a
bitter *Philippick* at the end of it, upon the forgetfulness of
chamber-maids" (V, xxvi, 458). In sum, he admits "---That, in
order to render the *Tristrapoedia* complete,--I wrote the chapter
myself" (V, xxvi, 459). A concept stated before that applies
here and bears repeating relates to the assimilation of
internally persuasive discourse, a process which, according to
Morson and Emerson, corresponds to "retelling in one's own words"
(MB 219). As Bakhtin points out, "In a human being there is
always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act
of self-consciousness and discourse, something that does not
submit to an externalizing secondhand definition" (PDP 58). This
act of redefinition, telling one's own story in one's own words
(or rather other people's words made one's own), is the final
stage as Tristram assimilates the voices of his world.

But in addition to a self that only he can define, there is
an openendedness, what Bakhtin calls an "unfinalizability" in
each character. Like Dostoevsky's hero from the underground,
Tristram "knows that all these definitions, prejudiced as well as
objective, rest in his hands and he cannot finalize them
precisely because he himself perceives them; he can go beyond
their limits and can thus make them inadequate. He knows that he
has the final word, and seeks at whatever cost to retain for
himself this final word about himself, the word of his self-
consciousness, in order to become in it that which he is not.

His consciousness of self lives by its unfinalizability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy" (PDP 53).

What Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky's characters is also true of Tristram: Although "they all do furious battle with such definitions of their personality in the mouths of other people," at the same time "they all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them. As long as a person is alive he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized, that he has not yet uttered his ultimate word" (PDP 59).

Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability illuminates three important features of Tristram's tale: 1) his comparison of his tale with the epic; 2) his flight from death; and 3) his constant reminders of his autobiography's very materiality.

To go back to the beginning of Tristram's story, where he ponders where to start and compares his beginning with Horace's recommendation for starting an epic, here we see highlighted Tristram's function as a novelistic hero endowed with what Bakhtin calls "an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness" (EaN 7). As a novelistic hero, Tristram's "existence must be a continual process of re-definition and re-evaluation," and "like the novel itself, he [the novelistic hero] dwells in the zone of incompleteness. His language is his own; he retains the power to make untrue anything final said about him; the plot never exhausts his character" (Morson, "The

Heresiarch of Meta" 419-420). This is in opposition to Bakhtin's conception of an epic hero, whom he describes as "a fully finished and completed being" of "the absolute past" whose "view of himself coincides completely with others' views of him" since "he sees and knows in himself only the things that others see and know in him" (EaN 34-35). While the epic hero exists in "the absolute past," the novelistic hero, by contrast, exists in "the zone of contact with the inconclusive events of the present (and consequently of the future)" (EaN 35), and has an "unrealized surplus of humanness" that is not embodied in his biography: thus "there always remains in him unrealized potential and unrealized demands. . . . there always remains a need for the future and a place for this future must be found. All existing clothes are always too tight, and thus comical, on a man" (EaN 37). As Carol Emerson observes, "when we think away his [the novelistic hero's] roles, there is something left: that remainder, that non-coincidence of self and social categories, that capacity to change into different clothes, is freedom." (Emerson, "Outer Word and Inner Speech" 35). Tristram, as a novelistic hero, is always more than the sum of the voices of his past.

Tristram is also more than the sum of others' words about him. Though the words of others are necessary to his development, Tristram is not bound by their words; in fact, he is not even bound by his own words. He is forever allowed to, even expected to, "try on different clothes," to experiment with those languages he finds internally persuasive as he moves into the

future. Because of his potential, he is forever "incongruous

with himself," ever more so than he acknowledges. Talking again

of the novelistic hero, Bakhtin states:

> There is no mere form that would be able to
> incarnate once and forever all of his human
> possibility and needs, no form in which he could
> exhaust himself down to the last word, like the
> tragic or epic hero; no form that he could fill to
> the very brim and yet at the same time not splash
> over the brim. (EaN 37)

It is this need for the future and the concept of

unfinalizability that point to the implications of Tristram's

flight from death. In volume VII Tristram states that "DEATH

himself knocked at my door" (VII, i, 576); and in speaking to

Eugenius he notes: "----I care not which way he enter'd, . . .

provided he be not in such a hurry to take me out with him--for I

have forty volumes to write, and forty thousand things to say and

do" (VII, i, 576). For the next forty-two chapters we race with

Tristram across France--through Calais, Boulogne, Paris,

Chantilly, Fontainbleu, and Auxerre in order to escape Death.

Tristram seems only too aware that as long as he's alive and

speaking and writing, he is unfinalizable, and that only death

can still his voice.

But can it? According to Bakhtin, "To be means to

communicate. Absolute death (non-being) is the state of being

unheard, unrecognized, unremembered" (PDP "Appendix II" 287).

Tristram is determined not to be unheard and not to go

unrecognized or unremembered. It is for this reason he is

constantly reminding us of the materiality of his work. He never

lets us forget that he is writing a book. His lament draws our

attention to his act of writing:

> I am this month one whole year older than I
> was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you
> perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth
> volume--and no farther than to my first day's
> life--'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred
> and sixty-four days more life to write just now,
> than when I first set out; so that instead of
> advancing, as a common writer, in my work with
> what I have been doing at it--on the contrary, I
> am just thrown so many volumes back . . . at this
> rate I should just live 364 times faster than I
> should write--It must follow, an' please your
> worships, that the more I write, the more I shall
> have to write--and consequently, the more your
> worships read, the more your worships will have to
> read.
>
> . . . and, was it not that my OPINIONS will
> be the death of me, I perceive I shall lead a fine
> life of it out of this self-same life of mine; or,
> in other words, shall lead a couple of fine lives
> together.
>
> . . . I shall never overtake myself--whipp'd
> and driven to the last pinch, as the worst I shall
> have one day the start of my pen--and one day is
> enough for two volumes--and two volumes will be
> enough for one year.-- (IV, xiii, 341-342)

Tristram is always reminding us that his final product is a book.

