4. The Art of Sterne -- (A) Technique of 'T.S.'

(a) Charges of formlessness:

Sterne's art of construction (in T.S.), however forbidding to the lay reader, is of singular interest to the serious student of fiction. In Sterne's age, Fielding had carefully laid down the rules of constructing a novel as an organic form, with the Aristotelian emphasis on plot, built on the interrelation of episodes, the story proceeding progressively in time (i.e., clock-time). This classical technique has been more or less faithfully followed by all conventional novelists. Sterne shocked the orthodox critical conscience by ignoring altogether, and making fun of, the set rules of construction. Charges of whimsicality and waywardness have been levelled at him. His well-known contemporary, Horace Walpole, was irked at the public reception of Sterne's novel (Bks. I & II only had appeared at the time) --

"At present nothing is talked of, nothing admired, but what I cannot help calling a very insipid and tedious performance; it is a kind of a novel, called The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, the great humour of which consists in the whole narration always going backwards".  

Samuel Richardson noted 'Unaccountable wildness; whimsical digressions' in T.S. In the next century, Sir Walter Scott, too, found in Sterne's novel a lack of order, an 'eccentricity in composition'. Walter Bagehot refers to the 'fantastic disorder of the form' in T.S. Taine notes that Sterne has 'neither sequence nor plan', and that
"when he lights upon anything orderly, he purposely contorts it".6

Traill, too, saw 'studied eccentricity' in the novel; he found Sterne 'uniformly eccentric, regularly irregular'. In the 20th century, Sichel notes 'length and disjointedness' as the faults in T.S. And Brimley Johnson, editor of Sterne's letters, while paying homage to Sterne's characters, points out that his novel is 'the most perversely conceived narrative ... without order or form'. He does not explain, however, how Sterne's characters of 'deathless vitality' - as he calls them - can issue out of a framework of utter disorder, of which they are but an integral part. A 'character' is a part of the pattern of a book. As Turnell says -

"... a character is a verbal construction which has no existence outside the book. It is a vehicle for the novelist's sensibility, and its significance lies in its relations with the author's other constructions".11

Even Priestley, while he appreciates the humour of T.S., is critical of the construction of the novel. Sterne's narrative - he says -

"neither starts from anywhere nor arrives anywhere; it does not travel at all, but merely contorts itself".12

He says further, that Sterne's novel is guided by no laws. Baker, the well-known historian of the English novel, echoes the opinion of Horace Walpole, when he says that Sterne

"turned the accepted structure upside down and inside out, or made the story ... go backwards instead of forward".15

And Quennell found in T.S., 'an exceedingly uneven book' - as he called it, 'perverse oddities and deliberate eccentricities'.14

The humorist author himself also confounds his critics in this regard. Quite often he makes playful statements about his technique of writing -
"I begin with writing the first sentence - and trusting to Almighty God for the second".15

"... is a man to follow rules - or rules to follow him?"16

"Ask my pen, - it governs me, - I govern not it".17

He refers to his novel as 'this rhapsodical work', and says, elsewhere, that he

"never yet knew what it was to say or write one pre­meditated word in my whole life".19

But we have to remember that all such statements are misleading if we take them at their face value and fail to see that they issue out of the author's irresistible gaiety of spirit and sense of humour, with which he apprehends all experience, including the psychological one of his relationship with his readers.

(b) The structural technique of the novel:

Before we go into the technique of the novel, let us see if there is any guidance in the matter from the author himself. We find narrator Tristram repeatedly emphasizing his own rules of construction -

"... in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his(Horace's) rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived".20

"... the machinery of my work is of a species by itself".21

He pleads for freedom from set rules; The good Addison had done so too, and for the place of imagination in a work of art; and he drives his point home by the example of Garrick's acting.

Elsewhere he says -

"All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, 'to let people tell their stories their own way'".24
And he requests his reader not only to allow him to tell his story his own way,

"but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside".25

Indeed, Sterne was not alone in believing that the artist should have full freedom in choosing his form, which can be as varied as content. Tolstoy said that

"every great artist necessarily creates his own form also".26

Bulwer-Lytton saw nothing wrong, for the novel, in

"an immense variety in modes of treatment - a bold licence of loose capricious adaptation of infinite material to some harmonious unity of interest, which even the most liberal construction of dramatic licence cannot afford to the drama".27

George Eliot even wondered why a story should

"not be told in the most irregular fashion that an author's idiosyncrasy may prompt, provided that he gives us what we enjoy".28

In Tristram Shandy, she takes exception only to 'the quality of the interrupting matter', not to 'the fact of interruption'. Even Pope, the acknowledged representative of 18th century classicism, granted that rules are but the means to an end; and if

"Some lucky licence answer to the full Th' intent propos'd, that licence is a rule".30

Poet Gray regarded rules as

"but chains good for little except when one can break through them".31

Though in practice these writers kept to rules, they are at one in granting that an artist should follow the free bent of his own genius, rather than the rules made by others.

(i) Narrator's 'Opinions'. Sterne calls his novel The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. The narrator is Tristram
himself. The novel has a motto from Epictetus, which means—

"It is not actions, but opinions concerning actions, which disturb men".

