

Self-Reflexive Metafictional Games in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*

Şule Okuroğlu Özün

Middle East Technical University

ÖZET *Tristram Shandy* İngiliz Edebiyatı'nın sıradışı eserlerinden biridir. Roman, günümüz teorilerinden iki yüzyıl kadar önce yazılmasına rağmen birçok üst-kurgusal tekniği incelemek için iyi bir örnektir. Roman Fielding'in *Tom Jones* ve Richardson'ın *Pamela* adlı eserlerinin çağdaşı olsa da bu yapısal bütünlük içeren eserlerle hemen hemen hiç benzerlik göstermez. Romanda Tristram anlamı belirleyen geleneksel anlatıcı rolünden uzaktır ve biçimsel özellikleri tam ve sıralı bir hikaye anlatmak uğruna feda etmez. Bunun yerine Tristram, bilinçli ve kendini yansıtan bir şekilde kurgusal dünyasını okuyucularının gözü önünde oluşturur. Bir üstkurgusal eser gibi *Tristram Shandy* kendi yazım aşamasını anlatır. Olanları yansıtmak yerine yazım aşamasının farkında olan roman, kendi kurgusallığını absurd bir şekilde açığa vurur ve üst-kurmaca türüne örnek teşkil eder.

ANAHTAR KELİMELER üst-kurgu, kendini yansıtmaya, *Tristram Shandy*, geleneksel roman, realizm

ABSTRACT *Tristram Shandy* is one of the most extraordinary novels in English literature. Although the novel is written two hundred years before all the contemporary theories, it is a good example for examining the application of several metafictional devices. The novel is the contemporary of Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Richardson's *Pamela*; however, it bears little resemblance to these sequential and structurally unified novels. In the novel Tristram does not perform the conventional narrator role as a meaning creating father to his work, and does not sacrifice the formal qualities of the text in order to narrate a complete and sequential story; instead of all these, Tristram consciously and explicitly underlines that he is composing his fictional world in front of his readers. Like a metafictional text *Tristram Shandy* uncovers its own fictionality. By bringing its own formal functions into absurd prominence and focusing on the self-conscious act of writing rather than on the thing being represented, *Tristram Shandy* committed itself to a type called metafiction. The aim of this paper is to seek out the self-reflexive metafictional devices in *Tristram Shandy*.

KEYWORDS metafiction, self-reflexivity, *Tristram Shandy*, conventional novel, realism

SELF-REFLEXIVE METAFICTIONAL GAMES IN *THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY*

Due to Einstein's theory of relativity, the uncertainty principle of Heisenberg, World Wars, the use of nuclear weapons, the application of sophisticated technology, the use of computers in every field, the development of a network of TV images, advertising and other theories and circumstances, both the identity and the position of man have become highly ambiguous. Especially after the breakdown of the idea of modernity, skepticism toward two terms, "advancement" and "civilization" have shaped a self-conscious sensibility based upon uncertainty rather than stability. Above all, in the field

of literature and literary theory, the idea of skepticism is furthered by two important names: Saussure and Derrida. Increased social, political and cultural self-consciousness have influenced the novel writing and in line with this; contemporary novelists have tended to become more conscious of the theoretical issues engaged in forming fictions. Thus, over the last decades parallel to these changing parameters, especially with the emergence of postmodernist theories, a more comprehensive cultural and social interest in the problem of reality and how man constructs his experience of the world have dominated the idea of fiction.

In order to depict the changes in fiction Robert Scholes states that “in the twentieth century it has become increasingly apparent that realism itself, instead of being simply the truest reflection of the world, was simply a formal device like any other, a tool to be put aside when it had lost its cutting edge.”¹ The necessity for “such renewal and transformation came to be increasingly felt in the early decades of our century”² with the coinage of the term metafiction and the most comprehensive definition of the term was shaped by Patricia Waugh in 1984:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.³

Through reflecting its own process of construction, metafiction not only asks questions about its own present condition but also about the experiences of man in the postmodern world. By doing so, metafictional self-consciousness as a response to reality enables the reader not to get answers about the reality but to ask questions about it, which may be even more important.

