

MAKING THE RULES BY BREAKING THE RULES:  
*TRISTRAM SHANDY, ULYSSES, AND THE*  
SPIRIT OF THE “CARNIVAL”

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## **DEDICATION**

To my father, Roderick, the armchair scholar, thank you for your passion for literature and your insatiable curiosity. And to my mother, Virginia, who said I could do it.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

“Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last.” – Samuel Johnson (Boswell 696)

Had Samuel Johnson the privilege of our contemporary literary perspective these words might never have escaped his lips. For as posterity has evinced, not only has *Tristram Shandy* “lasted,” but so too has Joyce’s *Ulysses*, a work received as equally “odd,” even profane, at the time of its publication. What Johnson seems to have found objectionable in *Tristram Shandy* is the work’s defiance of the literary conventions of its time, its “breaking of the rules,” so to speak, of the accepted forms of the eighteenth-century English novel. By extension we could safely assume that Johnson might have entertained a similar opinion of *Ulysses* given its own fundamental lack of conventionality. But what is important here is that Johnson lacked in perspective what the keenly intuitive Mikhail Bakhtin possessed in spades—a grasp of the sheer “novelty” of the novel form; an understanding of its organic nature and an appreciation of its imperative to fulfill its creative potential as an “ever-developing” literary genre (*The Dialogic Imagination* 6).

The appearance of the radically experimental *Tristram Shandy* roughly one hundred fifty years prior to the publication of Joyce’s *Ulysses* poses an array of puzzling questions for the contemporary reader and critic. It would seem that many of the

conventions we now associate with modernist and postmodernist texts—narrative discontinuity, subjectivity, reflexivity, intertextuality, absurdity—are not only already in play in Laurence Sterne’s masterfully “odd” eighteenth-century novel, but are developed to a remarkably full extent. In its “displacement and violation of conventional” literary forms (Shklovsky 156), *Tristram Shandy* emerges from its historical context as something altogether new, “novel,” in much the same way that Joyce’s *Ulysses* does in the early twentieth century. In breaking with the literary conventions of their respective times, both Sterne and Joyce create a space for the further realization of what Bakhtin characterizes as the “plastic possibilities” (*DI* 3) of the novel as a genre. Both novels contain a strong subversive element that echoes the anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical, and utopian “carnival spirit” that forms the basis of much of Bakhtin’s thought.

Informed then by Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, and in particular his notion of the “carnival spirit,” this thesis will perform a focused reading of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* in order to suggest that both texts internalize the “carnival” and are artistic representations of their authors’ resistance to rigidity and closure in all its forms, literary and non-literary. With respect to *Ulysses*, a post-colonial approach will be applied in further development of this idea. But before we delve into the texts themselves, let us first address the central concepts at work in Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, with specific emphasis on the carnivalesque and its relevance in respect to the works under consideration.

Perhaps the best entrée to such a discussion lies in the Soviet theorist and literary scholar’s own words:

The novel is the sole genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted. The forces that define it as a genre are at work before our very eyes: the birth and development of the novel as a genre takes place in the full light of the historical day. (*DI* 3)

As Michael Holquist observes in his introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination*, a group of four essays penned by Bakhtin in the 1930s and 1940s (posthumously published in Russian in 1975, and later translated into English in 1981) (*The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* 200), Bakhtin's theory of the novel stands out against the backdrop of those systematized theories advanced by various schools of literary criticism, from Russian Formalism to Derridean Deconstruction, for the precise reason that it is essentially resistant to “any strict formalization,” or systematization (xvii). Bakhtin's understanding of the novel is based on a conception of language, in both its written and spoken forms, as a “tension-filled unity of two embattled tendencies” (*DI* 272)—between what he characterizes as “centripetal” (or “unifying”) and “centrifugal” (or “decentralizing”) forces (*DI* 270-72). These forces manifest themselves as either monologic (“unifying” or “official”) discourse or dialogic (“decentralizing” or “unofficial”) discourse. He conceives of the relationship between these forces or forms of discourse not as a binary opposition but as a kind of dualism, which we might compare to the dualism of the Chinese philosophical principle of yin-yang or the Jungian concept of human personality, anima-animus, wherein neither of the paired forces achieves absolute dominance over the other. This linguistic relationship is contentious; it is one of conflict in which the two forces of discourse vie for dominance but are inevitably subsumed under the “master trope” of “heteroglossia’ [*raznorečie*]” (Holquist xix),

Bakhtin's coinage for that fundamental condition of multiplicity and diversity in a language, or more concretely, "that locus where centripetal and centrifugal forces collide" (*DI* 428).

