To Shake Eternity and Lick Creation: Tristram Shandy and the Carnivalesque Spirit of Time, Language, and Grotesque Realism

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Abstract

The objective of *To Shake Eternity and Lick Creation* is to explore the ways in which *Tristram Shandy,* through the means of time and space, language, and grotesque realism, participates in the carnivalesque spirit of undermining specific *fixed forms* of literary representation. In order to achieve this aim I have established a hybrid of two theoretical positions. The first, and of central importance to this study, is Mikhail Bakhtin's influential analysis of *Rabelais and His World* that explores the various ways in which carnivalesque literature intentionally subverts the handling of the images and structures of the traditional linear novel. Second, and in augmentation to Bakhtin, is Jacques Derrida's treatment of *freeplay* and *difference* that each focus on the unfixed metamorphosis of linguistic degeneration and regeneration. The combination of Bakhtin's unfixed forms, and Derrida's freeplay of language, offer a meaningful approach to Sterne's often chaotic and anti-structural treatment of textual design in *Tristram Shandy*, and the multiple ways in which the text transgresses the limitations of fixed design. Therefore, the carnivalesque mandate of undermining fixed forms, as well as the freeplay that ensues, foreground the ways in which *Tristram Shandy* participates in the carnivalesque spirit of time, language, and characterization.

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Notes on Abbreviations

D = ***Differance***

DC = ***Deconstruction in Context***

DTDB = ***Des Tours de Babel***

ECLIT = ***Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Criticism***

FOCF = ***The Frames of Comic 'Freedom'***

GAP = ***Gargantua and Pantagruel***

GFGP = ***Goethe's Faust: It's Genesis and Purport***

GUTF = ***Gathering up the Fragments***

LD = ***La dissemination***

LOBL = ***Living on — Border Lines***

NCTS = ***New Case Book Studies: Tristram Shandy***

OED = ***Oxford English Dictionary***

OG = ***Of Grammatology***

PDP = ***Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics***

PTAS = ***Probability, Time, and Space***

RAHW = ***Rabelais and His World***

TAP = ***Towards an Aesthetic of the Puppet Theatre***

TDI = ***The Dialogic Imagination***

TE = *The Enlightenment*

TOOT = *The Order of Things*

TS = *Tristram Shandy*

TSW = *Tristram Shandy's World*

WD = *Writing and Difference*

WFG = *Waiting for Godot*

WIA = *What is an Author?*

To Shake Eternity and Lick Creation:

Tristram Shandy and the Carnivalesque

Preface

There is nothing so foolish, when you are at the expense of making an entertainment of this kind, as to order things so badly, as to let your critics and gentry of refined taste run it down ... I guard against them both; for, in the first place, I have left half a dozen places purposely open for them. [1]

And if I speak to you outside of what I have written, these marginal comments cannot have the value of the work itself . . . don't take a preface seriously. The preface announces a project and a project is nothing until it is realized.[2]

I. Presence and Absence and the Compounding of Dualities

Traditionally, it is acceptable practice for a preface to be more like *speech* in its less formal conversational tone -- a different and more ambivalent voice than, say, the formal style to be found in the *writing* of the main text. But a preface, even in its completed state in front of a completed text reminds us of its divided nature, and as such, in true Shandean fashion, reveals itself to be something of a paradox. A preface is never contained entirely within nor stands wholly without the actual circumference of the narrative; it exists spatially outside the language of the main text, but is at once *with* and *in* that language by being semantically forced to share something like a common semiotic DNA.

1. *Tristram Shandy*, p. 104.
2. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p.159.

Therefore, in terms of location and semantic function, a preface is only temporarily included in the textual and linguistic structure of a text through a continuously rotating *presence* inside and *absence* outside the formal parameters of the main text. In *Living On – Border Lines*, Derrida refers to this spatial and linguistic position of the preface as the outer "fold," or the "envelope," of the main text -- the extrinsic edge of a dialogue. Indeed, the presence of the preface in its pre-assigned position has generally been understood as dependent upon, and prior to, the authority of the *stable centre* of discourse that is the main text itself. Further, this traditional linear mode of presentation is claimed to satisfy "humankind's common desire for a *stable centre*, and for the assurance of mastery – through knowing or possessing. And a book, with its ponderable shape and its beginning, middle, and end, stands to satisfy that desire" (OG, XI, italics mine). In other words, the position of a preface within a unified and *fixed* textual structure is an important part and, indeed, a result of the accepted logic of novelistic form that is guided by the *logos*, or linguistic law, of historical repetition.[3]

On the other hand, Sterne manipulates the *fixed forms* of spatial and linguistic representation in *Tristram Shandy* in order to subvert the *presence* and authority of the accepted logos of textual design. In fact, it is this manipulation of accepted forms of representation that creates the distinct carnivalesque persona of this text. For instance, Sterne undermines the notion of the traditional preface, which, instead of being situated at the beginning of the main

3.By this I am referring to the traditional representation of the written novel and order.

text of Volume I, is unceremoniously embedded into the twentieth chapter of Volume III. The displacement of "The Author's Preface" into this arbitrary textual space contradicts the readers' expectations of narrative order, and as a result complicates what is understood to be the *stable centre* of the main text. Not only does this new placement of the preface reveal the malleability or unfixed nature of *spatial* form, Sterne goes so far as to empty the preface of its traditional, hierarchical value by first subjecting the preface to an arbitrary act of displacement and, second, by re-defining its *linguistic* function: "the main good these things do, is only to clarify the understanding, *previous to the application of the argument itself*, in order to free it from any little motes, or specks of opacular matter, which if left swimming therein, might hinder a conception and spoil all" (TS, p.203, italics mine). So, Sterne not only displaces the preface from its accepted position in the textual hierarchy, he also devilishly empties the symbol of its traditional value. In fact, it is this continuous spatial and linguistic displacement in *Tristram Shandy* which produces a text that is itself entirely prefatory in that its completion is always contingent upon circumstances of development that never arrive or simply do not exist. Ironically, however, the function of this deferred progression is to allow the text to be reborn into a new, undetermined, and infinitely potent state.

I have begun my preface with a discourse on prefaces to illustrate the ironic position of dealing with an essentially anti-structural[4] literary text in a

4.Of course the text does have structure, otherwise it would be unreadable. However, for our purposes this inquiry will focus on particular aspects of the carnivalesque anti-structure and freeplay.

structured (and structural) paper. Since *Tristram Shandy* is ultimately built on a series of oppositions based on the binary relationship of *presence* and *absence* (I will return to this important relationship in more detail shortly), and since it is the division or distance between the terms of these oppositions that produce the ironic structure of the novel's design, we must also acknowledge the added irony of integrating Sterne's displaced preface into the more traditional preface of this study. It is important to recognize here at the outset that in order to uncover the ways in which Sterne intentionally satirizes the conventions of accepted representation, we must do so within the confines of the very conventions that he is attempting to manipulate. Therefore, the provocative relationship between the anti-structural aspects of the text combined with the structural approach of this study demands the acknowledgment of the irony of its own "tail-eating"[5] position. Also, the tension between an artificial desire for order and the disorderly nature, or *freeplay*, of language is an integral part of the essential opposition between presence and absence in Sterne's novel. As such, this motion between two points produces what Sterne foregrounds as the unfixed, and therefore illusory, position of presence – of any sense of a *stable centre* in the text.[6]

5.I use this as something similar to what Nietzsche identifies in *The Birth of Tragedy* as: "When the inquirer, having pushed to the circumference, realizes how logic in that place curls about itself and bites its own tail" (p.95).

6.This idea will become particularly relevant in Chapter I. For now, however, it is worth mentioning that the position of Tristram within the text actually undermines the stable progression of the narrative through the linguistic and spatial freeplay that is the result of the de-centred position of the narrator in relation to the author and his interaction with and in the text. A stable centre is a fixed position or fixed representation that controls the surrounding elements and produces order. For more information concerning the notion of the "stable centre" and "fixeforms" see Jacques Derrida's "Structure, Sign, and Play" contained in *Writing and Difference*, p.278-293.

What I intend to examine in this study are the ways in which Sterne manipulates the complex and often self-destructive systems of spatial, linguistic, and character representation in *Tristram Shandy*. In order to achieve this, I propose to establish a hybrid of two separate theoretical positions to more fully ascertain the components of what I see as the anti-structural design of the text. The first, and indeed the most important of these theoretical perspectives is Bakhtin's analysis of the *carnivalesque,* which I have culled from various sources but primarily from his exhaustive analysis of the characteristics of the Medieval carnival contained in *Rabelais and His World.* In this study Bakhtin purports that systems, be they social, historical, or literary, alternate between fixed and unfixed states; unfixed periods of carnival are dependent on their dialectical and dialogical division from traditionally accepted doctrines of fixed social forms. As we will come to see in our application of the carnivalesque to *Tristram Shandy*, the essential function of the carnivalesque is to disrupt otherwise stable systems, to reveal an anti-structural malleability that hides under a thin veneer of stable structure. This is particularly suited for an application to Sterne's novel for two distinct reasons. First, as Bakhtin argues in *The Dialogic Imagination*, the novel is an essentially unstable literary form. He explains that the novel "is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review" (TDI, p.39). Even in its earliest states of evolution, the novel challenged stable literary forms such as the epic and other genres of poetry. As an early example of the development of the English novel, it seems only fitting that *Tristram Shandy*

should be subjected to a carnivalesque analysis. Second, *Tristram Shandy*, with its insistence on topsy-turvydom, grotesque bodies, degradation, and disruption of linguistic spatial and temporal structure, unequivocally participates in the spirit of the carnivalesque. As I discussed in the example of the "preface", the same *laws* which apply to the carnivalesque also become manifest within what Bakhtin defines as "the carnivalization of literature": "All the images of carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis: birth and death ...blessing and curse, ... praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and wisdom" (PDP, p.126), and each is dependent upon the other to produce the desired dialectic.[7] Jung makes a similar point: "between all opposites there obtains so close a bond that no position can be established or even thought of without its corresponding negation, so [that] 'les extremes se touchent.'"[8]

While my interest in Bakhtin's applicability to *Tristram Shandy* broadly entails the carnivalesque and, more specifically, the effect of unfixed forms and the multifarious examples of degradation, the second half of this proposed theoretical equation is manifest less in terms of social issues than in the post-structuralist account of linguistics. So, while Bakhtin will provide us with a method of getting at the essence of *unfixed forms*, Jacques Derrida's analysis of

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7.The carnivalesque, as we shall see, wholly depends on the absence of the fixed systems that it undermines. These fixed systems are essentially vertical constructs such as hierarchies of class and/or religion that become unfixed, and as such achieve a horizontal equality that is characteristic of the medieval carnival before being restored. These issues will be dealt with in more detail in Section II.

8.Jung, Carl. *The Portable Young*. P.256.

the *freeplay* of language will augment and complete the proverbial upturn of our theoretical circle. Derrida's perspective on freeplay (both spatial and linguistic) theorizes a complex kaleidoscope of Shandean systems and traces osculating within its web.[9] Of course, part of the problem with lending too much credence to Derrida's concepts is that they are scattered throughout his books and articles under the guise of different names and a variety of applications.[10] In no way do I wish to suggest that Derrida is the ultimate authority, but his ideas are extremely relevant to and compatible with a Bakhtinian analysis. In order to introduce several of Derrida's key principles as they relate to both the carnivalesque and to *Tristram Shandy*, I will draw upon a variety of sources and contexts.

There is, of course, an important subtext (and possible source of carnivalesque amusement) in this undertaking of relating the composite positions of Sterne, Bakhtin, and Derrida. Although initially these writers may seem light years apart in theoretical orientation, by the time this study is finished I hope to illustrate that this is not necessarily so, that they do share some very solid common ground. Primarily, they all share a common interest in examining the implications of structural disruption—albeit from very different angles. As arguably the preeminent, or at least the most influential thinker of the late twentieth century, Derrida's understanding of the problems at hand is

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9.Jung refers to "the centre is often pictured as a spider in its web" *The Portable Jung*, p.451. The complex linguistic and spatial traces that produce the carnivalesque anti-structure of *Tristram Shandy* are certainly web-like through the nonlinear handling of the narrative.

10.At the same time, Derrida argues that there is no such thing as a centre, or an absolute, so ideas instead of reaching definitive conclusions often segue into other ideas.

extremely complex, and will take much of this paper to work out in detail. For now, however, suffice it to say that Derrida is at his most authoritative when he deals with how invasive the logocentric mindset is to human thought. Unlike many of his disciples, Derrida is painfully aware of his own susceptibility to the trappings of the need for order. However, his discourses on the nature of language and meaning are important because they at least try to come to terms with the self-inverting nature of "truth". Bakhtin, on the other hand, examines the subversion of fixed cultural and literary forms with the careful eye of a sociologist or historian. Bakhtin's model of history is constructed on a binary opposition which will become increasingly important in this paper—that between a stable presence and an unstable negation or absence of structure. Finally, Sterne, as the direct object of this study, exhibits a historically precocious propensity for participating in what Bakhtin refers to as the "novelization" of literary form. At his best, he disrupts systems of literary representation which, in the years of the enlightenment that directly preceded him, remained stable and, to be quite honest, classically conservative. So, in order to avoid the "fear of the big words which make us so unhappy,"[11] and because the statue often remains too well hidden within the stone, we should begin by first establishing the framework of this proposed relationship in order to allow its smooth augmentation as we move steadily closer to this investigation of the text.

