

Tristram Shandy and Spatial Form

JEFFREY R. SMITTEN

IT was a commonplace among Sterne's early critics that *Tristram Shandy* lacked structural coherence. Even a critic like Alexander Gerard, whose associationist doctrines seem to allow his sympathy with Sterne's eccentric narrator, criticized the novel's "total want of design." The narrator, he declared, had passively submitted to the "power of accidental associations," even going beyond writers like Montaigne "to the utmost degree of incoherence"; and he also suggests that Sterne had the kind of mind which produces "incoherent medleys, fantastical rhapsodies, or unmeaning reveries."¹ Modern critics, working with less narrowly Aristotelian assumptions, have not agreed with Gerard. There is a steadily growing body of criticism intended to show the structural design of Sterne's work;² and the last few years have seen a culmination of this trend, for *Tristram Shandy* has been discussed in conjunction with a rigorously formalistic view of narrative structure — Joseph Frank's concept of spatial form.³ What have we learned about *Tristram Shandy* from the application of Frank's idea, and what further insights into the novel's structure can it yield?

The basis of spatial form is what Frank calls reflexive reference among disconnected word groups. When narratives discard conventional dramatic and temporal structures, the reader often has to perceive relations among word groups which are chronologically and dramatically disconnected. This perception of relation is reflexive reference, and it is triggered by such devices as juxtaposition, motif, and rhythm (in E. K. Brown's sense). As this description suggests, the meaning of any single unit of reflexive reference is determined by its relation to other units and is

not intrinsic. Thus, as far as an understanding of the structure of a work in spatial form is concerned, most important is an awareness of how reflexive reference functions specifically in that work. Unfortunately, previous studies of *Tristram Shandy* and spatial form have neglected this very point. Admittedly, some involve only brief allusions to *Tristram Shandy* in the course of broader arguments;⁴ but even the two most thorough and intelligent discussions suffer from this failure. For both John M. Stedmond and William V. Holtz, the unity of *Tristram Shandy* is coextensive with Tristram's personality.⁵ The novel's dramatic and temporal dislocations are Sterne's attempt to capture the non-linear quality of mental life. Because structural questions are so resolved into questions of character, specific patterns of reflexive reference are not of concern. The continuity of Tristram's personality supplies the relation among disconnected word groups. This argument is sensible, but closer attention to structural technique tells us more about the spatial form of the novel. In an analysis along these lines, Douglas Brooks has tried to show that number symbolism is a unifying pattern and that *Tristram Shandy* "is one vast pattern-poem."⁶ But however laudable his intentions, Brooks's analysis fails to convince his readers that number symbolism would still be a basis for aesthetic structure in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁷

Although spatial form applies to a whole narrative, it is often more profitable to examine its applicability to only a part. As we have seen, previous criticism has concentrated on *Tristram Shandy* as a whole, with the result that vague assertion has displaced careful analysis of technique. If we are to understand the spatial form of the whole novel, we should first understand precisely the challenges the reader faces in a given portion if it. For my purpose, then, a single volume of *Tristram Shandy* would seem to be a sensible unit, long enough to be a valid paradigm for the whole novel, short enough not to be too cumber-

some. And, volume III, with its apparently incoherent structure, is reasonably typical of *Tristram Shandy*, so an argument by analogy for the rest of the novel will at least be plausible.⁸

Despite volume III's seeming narrative confusion, we can detect rudiments of order. Most striking is the fact that "The Author's Preface" comes at the mid-point of the volume (following chapter xx) and roughly divides it between a sequence of chapters on Tristram's birth (i-xvii) and on Walter's and Toby's hobby-horses (xviii-xlii). Accordingly, the volume contains three main topics: birth, hobby-horses, and Tristram's self-revelatory opinions on life and art. We should include with the last topic Tristram's occasional digressions on the problems of authorship scattered throughout the volume. Also, these three topics have thematic coherence. The main dramatic concern of the volume is Tristram's birth and the catastrophe of his crushed nose. From Walter's hobby-horsical point of view, Tristram's crushed nose signifies destruction of his sexual and intellectual capabilities; he is made impotent in body and mind. Walter derived this notion from his favorite authority, Bruscambille, and this passage, in which Bruscambille amplifies the proverb "voilà qui n'à pas de nez nous servira beaucoup," must have been a *locus classicus* for Walter:

On en pourra dire autant d'un Peintre, d'un Orfèvre, de l'auteur d'un pitoyable Livre, & generalement de toute sorte de choses qui ne feront pas dans le gout des Messieurs qui se qualifient du nez fin; de manière qu'à leur sentiment tout ce qui n'à point de nez est méprisable & ne mérite pas de voir le jour. Et c'est la raison pourquoi l'on cache ordinairement le cul comme étant un visage qui n'à point de nez, & au contraire la face est toujours découverte à cause qu'il y a dans le milieu un nez; un homme sans nez est rejeté des femmes. Le physionomiste Albert le grand aussibien que le savant Trismegiste disent que les femmes estiment les grands nez nobles, & de bonne race, les mediocres, de contentement, & les petits de bon appétit.⁹

Ironically, Sterne uses this hoary nonsense as the thematic core of volume III, for Tristram's birth, the Shandys' hobby-horses, and Tristram's opinions are all enveloped with the

idea of impotence. The articulation of this all-encompassing theme is my main concern, since here the spatial form of the volume is manifest.¹⁰

Volume III's coherence lies primarily in the dense interweaving of four motifs. Of course, to argue that *Tristram Shandy* is structured by motifs is not new; but to insist upon the extraordinary density of the motifs within a small compass, a density so great that it suggests complete integration of all compositional elements, is new. Each of the four motifs is a family of associated images and situations, is linked with the other motifs, and expresses a facet of the main theme of the volume. Although they run throughout the volume, one or two will occasionally predominate or be absent altogether in a given section. The four motifs may be labelled: (1) physical destruction, (2) tyranny of circumstances, (3) sexuality, and (4) imprisonment of reason and sentiment. Each is an aspect of the general definition of impotence, which includes physical mutilation, powerlessness, sexual impotence, and imbecility. All of them work together to give a sense of the total ruin ironically present at Tristram's birth, a total ruin which allies Tristram with Toby and Walter as a Shandy. Since the motifs are conditioned by the three main topics of the volume — birth, hobby-horses, and Tristram's opinions — it seems best to examine them as they are developed in connection with each topic. We can begin with the birth section.

The birth itself takes place off-stage, but it is suggested in chapters i-xvii by at least four surrogate births:¹¹ Walter's attempt to extract his handkerchief (ii), Slop's "delivery" of his baize bag which Obadiah had tied in knots (vii), Slop's awkward extraction of his forceps from the bag with a squirt dangling from them (xiii), and the classical orator who produced his *bambino* so cleverly that "no soul could say, it came in by head and shoulders" (xiv). Significantly, each of these mock-births is accompanied by the motif of destruction, turning a moment

of physical creation into ruin. Walter's groping for his handkerchief is clearly symbolic of a disastrous cross birth since he has to force his hand diagonally across his body to reach his opposite coat pocket while blood rushes to his face with the strain of his effort. The "delivery" of the bag results in Slop's cut thumb, hinting at Tristram's possible sexual damage; and Tristram indicates his mother's miserable condition by comparing her with the knotted bag: "My mother, madam, had been delivered sooner than the green bag infallibly — at least by twenty *knots*" (viii). Slop's clumsy handling of his forceps in chapter xiii foreshadows his use of them on Tristram, and, though the classical orator's rhetorical birth is more successful than Slop's, it too has catastrophic consequences: "It has open'd the sluices, and turn'd the brains, and shook the principles, and unhinged the politicks of half a nation" (xiv).

Besides touching these surrogate births, the destruction motif spreads through virtually every part of the first seventeen chapters, underscoring the idea of physical mutilation. The volume opens with the fireside conversation, like baby Tristram, on the brink of death. Toby's wish had put a stop to the dispute about modes of birth for four and a half minutes — "five had been fatal to it" (i). Adding to this enervated atmosphere is Slop's own bewilderment with Toby's wish. He stares with that "perplexed vacuity of eye which puzzled souls generally stare with," and he finds that his ideas have been put first into "confusion, and then to flight, [and] he could not rally them again for the soul of him." These hints are extended when the subject of the dispute is stated with brutal starkness: it "was one of the most interesting disputes in the world, 'Whether the child of [Walter's] prayers and endeavours should be born without a head or with one.'" More violent imagery figures in chapter iv where Tristram complains that the reviewers have stormed and raged at him. Translating their anger into a figurative assault, he says they "cut and slash[ed]" his jerkin and pursued him "pell mell,