Although written two hundred years before all the contemporary theories, Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (from now on it is going to be referred as *Tristram Shandy*) is a good example for examining the application of various metafictional self-reflexive devices since the novel “certainly does not satisfy the usual expectations as to how a novel should be organized, but that is

-
1. Robert Scholes, *Fabulation and Metafiction*, (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1980), p.169.
 2. Robert Alter, *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p.159.
 3. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p.2.

because it is not the usual sort of novel.”⁴ *Tristram Shandy* presents an extreme in novelistic interpretation, since the “presumed events of the narrative of Tristram’s autobiography and the Shandy family history, are not only told out of order, but are frequently cut off and fragmented.”⁵ Due to the fact that it is a “kaleidoscopic novel: rich and multicolored, with many complicated and beautiful patterns” which “thematizes fictional representation of reality, and...limitations of language,” for its time, the novel is highly unconventional in its narrative technique.⁶ Even the title of the novel suggests a play upon the novelistic tradition of its time. In the title instead of presenting the adventures of his hero, Sterne introduces his readers to the life and opinions of the protagonist. Although the novel is the contemporary of Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and Richardson’s *Pamela*, *Tristram Shandy* bears little resemblance to the sequential and structurally unified novels.

Within the conventional frame, the author invents a narrator who tells the whole story and also who stands as the transcendental being that produces the realities for the readers. However, “it is *Tristram Shandy*, the self-conscious narrator of his own life story, who tears the book apart or, if one prefers, holds it together.”⁷ In *Tristram Shandy*, readers cannot learn even the name of the narrator until Book I, Chapter IV and unconventionally they cannot come across the birth of the narrator until Book III. Tristram does not perform the conventional narrator role as a meaning creating father to his work, and does not sacrifice the formal qualities of the text in order to narrate a complete and sequential story. Tristram’s role in the novel is exactly the same as the role of a scriptor in metafiction. In metafictional texts, in complete contrast to a conventional narrator, “scriptor is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing... there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written *here and now*.”⁸ Within the conventional frame, the author invents a narrator who tells the whole story and also who stands as the transcendental being that produces the realities for the reader. This is not the case in *Tristram Shandy*. All we know about the world of Tristram is what he chooses to reveal to us. Tristram does not try to enforce pre-determined

4. D. W. Jefferson, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Tradition of Learned Wit” in Melvyn New (ed.), *Tristram Shandy* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p.17.

5. Jeffrey Williams, *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition* (UK: Cambridge UP), p.24.

6. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1988), p.1.

7. Wayne Booth, “The Self Conscious Narrator Comic Fiction before *Tristram Shandy*” in M. New (ed.), *Tristram Shandy* (London: Macmillan 1992), p.37.

8. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author” [translated by S. Heath] in *Image--Music--Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p.143.

meanings or to create outside referents for the sake of reality principle; what he is creating is just an artefact. Thus the signs on the printed page are not the “line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning (the “message” of the Author-God) but are multi-dimensional signifiers” and this multiplicity results in “the birth of the reader” and at the same time the “Death of the Author.”⁹ In Book IX, Chapter 8, Tristram builds an analogy between pen and his life by saying “life follows my pen.” He is aware of the fact that what he is creating is a linguistic world.

The most powerful self-reflexive device of Tristram’s narration is his direct addresses to the reader. Tristram deconstructs the narrative space between the author and the reader; and both consciously and reflexively makes his readers take part in his writing process. He demands the patience of his readers for his unconventional method and informs them about how to read his book. Tristram consciously draws the attention to his unconventional narrative style by saying, “[y]ou must have a little patience...my dear friend and companion, if you should think somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out, bear with me, - and let me go on, and tell my story my own way.”¹⁰ In another example Tristram sends a female reader back to retrace some readings since she has not come to all possible conclusions:

“----- How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, *that my mother was not a papist*. ---- Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to re-peat it over again, that I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing. -- Then, Sir, I must have missed a page. -- No, Ma- dam, -- you have not missed a word. --- - Then I was asleep, Sir. -- My pride, Ma- dam, cannot allow you that refuge. ---- Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter. -- That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again.”¹¹

When the lady departs, Tristram informs the rest of the readers about the book and its nature. There are a number of examples for Tristram’s conscious addresses to the reader. In Book I, Chapter 1 the reader is called “dear Sir”, in Chapter 4 Tristram addresses to a female reader as “Madam”, in Chapter 6 the reader is again called “Sir” plus “my dear friend and companion.” Such words as “in which the reader is likely to see me” and “I know there are readers in the world...who find themselves ill at ease” include readers in the process of writing .¹²

9. Roland Barthes, “The Death of the Author”, p.148.

10. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (London: Wordsworth, 1996), p.6.

11. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.20.

12. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.1.

What is striking about Tristram's "own way" is his digressive style. Tristram self reflexively comments on his writing technique which is digressive and at the same time progressive. In Chapter 22, he explores elaborately that although he utilizes digressions, he simultaneously shapes the progression of his own plot structure; as a consequence, he explicitly challenges realistic, sequential and causal linearity:

"— This is vile work. —For which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going ; — and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits."¹³

In the same chapter Tristram makes it clear that digressions are the essence of his narration:

"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."¹⁴

Throughout the novel, Tristram introduces numerous digressions which distort the linearity of the narration and parody the novelistic tradition of his time. According to Locke, "disparate thoughts and ideas are linked together without any logical or causal connections."¹⁵ Therefore, words and actions are under the control of unconscious motives. A conventional writer, through selecting the events taking place in a span of the time of a novel, composes a complete story. These ideas give birth to one of the recurrent self-reflexive devices of *Tristram Shandy*, which is about the difficulty of selection. *Tristram Shandy* opens with a romantic view of sexual intercourse; but, this romantic view is distracted by a mundane thought about winding a clock. This opening scene becomes the central metaphor for the writing process. The very first scene of the novel at the same time is the first digression of the book and the first barrier against the linear progression. In Book I, Tristram overtly states that he does not intend to confine himself to the literary principles of Horace and to other previous writers by claiming, "I find it necessary to consult everyone a little in his turn; and therefore must beg pardon for going on a little further...I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done...I shall

13. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.22.

14. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.22.

15. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, p.6.

confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived."¹⁶ In his new way, these associations intrigue Tristram with their irrational and unconscious nature. Although the novel seems quite a long one in physical terms, it does not include a long and complete story. From one event to another, Tristram moves among his digressions. The major parts of his story can be summarized in this way. The book includes three major fragments. The first one is about Tristram's birth and the theories of Walter Shandy through which he plans to control his child's upbringing. This part of the novel occupies the books until Book VI. The second fragment deals with Toby's battlefield stories and his courtship of the Widow Wadman. In the third one, Tristram shares his illness and his impending death with his readers. These fragments are not clearly separated from one another since Tristram moves in different time schemes, plus all these fragments include some other diversions that are unfinished. Tristram is not born until Book III, and when he is born his nose is crushed by the doctor's forceps in the process. He is baptized but given a wrong name accidentally. His father works on an encyclopedia for the education of his son slowly. Walter Shandy could not be successful in his process since he cannot keep up with the pace of Tristram's growth. Aged five, Tristram is accidentally circumcised by a sash window. The adult Tristram visits France, the widow Wadman falls in love with Uncle Toby, and wonders about the exact place of Uncle Toby's war wound. A very long novel can be abridged in a few sentences like these. Tristram's statement at the beginning of the novel frees him from the limitations of the conventional expectations. Thus, *Tristram Shandy* is not a novel dealing with what happens; instead of this, it deals with the writing process that takes place.