11.Joyce, James. *Ulysses*, p. 335.

In its most basic form, the common ground between Bakhtin, Derrida, and Sterne is a shared interest in the idea of "play." Bakhtin considers play as disruptive to the established forms of social thought and behavior. Play, structured as public entertainment in such "popular festive forms" as the medieval carnival, is capable of effecting transgression, disruption and revolution because it subverts and reacts against the authority of fixed belief systems. Umberto Eco defines carnival as a time when the "upside-down world has become the norm. Carnival is revolution (or revolution is carnival): kings are decapitated (that is, lowered, made inferior) and the crowd is crowned" (FOCF, p.3). In post-structural literary studies, the signifier "logocentrism" has come to represent this very reliance on fixed belief systems, or stable centres, which is also characteristic of the order subverted by carnival. In "Structure, Sign, and Play," Derrida writes that a *centre* is "a point of presence, a fixed origin" whose function is "not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure the organizing principle of the structure would *limit what we might call the free play of the structure*" (WD, p.247-8. italics mine). The *origin,* or for our purposes the *presence,* has been traditionally understood as the fixed form that, by its very laws, creates order and organizes the extrinsic nature of all subsidiary appendages. Bakhtin refers to something similar in his discussion of "popular festival forms":

> This old authority and truth pretend to be absolute, to have an extratemporal importance... they strut majestically, consider their foes the enemies of eternal truth, and threaten them with eternal punishment. They do not see themselves in the mirror

> of time, do not perceive their own origin, limitations and end ...They continue to talk with the majestic tone of kings and heralds announcing eternal truths, unaware that time has turned their speeches into ridicule. (RAHW, p.213)

The fact that logocentrism is itself contingent on the unity of signifier and signified makes it the prime example of the notion of the stable centre. Logocentrism takes "the position that words, writing, ideas, systems of thought are fixed and sustained by some authority or centre external to them whose meaning, validation and truth they convey" (ECLT, p.534-5). The result is a unity between the word and the object that tyrannically establishes a hierarchy of signs in which linguistic signifiers obtain power and value and come to be understood as "truths." As such, logocentrism admits no distance between signifier and signified.

However, as they undercut the tyrannical presence of such logocentric hierarchies, carnivalesque forms are always contingent upon the freeplay between countless binary oppositions which foreground the ambivalent and unstable centre of these otherwise official "truths." In this sense, carnivalesque freeplay is a condition of infinitely complex, dialogical structures working with and against each other, not an unconditional, nihilistic absence of any semblance of meaning or structure. By being essentially anti-structural in orientation, carnivalesque freeplay is the paradoxical manifestation of both presence and absence, structure and non-structure.

Now that we have some basic understanding of the insistence of logocentrism on a fixed form/stable centre and its actual incapability to

acknowledge the freeplay that envelopes it, I would like to discuss briefly the historical context of Sterne's remarkable novel, as it emerged from an age grounded in the belief that language could deliver an absolute presence. Kant's question, "what is enlightenment?" penned near the conclusion of the Enlightenment, was an important postscript to the scientific and philosophical establishments' attempts to do away with religious "myths" about man and his place under God – to "replace them with true scientific knowledge, [and] objectivity grounded on facts" (TE, p.21). For Kant, "enlightenment" meant man's final coming of age, an emancipation from "his self-incurred tutelage" to the science of reason.[12] (This again suggests the idea of *presence* and *absence* – the presence of God being replaced by the presence of Man and the withdrawal of traditional ideas of God from advanced Western thought). As Porter explains, the deposition of the old hierarchical order solicited a new anthropocentric orientation: "From the latter part of the seventeenth century onwards, many of Europe's greatest minds came to the conclusion that to understand the true history and destiny of the human race, neither unquestioning faith in the Bible, nor automatic reliance on the authority of the Greeks and Romans would any longer suffice. Man's nature was not properly known; it must become the subject of inquiry" (TE, p.16-17). The Enlightenment established man as the new centre of presence (albeit elusive) along a reconstructed vertical cosmological hierarchy. In another famous post-Enlightenment text, Goethe's

12.Kant is an apt example to pull from the Enlightenment not only because he is representative, but also because his ideas are profoundly important to Bakhtin. For a further discussion of Bakhtin as a Neo-Kantian, see Michael Holquist, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World* pp.14-30.

Mephistopheles levels an attack against the Enlightenment attempt to make a god out of man:

> **Go on, heed the old saying, and my cousin,**
> **the Snake;**
> **There'll come a time your godlike state will make you**
> **Quake![13]**

To paraphrase Goethe's famous anti-hero, consciousness is the death of potential.[14] Once one becomes aware of his own self, he is paradoxically divided from himself by virtue of becoming the subject of his own inquiry. This paradox implies that there are two "selves" to every "self," one which observes and one which is observed. Within the terms of this split into subject and object, man limits his own potential by fracturing his own consciousness. Taylor affirms this theory of displaced position and power by suggesting that, during the Enlightenment, "attributes traditionally predicated of the divine subject are gradually transferred to the human subject. Through a dialectical reversal, the creator God dies and is resurrected as the creative subject" (DC, p.3). Arguably, it was this new power, this "godlikeness", that allowed man to painfully realize his own limitations, causing the so-called Age of Reason to become something closer, at least near its end, to Sentimentality.

The division between science and religion that called into question the fixed forms of vertical constructs and made "man the object of inquiry of

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13.*Faust*, Part I, p.48. The scene in Faust's study. "Godlike" refers here to a kind of absolute knowledge.

14. As a disciple of Goethe, Thomas Carlyle would later write the article "Characteristics" in 1831 which deals with the inherent dividedness that consciousness brings with it. It remains an interesting postscript to this conflict essential to the Enlightenment goal of unlocking man's potential by placing him at the center of his own inquiry.

mankind", while superficially initiating a carnivalesque inversion of religious hierarchy, ceased to participate in the spirit of the carnival because it immediately erected a new hierarchy and a new meaning which placed university-educated European man at the supreme centre of the world. Philosophical and scientific inquiry into the nature of man became the new scripture, and literary and cultural aberrations that did not fit into the new Enlightenment model of the world, such as folk literature and "popular festive forms", were quickly discarded. It is a consequence of the relation to this logocentric "fixedness" of the Enlightenment that the kinship between *Tristram Shandy* and the traditions of folk literature is particularly remarkable. Bakhtin explains that *Tristram Shandy* was a reaction against the old "elements of classicism which characterized the self-importance of the Enlightenment. It was a reaction against the cold rationalism, against official, formalistic, and logical authoritarianism; it was a rejection of that which is finished and completed, of the didactic and utilitarian spirit of the Enlighteners with their narrow and artificial optimism" (RAHW, p.37).

The well-documented Enlightenment reactions to *Tristram Shandy* (of the "nothing odd can last long" sort) have contributed very few, and often inadequate, clues to contemporary critical attempts to understand Sterne's structural labyrinth. Also, most criticism written about *Tristram Shandy* attempts to organize its complex chaos into something easily "swallowable." Perhaps because of a natural aversion to literary works which do not come in neat little packages, most critics have failed to deal with Sterne's novel on its

own terms—as a text deliberately and meaningfully anti-structural. As Elizabeth W. Harries suggests, contemporary criticism of this "collection of fragments"[15] can be loosely identified by the wedge that divides the "high and the low": "some see the novel as the last development of Augustan wit and order, while others see it as the expression of a shattered world syntax, a confusion with more buzz than bloom" (GUTF, p.95). In fact, it is the recognition of the necessity of the juxtaposition of the "high and the low" that imbues *Tristram Shandy* with its distinctly carnivalesque character. Further, this carnivalesque insistence on duality and opposition represents Sterne's lasting influence on many of the most profound literary works of the twentieth century. Two of Sterne's fellow countrymen provide apt examples. Beckett's prose revels in the tension of compound oppositions, and no work more exemplifies this carnivalesque technique than the Darwinian wasteland of *Waiting for Godot.* "Godot" is what we would imagine the day after carnival to be like without the return of the king – a timeless day suspended between the crumbling columns of tragedy and comedy. An even more distinctly traceable kinship to *Tristram Shandy* is Joyce's *Ulysses*, where the classical Homeric quest provides a traditional framework for the modern journeys of Stephen Dedalus and Leopold Bloom. *Ulysses* harnesses much of its carnivalesque atmosphere from the alchemical blending of classical patterns and Joyce's manipulation of those same archetypal patterns.

15.Ferriar, John. *Illustrations of Sterne.* p.4

To return to our starting point, having now some idea of the issues at hand, Sterne's displacement of "The Author's Preface" illustrates the linguistic carnivalesque duality of *presence* and *absence*. The displaced presence of the preface *with* and *in* the elusive *stable centre* of the text is wholly dependent upon the reader's recognition of its absence from the outer fold of the narrative, or the pages preceding the writing of the main text. As such, Sterne's treatment of "The Author's Preface" suggests the cyclical pattern of the text[16] in that the initial absence is never erased because of its *dependency* on the new presence, and is therefore in a state of continuous displacement between its death and renewal as a fixed form (in its logical position). At the same time, the recognition of absence (or more precisely a *non-presence* or *past-present*) is also indicative of the complex role that the reader *plays* in relation to the pursuit of meaning within *Tristram Shandy*. The reader unconsciously manipulates (sometimes deliberately) the narrative order (summarizes and reassembles) to produce meaning that essentially re-writes the anti-structural contents of the text. In fact, the reader's reconstruction of the narrative (the anxiety of dis-order sets us on the path to meaning) mirrors the same technique of displacement that Sterne applies to the preface. Therefore it is important to recognize that through reader interaction with the text, the carnivalesque structure of *Tristram Shandy* must necessarily fold in on itself by being restructured –or acted upon by the reader while it is simultaneously acting *upon* the reader– every time it is read.

16.This applies to things such as parody that is only effective if the audience is aware of the conventions that it is subverting. Therefore the absence plays an equally important role in its death as it does in its rebirth as a new form.

The preface is, of course, only a single piece in this narrative jigsaw puzzle that operates upon the same principles of the unfixed nature of *presence* and *absence* that Sterne calls attention to through the mandala-like arrangement of the text. This arrangement, or what I will refer to from now on as the *process of anti-process,* is the result of linguistic and spatial strands that are always incomplete and divided by offsetting motions. To again draw on the example of the preface, Sterne's ironic manipulation of what we, as readers, expect of a linear text exhibits all of the characteristics of this *process of anti-process.* This occurs because a feedback loop is created between what convention has taught us to expect and what actually occurs in the reality of the text. In his famous book *Godel, Escher, Bach,* Hofstadter gives an interesting example of such a binary relationship between two linguistic fragments, each of which depends on the other for its existence and each of which undermines the other's existence. He identifies this relationship as a *strange loop*:

> **The following sentence is false.**
> **The preceding sentence is true.**[17]

It is also important to note here that Sterne's intentional manipulation of narrative convention is not simply satirical, but it is through this binary merry-go-round of spatial and linguistic presence and absence that the narrative representation ultimately becomes ironic. The irony of the multifaceted narrative structure – both spatially and linguistically – is a result of the

17.Hofstadter, Douglas R. *Godel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid.* p. 21. It should be noted here that the idea of a *strange loop* is also relevant to the whole question of *time* in *Tristram Shandy*. It is worth noting here the dichotomy of time as a construct in terms of "real time" and "novelistic time" as well as the way Sterne undermines its linear sequencing in *Tristram Shandy*.

revolving division between the traditional space and value and its new position that promotes the *freeplay* of its differences. The effectiveness of Sterne's narrative necessarily relies on what it is reacting against at every structural level of the text – spatially, linguistically, and through his treatment of character. Therefore we are left with a text of contained sets of dualities or oppositions that illustrate their differences from traditional representation (such as, for instance, the works of Swift and Pope, and even the more contemporary novels of Fielding and Richardson) while at the same time they are limited by, and never completely free from, those very same structures.

Ultimately, the effect of this process of anti-process is to obscure, through a system of frames moving in opposition to each other, any stable centre of the text. The following chapters will be an attempt to come to terms with this structural de-centreing effected by the text's frames of reference, as well as the text's employment of particular images which strongly link it, both thematically and structurally, to the tradition of carnivalesque literature.

I. Tristram Shandy and the Carnivalization of Time and Space

That was last year, replied I – But you have trod this
Moment upon a king.—Kings have bad times on't, said
I, to be trod upon by such people as me.[18]

I. The Displacement of Time: The Dual Life of the Clown-King

Since, according to Mann, *time* is the "medium of narration",[19] it seems only fitting to begin this study by investigating the ways in which Sterne subverts the traditional linear progression of narrative structure in *Tristram Shandy*. Indeed, it is this complex treatment of time and space, or what Bakhtin refers to as *chronotope*,[20] that produces this often chaotic textual architecture and grants Sterne the dialogic freedom to produce a new translation of "the language of time."