helter skelter, ding dong, cut and thrust, back stroke and fore stroke, side way and long way." The reference to rage is picked up in chapter v where Walter appears to be in a rage because of the "violent knitting of [his] brows, and the extravagant contortion of his body" and again in vii where Slop "was stamping, and cursing and damning at *Obadiah* at a most dreadful rate." In chapter viii, Tristram looks ahead with a certain note of pathos to the ruin of his affairs and the fortunes of his house. Jumping back in time in chapter x, he refers to the "catastrophe" of his great uncle Hammond Shandy who was hanged in Monmouth's rebellion. The fury, rage, and destruction of these opening chapters reaches cosmic proportions in the excommunication curse of Ernulphus, for Obadiah is damned by God Almighty down through all the order of angels and saints, and cursed "in living, in dying" and "in all the faculties of his body" (xi). The entire Shandy household totters on the verge of "mutiny and confusion" in chapter xiii, as Susannah cries: "Bless my soul! — my poor mistress is ready to faint, — and her pains are gone, — and the drops are done, — and the bottle of julap is broke, — and the nurse has cut her arm, — . . . and the child is where it was . . . and the midwife has fallen backwards upon the edge of the fender, and bruised her hip as black as your hat." Finally, as far as Tristram is concerned, the whole pattern of references to destruction comes to bear in chapter xvi where Toby's knuckles are crushed into a "jelly" by Slop's misapplication of the forceps, a vivid picture of what will soon happen to infant Tristram's head.

Closely complementing the motif of destruction in this section is the tyranny of circumstances. Tristram takes great delight in tracing important effects to ridiculous, trivial causes, implying the powerlessness of man to control his world and thus his impotence. Very early in volume III, Tristram introduces this motif: "the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt, give every thing in this world its size and shape; — and by tightening it, or

relaxing it, this way or that, make the thing to be what it is — great — little — good — bad — indifferent or not indifferent, just as the case happens" (ii). Looking ahead in volume III, we can see that infant Tristram's subjection to Slop's forceps reflects this proposition since the crushing of his nose by the forceps is the crushing of his fortunes. But the novel also presents a chain of causes antecedent to the events of volume III of which Tristram is well aware when he laments his fate as a "sport of small accidents" (viii). One terminus is the Shandy marriage articles by which Tristram was doomed to have his nose crushed flat (I, xv). We then pass through Slop's arrival without his medical bag (II, xi) to Obadiah's tying it up so he could hear himself whistle (III, viii). The train of causes becomes more ridiculous in III, ix when Tristram gives a grotesque mechanistic description of how Slop made his hasty decision to cut the knots, referring to the propositions which "are every day swimming quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man's understanding, without being carried backwards or forwards, till some little gusts of passion or interest drive them to one side." Even the fact that Slop was missing his front teeth and kept his fingernails closely cut (x) enters into his cutting the knots, accidentally cutting his thumb, and consequently making his touch so insensitive that he confuses Tristram's nose with his ears and extracts him with the forceps over the front of his face instead of along the sides.¹² Great human misfortune arises from such trivial, ludicrous causes.

The motif of sexuality is not prominent in this section, with only the closing few chapters containing instances of it. Nonetheless, these few references develop the idea of sexual impotence, the most obvious component of the general theme. Tristram evokes the possibility of sexual dismemberment in chapter xvi when he playfully declares that the decline of rhetoric in modern times is due to the disuse of "*trunk-hose*": "We can conceal nothing under ours, Madam, worth shewing." In chapter xv the unin-

tentional sexual pun in Toby's exclamation, "Good God! . . . *are children brought into the world with a squirt?*" calls attention to the old soldier's impotence as well as modesty. "Squirt" also recalls, perhaps, Tristram's disastrous conception in I, i which determined his imbecilic character, given to "rash jerks, and hare-brain'd squirts" (III, xxviii). And, in chapter xvii, the confusion over whether Tristram is presenting his head or his hip joins the ideas of sexual and intellectual impotence. When Slop mentions the possibility of castration by his forceps, Walter replies: "when your possibility has taken place at the hip, — you may as well take off the head too." This reference leads us directly to Walter's theory of noses and the hobby-horse section generally.