This is very significant, as it is a clear pointer to what we should expect in this novel, namely that, it will not be a story packed with 'actions' or adventures— as a story of Sterne's time was, but a record of 'Opinions'. In other words, the novel is going to have not an episodic, but psychological interest. In the novel itself, the humorist author rebukes the

"vicious taste, which has crept into thousands ... of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures, than of the deep erudition and knowledge which a book of this cast, if read over as it should be, would infallibly impart with them— The mind should be accustomed to make wise reflections, and draw curious conclusions as it goes along".

To understand his technique—he says—one must be thoroughly acquainted with Locke, whose Essay concerning Human Understanding— Sterne reminds us—is

"a history-book ... of what passes in a man's own mind."

Tristram Shandy thus is a record of what passes in the narrator's mind.

Tristram's, that is, Sterne's, story is about himself. Sterne's concept of personality is psychological, and derived from Locke. Now, Locke located personal identity in the individual's continuing consciousness—

"To find wherein personal identity consists we must consider what person stands for; which, I think, is a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places; which it does only by that consciousness ... personal identity consists not in the identity of substance, but in the identity of consciousness".
Addison echoes this view in his *Spectator* (no. 578, Aug. 9, 1714). So Hume says that self is

"a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement".  

Tristram also refers to the train of ideas in the mind, more than once. Noting a passing thought in the mind of Dr. Slop, he says that 'millions' of it

"are every day swimming quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man's understanding".

He finely records, elsewhere, the running stream of his ideas and physical sensations of suffering he had experienced while lying perilously ill on board the ship -

"... I am sick as a horse ... - what a brain! upside down! - hey-day! the cells are broke loose one into another, and the blood, the lymph, and the nervous juices, with fixed and volatile salts, are all jumbled into one mass - Good G-! every thing turns round in it like a thousand whirlpools - ... Sick! sick! sick! sick! - When shall we get to land? captain - they have hearts like stones - O I am deadly sick! - reach me that thing, boy - 'tis the most discomfiting sickness - I wish I was at the bottom - Madam! how is it with you? Undone! undone! un- O! undone! sir - ... - what a trampling over head! - hollo! cabin boy! what's the matter? - ...".

Sterne's concept of personality being psychological (the identity of the person being the identity of his consciousness which is in a perpetual flux), he sometimes humorously refers to his perplexity when asked by someone to declare his identity; for one's inward experience is not so much true for another as it is for oneself. Tristram is puzzled, when he is asked about his identity by the French commissary -

"-And who are you? said he. - Don't puzzle me; said I."
In S.J., referring to his interview with the Count de B~, the author says that there is

"not a more perplexing affair in life to me, than to set about telling any one who I am, for there is scarce any body I cannot give a better account of than myself".40

Tristram's story being about himself - and his personality being located in his inner being, in the running stream of his ideas, we have to go to this flow of his consciousness as narrator, in order to find the central principle of construction in the novel. There is no other way to connect the narrator's 'Life and Opinions' with the passages, where he is associating himself with a past event which had happened even before his birth. Consciousness may unite others' experiences to our own; in other words, others' experiences can become our own by subjectivity. Tristram warns Dr. Slop as the latter is about to bring him (Tristram) into the world -

"Truce! - truce, good Dr. Slop! - stay thy obstetric hand; - little dost thou know what obstacles, - little dost thou think what hidden causes, retard its operation!".41

By the same unifying principle of consciousness, Tristram (born 17-18) observes his uncle Toby examining the bewitching eye of Widow Wadman (Toby did so just after the Peace of Utrecht which ended his 'campaigns' on the bowling-green, that is, in 1713) -

"I see him yonder with his pipe pendulous in his hand, and the ashes falling out of it - looking - and looking - then rubbing his eyes - and looking again, ... - If thou lookest, uncle Toby, in search of this mote one moment longer - thou art undone".43

The past merges into the present in the consciousness of the narrator.

Russell ignores this subjective unity (of narrator's consciousness) in T.S., when he says that in this novel the first-person narrative is spoken by 'a minor character, not the hero';
this, however - he points out - is an advantage, in that it
"preserves at once the independence of the main charac-
ter(i.e., Toby Shandy, according to Rusgell) and the
opportunity for management and exposition".46
Russell says that the book might properly be called The Life and
Opinions of Mr. Toby Shandy, and adds that the given title of the
novel shows the 'indirect or tangential procedure' of Sterne. But
if Toby is the main character or hero of the novel, cannot the sa-
me be said of his brother Walter Shandy as well? For Walter occu-
pies as much space in the novel as Toby, if not more, and as a
character has the same thematic significance as Toby. These diff-
culties arise from ignoring the central principle of construction
in the novel. The whole structural pattern in the novel has its
focus in narrator Tristram's consciousness. There is no other un-
ifying principle in the novel - a story which frequently jumps sp-
ace and time, back and forth.