Bakhtin defines "chronotope" as "a unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented" (TDI, p.425). Initially, any discussion of chronotope must consider the position of the narrator in relation to the spatial progression of the text, as well as his interaction within and along the margins of the unfolding plot. As we shall see, it is the de-centred position of Tristram Shandy in relation to the surrounding text that allows Sterne to intentionally undermine traditional linearity and order of narrative. It is of little surprise, then, that Tristram is in

18.*Tristram Shandy*, p.297.
19.Mann, Thomas, *The Magic Mountain*, p.541.
20.See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*

fact sentenced to a chronotopic chaos that begins in the infamous opening frame with Mrs. Shandy's *untimely* question –

> *Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up The clock?* ————Good G—! Cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, ———Did *ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?*

– and continues throughout the remainder of the text. It is the earliest example of the intrusion of time which, while interrupting and dispersing the animal spirits, begets the chaotic progression of spatial patterns that take place throughout the mirrored labyrinth of the narrative. The solution to the "time-shifts" that instigate the "strange combination of ideas" and the freeplay of form invariably lead back to the role of the narrator through subjective, and often eccentric, associations of ideas. As such, the handling of time in *Tristram Shandy* functions less as a "medium" for literary representation and more as an anachronic re-interpretation of the sequential and successive events of traditional narrative form.

As I suggested in my Preface, the Babel-esque architecture of *Tristram Shandy* can be approached through an orchestration of two theoretical systems. The first, and of primary importance to the rest of this study, is Bakhtin's analysis of the carnivalesque taken from his study *Rabelais and His World.* The second is Derrida's notion of *freeplay.* Their shared interest in the "element of play" resonates for Sterne's playful "laying bare" of the literary form. For Bakhtin, freeplay is associated with images of the medieval carnival and

"popular festival forms", such as the puppet theatre. Indeed, Bakhtin explains that carnival "sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever-changing, *playful*, undefined forms" (RAHW, p.11, italics mine). Similarly, Derrida argues extensively about the inherent instability of logocentric forms effected by the *freeplay* of *differance.* Whether this freeplay comes in the way of carnival or in terms of the relationship between signifier and signified, they share a common interest in subverting the fixed forms or logocentric "truths." In much the same way, Sterne's narrative is opposed to "all that is finished and completed," and is constructed upon what Harries refers to as the "free play of a chain of associations whose endless and directionless movement is his only conception of order" (NCTS, p.104). In terms of the applicability of the carnivalesque to literature, it is Bakhtin himself who provides the link: "Because of their obvious sensuous character and their strong element of play, carnival images closely resemble certain artistic forms" (RAHW, p.7). Beginning with the role of the narrator, I will trace in the following section Sterne's uniquely carnivalesque and thoroughly chaotic use of chronotope in *Tristram Shandy*.

Plato set up a complex philosophical problem when he defined time as "the moving image of eternity." This statement opened up countless dichotomies based upon and around irresolvable binary oppositions like, for instance, presence and absence. In the eighteenth century, eternity, because of its abstractness of definition and its religious connotation of apocalypse, resembled an illusory absence, while time, being a social construct of man, suggested permanence and presence. Not surprisingly, it was the concern of the

Enlightenment to, "nurture the growth of time at the expense of eternity" (PTAS, p.114). For instance, the publication of John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* not only provides an epistemology to ground Newton's cosmology, but also contains a sizable discourse on the issue of time. For Locke, time does not equal duration, as duration is impression of the contraction and expansion of "a train of ideas which constantly succeed one another" Indeed, the *apparent* impact of this "succession of ideas" on the spatial structure of *Tristram Shandy* has received an inordinate amount of attention. Not intending to substitute one hypothesis for another, I would argue that Locke can be approached in terms of the motion that is produced by a sequence of ideas -- a *freeplay* around something (for instance a fixed form or a stable centre) that is *not* in motion. By extension, the root of eighteenth century philosophical and scientific inquiry centres on the position of man in relation to his ever-changing surroundings.

In order to fully appreciate the carnivalesque treatment of the foregrounded narrator in *Tristram Shandy*, it is first necessary to isolate the system of ideas that informs his perspective and infiltrates Sterne's complex handling of textual structure. While discussing the function of the narrator, who exists to vocalize the "subjectivity" of the author, Bakhtin posits an important remark about *Tristram Shandy*: "It is characteristic that internal man – pure 'natural' subjectivity – could be laid bare only with the help of the clown and the fool, since an adequate, direct (that is, from the point of view of practical life, not allegorical) means of expressing his life was not available ... A

personalized eccentricity, "Shandyism" (Sterne's own term), becomes an important means for exposing the "internal man" and his 'free and self-sufficient subjectivity'"(TDI, p.164). Traugott deals with this relationship between author and narrator in *Tristram Shandy* in explicit terms: "the real author is associated with the fictional author ... a real man, Sterne, [who]...wounds his genitals as Tristram and talks about his impotence in his real life letters, kills himself as Yorick for the pathos of his own life" (TSW, p.9). By lowering an otherwise omniscient, god-like narrator into the chaotic flux of the text—by subjecting him to the general decay that flesh is heir to–Sterne simultaneously acknowledges the humanity (and mortality) of the narrator and, through the symbolic deferral of death which unstable linguistic spatial and temporal form represent, tries to stave off that mortality. To this end, Tristram is the quintessential clown figure who represents both death and life—death in the sense that he is constantly in threat of being abused and degraded, of dying a symbolic death or castration at the hands of his readers, and even his author, and life in the sense that his playfulness liberates him from the linear progression of time, allowing him to triumph over, or be resurrected from, the imminence over his own death: "the thing I have to ask is, how you feel your heads? My own akes dismally—as for your healths, I know, they are much better—True Shandeism, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affectations which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely through its channels, and make the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round"(TS, p.333). In Tristram's

words, the power of "Shandyism," or the playful disruption of fixed linguistic and cultural forms, is to regenerate the body indefinitely.

To strengthen the link between Sterne as author and Tristram as the narrator of his subjectivity, Tristram's insistence on the ability of carnivalesque forms to stave off death is very likely related to Sterne's own declining health and imminent death at the time he was writing *Tristram Shandy*. In one particular instance, Sterne is clearly speaking *through* Tristram about the cough that was plaguing him: "And so, with this moral for the present, may it please your worships and your reverences, I take my leave of you until this time twelve month, when (unless this vile cough kills me in the mean time) I'll have another pluck at your beards, and lay open a story to the world you little dream of"(TS, p.333). In this passage, Sterne is also clearly identifying himself as a clown who, should he be able to beat his own death (which he does), will return to participate in extended carnivalesque pluckings at our own worshipful and reverent beards. By disguising himself with the clownish mask of Tristram, Sterne frees himself from the conventions of form and is able to engage himself, as well as his narrator and his readers, in the endlessly deferred (and deferring) "delightful topsy-turvydom"(TS, p.7) of freeplay.

The ultimate effect of this dual employment of the clown figure (author and narrator) represents Sterne's deliberate subversion of the authoritative role of the narrator. Sterne lowers the status of Tristram to that of an equal with the characters that he controls (the carnivalesque implications of which I will discuss shortly). In other words, he is a narrator who is painfully aware of his

own limiting subjectivity, and even the possibility of his own death. Accordingly, during carnival "there is a temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers among men" (RAHW, p.15). By reducing Tristram to the status of a common character, Sterne instigates not only the fracturing of the text by decentreing our stable frame of narrative reference, but also the fracturing of potential objectivity and logocentric power which the inherent dividedness, or subjectivity, of "internal man" subverts by positing instead the possibility of multiple voices ("heteroglossia") and multiple vantage points. Making Tristram a clown figure constitutes a "decentralization of the universe" (RAHW, p.369) of the text in that the traditional form of textual authority is purposely broken down, which in turn promotes the subsequent freeplay of the surrounding text.

To return to the essential aim of this study, in carnivalesque terms the tension between presence and absence finds its metaphorical embodiment in the binary relationship between the king and the clown, with the king representing (at least superficially) presence and logocentric authority and the clown representing the external subversion of that authority. However, what we should observe about the nature of this (and every) dialectical relationship is that it is paradoxically "separate" and, at the same time, "whole." On one hand, "binary" suggests a separateness between disparate, dissimilar entities. On the other hand, insofar as "binary" depends on the relationship of these dissimilar entities, it signifies a singular, inclusive entity which contains two paradoxical opposites. Hence, as Bakhtin points out, "kings and clowns have the same horoscope" (RAHW, p.198). The clown is not some external force which attacks

language, or logocentric order (the King's Order), from the outside; rather, he represents, through his intrinsic Jeckyll and Hyde relationship with the king, the forces inherent in language which cause it to undermine its own terms *from inside its own discourse.* The king only masquerades as the stable centre or presence of textual authority, but when his mask is removed it is revealed that he was, all along, the clown or tumbler who repeatedly destroys and reconstructs his own linguistic structures: "the clown was first disguised as a king, but once his reign had come to an end his costume was changed, 'travestied,' to turn him once more into a clown" (RAHW, p. 197). Relating this specifically to *Tristram Shandy*, we have a constant tension between, on one hand, order, and on the other, disorder (or what Derrida refers to as the "presence-absence"[21] of linguistic structures); the first part of this equation lies in the inherent assertion that *Tristram Shandy* is a text with a stable narrator, some semblance of a plot, and a dependence on the spatial and temporal function of the signifier to signify *something.* Without these, it would be totally devoid of *any* meaning. The other lies in Sterne's repeated attempts to undermine these very assumptions. The premise of a text depends upon the presence of a king, but it is ultimately the clown who triumphs over his order.

21. The hyphen is the essential part of this word as it signifies that "presence-absence" is neither "presence" as such, nor "absence," but something which possesses its own life independently of either.

II. Tristram Shandy as Master of Puppets:

The Metaphysics of Presence

The notion of carnivalesque *play*, with its underpinning of anti-structural forms in *Tristram Shandy*, exhibits an increasingly profound meaning if we consider the text in relation to such "popular festival forms" as the puppet theatre. Bakhtin argues that *Tristram Shandy* exhibits "the influence of the folk theatre, especially the puppet show and the performances given at fairs" (RAHW, p.37). Traditionally, the puppet theatre was a popular source not only of entertainment and political satire, but also of a parody which suggested an alternative, "marginalized" reality to the logocentrism of the fixed strictures (and structures) of the high theatre. There are several specific methods by which *Tristram Shandy* can be said to share in the conventions of the popular puppet drama. Mason observes that the puppet shows of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were characterized by a perpetually evolving script. These dramas "never appeared in print and varied from troupe to troupe, from puppet-theatre to puppet-theatre, probably even from performance to performance"(GFGP, p.4). Given what Bakhtin claims of the quintessential carnivalesque experience, that it was "opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretence to immutability, [and] sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful undefined forms" (RAHW,p.11), the connection between *Tristram Shandy*, the puppet theatre, and the world of the carnivalesque should be clear. By subverting the function of a traditional, fixed logos, *Tristram Shandy*--a text which seems constantly to be evolving---exhibits

the essential characteristics of the unfixed anti-forms of the puppet drama. At times, in true self-reflexive carnivalesque fashion, it permits its own play with form to become the subject matter of its content.

Intimately related to the play with words (linguistic structures) in a carnivalesque aesthetic is the role a text's characters serve. Of course, in the world of the text, character names are nothing more than proper nouns, words which we are coerced into attributing a heightened sense of significance to by virtue of their capitalization and our belief that, surely, they must stand for something either allegorical or more "realistic" in terms of life experience. And, like the entire sea of words which Sterne plays with, this retinue of proper names in *Tristram Shandy* is subject to the same deconstruction, manipulation, and play as all extant linguistic forms (I will address the complexities of these issue in Chapter II). In terms of the text's relationship to the puppet theatre, the characters tend to serve the function of the puppets, while Tristram (and Sterne) are the quintessential puppet masters. Hence, the puppet theatre is a metaphor for both the author's and the narrator's manipulation of all words, whether they signify something as simple as a basic subject-verb sentence or as complex as characterization and caricaturization.

To gain a sense of Tristram's and Sterne's respective, and sometimes collapsing, positions in relation to the characters and the text, we should consider for a moment a painting such as Velazquez's *Las Meninas,* in which the objective artist, by the act of situating himself inside the frame of creation, delineates the metamorphosis of the objectifying subjective (or creative subject).