Although the motif of physical destruction is as richly developed in the hobby-horse section as it was in the birth section, Sterne adds in the later section the full development of the motif of the imprisonment of reason and sentiment. In addition, the motifs of circumstances and sexuality support the imprisonment motif because they are now associated with mental phenomena. The imprisonment motif touches both Walter and Toby, insisting on the ineffectuality of reason and sentiment in coping with reality. Reason, in the form of theoretical explanations, is ridiculed as being inapplicable to reality, while sentiment, though at times uniting isolated individuals, often fails to lead to benevolent action. Since this motif is the most complex, it may be well to examine a single incident briefly to understand the polarities involved before going on to its structure in the volume. Sterne introduces the motif at once in chapter xviii with the confrontation of Walter's paraphrase of Locke's theory of duration and Toby's image of his train of ideas as a "smoak-jack." Imprisonment is demonstrated on one level by the comic failure of communication, for each character is trapped by his framework of ideas. But the motif is developed at a deeper level since Locke's convoluted abstractions and simplistic image

of the magic lantern are juxtaposed with the smoke-jack, a machine whose complicated movements give it an affinity to other images Sterne uses to suggest reality. A smoke-jack was a rather intricate little machine, intended to turn a spit, whose assemblage of drums, cogs, fly wheel, weights, and worm gears produced both clockwise and counter-clockwise motions within the machine.¹³ Its movement resembles Tristram's description of his novel as a machine reconciling two contrary motions (and so truly mimetic of life) (I, xxii), the image of the Shandy family as a Dutch silk mill in which "wheels were set in motion by . . . many different springs, and acted one upon the other from . . . a variety of strange principles and impulses" (V, vi), and his frequent use of the image of puzzled or tangled skeins to represent problematic reality (for example, VII, xxviii). The meaning this image had for Sterne is perhaps best summarized in one of John Hall-Stevenson's doggerels, in which Sterne is speaking:

Therefore, I have no notion
That is not form'd, like the designing
Of the peristaltic motion;
Vermicular; twisting and twining;
Going to work
Just like a bottle-skrew upon a cork.¹⁴

Such crazy movement represents the way the mind actually works. Thus, Toby's "smoak-jack" represents a concrete reality to be explained, and the reader can only laugh at the gap between that complexity and Locke's obscurity and simplicity.

Walter's hobby-horsical theory of noses is a caricature of Lockean reasoning. At first Tristram indirectly exposes the imprisonment of Walter's intellect by using a sequence of analogous episodes. In chapter xxxi he begins with a comically circular definition of "nose." He next reduces Locke's theory of property to a matter of perspiration (xxxiv). Locke had said that private property exists because a man may be said to add labor to objects otherwise held in common. For Tristram what is added cannot be an airy abstraction like labor but must be something con-

crete like sweat. Ironically, the concrete term questions the validity of the abstraction: what can we mean when we say labor is *added* to material objects? Isn't that way of speaking simply another misleading fabrication of the intellect? Tristram then makes an allusion to his book, supplying the reader with the marbled page as its "motley emblem" (xxxvi). Without extensive learning the reader will never penetrate its moral, Tristram declares. Yet the emblem has no allegorical meaning, so the reader's learning is inapplicable to the marbled page (the essence of the novel) in the same way that John Locke's and Walter Shandy's theories are inapplicable to reality. Turning more directly to Walter's learning on noses, Tristram discloses its fruitlessness and ineffectuality by presenting us with Walter's penknife emendation of Erasmus's dialogue for school boys which only issues in an obscene pun (xxxvii); Hafen Slawkenbergius's grand folio on noses, a large book of worthless tales written by a man whose name is made from "chamber pot" and "offal" (xxxviii); and, a reenactment (xli) of the failure of communication dramatized in chapter xviii, another object lesson in the imprisonment of reason.

Although frequently representing a standard of humane values, Toby is also touched by the motif of imprisonment. This is most obvious when, like Walter's, his learned investigations go in circles. He finally decides on a new bridge

of the marquis *d'Hopital's* invention, which the younger *Bernouilli* has so well and learnedly described, as your worships may see, — *Act. Erud. Lips.* an. 1695, — to these a lead weight is an eternal ballance, and keeps watch as well as a couple of centinels, inasmuch as the construction of them was a curve-line approximating to a cycloid, — if not a cycloid itself.