(ii) Digressions: law of association. The main difficulty with
T.S. is its perennial digressiveness - 'the eternal scampering of
the discourse from one thing to another'. But digressiveness did
not originate with Sterne. Swift had used the digressive techni-
que in his Tale of a Tub. In The Author's Apology, prefixed to the
Tale, he says that he would

"proceed in a manner that should be altogether new ... The abuses in religion, he proposed to set forth in the
allegory of the coats and the three brothers, which wa-
s to make up the body of the discourse: those in learn-
ing he chose to introduce by way of digressions".49

Indeed, more than half the Tale is digressions. Besides 'abuses
in learning' - which, the author says, is the main theme of the
digressions, there are other matters, too, which come in the
digressions, such as, explanation of his theme and technique, in-
direct talks with his readers, indictment of his critics, explai-
ning the true business of criticism, and so on. Swift has much to
say on the virtue of digressiveness, or rambling at will —

"For in writing it (i.e., the story), as in travelling;
if a man is in haste to be at home (which I acknowled­
ge to be none of my case ...). I advise him clearly
to make the straightest and the commonest road, be it
ever so dirty; but then surely we must own such a man
to be a scurvy companion at best." 53

Towards the end of his Tale, Swift refers to his long wandering
away from his main subject, and promises to return to it and pro-
ceed steadily to the end of the journey, unless

"some beautiful prospect appears within sight of my way" 53
— when he may crave the indulgence of his reader to stray again
away. We find Sterne similarly making, after many digressions, a
pious promise to mend and go in a straight line. He even uses the
same image for his digressive technique as Swift — namely, that
of breaking one's journey and travelling sideways at leisure, in­
stead of going straight forward. But while Swift cuts out digress­
sions from his Gulliver's Travels, Sterne's novel is chock-full of
them.

In making fun of his philosophic father, Walter Shandy, who made himself utterly ridiculous by his exclusive absorption
in theories, and by suppressing his natural instincts, Tristram
says of the disturbance caused to Walter by his unlearned wife's
irrelevant question at the time of his (Tristram's) procreation.
For Walter Shandy had his learned theory of procreation, an idea
of which we can have from Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy (where
Burton, quoting ancient authors, says of the need of the
peaceful transmission of natural spirits from the parent, and of the parents' responsibility in this regard). Mrs. Shandy's question was about the winding up of the family clock, and was prompted by the law of association of ideas, because Mr. Shandy then used to wind up the large family clock and attend to 'some other little family concerns' on the same night - which was the first Sunday night of the month.

Now, this law of association was set up by Locke as an unnatural and evil principle.

"Ideas that in themselves are not all of kin come to be so united in some men's minds, that it is very hard to separate them; they always keep company, and the one no sooner at any time comes into the understanding, but its associate appears with it". When 'wrong connection' of ideas, which are by themselves 'loose and independent of one another', comes from 'custom', and has a very powerful and unhealthy influence on our actions and character. Thus, a child associates, or is taught to associate by a foolish maid, ghosts with darkness, there is little natural connection between the two. Humorist Sterne makes fun of this 'association' through Walter Shandy's displeasure at the interruption, already referred to. Locke, however, admits that some of our ideas have a natural connection; and it is the business of our reason to trace these. Hume emphasizes this naturalness of the 'association'; the connection between different ideas, he says, is "not entirely without rule and method". Even 'the loosest and freest conversation' would on careful examination be found to have something in it "which connected it in all its transitions". Rutcheson calls this associative principle 'a natural involuntary
determination' of the mind, affecting 'our apprehensions of good and evil, natural and moral'. While Hutcheson admits that this association may sometimes cause miseries to the mind — as, for instance, when we associate 'spectres' with churchyards, he sees the 'absolute necessity of this determination'; for

"Without it we could have little use of memory, or recollection, or even of speech".67

Here Hutcheson was referring to a basic principle of psychic law, which has been thoroughly exploited in the modern age by the stream of consciousness novelist. In Sterne, however, the associative law works more simply. The operation of this law in the running stream of the narrator's consciousness brings in perpetual digressions in T.S., and connects ideas which are apparently loose and independent. And it is in these digressions that we mostly find Tristram's 'Opinions'.

Let us see how this principle of association works in his story. Tristram's procreation brought in his father's theory of geniture in the very beginning of the novel. His birth introduces the country midwife and parson Yorick who had helped her settle in her profession. Tristram's birth in the country is explained by a clause in his parents' marriage contract. Walter's funny theory of names is introduced to prepare us for his philosophic grief, coming soon after, over Tristram's mis-christening. Uncle Toby comes in, too, with his inevitable hobby-horse, or ruling passion, which — according to the author — distinguishes every character, and from which, he says, he will draw Toby's character. As Book I closes, the narrator has just begun digressing on how the good Toby acquired his hobby-horse. The only development in
Tristram's 'Life' in this Book is the enquiry of Walter Shandy about 'that noise ... above stairs'.

Leaving this dull main 'action' of his birth in the background, Tristram begins his Book II with the interesting digression on the development of his uncle Toby's hobby-horse. We are led on to a detailed account of Toby's wound in the siege of Namur, of his sick-bed in London, and his new interest in the science of fortification. This leads naturally to the story of Toby's bowling-green, which, however, is only mentioned here, but taken up later. Leaving this digression for the present, the narrator harks back to the main story of his 'Life'; for, though his digressions are 'the sunshine' and make the chief excellence — the very life — of his novel (whose charm lies in the exposition of the author's humorous and humanistic 'Opinions', arising from the learned folly and universal humanity of Walter and Toby respectively), yet he cannot ignore his 'main business' altogether. His work is 'digressive' and 'progressive' both. So, just after introducing Toby's bowling-green, the narrator comes back to the Shandy parlour, promising to take up this interesting digression on Toby's 'campaigns' later. (He does it in Book VI).