Velazquez's dividedness, stemming from the fracturing of his own projected (painted) image and his actual "self," is similar to Sterne's relationship to Tristram, and by extension Tristram's to the surrounding characters (the implications of which I will discuss momentarily). This carnivalesque *doubling* is similar to what Derrida defines as the freeplay between *writing* and *speech* in which we find a double nature that *destabilizes* any sense of absolute representation:

> There is no longer a simple origin. For what is reflected is split in itself [se dedouble en soi-meme] and not only as an addition to itself of its own image. The reflection, the image, the double, splits what it doubles. The origin of the speculation becomes a difference. What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation of the thing to its image. (OG, p.55)

The image inside the painting implies the possibility of a link between the subjective and objective positions, as the painter becomes the subject matter of his own painting, and also illustrates the unbridgeable division—the frame—between three worlds (creator/creating/creation). For now, however, we should explore the implications of this subjective/objective binary in *Tristram Shandy* by first considering Velazquez's intention in creating such a conundrum. Foucault, in *The Order of Things,* offers an applicable explanation:

> The painter ... is perfectly visible in his full height; or at any rate he is not "masked" by the tall canvas, which may soon absorb him, when, taking a step towards it again, he returns to his "task." Now he can be seen, caught in a moment of stillness, at the neutral centre of this oscillation....Emerging from that canvas beyond our view, he moves into our gaze, he will be standing exactly in front of the canvas he is painting; he will enter that region where his painting, neglected for an instant, will, for him, become visible once more, free of shadow and free of reticence. As though the painter could not at the same time be seen on the picture where is

> represented and also see that upon which he is representing something. He rules at the threshold of those two incompatible visibilities. (TOOT, p.3-4)

As in *Tristram Shandy*, the scene in *Las Meninas* mixes together the creator, the creative process, and the subject of creation. Resulting from this praxis is a freeplay inside the dividing space between the two temporal spaces designated "creator" and "creation." In both *Las Meninas* and *Tristram Shandy*, the attempt to represent reality is treated as a *metatextual* re-representation, as "the forms of representation become the object of other forms of representation" (TSW, p.11). The manipulation of various frames against one another and into one another throws the whole process of creation into dis-equilibrium by suggesting that there are no clear-cut, *hierarchical* distinctions between the creator, the created, and the process of creating both of them. In terms of "representation" signifying some link to "reality," or some attempt to re-present reality, the re-representational (metatextual) form tends to approach more closely the rich, paradox-laden experiential reality of the abstract term "reality." As such, carnivalesque writing becomes a disruptive play in which there is always the presence of a doubling that is *suggestive* of the author's absence. I will return to discuss the implications of this relationship in terms of characterization shortly.

To digress momentarily, (in the hopes, as Tristram would say, of providing some much needed "sunshine" for this discussion) it is important to recognize that while this division – the space between two frames – is similar to

the space of carnival, it also resembles Derrida's notion of *differance*. In short, differance is both a *division* as well as a *delay*; it is an anti-place where time is marginalized and a freeplay of form ensues. Therefore, differance *is* carnival insofar as it coincides with the freeplay of spatial and temporal *division* and *delay* found in *Tristram Shandy*. Tristram often makes reference to this digressive freeplay in the text: "These unforeseen stoppages, which I own I had no conception of when I first set out; -- but which, I am convinced now, will rather increase than diminish as I advance" (TS, p.65). Indeed, I will return to this important idea of differance in much greater detail (particularly in Chapter II) throughout the course of this inquiry. For now, however, it is important to reiterate that the temporal, spatial, and linguistic freeplay of differance found in *Tristram Shandy* begins with the *de-centred* and ultimately unresolved positions of the narrator and author. According to Derrida, in opposition to this phenomenon is the traditional logocentric notion of a centre which is "a point of presence, a fixed origin" whose function is "not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *free play* of the structure" (WD, p.278, italics mine). Because *Tristram Shandy* intentionally undermines any decipherable "organizing principle," the worlds of representation and reality continue to collapse into one another. This process represents exactly the carnivalization of the text.

***Tristram Shandy* participates in this carnivalesque spirit of undermining the fixed forms of representation through its self-reflexive depiction of the**

creative process. Tristram repeatedly exposes the process of writing by both complicating and collapsing the division between the subject and object. The "doubling," as Derrida calls it, that results from the interplay between the presence of the narrator within the text and the absence of the author without the text, revisits the complex metaphysical and metafictional union of the king and the clown in the carnival. Derrida address this freeplay of the image that collides with itself and produces the doubling inside the canvas of the text:

> the mirror unites the self (moi) to its image... deliberately and unilaterally closes the fold, interprets it as coincidence with itself, makes the opening the condition of *adequation* to itself, reduces everything in the fold which also marks dehiscence, dissemination, spacing, temporization... (LD, p.302)

Sterne often employs Tristram as the image in the mirror that reflects the process of creation. For instance, in the following example we are privy to the narrator-as-author's power to both create and destroy the same world that he is a part of: "It is not half an hour ago, when (in the great hurry and precipitation of a poor devil's writing for daily bread) I threw a fair sheet, which I had just finished, and carefully wrote out, slap in the fire, instead of the foul one" (TS, p.291). In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne employs (and controls) the clown figure of Tristram as his puppeteer (the image inside the painting), or dual subjective-objective self, to subvert the conventions of the fixed forms of character representation which produces, by extension, the freeplay of narrative structure.

In the puppet theatre, the puppet, by symbolizing a living, sentient being, suggests a complex relationship between subject and object – between the real and ideal; the metaphysical implication of the puppet, as the audience suspends their disbelief and invests the puppet with human qualities, is that the living being is himself a mere puppet on a string. The puppet functions both singly as a self-referential entity and as a *double* for humanity:

> **While the audience knows, on some level, that the puppet is a mere sign (specifically a metonym), observers are led to disattend this fact by the artistic conventions of the art form...[Yet] despite the convention of disattending the human presence in puppet plays, some traditions...[create a] tension arising from the audience's alternate perception of the puppet as an independent "actor" and as a manipulated object" (TAP, p.60).**

Similarly, in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne employs the dramatic techniques of the puppet theatre in order to subvert the fixed forms of character representation in the traditional text. For example, the description of the posture assumed by Corporal Trim to read the sermon belonging to Yorick becomes a mock-dramatic monologue that underlines the close proximity of the clown (narrator, puppeteer) to the folk (characters, puppets) and undermines the logocentric nature of static character representation: "to take the picture of him in at one view, with his body swayed, and somewhat bent forwards, -- his right leg firm under him, sustaining seven eighths of his whole weight, -- the foot of his left leg, the defect of which was no disadvantage to his attitude, advanced a little, -- not laterally, not forwards, but in a line betwixt them" (TS, p.138), and so on. This puppet-like description of Trim, whose meticulously-described movements are wooden and deliberate ("the foot of his left leg . . . advanced a little"), suggest

both his physical and linguistic manipulation at the hands of Tristram. And it all concludes with a bow.

As it shares in a common tradition with the carnivalesque puppet theatre, *Tristram Shandy* also exhibits what is perhaps the most significant characteristic of the carnival experience. I suggested above that the carnival is "marginalized." By this I wish to observe that its existence is contingent upon the anti-structural suspension of "normal" space and time. During the medieval carnival, time, as a fixed, linear entity of ceaseless process, was suspended; it was disregarded in the folk festivals as a limiting discourse of the hierarchical world. Similarly, the genre of the novel is informed by a similar carnival experience, in which "real" time is absolutely unrelated to the action of the unfolding narrative. Thus, the text itself is a liminal, carnivalesque world -- a miniature linguistic puppet show subject only to the laws of its own freeplay suspended within (and between) the fixed boundaries of extrinsic "real" time. In *Tristram Shandy,* the text resembles the suspended *sequentiality* of time that is characteristic of both carnival and the puppet theatre.

Indeed, Bakhtin offers an explanation that reinforces this notion: "at the heart of *Tristram Shandy* lies the intervalic chronotope of the puppet theatre, in disguised form. Sterneanism is the style of the wooden puppet directed and commanded upon by the author himself" (TDI, p.166). Bakhtin's term "intervalic" can be understood in terms of the fourteenth century usage of the word "space" that was used to mean (and used to mean) an extent (lapse, or *interval*) of time, as well as a linear distance defining an extent, or interval,

between two or more points. Thus, the "intervalic" time of the puppet theatre serves as a metaphorical connection to the suspended-time characteristic of the genre of the novel. Like the medieval puppet theatre, the novel is intervalic, timeless, and suspended—a form ultimately divided from the tyrannical order of unfolding linear time. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne celebrates this important dividedness (the real from the ideal) through the interplay between the subjective world of the reader and the objective world of the text. In fact, the play between the intervalic chronotope of carnival and the linear chronotope of "real" time in *Tristram Shandy* enables the carnivalesque collapsing of the frames of representation (objectivity) and reality (subjectivity) – the division between "real" time and interval: "It is about an hour and half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr Slop, the man-midwife;– so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking , and considering the emergency too, both to go and come;— though, morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots" (TS, p.122). This alchemy of carnival time found in the text along with the real time of the reader celebrates the division between representation and reality, while foregrounding their dialectical incompatibility. Therefore, the genre of the novel "discloses the potentiality of an entirely different world, of another order ... out of the confines of the apparent (false) unity, of the indisputable and stable" (RAHW, p.48).

To return to our definition of "intervalic" as a distance or interval between two points, in *Tristram Shandy* it is this distance that separates two points which produces the apparent anti-structure of the text and leads Sterne "out of the confines" of unity and stable forms. Linear time, or *sequentiality,* is fractured by the freeplay of an interval, and, in the case of *Tristram Shandy*, what is attributed to the "free association of ideas." Because an interval is *timeless* and *suspended,* it constantly destabilizes itself by fracturing, folding, and unfolding, which produces the open and unfinished character of both the medieval puppet theatre and *Tristram Shandy*. For instance, the scene involving Walter Shandy and uncle Toby walking down the stairs illustrates this notion of interval. In this example, the distance between the moment when Walter Shandy's foot leaves the stair, to the time it finally lands, covers almost fifty pages of the text. Tristram, in creating such a sterling example of the intervalic chronotope, admits to a subversive, carnivalesque intent: "The deuce of any other rule have I to govern myself by this affair — and if I had one — as I do all things out of all rule — I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had — Am I warm? I am, and the cause demands it — a pretty story! Is a man to follow rules — or rules to follow him?" (TS, p.282). The temporal/spatial linguistic freeplay that occurs between these two points (the foot lifting and the foot falling) represents the open nature of the intervalic chronotope of the puppet theatre. Indeed, as Tristram says to the reader: "--So then, my friend! You have got my father and my uncle Toby off the stairs, and seen them to bed? — And how did you manage it? — You dropped a curtain at

the stairs foot — I thought you had no other way for it — Here's a crown for your trouble" (TS, p.287).

It is important to note that Sterne also uses theatre imagery to fracture time and undermine the realism of his characters. The "You dropped a curtain" that is directed toward the reader in the passage above is a casual reference to his own theatrical tendencies. Indeed, theatre imagery allows Sterne to fracture scenes and avoid any real sense (or possibility) of closure, as well as, (like the example concerning the puppet-like handling of Corporal Trim) undermine the human reality of the characters; at the point where these two issues converge, the effect is absolutely carnivalesque: "I beg the reader will assist me here, to wheel off my uncle Toby's ordnance behind the scenes,– to remove his sentry box, and clear the theatre... that done, my dear friend Garrick, we'll snuff the candles bright,–sweep the stage with a new broom,– draw up the curtain, and exhibit my uncle Toby dressed in a new character" (TS, p.175). Puppet theatre imagery enables Sterne to undermine the literary conventions of characterization, representation and reality, as well as objectivity and subjectivity through the clown-like mask of Tristram.

The intervalic chronotope of the puppet theatre, which is itself a miniature manifestation of the suspended time of the carnival, is also similar to Derrida's notion of *differance*. The result of this intervalic differance is the deferral of any sense of closure in the text. Indeed as Derrida informs us, the linguistic interplay within the text "permits the different threads and different lines of meanings – or force – to go off again in different directions, just as it is

ready to tie itself up with others" (D, p.8). This behavior, which is manifest within the carnivalesque freeplay of spatial and temporal forms in *Tristram Shandy,* has important implications when considered in terms of its effect on the narrator.

If Sterne has occasion to shred the linguistic arteries in the body of the text, he does so for the life of his narrator. The freeplay of linguistic spatial forms in *Tristram Shandy* offers the possibility of a text that need not resolve itself to any artificial sense of closure. Indeed, Derrida refers to the "text" as no longer being, "a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or in its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces" (LOBL, p.257). The anti-structural power of the written word is a result of its ability to undermine the linearity of time; time is subject to the countless directions in which language can divide, defer, unfold, and suspend. This "differential network" enables the text through the transcendental nature of writing to, "unfold like a game (jeu) that invariably goes beyond its own rules and transgresses its [own] limits"(WIA, p.102). *Tristram Shandy* evokes a similar sense of freeplay that is specifically designed to avoid any sense of "real" closure. As such, Tristram undermines any kind of finality – all time becomes present time. The medieval puppet theatre, with its similar sense of intervalic suspended time, dramatizes this ability to overcome the closure of death through the inverted Faust-like scenes in which Punch confronts the Devil, and emerges victorious:

> The Devil, stands forth, horrid in shape, deformed, monstrous and black. Nearer he approaches with tremendous shrieks, and as he stretches out his muscular arms the battle begins. The Hero [Punch] wages his more than human struggle with unequal strength ...[and the Devil] flees from this double embrace and, thinly shrieking, vanishes in the air. (TAP, p.97)

Indeed, this carnival spirit allows for a nonlinear and endlessly deferring experience of being (or, in the case of Tristram, the difficulties of actually becoming a being) as a means of overcoming the linearity of time, and, by extension, death. Deferral then, is equivalent to the intervalic chronotope of carnival which "offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things" (RAHW, p.34). This "new order of things" is the result of the linguistic spatial differance of endlessly evolving strands and patterns of the written word. For instance, Tristram actually comments on the infinite nature of writing: "— for my own part, I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could,— and am not yet born: — I have just been able, and that's all, to tell you when it happened, but not how;— so that you see the thing is yet far from being accomplished" (TS, p.65). Writing can be regarded as the endless deferral of arrival that allows the hero to conquer death by, in the case of Tristram, even failing to get born until half way through the text. Writing, then, in a deconstructive context of deferral, is the scripture of carnival that suspends time and is an endless interval of differance. Bakhtin explains that the carnivalesque "reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming" (RAHW, p.24). The

freeplay of the linguistic sign allows this constant regeneration that potentially makes life inside the text timeless.