For Federman, the digressive writing process shapes the metafictional discourse; in other words, "sequences, scenes, word-designs, sections, chapters must become digressive from one another" to offer "multiple possibilities of rearrangement in the process of reading."¹⁷ Tristram does not intend to follow a causal, sequential and logical plot structure that leads to conventional expectations in readers' mind. The digressive nature of the writing process creates fragments and these fragments reflexively distort the time sequence of the novel. The time span of a realist novel includes years to complete a story that has a certain beginning, middle and an end. A realist writer "normally wants the reader to become lost in the story, to believe in the characters, and turn the pages in suspense to find out what is going to happen"; moreover, "he does all this as if the novel's content

16. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.32

17. Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays* (New York: New York Press, 1993), p.42.

were real, not imaginary.”¹⁸ All the events happening in these years are based on cause and effect relationship. Tristram begins his writing process at the earliest possible point wishing “to go on tracing everything in it, as Horace says, *ab Ovo*.”¹⁹ While trying to cover every issue, Tristram leaves the fragments unfinished; so, he creates atemporality that the readers are not accustomed to. Tristram suspends all the stories in the readers’ mind, makes them imagine the rest, and involves them in his writing process. For example, In Book III, Chapter 20, Tristram stops writing “The Author’s Preface” saying that “all my heroes are off my hands... ’tis is the first time I have had a moment to spare.” In Book II, Chapter 8, Tristram refers to another fragment, “I shall be able to find a place for it in the third volume or not. It is about an hour and a half’s tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rang the bell.” In the book, Walter Shandy’s *Tristrapaedia*, the story of Aunt Dinah and the coachman, the tale of the King of Bohemia, story of the uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman all remain unfinished. As said by Tristram “when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in reader’s fancy.”²⁰ Producing the sense of incompleteness towards his fragmented stories, Tristram shows that his story is just a production. Tristram “insists that readers forget their expectations of simple linear chronological narrative and follow wherever his whims or private associations lead.”²¹

Through applying the method of selection, Tristram at the same time parodies the minute- by- minute realism of a conventional writer. In Book IV and Chapter X, Tristram defamiliarizes Mr. Shandy’s posture by making the action slow down. In another example, in a two-chapter-long period Tristram narrates the attempt of his father and Uncle Toby to get downstairs in a self-reflexive manner:

“Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs? For we are got no father yet than to the first landing, and there are fifteen more steps down to the bottom; for aught I know, as my father and my uncle Toby are in a talking humour, there may be as many chapters as steps.”²²

This resistance is similar to the Brechtian alienation effect. The formal qualities (*sjuzet*), actually the violation of the conventional expectations, defamiliarizes the readers from

18. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, p.6.

19. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.4.

20. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.33.

21. Betty Rizzo, ““How could you Madam, be so Inattentive?” Tristram’s Relationship with the Reader,” in Melvyn New (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Sterne’s Tristram Shandy* (New York: MLA, 1989), p.67.

22. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.52.

the automatized perception of the novel and creates the alienation effect by reminding them that what is being presented is just an artefact not the mirroring of the reality.

The process of conventional reading is based upon the interpretation of the signs. In order to create the illusion of reality, in the conventional novels a linguistic sign is used as the signified referring to an object of the outside world; moreover, readers are made to believe that the relationship between the sign and the signified is natural. In metafiction, contrary to the language of the realistic conventions, signs do not refer to objects or situations that are presented as the outside reality. William Gass stresses that the words depicted in a work of metafiction are “only imaginatively possible ones” that “need not to be at all like any real one.”²³ In line with this metafictional claim, Tristram discusses the relationship between the signified and the signifier by stating, “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, opaque words, one before another, in a right line, betwixt your own and your readers conception.”²⁴ Tristram uses the term “opaque” to indicate “imperfection of the words” and to explain “the word is not the thing, but only a sign for a conception of it” as well.²⁵ To illustrate, the idea of the hobby-horse becomes a major signifier for the readers. It refers to the obsessions of the people but not with a certain signified. For Tristram, it is the formal concern of his novel writing, and he follows a kind of hobby-horsical movement: forward and backward. For Walter Shandy, hobby-horse refers to his philosophical views on his child’s upbringing. In uncle Toby’s case, it is the obsession with his map, the detailed study of fortification and military science. For instance, Tristram introduces his uncle Toby as a “man with very little choice in words.”²⁶ Since there is a gap between the sign and the referent, Toby cannot transmit the things in his mind truly. Tristram explains this by claiming, “the true cause of the confusion in my uncle Toby’s discourse” is “the unsteady uses of the word.”²⁷ Like a metafictionist Tristram Shandy abandons centers and deconstructs oppositional hierarchies; as a replacement for these, it offers *différance*, which is the play of signifiers which is the fusion of delay and being different. For Holtz, “only in recent years have scholars started to see how basic is Tristram Shandy’s concern for language.”²⁸