My uncle *Toby* understood the nature of a parabola as well as any man in *England*, — but was not quite such a master of the cycloid; — he talked however about it every day; — the bridge went not forwards. — We'll ask somebody about it, cried my uncle *Toby* to *Trim*. (xxv)

Theory leads not to execution but to a maze of abstractions. On the other hand, Toby's benevolence has practical conse-

quences in this volume when Walter has a fit of coughing (xxiv) and is on his bed of grief (xxix; IV, ii). But, at the same time, his benevolence, like his learning, is often shown to be impractical, without consequences, and therefore imprisoned and impotent. The hobby-horsical character of Toby's benevolence is suggested in chapter xxxiv when Tristram apostrophizes Toby's goodness as it is memorialized in his bowling green. The bowling green is literally a cul-de-sac (closed off by the hornbeam hedge) and thus memorializes a private state of mind, not public actions. This idea of imprisonment is underscored in chapter xxxiv by the juxtaposition of Tristram's apostrophe with the long description of Walter's theory of noses. Both the proximity of the two hobby-horses and the fact that they are explicitly paralleled (for example, Walter would "intrench and fortify" his theories "with as many circumvallations and breast-works as my uncle *Toby* would a citadel") reinforce the notion that Toby's benevolence is self-enclosed like Walter's theory. Several earlier episodes in this volume confirm this suggestion. In chapter xxii, Walter admonishes Toby that his expenses for the bowling green will ruin his fortune, to which Toby replies: "What signifies it if they do, brother . . . so long as we know 'tis for the good of the nation." Private illusion absorbs public reality; Toby's world is a closed system. Similarly, Toby's pity for the Devil in chapter xi is at once charming and outrageous, for it indicates a benevolence wholly incapable of discriminating its objects — in sum, a benevolence unrelated to the exigencies of reality. Last, the self-generating quality of Toby's benevolence is seen in chapter v when, although Walter's appearance indicates rage, Toby, "the benignity of whose heart interpreted every motion of the body in the kindest sense the motion would admit of," ignores these external signs and blames only the tailor who cut the pocket so low. Since Toby's benevolence is a function of his character, his responses, objectively speaking, are sometimes right (as here) and sometimes comically extravagant

or ineffectual. Benevolence is imprisoned with the self and can only be made synchronous with external reality by chance.

The two remaining motifs in this section, the tyranny of circumstances and sexuality, are both developed in association with the Shandys' hobby-horses, commenting ironically upon the intellectual concerns of this section. The circumstances motif appears in chapter xxvi when Walter's hopes in his child are overturned by the intricate chain of trivial events described in the birth section. Since his happiness is destroyed by such a small setback, Tristram explains the cause of Walter's excessive grief, which is "the force of education, and the prevalence of opinions long derived from ancestors!" (xxxiii). Walter's absurd belief in the nose as a sign of sexual and intellectual potency is not merely a whim but the product of childhood conditioning: "in great measure he might be said to have suck'd this in, with his mother's milk (xxxiii). Walter, the would-be Lockean philosopher, is here a victim of the irrational association described by Locke in the *Essay* (II, xxxiii). In that famous chapter, Locke suggested that the mind is shaped by concatenations of seemingly trivial circumstances over which reason has little control. Walter's mind, like Tristram's destiny, is governed by apparently insignificant circumstances; both characters are helpless preys of small accidents.

The motif of sexuality in this section alludes ironically to the sexual impotence of the Shandy brothers and, more interestingly, is associated with their hobby-horses. Indeed, the term "hobby-horse" is a slang for "whore," a pun which underscores this association.¹⁵ In terms of the sexuality motif, hobby-horses are Shandean efforts to compensate for sexual impotence. The Shandys can create only through their hobby-horses; they only can beget their private worlds. Yet, as we have seen, the hobby-horses are also presented in terms of the imprisonment motif and so are most imperfect compensations because they are