Attending to his present business, Tristram says about Walter Shandy's call for the doctor, Dr. Slop's comic appearance, the parlour talks, Dr. Slop's preparations for going into action, during which (preparations) he cuts his finger. The temptation of ridiculing the splenetic Slop, who was a Papist too, leads the author to digress with a chapter on curses. After another little digression, in which he stresses the need of freedom from set rules for an imaginative writer, the narrator despatches Dr. Slop into
Mr. Shandy's room. The Shandy parlour is silent for a while, Walter and Toby falling asleep and Trim being away; and the narrator feels that it is

"the first time I have had a moment to spare." 76.

And he uses his 'spare moment' in writing his 'Author's Preface', 77 where he says that, as his intention is "to write a good book", he would take care to put into it 'all the wit and the judgment' of which he is capable. 78 Here, disagreeing with Locke who believed in the incompatibility of 'wit' and 'judgment', our author pleads their co-existence as the 'top ornaments of the mind of man'. 79 The breaking of Tristram's nose by the 'scientific apparatus' of Dr. Slop brings in another round of digressions, crowned by the Slawkenbergius Tale (with which Bk. IV opens). This is necessary for an exposition of Walter's ridiculous theory of noses. The digression over, the narrator proceeds with his 'main business' in hand. He deals with the philosophic grief of his father, the christening error (Trismegistus turning into Tristram), and with his father's second round of grief over the misnaming. He resuscitates Yorick (whose death was reported earlier, in connection with his character-sketch), sends his father and uncle to the Visitation Dinner for consultations with the Church scholars on the changing of Tristram's name, and refers to the learned divines' decision to the contrary. The death of Bobby sets the Shandy house in grief - the philosophic heartless grief of Walter running parallel to the simple heart-felt grief of the unlearned servants (in Bk. V). The humorist author, however, begins this Book (V) with a little digression with the chapter on Whiskers, which (digression) seems to be a veiled attack on false sensibility or
At twenty-six, he realizes that a part of his life has passed away; he tells his 'old instructor' that he has "enjoyed too much", and asks for 'something to desire'. He spends 'twenty months' musing, and later regrets this waste of time. This sharp awareness of the passage of time is present throughout, in the mind of Rasselas. Indeed, clock-time is not only used in the mechanical organization of the story (Rasselas), it sits in the heart of the subjective experience of the hero.

Sterne is the only novelist of his time, laying stress on thought-time in the making of his story. Tristram writes his 'Life and Opinions', and - as we have mentioned earlier (pp. 177-8) - gives greater importance to his 'Opinions'. Now, the law of association and consequent digressiveness rule out the rigid allegiance to calendar time. Making a reference to his own treatment of time in the novel, the author remarks in his usual humorous manner, that

"the idea of duration, and of its simple modes, is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas, - and this is the true scholastic pendulum, - and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter, - abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever".95

The idea is taken from Locke. Locke traced our knowledge of time, like other kinds of knowledge, to sensation and reflection. Our idea of duration is received from the train of ideas in the mind constantly succeeding one another.

"Reflection on these appearances of several ideas one after another in our minds, is that which furnishes us with the idea of succession; and the distance between any parts of that succession, or between the appearance of any two ideas in our minds, is that we call duration".96

According to Berkeley, too, we can have no notion of time apart
from 'the succession of ideas in our mind'.

Addison has an interesting essay on the subjectivity of time. Referring to Locke's idea, that time is related to our consciousness of the succession of ideas in the mind, he says that we may

"consider a man as, on one side, shortening his time by thinking on nothing, or but a few things; so, on the other, as lengthening it, by employing his thoughts on many subjects, or by entertaining a quick and constant succession of ideas. . . . if our notion of time is produced by our reflecting on the succession of ideas in our mind, and this succession may be infinitely accelerated or retarded, it will follow, that different beings may have different notions of time the same parts of duration according as as their ideas . . . follow one another in a greater or less degree of rapidity".98

Then, giving an example of the subjectivity of time, Addison relates a story from the Quoran, in which Prophet Mohamed had a long enough experience of the seven Heavens, the Paradise and Hell, in a trice of a second. For Tristram, too, time is lodged in his inward experience, as much as upon the clock-face.

There was another clue for Sterne, who read not only Addison (as is evident from his recommendation of the Spectator essays to his daughter), but Montaigne too, - namely, in Montaigne. Montaigne said that his object in the Essays was self-portrayal -

"... it is my self I portray ... myself am the groundwork of my book".101

Montaigne reports associational life, not objective life. Life, to him, is inward experience. The external life is 'a material and corporal motion, an action imperfect and disordered by its own essence'. It is impossible, and unwise, to bend life to a set, artificial order. Therefore, Montaigne says,
Montaigne's concept of experience rules out any conformity to an objective standard, and accepts only the inner laws and constitution of man himself. The subjective self is the measure of all experience.

As narrator Tristram reports his associational life, projected from the running flow of his consciousness (it is the narrator's consciousness, which — we have seen — makes the unity in the novel — p. 180), and not chronological life, his story proceeds forwards and backwards in time.