21. William Gass, *Fiction and Figures of Life* (New York: Knopf, 1970), p.9.

22. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.25.

23. William Holtz, *Image and Immortality: A Study of Tristram Shandy* (USA: Brown University Press, 1970), p.66.

24. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.21.

25. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p. 2

26. William Holtz, *Image and Immortality: A Study of Tristram Shandy*, p.66.

Since metafictional texts construct multiple realities through linguistic signs it can be concluded that characters are the parts of this process of construction. Within the frame of realistic conventions a linguistic sign is seen as a referent to the real world, so the productive nature of language is suppressed; as a result, characters are portrayed according to the verisimilitude principle and they are depicted for the reader as real people. Traditionally, the protagonist of the book progresses in time, s/he becomes educated, and usually reaches adulthood. While the hero or protagonist who is blessed with a proper name, an age, parental ties, a nationality, a past, and a social role functions within all these predetermined conditions, the “creatures” in metafiction are busy with their own creations only out of language. On the word of Larry McCaffery,²⁹ characters in metafiction “are incorporeal essences and definitions which are assigned a name and whose physical characteristics are limited to the sounds, shape and pitch, and rhythm of the words out of which they are created” while “we often think we can visualize characters and empathize with them much as we can with our next-door neighbor.” Even though a realist novel usually begins with the birth of the protagonist in *Tristram Shandy* the time span before the hero’s birth is given priority. In the novel, Walter Shandy, Elizabeth Shandy (Mrs. Shandy), Captain Toby Shandy (Uncle Toby), Corporal Trim, Dr. Slop, Parson Yorick and all the other characters are linguistic entities living inside the text. Readers cannot witness the psychological conflicts of these characters, their inner thoughts, or even their backgrounds due to the fact that the stories narrated by Tristram are all fragmented and incomplete. Realistic fiction presupposes “an irreducible individual psyche as the subject of its characterization;”³⁰ however, Sterne does not reveal the inner psyche of his characters, does not portray them according to the verisimilitude principle and he does not depict these characters as real people for the reader.

So as to attract all the attention to the creative process of the text, the self-reflexive metafiction is “no longer progressing from left to right, top to bottom, in a straight line, and along the design of an imposed plot;” instead it will follow “the contours of the writing itself as it takes shape within the space of the page”; in other words, it “will circle around itself, create new and unexpected movements and figures.”³¹ This new type of paginal syntax wipes out the conventional elements associated with the book form,

29. Larry McCaffery, *The Metafictional Muse* (London: Pittsburgh Press, 1982), p.156.

30. Ronald Sukenick, *The Death of the Novel and Other Stories* (New York: Dial Press, 1969), p.41.

31. Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, p.43.

join the process of creation. This self-reflexive writing process mirrors the nature of the text for which the aesthetic philosophy and artistic practice are more important.