themselves enclosed, impotent systems. In this way, rich and complicated ironies develop because the sexuality motif points up simultaneously Shandean sexual and intellectual impotence. Toby is victimized by these ironies when sexual innuendoes and military language interpenetrate in chapters xxiv and xxv with references to his siege of the widow Wadman (looking ahead to volume IX); Trim's wooing of Bridget and their ambiguous tumbling into the draw bridge, which carries the further suggestion of nasal bridges flattened by venereal disease; and Trim's effort at explanation which involves such suggestive terms as "fossé" and "cuvette". Implicating himself as well, Walter adds phallic imagery with a "panegyric upon the *battering rams* of the ancients," and fittingly concludes with an obscene pun on "sally port":¹⁶ "no bridge, or bastion or sally port, that every was constructed in this world, can hold out against such artillery" as Trim's. Finally, these references are amplified by Toby's experiments with hinged bridges which "stand bolt upright" and "thrusting bridges" which are "made to draw back horizontally, to hinder a passage; and to thrust forwards again to gain a passage" (xxv). Turning to Walter, we recall from Bruscambille that Walter's whole theory of noses rests upon an obscene joke which surfaces in this section particularly in the Shandy family history (xxxii-xxxiii) and in the dispute over whether the nose begets the fancy or the fancy begets the nose (xxxviii). These references are complemented by references to Walter's solacing himself with Bruscambille as "your worship solaced yourself with your first mistress" (xxxv), Tickletoby's mare (xxxvi), and the obscene emendation of Erasmus in which *ad excitandum focum* becomes either *ad excitandum locum* or *ficum* (xxxvii).

The third section of volume III contains Tristram's self-revelatory opinions on life and art. It establishes particularly Tristram's impotence as a writer and thinker, most obviously by allusions to the collapsing organization of the narrative.¹⁷ The prime example is "The Author's Preface"

with its unconventional (but pedantically correct) placement. However, the "Preface" is also subtly developed in itself, for it is Tristram's formal portrait of himself as an impotent Shandy. Although all of the motifs appear in the "Preface," by far the most important is imprisonment of reason. It is revealed through Tristram's lack of logical control, the "Preface" resembling one of Bruscombille's prologues which are tissues of comic self-contradiction and illogical argument. There is a splendid irony in Tristram, at his entrance into the world, being the literal fulfillment of Walter's years of studying Bruscombille and, at the same time, exposing Bruscombille's, Walter's, and his own imbecility. The entire "Preface" subverts itself logically with the result that wit and judgment, instead of being reconciled as Tristram says they ought to be, are pitted against each other. Imprisoned within these contradictions, Tristram cannot reach meaningful logical conclusions.

He begins by asserting that he put into his book "all the wit and judgment (be it more or less) which the great author and bestower of them had thought fit originally to give me, — so that, as your worships see, — 'tis just as God pleases." Resignation to God's wisdom is undercut by Tristram's subsequent "zealous wish and fervent prayer" that all men's brains be packed as full as they can be of wit and judgment. On the heels of his wish, however, Tristram takes off in the opposite direction, declaring "there is but a certain quantum [of wit and judgment] stored up for us all." After wandering through an analysis of mind in relation to climate, Tristram returns to his original view that God in His wisdom disposes wit and judgment in accordance with our needs, and confesses "that the fervent wish in your behalf with which I set out, was no more than the first insinuating *How d'ye* of a caressing prefacer stifling his reader, as a lover sometimes does a coy mistress into silence." Yet, juxtaposed with this conclusion is a satirical picture of what the world would be like if wit and judgment were as easily procured as Tristram

had wished. Ironically, we are shown that an increase in these faculties leads men out of the present orderly system based on vice into a chaos of virtue. The shift from resignation to satire, with the implication of dissatisfaction with present conditions, only further disrupts logical continuity. The "Preface" as a whole comes to bear on the closing analogy between wit and judgment and the knobs on the back of Tristram's chair. Tristram's ostensible purpose in the "Preface" is to show that Locke's distinction between wit and judgment is false; in the same way that the chair looks ridiculous with one knob removed, so to conceive of a man of only wit or judgment is foolish. But the analogy is comically misleading. For Locke, wit and judgment were the mental operations which made all knowledge possible; they were the highest ornaments of the human frame in a functional sense. The knobs on Tristram's chair are its highest, most ornamental features only in a physical or decorative sense. Thus, wit reaches out for an analogy which judgment could never accept as valid; the two faculties in Tristram's analogy are set against one another just as they had been during the earlier course of the "Preface" when the illogical veering of the argument undermined its coherence. The "Preface" does indeed "speak for itself" as Tristram had hoped; it shows us that Tristram is a true Shandy, imprisoned within the warring faculties of his mind.