The longevity of the text that is produced through the endless deferral and fracturing of the linguistic traces of chronotope acquires other important carnivalesque implications if we consider the various ways in which Sterne foregrounds the inability of the written word to generate any sense of absolute meaning. Thus, differance and the intervalic chronotope of the puppet theatre carnival take on "added" meaning in terms of the unresolveable space that divides signifier from signified. It is now necessary to explore the way in which Sterne undermines the logocentric qualities of language and the carnivalesque implications which serve as the foundation of this paradoxical and ultimately ironic treatment of the marketplace language of carnival in *Tristram Shandy*.

II. Tristram Shandy and the Language of the Marketplace

Every thing in this world, said my father, is big with jest, —
and has wit in it, and instruction too, — if we can but find it out.[22]

I. The Malleability of the Word

Through the context of the puppet theatre, this study has centred around (and within) the carnivalesque anatomy of the chronotope (time/space) found in *Tristram Shandy*. Given this, there are two important carnivalesque implications in the text:

1. **The narrative voice reveals that the carnivalesque relationship between Sterne and Tristram is similar to that of the king and the clown, respectively, which enables Sterne to undermine the conventions of spatial linearity in the text through the mask of his narrator. The spatial freeplay that ensues participates in the spirit of the carnival experience in that its open and unfinished nature undermines fixed forms.**

2. **Tristram resembles the puppet master through his manipulation of the action and representation of the characters in the text. Sterne employs many of the conventions found in the puppet theatre to fracture and complicate the frames of reality and representation.**

The primary aim of *this* chapter is to investigate the particular linguistic components that inform the two above-cited carnivalesque modes of representation. As we shall see, the complex, and often hostile, undermining of the "truth" of the written sign in *Tristram Shandy* involves a severe problematization of language as it and its capacity for communication become unhinged, obscuring their accepted correlation to the unfolding of meaning. This process, which disrupts any sense of absolute meaning, is complicated by the

22. Tristram Shandy, p. 284.

employment of the spoken word (within the written narration) in *Tristram Shandy* that problematizes communication through the characters' association of ideas and their individual hobby-horses. While this study will branch out to include various issues surrounding the question of language, the brunt of the discussion will once again centre around two thoroughly carnivalesque, Shandean "handles" found in the book: first, an important, unofficial tenet of the carnivalesque dialect is that language is not fixed, but is in a continuous state of evolution and devolution. Therefore, the initial focus of this discussion will centre on the methods in which the fixed forms of language are subverted through the carnivalesque freeplay of possible meanings – of ambiguities and paradoxes– that are a component of the *marketplace language* of the medieval carnival. The second half of this discussion will explore the effects of the ambiguities of language and Sterne's handling of the contingencies of carnivalesque voices housed within the text.

We do not have to search far in *Tristram Shandy* to find an example of the carnivalesque freeplay that exists between a word and its meaning. For instance, the etymology of the noun "opinions," taken from the full title, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman,* offers an applicable example of this play that is characteristic in the unfixed nature of language. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word *opinion* is another word for *sentiment*, which "suggests a more or less settled opinion, often involving feelings or emotions" (OED). As I have been suggesting over the course of this study, presence is never absolute, but is always contingent upon, for its full agency, the

acknowledgement of an absence or a non-presence. Indeed, it is the freeplay that takes place between the two poles of presence (signifier) and absence (signified) that reveals the unstable and unfixed centre of the sign. This being the case, a word like *opinions* can also mean "view, conviction, persuasion and *sentiment*" (OED, italics mine). However, not only is the word *opinions* a signifying relative of *sentiment*, but it also branches off to include the word *sentimental*. Sentimentality is a particular behavioral trait common amongst the Shandy family and also finds its way into the title and content of Sterne's other text, *A Sentimental Journey*. Therefore, a word like *opinions* operates upon an ever expanding set of relations which reveals the play of language that acts as *a strange attractor* to multiple meanings. In the case of the narrator and characters in *Tristram Shandy*, the carnivalesque freeplay of language within the text is more often than not the source of the confusion of linguistic emission and reception that comprises the ambiguous essence of dialogic "heteroglossia," or multiple voices working with and against each other to form a new, complex, subversive — and often paradoxical – meaning.

The Babel-esque variety of *opinions* in *Tristram Shandy* contribute to and accentuate this ambivalence often found in the confused relationship between a word and its meaning in a number of interesting ways. One method to approach the ambivalence of the linguistic freeplay in *Tristram Shandy*, as well as the carnivalesque implications found therein, is through what Bakhtin refers to as "marketplace language." Bakhtin explains that "the marketplace of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was a world in itself, a world which was one; all

'performances' in this area, from loud cursing to the organized show, had something in common and were imbued with the same atmosphere of freedom, frankness, and familiarity. Such elements of familiar speech as profanities, oaths, and curses were fully legalized in the marketplace and were easily adopted by all the festive genres" (RAHW, p.153). Bakhtin explains further that the ambiguities of marketplace language such as abuse and swearing "were ambivalent: while humiliating and mortifying they at the same time revived and renewed" (RAHW, p.16). In this sense, marketplace language is one of the key components of Bakhtin's idea of degradation, or the process of killing -- making low or deconstructing -- in order to resurrect or reconstruct in a new form. Communication in the virtual marketplace of *Tristram Shandy* is almost always thwarted by the confusion that germinates in the very language of the characters and their inability to understand one another, as well as in the freeplay of forms of "marketplace language" such as abuse and cursing. There is no more explicit example of the importance of swearing and curses in *Tristram Shandy* than in Slop's rendering of St Ernulphus' curse which was written in the Middle Ages. In this passage, Slop employs the curse to damn Obadiah, who, upon retrieving Slop's green medicine bag, has tied his bag up in knots. The passage (partly for the sheer comical enjoyment of it) is worth quoting at length:

> By the authority of God Almighty, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and of the undefiled Virgin Mary, mother, and patroness of our Saviour, and of all 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 of the holy martyrs and holy confessors, and the holy

virgins, and of all the saints together, with the holy and elect God,— May he,' (Obadiah) 'be damned,' (for tying these knots.) —'We excommunicate, and anathematize him, and from the thresholds of the holy church of God Almighty we sequester him, that he may be tormented, disposed, and delivered over with Dathan and Abiram, and with those who say unto the Lord God, Depart from us, we desire none of thy ways. And as fire is quenched with water, so let the light of him be put out for evermore, unless it shall repent him' (Obadiah, of the knots which he has tied) 'and make satisfaction' (for them.) 'Amen.'

May the father who created man, curse him. —May the Son who suffered for us, curse him.— May the Holy Ghost who was given to us in baptism, curse him' (Obadiah.)— 'May the holy cross which Christ for our salvation triumphing over his enemies, ascended, curse him.

May the holy and eternal Virgin Mary, mother of God, curse him.— - May St Michael the advocate of holy souls, curse him.— May all the angels and archangels, principalities and powers, and all the heavenly armies, curse him...

May St John and the prae-cursor, and St John the Baptist, and St Peter and St Paul, and St Andrew, and all other Christ's apostles, together curse him. And may the rest of his disciples and four evangelists, who by their preaching converted the universal world, and may the holy and wonderful company of martyrs and confessors who by their holy works are found pleasing to Almighty God, curse him' (Obadiah).

'May the holy choir of the holy virgins, who for the honour of Christ have despised the things of the world, damn him.— May all the saints who from the beginning of the world to everlasting ages are found to be beloved of God, damn him — May the heavens and earth, and all the holy things remaining therein, damn him,' (Obadiah) 'or her,' (or whoever else had a hand in tying these knots.)

'May he' (Obadiah) 'be damned wherever he be,— whether in the house or in 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 living, in dying...May he be cursed in eating and drinking, in being hungry, in being thirsty, in fasting, in sleep, in slumbering, in walking, in standing, in sitting, in lying, in working, in resting, in pissing, in shitting, and in bloodletting!'

'May he' (Obadiah) 'be cursed in all the faculties of his body!

'May he be cursed inwardly and outwardly.— May he be cursed in the hair of his head.— May he be cursed in his brains, and in his vertex,' (that is a sad curse, quoth my father) 'in his temples, in his forehead, in his ears, in his eye-brows, in his cheeks, in his jaw-bones, in his nostrils, in his fore-teeth and grinders, in his lips, in his throat, in his shoulders, in his wrists, in his arms, in his hands, in his fingers.

'May he be damned in his mouth, in his breast, in his heart and purtenance, down to the very stomach.

> 'May he be cursed in his reins, and in his groin,' (God in heaven forbid, quoth my uncle Toby) — 'in his thighs, in his genitals,' (my father shook his head) 'and in his hips, and in his knees, his legs, and feet, and toe-nails.
>
> 'May he be cursed in all the joints and articulations of his members, from the top of his head to the soal of his foot, may there be no soundness in him...
>
> —'Curse him,' continued Dr Slop, – 'and may heaven, with all the powers which move therein, rise up against him, curse and damn him' (Obadiah) 'unless he repent and make satisfaction. Amen. So be it,–so be it. Amen.' (TS, p.185-191)

Bakhtin explains that "a new type of communication always creates new forms of speech or a new meaning given to the old forms" (RAHW, p.16). Like the actual structure of the Tower of Babel that, over the centuries, was destroyed and rebuilt and destroyed once again, the freeplay of marketplace language in *Tristram Shandy* charts a similar process of perpetual deconstruction and reconstruction. The formalities of these basic carnivalesque issues of language will serve as our initial point of departure for the rest of this chapter.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the most notable examples of the destructive and reconstructive qualities of marketplace language often surface within the context of the ambivalent relationship between Walter Shandy and uncle Toby. The degrading nature of abuse and cursing that is characteristic of the interaction between these two characters takes on carnivalesque implications in, for example, the following passage in which Walter Shandy unleashes his anger on uncle Toby's hobby-horse of fortification that seems to pervade and invade every topic of conversation: "By the mother who bore us!—brother

Toby, quoth my father, not able to hold out any longer,-- you would provoke a saint;-- here have you got us, I know not how, not only souse into the middle of the old subject again:--... I wish the whole science of fortification, with all its inventors, at the devil" (TS, p.130). This marketplace abuse leveled at uncle Toby is not just abuse for its own sake, but also serves to restore equilibrium and provide perspective; it displaces the traditional definition of abuse as solely negative when, inside the space of two pages, Walter Shandy's outpouring of anger undergoes a metamorphosis that swings the pendulum back and illustrates the restorative power of language that is found in the ambivalence of its very meaning: "For as soon as my father had done insulting [Toby's] HOBBY-HORSE, -- he turned his head without the least emotion, from Dr Slop, to whom he was addressing his discourse, and looked up into my fathers face, with a countenance spread over with so much good-nature ...it penetrated my father to his heart: He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing hold of both my uncle Toby's hands as he spoke:-- Brother Toby, said he, -- I beg thy pardon; -- forgive, I pray thee, this rash humour" (TS, p.132). The double-headed (or *ambi*-valent) connotation that belies the abuse found in the freeplay of marketplace language is clearly constructed in the above passage and emphasizes Sterne's interest in employing marketplace language to serve a particular linguistic function: to simultaneously kill and bring back to life a particular character in the carnivalesque spirit of degradation.

In fact, the ambivalent function of swearing is itself often a subject of discourse in *Tristram Shandy*. Not only does this suggest the carnivalesque

technique in the text of lowering the level of discourse from the official standards of "literature" to the unofficial standards of carnivalesque expression, but it also levels the fixed notions of swearing and as such takes on the ambiguity of marketplace language: "Praise and abuse are, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin. If the right side is praise, the wrong side is abuse, and vice versa. The billingsgate idiom is a two-faced Janus. The praise is ironic and ambivalent. It is on the brink of abuse; the one leads to the other, and it is impossible to draw the line between them" (RAHW, p.165). In the following passage, Walter Shandy's opinion on swearing underpins the notion of marketplace language as being something able to restore a state of equilibrium to a particular social scenario: "Small curses, Dr Slop, upon great occasions, quoth my father, (condoling with him first upon the accident) are but so much waste of our strength and soul's health to no manner of purpose...They serve, continued my father, to stir the humours — but carry off none of their acrimony: – for my own part, I seldom swear or curse at all – I hold it bad — but if I fall into it, by surprise, I generally retain so much presence of mind (right, quoth my uncle Toby) as to make it answer my purpose — that is, I swear on, till I find myself easy" (TS, p.181).