"... when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the reader's fancy." 103

In the consciousness, the past merges in the present, or lives in the present. Obadiah comes back with Dr. Slop in about two minutes, a little before Tristram's birth. But during this short interval of Obadiah's absence, the narrator roaming in the past has brought his uncle Toby from Namur to England, kept him in sick bed for about four years, and then sent him with corporal Trim to his country-house — all which events had happened well before Tristram's birth. Dr. Slop spends about two hours conversing with the Shandy brothers, before going into Mrs. Shandy's room. It was a period of intense psychological activity in the Shandy world. Walter's and Toby's respective hobby-horses of learning and arms are touched upon, parson Yorick's manuscript sermon on Conscience is read by Trim and discussed by the Shandy brothers (in interspersed comments), Walter and Dr. Slop admire the new obstetrical
science, Walter's theory of the extraction of the foetus is discussed, Toby interrupts with the 'prodigious armies we had in Flanders', and Dr. Slop reads the long list of curses from Ernulphus. By the employing of 'thoughts on many subjects', and 'entertaining a quick and constant succession of ideas' - as Addison would say (see ante, p. 190), the two-hour period seemed lengthened out to 'almost an age' in the mind of Walter Shandy; for as Dr. Slop leaves the Shandy parlour, Walter looks at his watch and says -

"It is two hours, and ten minutes - and no more ... since Dr. Slop arrived - and I know not how it happens, brother Toby - but to my imagination it seems almost an age". 111

In the Shandy world, chronology matters but little; thought-time is more important than clock-time. As corporal Trim prepares to tell the story of the King of Bohemia, and falters about the date, his master asks him not to bother about it.

"The corporal bowed; for of every century, and of every year of that century, from the first creation of the world down to Noah's flood; and from Noah's flood to the birth of Abraham; through all the pilgrimages of the patriarchs, to the departure of the Israelites out of Egypt - and throughout all the Dynasties, Olympiads, ... and other memorable epochs of the different nations of the world, down to the coming of Christ, and from thence to the very moment in which the corporal was telling his story - had my uncle Toby subjected this vast empire of time and all its abysses at his feet". 112

Toby and Trim live as much in the past as in the present. Past events are not merely described by them; they become present experience too. Toby and Trim, kindred souls, move and talk in terms of that experience; the past and the present become one time to them. Toby was giving an account of the battle of Steenkirk (1692) to Yorick, when suddenly Trim enters the room to report
Tristram's accident (which happened when Tristram was five years, that is, in 1725). Toby was telling of the strange conducting of the battle by count Solmes in defiance of his King's commands—which cost many lives and involved Trim, too, in an accident. Trim and Toby now bring the battle to life—

"'Twas owing, an' please your honour, entirely to count Solmes, - had he drubbed them soundly at Steenkirk, they would not have fought us at Landen. - Possibly not, - Trim, said my uncle Toby; - though if they have the advantage of a wood, or you give them a moment's time to intrench themselves, they are a nation which will pop and pop for ever at you. - There is no way but to march coolly up to them, - receive their fire, and fall in upon them, pell-mell - Ding dong, added Trim. - Horse and foot, said my uncle Toby. - Helter skelter, said Trim. - Right and left, cried my uncle Toby. - Blood and 'ounds, shouted the corporal; - the battle raged. - Yorick drew his chair a little to one side for safety ...".114

The past and present have become one in their (Toby's and Trim's) consciousness. In their re-living in the past, Toby and Trim have not digressed from the present. As Toby tells Yorick how King William was angry with count Solmes, Yorick fears, Walter Shandy would be similarly angry with Trim (because Trim removed the weights from the window, thus unwittingly causing the accident to Tristram); Yorick says that Trim should not suffer the same fate as Solmes; because Solmes disobeyed the King's commands, while Trim, in removing the weights, only obeyed his master's commands (the weights being needed for Toby's 'armaments' on the bowling-green). Toby stands up four-square for his Trim.

"King William, said my uncle Toby, addressing himself to Yorick, was so terribly provoked at count Solmes for disobeying his orders, that he would not suffer him to come into his presence for many months after. - I fear, answered Yorick, the squire will be as much provoked at the corporal, as the King at the count. - But 'twould be singularly hard in this case ... I would spring a mine, cried my uncle Toby, rising up, - and
blow up my fortifications, and my house with them, and we would perish under their ruins, ere I would stand by and see it".116

There is a complete fusion of the past and the present in the consciousness of Toby.

By taking the point of view of the individual consciousness in his treatment of time and in the structural organization of the story, Sterne anticipates in a way the modern stream of consciousness novelists. The expression 'stream of consciousness' was first used by William James in his Principles of Psychology.