My analysis of volume III does not purport to include all its themes and motifs, not to mention those of the whole novel. Using the concept of spatial form, I have presented a paradigm of a structure pervading the novel: reflexive reference operates within and among motifs completely to unify the work. Even from this partial analysis, we can see how apparently insignificant details necessarily interconnect throughout volume III. Slop's close-cut fingernails, Tristram's wildly self-contradictory "Preface," and Walter's panegyric on the battering rams of the ancients have no relationship in themselves. However, they inter-

lock through the theme of impotence: though intrinsically each image and event has little meaning, each acquires meaning as part of a network of images and events expressing the theme of impotence in its various aspects. The extraordinary density of these reflexive references, suggesting total integration of all compositional elements, is one of the novel's most remarkable features and perhaps its greatest formal triumph.

NOTES

- ¹*An Essay on Genius* (London, 1774), pp. 52-54.
- ²See, for example: A. A. Mendilow, *Time and the Novel* (1952; rpt. New York: Humanities Press, 1965), pp. 158-99; Alan Dugald McKillop, *The Early Masters of English Fiction* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1955), pp. 198-204; Henri Fluchère, *Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick*, tr. and abr. Barbara Bray (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 26-89; William Bowman Piper, *Laurence Sterne* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), pp. 31-46; William Freedman, "Tristram Shandy: The Art of Literary Counterpoint," *MLQ*, 32 (1971), 268-80; Elgin W. Mellown, "Narrative Technique in *Tristram Shandy*," *PLL*, 9 (1973), 263-70.
- ³"Spatial Form in Modern Literature" was originally published in *Sewanee Review*, 53 (1945), 221-40, 433-56, 643-53. It has been widely reprinted in various forms, but the best version is the slightly expanded and revised one in Frank's *The Widening Gyre* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1963), pp. 3-62.
- ⁴See: Ronald Paulson, "Hogarth and the English Garden: Visual and Verbal Structures," in *Encounters*, ed. John Dixon Hunt (New York: Norton, 1971), pp. 82-95; and, John Somer, "Geodesic Vonnegut; Or, If Buckminster Fuller Wrote Novels," in *The Vonnegut Statement*, ed. Jerome Klinkowitz and John Somer (New York: Dell, 1973), pp. 221-54.
- ⁵Stedmond, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), pp. 11-29; Holtz, *Image and Immortality* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1971) pp. 90-119.
- ⁶*Number and Pattern in the Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 161.
- ⁷See the review of Brooks by Robert W. Uphaus in *ECS*, 8 (1974), pp. 116-19.
- ⁸The text of *Tristram Shandy* cited is that edited by James A. Work (New York, 1940). All references (to volume and chapter) have been inserted into the text.

- ⁹*Pensées Facetieuses* (Cologne, 1709), pp. 61-62. The passage may be translated: "One could as well say it of a Painter, of a Goldsmith, of the author of a paltry book, and generally of a variety of things having no relevance to the taste of Gentlemen who style themselves fine-nosed; their feeling is that anyone who has no nose at all is contemptible and does not even deserve the light of day. And that is the reason why one customarily hides one's arse as it is a face without a nose and contrariwise one always uncovers the face as it has a nose in the middle of it; a man without a nose is repellent to women. Albertus Magnus the physiognomist as well as Trismegistus the scholar says that women think of big noses as noble, and well-bred middle-sized ones as satisfying, and little ones as having good inclinations."
- ¹⁰The structural account to follow cannot adequately recognize the comic tone of the volume. We should remember that the impact of specific incidents is conditioned by Tristram's voice and that the entire network of relations in volume III rests on nonsense.
- ¹¹I owe this point to Mellown, "Narrative Technique in *Tristram Shandy*."
- ¹²The obstetrical background of volume III has been well described by Arthur H. Cash, "The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr. Burton," in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. R. F. Brissenden (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1966), pp. 133-54.
- ¹³Marjorie and C. H. B. Quennell, *A History of Everyday Things in England*, 4 vols. (London: B. T. Batsford, Ltd., 1918-34), II, 115-16 and fig. 65.
- ¹⁴*Works*, 3 vols. (London, 1795), III, 30.
- ¹⁵See, s.v.: Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961).
- ¹⁶See, s.v.: J. S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Slang and Its Analogues* (1890-1904; rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1970).
- ¹⁷See: xxiii, xxxiv, xxxviii.