Before further unraveling some of the other complexities of Sterne's carnivalesque handling of language in the text, it is worth taking a moment to briefly foreground some of the issues that will become relevant throughout this study. First, Sterne's carnivalesque treatment of language deconstructs the fixed correlation between the signifier and the signified and substitutes in its

place a carnivalesque freeplay of language and meaning. As Tristram makes clear in the case of uncle Toby's attempt to explain "the differences and distinctions between the scarp and the counterscarp" (TS, p.103), the meaning that is hidden behind the veil of language often makes it difficult "to keep the discourse free from obscurity" (TS, p.104). However, the ambiguities of language also have a positive effect in the text. This carnivalesque freeplay of language is also seen in terms of the division between tones and style of discourse. The space of this freeplay, or what Derrida would refer to as the space of *differance* (which I will discuss in section II), works as a metaphor for the whole experience of carnival and for the text itself. The ensuing confusion that is manifest in this carnivalesque anti-structure illustrates the carnivalesque preoccupation with the ambiguities in the linguistic sign.

II. Tristram Shandy and the Tower of Babel

...but in my opinion, to write a book is for all the world like humming a song — be but in tune with yourself, Madam, 'tis no matter how high or how low you take it.[23]

I suggested in both the previous chapter and in the preface that the anti-structural architecture of *Tristram Shandy* is Babel-esque by nature. By this I mean to suggest that the non-presence of the text – in its perpetually *incomplete* form, its contingencies of different dialects and styles, its metafictional discussions of the written word, as well as its often comically inept characters who fail to communicate with one another – conjures up the imagery of the decaying architecture of the tower of Babel, folding under the weight of its own lofty pretences of unity and fixity. I would even argue that Sterne is something of an eighteenth century deconstructionist who chooses to revel in the endless play of "clearing the ground to raise the building" (TS, p.332) that subsequently defers any sense of spatial or linguistic completion through the apparent chaos and confusion housed within the text. The crumbling tower of Babel then serves as a metaphor for Sterne's treatment of language through the carnivalesque de-stabilization of the fixed centre of the tower that brings the vertical constructs of uniformity – of all that is high – back down to the earth. The intent of *this* discourse will be to come to terms with the complex and often self-subverting

23. *Tristram Shandy*, p.313

carnivalesque character of language and meaning gathered together in the unstable narrative architecture of *Tristram Shandy*.

The following passage from Genesis describes the tower of Babel and the process by which it became the enemy of the univocal, logocentric order of the Word of God:

> And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; ... and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.
>
> Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.
>
> So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.
>
> Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth" (Genesis, 11:6-9).

The subsequent diversity and confusion between language and its (in)ability to mean *something* in the "confounded" architecture of the tower of Babel is also characteristic of the anti-structural architecture of *Tristram Shandy*. The carnivalesque play of language found in a word such as *opinions,* which we explored earlier, offers an important link between the treatment of language in the text and the term "Babel." Derrida posits the meaning of Babel as being a double-edged discourse: "it is not only a proper name, the reference of a pure signifier to a single being — and for this reason untranslatable — but a common noun related to the generality of a meaning" (DTDB, p.245). In his *Dictionnaire philosophique*, Voltaire identifies a similar confusion:

> I do not know why it is said in Genesis that Babel signifies confusion, for *Ba* signifies father in the Oriental tongues, and *Bel* signifies God; Babel signifies the city of God, the holy city. The Ancients gave this name to all their capitals. But it is incontestable that Babel means confusion, either because the architects were confounded after having raised their work up to eighty-one thousand Jewish feet, or because the tongues were then confounded. (p. 245).

Therefore, *Babel* is not only a proper name that is unknowable, but also signifies the inability to define, and by extension is the word for that confusion that is manifest in the variety of languages and the complexities of communication. This is also characteristic of the carnivalesque mindset in that it opposes the official notion of a fixed meaning, and instead celebrates the diversity of language. Therefore, both spatially and linguistically, *Tristram Shandy* shares in the carnivalesque dialect that is "opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook" (RAHW, p.3).

Derrida explains that "the 'tower of Babel' does not figure merely the irreducible multiplicity of tongues; it exhibits an incompletion, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something on the order of edification, architectural construction, systems and architectonics" (DTDB, p.244). In terms of *Tristram Shandy*, this carnivalesque confusion and "incompletion" is the evolutionary freeplay between a signifier and its signified that is illustrated in the following passage by the ever-changing, carnivalesque,

phallic connotations of the word *nose*: "'Twas 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 those 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" (TS, p.343-4, italics mine). This passage suggests that "the word" is subject to decay and instability and possesses an always-evolving linguistic "life" by virtue of its multiple, thoroughly degraded and degrading, meanings. Tristram explains further that "the best word, in the best language of the best world must have suffered under such combinations" (TS, p.344); as such, there is a continuous process of displacement of the presence of a term that is always fractured by the absence or non-presence of its "other" related meanings. The resonance and oscillation of possible meanings of a dialogized word like "nose" are never complete, but instead continue to change throughout the course of a linguistic evolution. Thus, the term "nose" reveals a Babel-esque deconstruction and confusion that also marks a regeneration of language and meaning. As we shall see, while the carnivalesque celebrates the diversity and, thus, the unfixed nature of language, it also exhibits what Bakhtin refers to as the "common voice" of the narrator and his division from the "high voice" of officialdom.

One of the most important ways in which the stable centre (or tower) of the narrative voice is fractured into a virtual tower of Babel in *Tristram Shandy* is through the intervalic speech of officialdom that disrupts the tone and style of

the prevalent "common" carnival voices of the text: "'*Blessed is the man, then, as the author of the book of Ecclesiasticus expresses it, who is not pricked with the multitude of his sins: Blessed is the man whose heart hath not condemned him; whether he be rich, or whether he be poor, if he have a good heart* (a heart thus guided and informed)*...his mind shall tell him more than seven watch-men that sit above upon a tower on high.*' – [A tower has no strength, quoth my uncle Toby, unless 'tis flanked]" (TS, p. 148). This example, (complete with Babel-esque imagery), reiterates the carnivalesque mandate to bring the language of officialdom down to the level of the common folk while managing to poke fun at the division that exists between these two methods of communication. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin identifies a similar Babel-esque confusion of voices as "heteroglossia" which, when found within the context of a novel, "allows for the fullest artistic representation of the diversity of social speech types and the individual voices in a given culture" (TDI, p.552). In fact, it is the "common voice" of uncle Toby that undermines the ideology hidden behind these italicized high words of officialdom. Bakhtin explains that "this act of authorial unmasking, which is openly accomplished within the boundaries of a single simple sentence, merges with the unmasking of another's speech. The ceremonial emphasis on glorification is complicated by a second emphasis which is indignant, ironic, and this is the one that ultimately predominates in the final unmasking words of the sentence" (TDI, p.304). Here, in an almost ritualistic fashion, uncle Toby takes part in the carnivalesque treatment of official language by degrading a language that would otherwise be high.

Bakhtin explains that the "comic style demands of the author a lively to-and-fro movement in his relation to language, it demands a continual shifting of the distance between author and language, so that first some, then other aspects of language are thrown into relief" (TDI, p.302). The contrast is an important carnivalesque technique that illustrates another important example of the difference between the world of official language and that of common language. Tristram seizes upon this carnivalesque propensity to undermine all that is high and, in particular, the official language that thwarts communication by a succession of words that mask meaning: "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 reader's conception" (TS, p.208). Not only does this passage underpin the division between common and official language, but it also reasserts the carnivalesque orientation of Sterne's text by undermining the official voice and threatening to empty that language of its meaning.

This interaction with, and dispelling of, the high voice of officialdom by the "common voice" of Tristram and uncle Toby presents other carnivalesque implications that are relevant to the examples that I discussed above. The carnivalesque acceptance of the diversity and play found in the language of *Tristram Shandy* also, at times, takes on the same tone as the officialdom that is presented as an "other" voice. However, in this example, the clownish narrator reasserts his indivisibility from the king, as Tristram herein invokes the

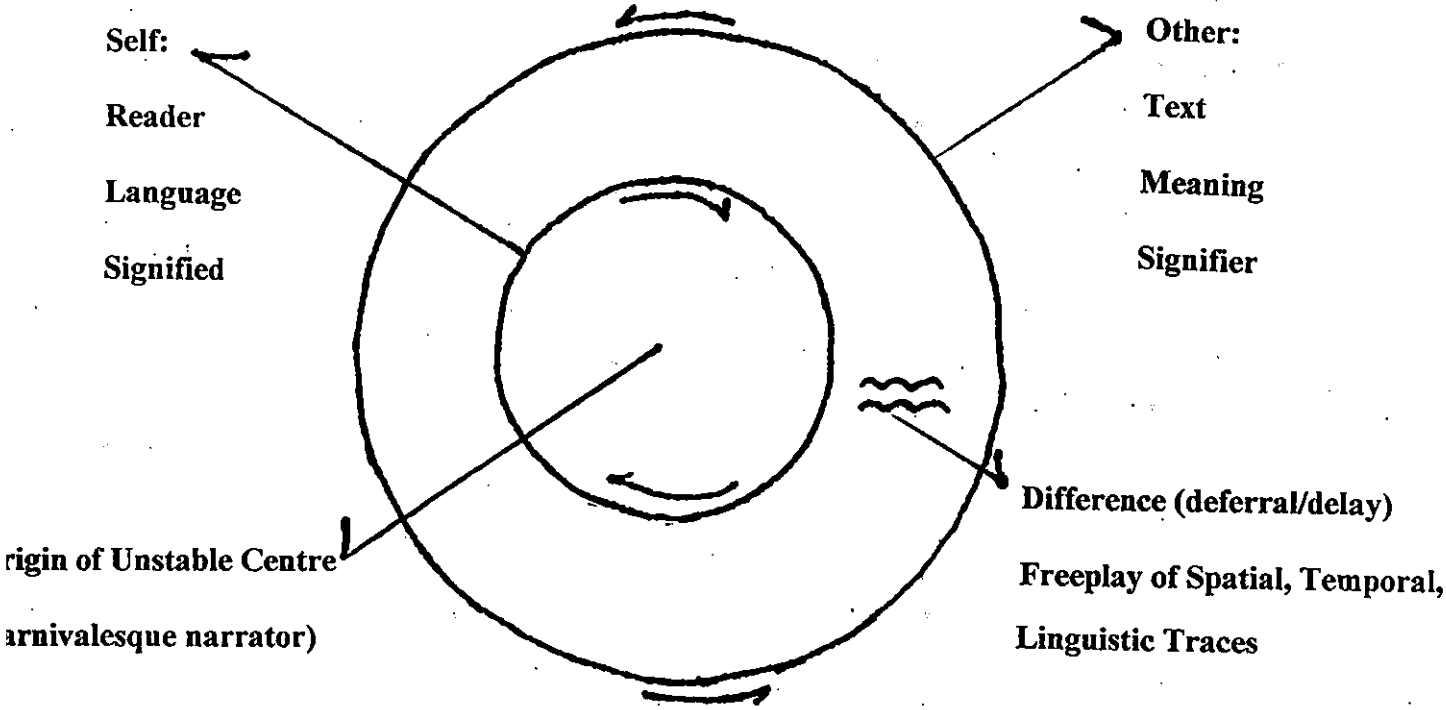
succession of tall "opake" words in the carnivalesque narrative that documents the metamorphosis of the clown into the king: "Thus — thus, my fellow labourers and associates in this great harvest of our learning, now ripening before our eyes; thus it is, by slow steps of casual increase, that our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, enigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and obstetrical, with fifty other branches of it, (most of 'em ending as these do, in *ical*) have, for these two last centuries and more, gradually creeping upwards towards that '*Axun* of their perfection" (TS, p.88). There is a concealed form of speech at work here, in which the author masks himself in the language (the *icals*) of officialdom. Therefore the "speech of another is introduced into the author's discourse (the story) in *concealed form*, that is, without any of the *formal* markers that usually accompany such speech, whether direct or indirect. But this is not just another's speech in the same "language"—it is another's utterance in a language that is itself 'other'" (TDI, p.303). Carnivalesque language is dependent on ambiguities in that it not only undermines and degenerates the fixed notions of officialdom, but also regenerates those fixed notions which produce the unfixed, oscillating freeplay between official and unofficial language.

In another important example, the freeplay of meaning that is the result of a diversity of languages also contains apocalyptic undertones. The tearing down of the tower of Babel, and the subsequent division between languages, has been the cause of many of the battles of recorded history. Certainly in the carnivalesque landscape of *Tristram Shandy*, the theme of war is foregrounded,

and is often the result of the play of language upon the mind (I will touch on the carnivalesque implications of war in Chapter III). The main concern here, however, is that the freeplay of a word -- the tearing down of the tower of Babel -- and the heteroglossic nature of language that ensues, incite confrontation through the act of relating language to meaning. In this example from *Tristram Shandy*, Francis the First of France, in order to further "strengthen" his relations with Switzerland, suggests making that country the godparent to his child, which includes the right to name that child. Switzerland accepts with the "highest sense of the honour" and provides their names of choice. Francis, believing it will be "Francis" or "Henry" or "Lewis" is informed by his minister that he is deceived: "And what name has the republic fixed upon for the Dauphin? – Shadrach, Mesech, and Abed-nego, replied the minister" (TS, p.298). Enraged and insulted, the king is mocked and brought even lower by our clownish narrator as he links such phrases as "highest sense of honour" with a tawdry, sexual discourse: "I will have nothing to do with the Swiss, cried Francis the First, pulling up his breeches and walking hastily across the floor. 'Your majesty, replied the minister calmly, cannot bring yourself off'" (TS, p.298). The humor that "arises" from the sexual innuendoes, coupled with the fact that the king is broke and therefore unable to bribe the Swiss, undermine the image of officialdom by revealing its impotence. This degradation that yokes together and undermines the notions of power and language traces the path to the apocalypse: "Then, Mons. Le Premier, said the king, by —— we'll go to war with 'em" (TS, p.298). The war to be fought is essentially a war over words.