"Each thought" - he says - "tends to be part of a personal consciousness ... Within each personal consciousness thought is always changing".117

This 'thought' is 'sensibly continuous'. Explaining the nature of this continuity, James says further -

"Consciousness, then, does not appear to itself, chopped up in bits. Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly as it presents itself in the first instance. It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it ... let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life".118

This continuity of inner experience is what Bergson calls 'the undivided unity of perception'. The distinct characteristic of the stream of consciousness novel, which records this 'subjective life' of the characters, lies in this, that it is 'a story without an ending'. This 'endlessness' arises out of the stream-like continuity of the individual consciousness. Virginia Woolf says, while recording the stream of Mrs.Ramsay, in To the Lighthouse -

"For now she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. ... this self having shed its attachments was free for the strangest adventures. When life sank down for a moment, the range of experience seemed limitless".121
Tristram, who records his self (see ante, pp. 177-80), reveals— in a much simpler way, though—the same awareness of the 'limitless' 'range of experience', when he plans to keep his story 'a-going these forty years', his health permitting, of course.122

T.S. and the stream of consciousness novel: their difference.

But though he employs the point of view of the individual consciousness in his novel, Sterne's technique is not the same as that of the modern stream of consciousness novelist.

First, the moderns have perfectly ignored clock-time; their search for reality is turned exclusively inward. In Joyce's Ulysses—Beach says—

"there is a tendency to exhaust the content of the moment presented, there is an infinite expansion of the moment".123

In the perpetual shifts of time in the consciousness, there is an intermingling of past, present and future. This is how, for example, Clarissa Dalloway is musing on Peter Walsh, who was expected back from India soon—(Virginia Woolf is recording her stream):

"She owed him words: 'sentimental', 'civilized'; they started up every day of her life as if he guarded her. A book was sentimental; an attitude to life sentimental. 'Sentimental', perhaps she was to be thinking of the past. What would he think, she wondered, when he came back?

That she had grown older? Would he say that, or would she see him thinking when he came back, that she had grown older? It was true. Since her illness she had turned almost white.

... She was not old yet. She had just broken into her fifty-second year. Months and months of it were still untouched. June, July, August! Each still remained almost whole, and, as if to catch the falling drop, Clarissa (crossing to the dressing-table) plunged into the very heart of the moment, transfixed it, there—the moment of this June morning on which was the pressure of all the other mornings, seeing the glass, the dressing-table, and all the bottles afresh, collecting the whole of her at one point (as she looked into the glass),
seeing the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of Clarissa Dalloway; of herself'.

This is an apt illustration of what has been called 'extension of the moment' (p. 195, ante), for Mrs. Dalloway's psychic life. Plunging 'into the very heart of the moment', she roams over the past, present and future at one sweep; her past association with Peter Walsh ('She owed him words: 'sentimental', 'civilized'...'), her much-longed-for future meeting with him ('What would... when he came back? That she had grown older? Would he say that...?'), and her present feeling about her age ('She had just broken into her fifty-second year...'), all merge into one immediate experience. So Peter Walsh, now back from India, and going along on the London road, receives a myriad impressions on his mind. He cannot sort them out logically, for they are time-less; life to him is

"full of turns and corners, surprising,... really it took one's breath away, these moments".

Into the present moment all experience is crystallized. An 'incessant shower of innumerable atoms' fall on these "moments of being", which make real 'life' to the stream of consciousness novelist. In T.S. we do not find this infinite fluidity of consciousness.

This is because, unlike the moderns, Sterne could not ignore clock-time altogether. In T.S., we can trace a temporal sequence in the events, though they are not arranged in the usual progressive order. Corporal Trim (then James Butler) joined the army in 1690 (he says of the siege of Limerick, beginning in "the year after I went into the army"). He received his wound in the battle of Landen, that is, in 1693. Toby was wounded in the siege of Namur, in 1695. He came to London in 1697, and was 'four years totally
confined' to bed - the third year of the confinement beginning in August, 1699, when he developed his new interest in the science of projectiles. He left London, when he was not completely cured, for his country house in 1701, to stage his 'campaigns' on the bowling-green, at the suggestion of corporal Trim. This year Toby first met widow Wadman. Mrs. Wadman's emotional disturbance continued for about eleven years, during which period Toby, unmindful of everything else, was absorbed in his toy-wars on the bowling-green.

Le Fever arrived at the country inn in 1706 ('that year in which Dendermond was taken by the allies'). Toby's 'campaigns' ending with the Peace of Utrecht (1713), the amorous passion was awakened in him by Trim's story of his own amours. Mrs. Shandy now 'attacked' the vulnerable Toby in his sentry-box. But Toby was to be disappointed in love; he speaks of 'the shock' he received 'the year after the demolition of Dunkirk' (i.e., in 1714) in my affair with widow Wadman'. Walter Shandy began writing his Dissertation upon the word 'Tristram' in 1716 ('two years before I was born').

Young Le Fever went to join Prince Eugene's army on the continent in 1717; for he is said to have arrived in time for the defeat of the Turks before Belgrade; and he fought 'for four years together after'. Tristram was born 'on the fifth day of November, 1718'.

His misnaming threw his father into grief. At this time Walter Shandy received aunt Dinah's legacy of a thousand pounds. Walter's elder son Bobby died in London at this time too. Walter begins his Tristrapaedia 'after affairs were a little settled in the family'. Tristram's accident by the window-sash happened in 1723, when he was five years. Toby let the disturbing fly go, and this example of universal good-will was permanently imprinted on Tristram's mind; in 1728, when Tristram was ten years. Tristram led
'Mr. Noddy's eldest son' through Europe 'in the year 1741'. Parson Yorick died about 1748; for Tristram, writing in 1759, says that Yorick died about ten years ago. But though we can trace a temporal sequence in the events of the novel, they are not arranged in the chronological order. They come in, as and when they flash on the narrator's consciousness. They exist not as external phenomena, artfully presented by the third-person author, but in the train of ideas of narrator Tristram.