At various points we observe him sitting at his desk, pen in

hand. He typically declares that "I Have begun a new book" (II,

i, 93), or talks of the chapter he "was obliged to tear out" (IV,

xxv, 374). Needless to say, he also plays with this concept of

materiality when we watch Walter attempt to alter the meaning of

a sentence with a penknife (III, xxxvii, 272), and listen as

Phutatorius's friends advise him to wrap his injured part in a

leaf from the second edition of his treatise, just off the press, for the soothing qualities in the oil and lamp-black of the ink (IV, xxviii, 386-387).

It seems that Tristram is aware that his ultimate unfinalizability lies in this materiality which will transcend even his own death. While Tristram swears to preserve Toby's bowling green, we know that it must eventually fail in its explanation of Toby's science of fortification. It is in the written form of his tale, in the record etched on pages of paper, that Tristram sees his ultimate survival. Commenting on the novel and autobiography, Spacks notes that "both save individual identity from pure subjectivity by converting human beings into objects: quite literally: pages with words on them: illusions of consistent substantiality" (22). She goes on to note that "the reader believes in a character's identity not because the character believes in it, not on the basis of the character's memory, but as a result of that character's existence in a succession of moments recorded, ultimately, in the readers' memory" (10-11). It is by his conversation, preserved forever in the pages of millions of copies of his story, the dialogue forever reenacted through his voice recorded in characters of ink, the recitation of his process of self-definition recorded in his language, that Tristram will move into the future.

It is Tristram's voice, carrying within it the heteroglossia from which it was formed, ever exposing the scaffolding of its construction, that transcends time. The sum of his parentage and

more, a mule-like hybrid created from the voices of his world, Tristram will forever talk with us in the continual now, forever interpret and reinterpret his life, forever be recreated as languages come together and interact. His story represents an intersection point, a microcosm of heteroglossia, and as Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky, "on the plane of the present there came together and quarreled, past, present, and future" (PDP 90).

¹ All citations to the text of <u>Tristram Shandy</u> are made to the following edition: Laurence Sterne, <u>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman</u>, ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 3 vols. (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1978-1984).

² Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia describes more than the presence of different languages in the world at any one time. It has additional ramifications in terms of the formation of language. According to Holquist, "heteroglossia is as close a conceptualization as is possible of that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide" (<u>Dialogic Imagination</u>, Glossary 428). Morson and Emerson see "heteroglossia" as "Bakhtin's term for linguistic centrifugal forces and their products" and note that it "continually translates the minute alterations and reevaluations of everyday life into new meanings and tones, which in sum and over time, always threaten the wholeness of any language" (<u>MB</u> 30). Centripetal forces of language are those "historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization" (<u>DiN</u> 270) that seek to systematize and freeze language. Bakhtin specifically mentions philology and linguistics as two such attempts. Centrifugal forces are those processes of "decentralization and disunification"; they include dialects and professional stratifications which fragment language.

Heteroglossia is an expression of Bakhtin's rejection of the operation of a formal overall "system," and his recognition of the ultimate "messiness" of language, even as he takes into account the ability of language to signify and serve as a means of communication.

[3] "Dialogized heteroglossia" goes beyond the recognition of the multilanguagedness of the world and describes the interanimation of the languages present. "Undialogized" heteroglossia can best be illustrated using Bakhtin's hypothetical illiterate peasant. The peasant "lived in several language systems: he prayed to God in one language (Church Slavonic), sang songs in another, spoke to his family in a third and, when he began to dictate petitions to the local authorities through a scribe, he tried speaking yet a fourth language (the official-literate language, "paper" language)" (DiN 295-296). While the peasant experiences life through several languages, "the place occupied by each of these languages is fixed and indisputable, the movement from one to the other is predetermined and not a thought process; it is as if these languages were in different chambers. They do not collide with each other in his consciousness, there is no attempt to coordinate them, to look at one of these languages through the eyes of another language" (DiN 295). Bakhtin goes on to note that "as soon as a critical interanimation of language began to occur in the consciousness of our peasant, as soon as it became clear that these were not only various different languages but even internally variegated

languages, that the ideological systems and approaches to the world that were indissolubly connected with these languages contradicted each other and in no way could live in peace and quiet with one another--then the inviolability and predetermined quality of these languages came to an end, and the necessity of actively choosing one's orientation among them began" (DiN 296).

[4] In addition to the difference in timing of audience response, Bakhtin's theory of novelistic discourse can be differentiated from reader-reception theory along the axis of locus of meaning. In the more radical brand of reader-reception theory, that of Stanley Fish, all meaning is created by the interpretive community. Fish argues against "the assumption that there is a sense," and "that it is embedded or encoded in the text" (158). He believes instead that "formal units are always a function of the interpretive model one brings to bear; they are not 'in' the text" (164). For Fish, the text (and the language constituting it) are empty shells to be filled with meaning supplied by the reader.

In Bakhtin's theory, language itself carries history and potential, embedded in words. In Bakhtin's view, "only the mythical Adam, who approached a virginal and as yet verbally unqualified world with the first word" (DiN 279), would have had the luxury of creating his own meaning out of a text. Bakhtin's concentration on utterance as a shared process in no way nullifies the past life of a word which is carried with that word.

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