As I discussed in the previous chapter, the employment of chronotope in *Tristram Shandy* is not a linear sequence that carries the narrative towards a sense of logical conclusion. Instead, the structure, or tower of the text, is continuously fractured through Sterne's freeplay of spatial and temporal form, which, in turn, produces the anti-process anachrony of the narrative. Indeed, on the one hand, a reader's relationship to a text is understood as a unified process towards a conclusion which, in turn, unifies the language of the text together with the meaning of the plot; the anti-processual freeplay of chronotope in *Tristram Shandy,* on the other hand, often swings in opposition to the progressive quest of the reader and text and substitutes a series of well-tied knots to undermine the arrival of a dénouement. We have seen that Sterne's carnivalesque foregrounding of the diversity of language often undermines the conclusive agreement between a word and its stable meaning. Indeed, while the traditional function, or process, of language is to establish an epistemological relationship between self and world, the expanding and contracting action of "other" possible meanings that are characteristic of the deconstructive instability of language defer, and at times problematizes this process. The space that divides these centripetal and centrifugal forces of spatial and linguistic freeplay in *Tristram Shandy* is similar to what Derrida defines as *différence.* Language as the function of the "self" is unable to bridge the space of differance (the void which divides) in order to unify in any absolute sense the diversity of "other" possible meanings. This unstable arrangement that produces the oppositional forces between language and meaning, and temporal and spatial

form, informs the carnivalesque freeplay, or what I referred to in my Preface as the "process of anti-process." By this I signify a structural, or rather anti-structural process that inherently works against its own development. The model might look something like this:



In essence, the small inner circle, spinning in clockwise rotation, represents the intrinsic nature of the self. The large outer circle, spinning in counter-clockwise rotation, represents the extrinsic nature of the other. The void between them, as well as beyond them and within them, is the void of differance. As the intrinsic self tries to bridge the gap between itself and the extrinsic other through the process of language, that bridge is disrupted by the motion of differance, which is paradoxically both an effect and a cause of, the inherent dividedness of the self and the other, or their spatial division *and* their simultaneous rotation in opposite directions. As language only *re*-presents the other in order to make it conceptually "swallowable" for the subject, it can never reveal the essence of

the other, but only show it through a series of veiled mirrors. These veiled mirrors, we should note, are what Derrida refers to as traces, or non-entities which point towards each other and themselves in an endless process (or anti-process) of "play" or structural flux. In the nameless void of differance, the process of signification, by which the self would potentially approach a meaningful understanding of the other, is disrupted and fractured into an endless deferral of meaning *and*, therefore, understanding.

In the following passage, Sterne provides an applicable description of the "process of anti-process" that has been discussed above: "the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, — and at the same time ... 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" (TS, p.73/80-82). These metafictional digressions not only produce divisions, but also illustrate the freeplay between language and meaning in the text. This freeplay in the space that divides the counter-rotation of the two circles – between language and meaning – in turn fractures the characters' ability to communicate with one another. In the following passage, Walter Shandy attempts to produce meaning by way of an "analogy" that illustrates this division between word and meaning and reveals that that word itself is also subject to endless digressions and ambiguities: "Now, if a man was to sit down coolly and consider within himself the make, the shape, the construction, come-

at-ability, and convenience of all the parts which constitute the whole of that animal, called Woman, and compare them analogically — I never understood rightly the meaning of that word,– quoth my uncle Toby, – ANALOGY, replied my father, is the certain relation and agreement, which different —— Here a devil of a rap at the door snapped my father's definition (like his tobacco pipe) in two" (TS, p.122). An analogy attempts to correlate two unrelated images that, when together, circumvent the barrier that is language in order to produce meaning. In the above example, however, any sense of an absolute definition is thwarted by the "rap at the door" (the space of differance) which suspends and defers the closure between the understanding of the *word* "analogy" and, ultimately, it employment in specific relation to women. Indeed, Bakhtin explains that "it is possible to give a concrete and detailed analysis of any utterance, once having exposed it as a contradiction-ridden, tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies in the life of language" (TDI, p.282).

The carnivalesque freeplay between language and meaning undermines the presence of a word in order to reveal the multiplicity of its meanings, and also subverts the fixed centre of language characteristic of the discourse of officialdom. A similar subversion of language is used in *Tristram Shandy* to describe the carnivalesque images of the grotesque body. According to Bakhtin the "grotesque image reflects a phenomenon in transformation, an as yet unfinished metamorphosis, of death and birth, growth and becoming. The relation to time is one determining trait of the grotesque image. The other indispensable trait is ambivalence. For in this image we find both poles of

transformation, the old and the new, the dying and the procreating, the beginning and the end of the metamorphosis" (RAHW, p.24). The final chapter, then, will investigate the grotesque imagery found in *Tristram Shandy* by focussing on these two poles of transformation – birth and death – and the means by which Sterne undermines the subject matter and behavior of his characters and produces the images of the grotesque in the text.

cosmological implications of grotesque realism which Bakhtin lays out. According to Bakhtin, the grotesque body is "not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits" (RAHW, p.26). Speaking cosmologically, the grotesque body, like the entire tradition of carnivalesque images and language, derives its distinctive flavor by transcending the limits of the microcosm and participating joyfully in the life of the entire cosmos. It does so in two distinct ways: first, by venturing out into the world (penis, nose, belly); and second, by allowing the universe to pass through it (anus, mouth, belly). Bakhtin explains, "The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world. This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, *the genital organs*, the breasts, *the phallus, the potbelly, the nose*" (RAHW,p.26, italics mine). Thus, the sites of these alternate acts of penetrating and being penetrated by the cosmos are located all over the body, which Bakhtin divides into an upper and a lower strata. In fact, there is even a cosmological parallel between the face and the "nether face" as the nose and the penis, the mouth and the anus, the cheeks of the face and the cheeks of the buttocks all become alternate symbols of each other. In this respect, the grotesque body becomes the twofold symbol of carnivalesque life as it becomes not only a symbol of itself, but of the universe.

The grotesque body is also the site of the deconstruction of vertical hierarchies and can be viewed explicitly in terms of the topographical relationship between the upper and lower strata. While the traditional cosmological interpretation of the hierarchy of ascent and descent valorizes "upward" movement towards heaven over "downward" movement into the earth and, in Judeo-Christian terms, hell, the carnivalesque scrambles this vertical, topographical hierarchy by locating the origin of life in the earth, the belly, and, generally, in any topographical symbol associated with the lower stratum. Bakhtin explains that we see, "the essential topographical element of the bodily hierarchy turned upside down; the lower stratum replaces the upper stratum" (RAHW, p.309). Hence, the grotesque body represents precisely the carnivalesque process of degradation by yoking "upward" and "downward," heaven and earth, together and allowing the substance of the universe to be returned to the material level by passing through the body's orifices.

Given this ambivalent, dual nature of the grotesque body, the degradation it represents serves not simply a negative, deconstructive function, but is also responsible for the very possibility of regeneration. Thus, in the grotesque image of the body, as in the entire tradition of carnivalesque language, space, and time, the binaries of death and rebirth are inextricably connected. In this chapter I will examine Sterne's employment of the grotesque body, and grotesque realism in general, in light of the issues of cosmology, verticality, and degradation. By doing so I hope to establish that *Tristram Shandy* participates not only in the structural free play of the carnivalesque

form, but exhibits all of the joyfully grotesque imagery which characterizes the carnival experience.

As a point of departure for this inquiry into the images of grotesque realism in *Tristram Shandy*, I would like to draw attention to a number of its specific components as defined by Bakhtin in the following two passages:

> **The essential principle of grotesque realism is *degradation*, that is, the *lowering all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract*; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of the earth and body in their indissoluble unity (RAHW, p.19-20, italics mine)**

> **To degrade also means to concern oneself with *the lower stratum of the body*, *the life of the belly* and the *reproductive organs*; it therefore relates to acts of *defecation* and *copulation, conception, pregnancy, and birth*. Degradation digs a bodily grave for a new birth; it has not only a destructive negative aspect, but also a regenerative one. (RAHW, p.21, italics mine)**

The components of grotesque realism italicized in the two above passages will serve as guidelines for the remainder of this discussion.

The quintessential grotesque body in *Tristram Shandy* is arguably that of Dr Slop, the "man mid-wife." His ambivalent, androgynous physical description, as well as his comical interaction with and juxtaposition to the other characters, contribute to countless scenes which find their locus in the body's lower stratum and participate in the perpetual processes of degradation and regeneration. I would like to begin by isolating Sterne's description of Dr Slop's grotesque attributes because I will use it as a touchstone throughout this investigation: "Imagine to yourself a little *squat*, uncourtly figure of a Doctor Slop, of about *four feet and a half perpendicular height*, with a breadth of back, and *a*

sesquipedality of belly, which might have done honour to a serjeant in the horse-guards" (TS, p.123, italics mine). This grotesquely descriptive portrait of Dr Slop posits two central images in the system of carnivalesque grotesque imagery that we should consider. First, Slop is dwarfish in stature, which implies the grotesque notion of miniaturization and the consequent liberation of the body from fixed biological categories. The body which is grotesquely deformed, or in this case shrunken, constitutes an anomaly to the laws of official scientific nomenclature. Second, and of equal importance, the description of his Sancho Panza-like "sesquipedality of belly" (which literally means one and a half belly's) transgresses the limits of the official, microcosmic body and moves towards the grandiose outside world of the macrocosm. It is significant, at least in terms of verticality, that Slop seems to be wider than he is tall, as his body moves outward (versus upward) towards the universe. These inversions of the typically rigid and skeletally vertical body function to transfer the discourse surrounding Slop, which typically would focus on the cerebral (he is, after all, a doctor), from the upper stratum of the head to the lower stratum of the belly and the genitals.

While the grotesque description of Dr Slop foregrounds many of the primary concerns of the grotesque found in *Tristram Shandy*, it is Slop's ambivalent and contradictory interaction with other equally ambivalent characters in the text that produces the freeplay of grotesque imagery and repeatedly—continuously—deconstructs the vertical images of officialdom. For instance, both the descriptive imagery surrounding and the consequences

resulting from the "head on" collision between Dr Slop and Obadiah upon their respective "horses" (or symbolic phalluses) recapitulates the process of the death and regeneration of a power symbolized by the phallus. Tristram's initial description of the riders' approach is heavily laden with phallic imagery: "Dr Slop's figure, coming slowly along, foot by foot, waddling through the dirt *upon the vertebrae of a little diminutive pony, of a pretty colour; — but of strength, — alack*! — scarce able to have made an amble of it, under such a fardel, had the roads been in an ambling condition ... Imagine to yourself *Obadiah mounted upon a strong monster of a coach-horse, pricked into a full gallop, and making all practicable speed the adverse way"* (TS, p.124, italics mine). This thinly sheathed language transfers the origin of Tristram's discourse to the powerful region of the genitals as Obadiah's "strong monster" battles it out with Slop's "diminutive pony." However, while this degradingly carnivalesque description of a symbolically-impotent Slop is centred on a phallic lack emphasized by his juxtaposition with the potent Obadiah, Slop is resurrected later through the ambivalently metaphorical language which suggests that he is, indeed, capable of a good thrust: "Dr Slop clapped his finger and his thumb instantly upon his nostrils;—Susannah's spleen was ready to burst at it;— 'Tis false, said Susannah.—Come, come, Mrs Modesty, said Slop, not a little elated with *the success of his last thrust*,— if you won't hold the candle, and look – you may hold it with your eyes shut" (TS, p.400, italics mine). Slop is, without a doubt, the most carnivalesque character in *Tristram Shandy* because, in the manner of the two above passages, he is continuously degraded and then regenerated through

Sterne's treatment of descriptive language which centres around the regenerative carnivalesque *axis mundi*, or world axis, of the phallus which is located in the body's lower stratum.

The carnivalesque binary opposite to Slop's phallically-challenged pony in the above passage is, of course, Obadiah's stallion. Providing the binary opposition to Slop, the image of Obadiah can also be correlated to the immeasurable power of the carnivalesque giant – Sterne's own version of Rabelais' Gargantua (whose codpiece, by the way, was reportedly six feet long). The following description from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* emphasizes the carnivalesque potency of phallic symbols such as Obadiah and his horse. At their core, these symbols represent the regenerative region of the lower stratum:

> Which codpiece, or braguette, his governesses did ever day deck up and adorn with fair nosegays, curious rubies, sweet flowers, and fine silken tufts, and very pleasantly would pass their time in taking you know what between their fingers, and dandling it, till it did revive and creep up to the bulk and stiffness of a suppository, or street magdaleon, which is a hard rolled up salve spread upon leather. They did burst out laughing, when they saw it lift up its ears, as if the sport had liked them. (GAP, p.31)

Although superficially it recapitulates the fixed rigidity of official logocentric hierarchies, the gargantuan phallus is the perfect metaphor for the process of degradation and regeneration by virtue of its ability to go, for lack of a better expression, up and down. In this respect, it is the quintessential collapsible power structure that, on one hand, is literally "high and mighty," and on the other hand is always in threat of losing its power either by castration or by spent sexual energy.