This juxtaposition of clock and thought time is unique in Sterne. He says in the novel—

"my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, — and at the same time"150, the 'digressive' tendency, however, being greater than the 'progressive' one. And he regards his digressions as 'the sunshine'.

About the co-existing digressive and progressive movements, the author says—

"I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going".151

Now, this presents a problem to the narrator at times—a problem on the relative advances of clock and thought time. Thus, he says that he has taken one year to narrate his one day's life; so he has

"three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out"152, so that his 'Life' and 'Opinions' can go together. Therefore, 'instead of advancing, as a common writer', he finds he is 'just thrown so many volumes back'; for, every day of his life will, in its recording by the narrator's own time-law, be 'as busy as this'.
that is, will take a whole year to record. Then, after making a
playful mathematical calculation, he says that his 'Opinions'
cannot be cut short,

"as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster
than I should write". \textsuperscript{153}

And so it follows that

"the more I write, the more I shall have to write —
and consequently, the more your worships will have
to read". \textsuperscript{153}

The narrator thus explains humorously why his thought-time is
ever expanding beyond his clock-time.

Sterne's second important difference with the modern
school is that, the latter, with the rich advantage of the re­
cent psychological and psycho-analytical studies, explore the sub­
conscious, that is, what lies below the rational, communicable
mind at different levels. Search for life consists in the explo­
ration of these hidden recesses of the mind, which defy rational
or logical analysis. In \textit{The Sound and the Fury}, for example, as
Benjy the idiot gets into water, he falls to musing thus —

"I sat down and he took off my shoes and rolled up my
trousers. 'Now, git in that water and play and see
can you stop that slobbering and moaning'.
I hushed and got in the water and Roskus came and said
to come to supper and Caddy said,
It's not supper time yet. I'm not going.
She was wet. We were playing in the branch and Caddy
squatted down and got her dress wet and Versh said,
'Your mommer going to whip you for getting your dress
wet'.
'She's not going to do any such thing'. Caddy said.
'How do you know'. Quentin said.
'That's all right how I know'. Caddy said. 'How do you
know'.
'She said she was'. Quentin said. 'Besides, I'm older
than you'.
'I'm seven years old'. Caddy said. 'I guess I know'.
'I'm older than that'. Quentin said. 'I go to school.
Don't I, Versh'.
'I'm going to school next year'. Caddy said, 'When it
comes. Aint I, Versh'.
'You know she whip you when you get your dress wet'.
Versh said.
'It's not wet'. Gaddy said. She stood up in the water
and looked at her dress. 'I'll take it off', she said.
'Then it'll dry'.
'I bet you won't'. Quentin said.
'I bet I will'. Caddy said.
'I bet you better not'. Quentin said.
Caddy came to Versh and me and turned her back.
'Unbutton it, Versh'. She said.
'Don't you do it, Versh'. Quentin said.
'Taint none of my dress'. Versh said.
'You unbutton it, Versh'. Caddy said, 'Or I'll tell Dilly
what you did yesterday'. So Versh unbuttoned it.
'You just take your dress off'. Quentin said. Caddy to-
k her dress off and threw it on the bank. Then she di-
 didn't have on anything but her bodice and drawers, and
Quentin slapped her and she slipped and fell down in the
water. When she got up she began to splash water on Qu-
entin, and Quentin splashed water on Caddy. Some of it
splashed on Versh and me and Versh picked me up and pu-
t me on the bank. He said he was going to tell on Caddy
and Quentin, and then Quentin and Caddy began to splash
water at Versh. He got behind a bush.
'I'm going to tell mammy on you all'. Versh said.
Quentin climbed up on the bank and tried to catch Versh
but Versh ran away and Quentin couldn't. When Quentin
came back Versh stopped and hollered that he was going
to tell. Caddy told him that if he wouldn't tell, they'd let him come back. So Versh said he wouldn't, and
they let him.
'Now I guess you're satisfied'. Quentin said, 'We'll
both get whipped now'.
'I don't care'. Caddy said. 'I'll run away'.
'Yes you will'. Quentin said.
'I'll run away and never come back'. Caddy said. I be-
gan to cry. Caddy turned round and said 'Hush'. So I
hushed. Then they played in the branch. Jason was pl-
ying too. He was by himself further down the branch.
Versh came around the bush and lifted me down into the
water again. Caddy was all wet and muddy behind, and I
started to cry and she came and squatted in the water.
'Hush now', she said. 'I'm not going to run away'. So
I hushed. Caddy smelled like trees in the rain.
What is the matter with you, Luster said. Cant you get
done with that moaning and play in the branch like fo-

Benjy's getting into the water brings into his shadowy, undevelop-
ed mind the memories of his childhood associated with playing in
water. This musing is not a deliberate act of volition, for idiot
Benjy is not capable of it; he cannot think, as a normal,
rational person can. The ideas— the matter of his 'moaning'—
flash on the inner recesses of his mind. He cannot report them
properly to his keeper, for they are beyond his conscious con-
trol. Such involuntary flash-backs into the past are like uns-
substantial shadows in the undeveloped mind of Benjy; and even
as he muses, he is not really conscious of them.