In a traditional reading process, readers take a novel expecting to face up to written words arranged in a straight line to be read from left to right and top to bottom. Proclaiming that “words, sentences, paragraphs (and of course the punctuation) and their position on the page and in the book must be rethought and rewritten so that new ways...of reading can be created”, Federman underlines the necessity of using typographical elements in metafiction.³⁶ With his unusual narrative style, Tristram creates some feeling of shock. After Yorick’s death, instead of words Tristram gives way to black pages, and subverts the expectations of the readers. Similar to this, in Book III, Chapter 36, Tristram places two marbled pages which totally distort the linearity of a realistic-page-set up. Tristram leaves a blank page for his readers to draw their own version of Widow Wadman and forces them to take part in the creative process. Tristram consciously cuts his narration, and wants his readers to “call for pen and ink...to put [their] fancy in it.”³⁷

“Conventionally, pages are to be filled with words by the author” and they should follow a sequential line; however, Tristram’s “sense of the book’s physicality allows him to leave pages blank, or to pretend that he’s torn a page out altogether.”³⁸ In Book I, Chapter 25, Tristram declares that “what was to come in the next page” he will “tear out of [his] book.” Furthermore, in Book IV, he consciously and explicitly leaves out a whole chapter. Although he knows that “there is a whole chapter wanting” there, he makes “a chasm of ten pages in the book.”³⁹ In the next chapter, Tristram explains that he has omitted those pages since they are not in line with the stylistic process of his own construction. He intentionally and openly refuses to draw the attention of his readers to the story; contrary to this view, he desires to make his readers aware of the formal construction.

“It has now been named, is fiction about fiction - that is, fiction that includes within itself a commentary on its own narrative and/or linguistic identity” says Linda Hutcheon, in her book entitled *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, and employs the word “narcissistic” to designate metafictional self-awareness.⁴⁰ In line with what is articulated by

36. Raymond Federman, *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, p.41.

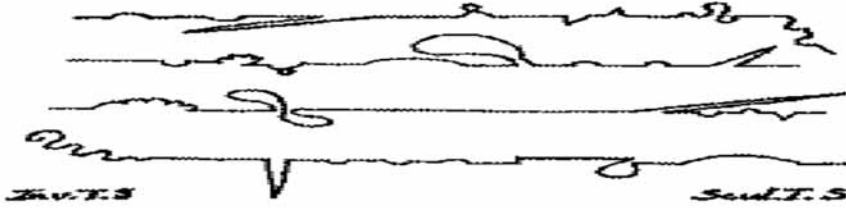
37. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.38.

38. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, p.63.

39. The pagination in the Wordsworth edition goes from page 208 to page 219.

40. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen Ltd., 1985), p.1.

Hutcheon, Tristram in the novel comments on his narrative style and how he is forming his textual world. The most outstanding example of self- reflexive typography is displayed in Book:⁴¹



These graphic illustrations show narrative lines in *Tristram Shandy*. So as to exhibit both the progressive and the digressive nature of his writing process in Book II, III, IV and V, Tristram draws four wiggly diagrams. “These are not drawings relating to the content of the novel, but rather to the “technical aspects of novel-writing.”⁴² Just like a metafictional text, *Tristram Shandy* explicitly discusses its own creative process with its readers and does not try to make them forget the formal qualities that create the text.

For Victor Shklovsky, the technique of art is to make the familiar objects seem strange.⁴³ Tristram constantly baffles the readers’ accustomed process of reading by employing typographical devices, by giving references to the difficulty of writing, by addressing directly to the readers, by using a digressive act of writing, and so on. The mimesis of the outside world in realistic tradition is transformed into the “mimesis of process” in metafiction and this process is mirrored overtly by metafictional self-reflexivity.⁴⁴ The readers’ desire to become lost in the story is deconstructed by Tristram’s conscious and self-reflexive insistence on his writing process. Tristram deals with what is called literariness, by laying bare all its formal devices, and rejects the realist expectation of language as a transparent tool. As stated by Shklovsky, “by violating the form, he forces us to attend to it; and, for him, this awareness of the form through its violation constitutes the content of the novel.”⁴⁵

41. Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, p.40.

42. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, p.102.

43. Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique” in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: Lemon and Resis, 1965), p.57

44. Linda Hutcheon, *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox* (London: Methuen Ltd., 1985), p.5.

45. Victor Shklovsky, “Art as Technique”, p.57.

While defining the metafictional rise in the novel and the changing realities of the 80s Patricia Waugh points out that the “increased awareness of “meta” levels of discourse and experience is partly a consequence of an increased social and cultural self-consciousness” and consequently “the simple notion that language passively reflects a coherent, meaningful and objective world is no longer tenable... “meta” terms, therefore, are required in order to explore the relationship between this arbitrary linguistic system and the world to which it apparently refers.”⁴⁶ Even though *Tristram Shandy* was written between the years 1759 and 1767, Sterne’s view of the novel form is very close to the contemporary self-reflexive metafiction. Metafictional reflexivity “uncover[s] a great deal about the whole narrative circuit - the codes by which we organize reality, the means by which we organize words about it into narrative, the implications of the linguistic medium we use to do so” and “the means by which the readers are drawn into narrative and the nature of our relation to “actual” states of reality.” Like a professional metafictionist whose aim is “to unmask its own fictionality...not to pretend any longer to pass for reality,” in order to deconstruct the realistic writing process *Tristram* self-consciously and reflexively employs various techniques.⁴⁷ He omits a chapter, tears out a page, displays typographical illustrations, distorts the linear narrative process, and makes comments on the use of language. Thus, *Tristram Shandy* “could be called the first great anti-novel” and at the same time “the archetypal example of reflexive fiction [that] can exist only in opposition to a novel.”⁴⁸ The rejection of the traditional forms of realism is a kind of liberation for the metafictionist since this rejection frees the writers from the imposed limitations of realism such as the verisimilitude principle, true-to-life characterization, and plausibility in constructing the plot structure. By bringing its own formal functions into absurd prominence and focusing on the self-conscious act of writing rather than on the thing being represented, Sterne committed himself to a type called metafiction.

REFERENCES

- Alter, Robert. (1975). *Partial Magic: The Novel as a Self-Conscious Genre*, (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Barthes, Roland. (1977). “The Death of the Author” [translated by S. Heath] in *Image--Music--Text*, (New York: Hill and Wang).

46. Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1984), p.3.

47. Robert Siegle, *The Politics of Reflexivity* (London: Hopkins UP, 1986), p.3.

48. Ruth Whittaker, *Tristram Shandy*, p.75.

- Booth, Wayne. (1992). "The Self Conscious Narrator Comic Fiction before Tristram Shandy" in M. New (ed.), *Tristram Shandy*, (London: Macmillan).
- Federman, Raymond. (1993). *Critifiction: Postmodern Essays*, (New York: New York Press).
- Gass, William. (1970). *Fiction and Figures of Life*, (New York: Knopf).
- Holtz, William. (1970). *Image and Immortality: A Study of Tristram Shandy*, (USA: Brown University Press).
- Hutcheon, Linda. (1985). *Narcissistic Narrative: The Metafictional Paradox*, (London: Methuen Ltd.).
- Jefferson, D.W. (1992). "Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit" in Melvyn New (ed.), *Tristram Shandy* (London: Macmillan).
- McCaffery, Larry. (1982). *The Metafictional Muse*, (London: Pittsburgh Press).
- Rizzo, Betty. (1989). "'How could you Madam, be so Inattentive?'" Tristram's Relationship with the Reader," in Melvyn New (ed.), *Approaches to Teaching Sterne's Tristram Shandy*, (New York: MLA).
- Scholes, Robert. (1980). *Fabulation and Metafiction*, (Chicago: University of Illinois).
- Shklovsky, Victor. (1965). "Art as Technique" in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reiss (eds.), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, (Lincoln: Lemon and Resis).
- Siegle, Robert. (1986). *The Politics of Reflexivity*, (London: Hopkins UP).
- Sterne, Laurence. (1996). *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, (London: Wordsworth).
- Sukenick, Ronald. (1969). *The Deathn of the Novel and Other Stories*, (New York: Dial Press).
- Williams, Jeffry. *Theory and the Novel: Narrative Reflexivity in the British Tradition*, (UK: Cambridge UP).
- Whittaker, Ruth. (1988). *Tristram Shandy*, (Philadelphia: Open University Press).
- Waugh, Patricia. (1984). *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, (New York: Methuen).