As I have suggested before, the carnivalesque process of lowering all that is high is part of an ongoing cycle of descent and ascent, degeneration and regeneration. In the collision between Dr Slop and Obadiah, even the power of Obadiah's sterling steed is degraded and ends up wallowing in the mud: "[Dr Slop] was advancing thus warily along towards Shandy Hall, and had approached to within sixty yards of it, and within five yards of sudden turn, made by an acute angle of the garden-wall,-- *and in the dirtiest part of a dirty lane,*– when *Obadiah and his coach-horse turned the corner, rapid, furious, -- pop, -- full upon him*!"(TS, p.124, italics mine). Thus, the phallic symbol of Obadiah's "coach-horse" falls "full upon" Slop and represents the degraded image of the symbolically-castrated phallus which is brought back down to the mud—or slop–of the earth, which is implied in the doctor's name. Even the carnivalesque's own turgid symbols of power must participate in the ongoing process of degradation so that they might be resurrected in new, viable forms. In fact, the "sodomistic" yoking (they symbolically enter each other in "the dirtiest part of a dirty lane") of these two disparate phallic symbols represents the process by which one of them (Obadiah) is restored to the grotesque material level, and the other (Slop) asserts its own power to degrade that which parades as a symbol of power. Obadiah becomes the image of spent sexual energy, the descent of the phallus into the grotesque earthly body's lower stratum. In a sense, Obadiah and Dr Slop re-enact the cyclical motion between chaos and order, between noise and silence, which is a component of carnivalesque degradation.

The idea of the binary oppositions of degradation and regeneration is manifested in the image of Dr Slop following his collision with Obadiah. In this scene, Slop, with his "sesquipedality of belly" (the bodily locus of carnivalesque death and rebirth) falls—or tumbles—rear-end-first into the mud: "He stood, like Hamlet's ghost, motionless and speechless, for a full minute and a half at the parlour door (Obadiah still holding his hand) *with all the majesty of mud. His hinder parts, upon which he had received his fall, totally besmeared*" (TS, p.126, italics mine). The image of mud, which clearly symbolizes excrement in this passage ("his hinder parts...totally besmeared"), represents the ambivalent process of death and regeneration as "defecation [is] on the absolute lower level of grotesque realism, of the gay bodily grave (belly, bowels, earth)" (RAHW, p.22). Coupled with Slop's grotesque belly, the juxtaposition of these two images, one of death or degradation, the other of life and rebirth, emphasizes that the grotesquely "squat" Slop is a character who constantly participates in the ambivalence of dual carnivalesque realities. Also, Slop's close association in this passage with the carnivalesque tumbler, who symbolizes the cosmos by repeatedly inverting himself and his bodily topology, reinforces the depiction of Slop as the quintessential, dying and birthing, degrading and regenerating, carnivalesque character.

The grotesque belly yokes the images of birth, life, and death, into a single indivisible union and illustrates the processes of regeneration and degradation that are housed within the body's lower stratum. Bakhtin explains that in this sphere of the body, death "is here always related to birth; the grave

is related to the earth's life-giving womb. Birth-death, death-birth, such are the components of life itself. Death is included in life, and together with birth determines its eternal movement" (RAHW, p.50). In this passage from *Tristram Shandy*, the marriage between "birth-death, death-birth" are identified by Trim, who explains the misadventure of the new-born Tristram at the hands of Slop: "'—In bringing him into the world with his vile instruments, [Slop] has crushed his nose, Susannah says, as flat as a pancake to his face, and he is making a false bridge with a piece of cotton and a thin piece of whalebone out of Susannah's stays, to raise it up" (TS, p.222). The "vile instruments" which Trim mentions are in fact Dr Slop's forceps, which, on the one hand, are symbolic of regenerative channeling of the new life out from the confines of the womb, while on the other hand, the forceps crush, maim, and degrade that life, or in this case Tristram's "nose" (which, of course symbolizes is his phallus). The flattening of Tristram's symbolic phallus with the forceps connects the new life to the death-in-life image of Slop, while at the same time draws the infant towards the "threshold of the grave and the crib" (RAHW. p. 26). Conversely, by pulling new life painfully out into the world, Slop, to quote Beckett, stands between "a grave and a difficult birth. Down in the hole, lingeringly, the grave-digger puts on the forceps" (WFG, p.58). Also, it is worth mentioning that this symbolic castration depicts the degradation of the phallus as a hierarchical power structure that is "brought low" by the act of symbolic castration, while the attempt to raise the phallus "with a piece of cotton and a thin piece of whalebone" represents the regeneration and resurrection of the degraded

phallic image so that it may once again transgress the limitations of the bodily microcosm to penetrate the cosmos.

Perhaps the most important example of the cosmological union between the upper and lower strata of the body is contained in this passage, in which Walter Shandy learns that "the lax and pliable state of a child's head in parturition, the bones of the cranium having no sutures at that time, was such,-- that by force of the woman's efforts, which in strong labour-pains, was equal, upon an average, to a weight of 470 pounds averdupoise acting perpendicularly upon it;-- it so happened that, in 49 instances out of 50, the said head was compressed and moulded into the shape of an oblong, conical piece of dough, such as a pastry-cook generally rolls up in order to make a pie of" (TS, p.164). The passage suggests the images of the lower body transgressing itself through the act of childbirth, while the birthing body symbolizes the bodily grave which "constructs what we might call a double body. In the endless chain of bodily life it retains the parts in which one link joins the other, in which the life of one body is born from the death of the preceding, older one" (RAHW, p.318). The detailed description of the force of the labour pains further emphasizes the union between the head of the infant's upper stratum with the lower stratum of the mother's body by turning the microcosm of the body upside down. At the same time, this detailed description is an important part of the incomplete metamorphosis of transformation that turns the grotesque body inside out with the graphic details of childbirth. While these details are typically and intentionally grotesque, they possess the added significance of serving the

complex function of grotesque realism. Further, the process by which the life of the cosmos (in the form of the infant) moves down from the pregnant, protruding belly through the orifice of the vagina represents the grotesque body transgressing its own microcosmic limits as it is laid open to, and simultaneously penetrates, the macrocosmic universe.

Detailed descriptions of the internal workings of the grotesque body have further significance in terms of Walter Shandy's suggestion to topographically invert the baby inside of the mother's womb. This inversion, however, is not a natural process, but involves the penetration of the microcosm of the body by the doctor's arm, and the manipulation of the upside down infant in an attempt to protect the delicate cranium. Through Walter Shandy's thirst for knowledge in books, he learns that "when a child was turned topsy-turvy, which was easy for an operator to do, and was extracted by the feet;– that instead of the cerebrum being propelled towards the cerebellum, the cerebellum, on the contrary, was propelled simply towards the cerebrum where it could do no manner of hurt" (TS, p.165). The effect of this "feet-first" exit from the lower stratum is twofold; first, it doubles the image of the lower stratum, and second, the infant becomes a version of the carnivalesque tumbler figure participating in a perpetual, grotesque, cyclical motion of topsy-turvydom.

Another instance of the carnivalesque lowering of hierarchical constructs in the lower stratum occurs in the following passage describing Tristram's castration: "I was five years old.—Susannah did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,– so slap came the sash down like lightning upon us;–

Nothing is left,-- cried Susannah,-- nothing is left--" (TS, p. 369). The window sash's crushing of Tristram's phallus is the ultimate scene of degradation in the body's lower stratum. Similar to uncle Toby's wound to the groin suffered at the "siege of Namur", as well as Slop's and Obadiah's already-discussed mutual castrations, the fall of the window sash on Tristram's phallus topples the vertical tower of masculine power, suggesting a grotesque body that is incomplete, or wounded, and, thus, made open to the cosmos. Also worth mentioning is the subtle connection between the description of Tristram's castration/impotence to images of war. War is traditionally associated with patriarchy and the hierarchical constructs of officialdom that serve to protect a way of life and regeneration of community. Following Tristram's castration, Trim admits that he used the weights that keep the window up for the construction of the town on the bowling green. Trim explains: "—I wish, said Trim, as they entered the door,-- instead of the sash weights, I had cut off the church spout, as I once thought to have done.—You have cut off spouts enow, replied Yorick.—" (TS, p.374). As such, Sterne undermines the potent image of war, and connects it instead with images of castration.

Another means by which official, masculine power and authority, as represented by the phallus, are degraded in *Tristram Shandy* is through verbal abuse leveled by the Shandy women. In moments of carnivalesque degradation, the language of particular female characters replaces the authority of a male logos and attains a position of power. In this scene, Tristram recounts a less than subtle dialogue between his great-grandfather and great-grandmother, in which

the power clearly shifts from the masculine to the feminine: "'Because,' quoth my great-grandmother, repeating the words again,– 'you have little or no nose, Sir.'— 'Sdeath! Cried my great-grandfather, clapping his hand upon his nose,– 'tis not so small as that comes to;– 'tis a full inch longer than my father's.— Now, my great-grandfather's nose was for all the world like unto the noses of all the men, women and children, whom Pantagruel found dwelling upon the island of ENNASIN.— By the way, if you would know the strange way of getting a-kin amongst so flat-nosed a people, — you must read the book; – find it out yourself, you never can.—'Twas shaped, Sir, like an ace of clubs" (TS, p.226). The diminutive phallus-nose of Tristram's great-grandfather is a symbol of lost, or even never-existent, power (in the terms that its power is only derived from an illusion or pretence of potency). The female voice not only degrades and insults the otherwise vertically-potent image of masculine power, but actually contributes to its diminishment. The scene concludes: "—'Tis a full inch, continued my grandfather, pressing up the ridge of his nose with his finger and his thumb; and repeating his assertion, – 'tis a full inch longer, madam, than my father's–. You mean your uncle's, replied my great-grandmother" (TS,p.226).

The image of miniaturization (linked symbolically to images of castration) is also important in the carnivalesque degradation of fixed, official, and vertical constructs. In the following example, Tristram participates in the grotesque idiom of miniaturization by describing his own beginnings of life in his father's "scattered and dispersed" homunculus. According to Tristram, homunculi are little men with "skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments,

nerves, cartilages, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations" (TS, p.36). As in the implied metaphysical or cosmological relationship between the human and the puppet, the official image of the human being is degraded, emptied of its power, through the relationship between the homunculi and humanity. However, the most telling example of this degradation of official social constructs occurs in Tristram's claim that the homunculus is no different than the "Lord Chancellor of England." The official image of the "Lord Chancellor," who derives his social power from a vertical social hierarchy, is undermined and degraded by Tristram's suggestion that he is, in essence, no different than mutable, miniaturized version of humanity that the homunculi represent.

Tristram's ambivalent description of the regenerative journey of the homunculus, offset by the fatigue of his battle-worn little "philosopher," foregrounds the degradation inherent in the life that is being created: "Now, dear Sir, what if any accident had befallen him in his way alone? – or that, through terror of it, natural to so young a traveller, my little gentleman had got to his journey's end miserably spent;— his muscular strength and virility worn down to a thread ... I tremble to think what a foundation had been laid for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind, which no skill of a physician or the philosopher could ever afterwards have set thoroughly to rights" (TS, p.36-37). There is, of course, the degradation of the official image of the intellectual effected by referring to his sperm as a "little philosopher"; however, of even greater significance is Sterne's depiction of the two primary attributes of the

homunculus as an ambivalent image of the lower stratum of the body. The homunculus is a regenerative, pro-creative entity that reveals the open and unfinished nature of the grotesque body. And while this scene, like the previous one, suggests images of grotesque realism, it is the other side of the grotesque, the image of degradation, that is represented by the grotesque body, in this case the homunculus itself, which completes the binary oppositions inherent in the body's lower strata.

In conclusion, Sterne's treatment of the text itself also participates in the carnivalesque imagery of the grotesque body. The design of the text, which I have referred to as "the process of anti-process", takes on bodily, physical carnivalesque implications through its unfinished, open-ended nature and the freeplay of the "association of ideas". While the text is structured upon the workings of the upper stratum of Tristram's mind, the subject matter of these associations are primarily concerned with the ambivalent images of the body's lower stratum. This connection between the high and the low in the text is the "logic of opposites, the contact of the upper and lower level" (RAHW, p.309), and therefore precisely represents the carnivalesque images of the grotesque. By participating in the freeplay of form, in the perpetual cycle of linguistic living and dying, the text is in a continual state of degradation and regeneration. In fact, the degradation of the text is most notable in its relationship with the reader. In moving through the narrative, the reader participates in the demise of the text as both he and it move towards a sense of completion and/or conclusion. However, the process of moving through the text is not only one of

degeneration. The prefatory design of *Tristram Shandy* is an anti-process that thwarts the arrival at a site of conclusion or death, and therefore through the degraded images and form housed within its folds, unfolds forever.

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