This lack of control of one's psychic activity is seen
in the case of a rational being, too. Let us take, for example,
a monologue of Molly Bloom's, in Ulysses. She is in bed, by the
side of her late-returned husband who is sleeping. As she is try-
ing to go to sleep, we are let in her stream of consciousness
which is at the pre-speech level— as the punctuation(or, lack
of it) and syntax will show—

"...quarter after what an unearthly hour I suppose
they're just getting up in China now combing out
their pig-tails for the day well soon have the nu-
ns ringing the angelus they've nobody coming to in
to spoil their sleep except an odd priest or two
for his night office the alarum-clock next door at
cock-shout clattering the brains out of itself let
me see if I can doze off 1 2 3 4 5 what kind of fl-
owers are those they invented like the stars the
wall-paper in Lombard Street was much nicer the
apron he gave me was like that something only I on-
ly wore it twice better lower this lamp and try ag-
ain so as I can get up early Ill go to Lambes the-
re beside Findlaters and get them to send us some
flowers to put above the place in case he brings him
home tomorrow ... first I want to do the place up
somewhat the dust grows in it I think while Im asl-
leep then we can have music and cigarettes I can ac-
company him first I must clean the keys of the piano
with milk whatll I wear shall I wear a white rose or
those fairy cakes in Liptons I love the smell of a
rich big shop at 7 1/2d. a lb or the other ones with
the cherries in them and the pinky sugar 1d. a co-
uplet of lbs of course a nice plant for the middle of
the table I'd get that cheaper ...").155

Here the association of ideas is working at the pre-speech level.
Molly is not consciously thinking of these matters; but the ide-
ideas, in their fluid, embryonic, confused stage, are just flitting across her half-awake mind. We may trace their association somewhat as follows - A striking clock takes Molly's imagination to early rising in China, to the combing of pig-tails, to morning hymn, to her husband Leopold's late arrival disturbing her sleep, then to morning again and disturbed sleep (the annoying alarum-clock next door ringing in the morning); from this, the idea of trying to go to sleep recurs to her ("let me see if I can doze off ..."), her mind then strays to the flowers on the wall-paper, to the wall-paper in a former house at Lombard Street, the flowers in the wall-paper leading to the flowers on the apron her husband bought for her; the thought of her husband reminds her of his desire to have breakfast in bed, and so, of the need of her getting up earlier next morning; the flower image, representing beauty and youth, takes her mind to Stephen Dedalus and to his reception ("I'll go to Lambes there beside Findlaters and get them to send us some flowers to put above the place in case he brings him home tomorrow"), to the happy company of Stephen, to her own appearance, to her shopping in the morning ("those fairy cakes in Liptons I love the smell of a rich big shop"), and so on. Such interior monologues reveal what may be called 'the mind in undress'; and the ideas are not distinctly traced for us by the author (who has vanished completely); they are presented in their natural state of incoherence.

It is otherwise with Sterne. For one thing, in T.S. we are mainly in the stream of the narrator, who traces for his reader the shifts in his ideas and in the ideas of his characters. He takes care to explain, for example, his insertion of
'The Author's Preface' in the middle of Bk.III of his novel. Earlier, as the self-important Slop is vaunting his knowledge of the new obstetrical science, Toby suddenly interrupts him—

"I wish ... you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders".158

And then immediately the author says to his reader—

"I have dropped the curtain over this scene for a minute, - to remind you of one thing, - and to inform you of another"159;

and after he does these two things, he draws up the curtain again and lets the Shandy brothers and Slop continue their earlier talks. Such exposition by the narrator applies not only to the flow of his (narrator's) ideas, but also to that of his characters. The successive series of ideas released by Tristram's accident in the minds of the Shandy brothers, and of Trim and Yorick, are rationally and systematically traced by the narrator. In the stream of consciousness novel, on the other hand, there is

"the drip, drip of one impression after another down into that cellar where they stood, deep, dark, and no one would ever know. Partly for that reason, its secrecy, complete and inviolable, he(Virginia Woolf is referring to Peter Walsh's 'impressions') had found life like an unknown garden, full of turns and corners, surprising ..."161

Peter Walsh cannot control, far less organize, his impressions; nor does the creator do it for him. Memory - Virginia Woolf says elsewhere - is a 'seamstress, and a capricious one at that'.

"Memory" - she continues - "runs her needle in and out, up and down, hither and thither. We know not what comes next, or what follows after".162

There is another difference, too, between the stream of consciousness novel and Sterne's novel. In the former, the
revelation of the flux of consciousness, of sensation and thought, wherein lies the identity of the person, becomes an end, or almost an end, in itself. Sterne has an important thematic 'motif' in his novel; and he takes care to stress it more than once in the novel itself (see ante, Chap. V, pp. 93-9).

Even so, Sterne is unique in his age, as a technician of the novel. In a significant way, he anticipates the moderns, in his subjective exploration of the human personality (see also Chap. XI - Art of Characterization), and in his use of thought-time in which the past merges in the present in the narrator's, and sometimes in his characters', consciousness.