Based on his readings of Bakhtin, Holquist asserts that this "clash" of centripetal and centrifugal forces is "present in culture as well as nature, and in the specificity of individual consciousness; it is at work in the ever greater particularity of individual utterances" (xviii). Elaborating on this point he states that, "The most complete and complex reflection of these forces is found in human language, and the best transcription of language so understood is the novel" (Holquist xviii).

Indeed, the novel as Bakhtin conceives it would seem to be the most accurate reflection of this essential notion of struggle in human existence and its linguistic and material manifestations. In "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin suggests that

the novel can be defined as a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized. The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour (each day has its own slogan, its own vocabulary, its own emphases)—this internal stratification present in every language at any give moment of its historical existence is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre. The novel

orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types [*raznorečie*] and by the differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. (*DI* 262-63)

Speaking of works as being either comparatively monologic or dialogic, Bakhtin characterizes a monologic work as one that is “clearly dominated by a single, controlling voice or discourse, even though it may contain characters representing a multitude of viewpoints” (*Bedford Glossary* 107). Dissonant or “contrary voices are subordinated to the authorial (and authoritative) voice,” which is typically, but not always, “representative of the dominant or ‘official’ ideology of the author’s culture” (*Bedford Glossary* 107). A dialogic work, by contrast, is one in which a multiplicity of voices or discourses are allowed to “emerge and engage in dialogue with one another” (*Bedford Glossary* 107). In such works, the “culture’s dominant social or cultural ideology may vie with the discourses of popular culture” (*Bedford Glossary* 107). Despite having made the distinction between monologic and dialogic works, Bakhtin, however, concedes that no work can be entirely monologic. This is due to the fact that the basic unit of language, the word, is internally dialogized, as Bakhtin observes in “Discourse in the Novel”:

The word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object. A word forms a concept of its own object in a dialogic way. But this does not exhaust the internal dialogism of the word. It encounters an alien word not only in the object itself: every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word

that it anticipates. The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction. Forming itself in an atmosphere of the already spoken, the word is at the same time determined by that which has not yet been said but which is needed and in fact anticipated by the answering word. Such is the situation in any living dialogue. (*DI* 279-80)

Such a view of language is intrinsically social, and as Michael Holquist reflects vis-à-vis Bakhtin's emphasis on "utterance," "Language, when it *means*, is somebody talking to somebody else, even when that someone else is one's own inner addressee" (xxi). Bakhtinian dialogism comprehends that "everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole—there is constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (*DI* 427). Apropos to this, Bakhtin writes:

The dialogic orientation of a word among other words (of all kinds and degrees of otherness) creates new and significant artistic potential in discourse, creates the potential for a distinctive art of prose, which has found its fullest and deepest expression in the novel. (*DI* 275)

The principle of carnival finds a natural setting in the novel as one of several means by which heteroglossia is manifested. Krystyna Pomorska remarks in her foreword to *Rabelais and His World*,

Bakhtin's ideas concerning folk culture, with carnival as its indispensable component, are integral to his history of art. The inherent features of carnival that he underscores are its emphatic and purposeful

“heteroglossia” (*raznogolosost’*) and its multiplicity of styles (*mnogostil’nost’*). Thus, the carnival principle corresponds to and is indeed a part of the novelistic principle itself. One may say that just as dialogization is the *sine qua non* for the novel structure, so carnivalization is the condition for the ultimate “structure of life” that is formed by “behavior and cognition.” Since the novel represents the very essence of life, it includes the carnivalesque in its properly transformed shape. (x)

Bakhtin’s exploration of the carnival is centered upon a fascination with Rabelais and his “nonliterary nature,” his lack of conformity with respect to the literary “norms and canons predominating in the sixteenth century” (*Rabelais and His World* 2). He observes:

Rabelais’ nonconformity was carried to a much greater extent than that of Shakespeare or Cervantes, who merely disobeyed the narrow classical canons. Rabelais’ images have a certain undestroyable unofficial nature. No dogma, no authoritarianism, no narrow-minded seriousness can coexist with Rabelaisian images; these images are opposed to all that is finished and polished, to all pomposity, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook. (RW 2-3)

We are reminded in Bakhtin’s description of Rabelais’s work of two similarly nonconformist authors, namely Laurence Sterne and James Joyce and their curiously unconventional works, *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*.

Viewing Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as a key to exploring the folk culture of humor, Bakhtin focuses his attention in *Rabelais and His World* on the

Renaissance and Middle Ages as an important locus for the rise of the carnivalized novel. We note here that in Bakhtin's view, the carnival is a historically situated phenomenon. Our reading of carnival in respect of this thesis is in terms not of actual carnival, as in the medieval and Renaissance carnival, but of the carnival spirit, the anti-authoritarian, subversive, playful aspects of carnival, aspects suggested in the following remark by Bakhtin:

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (*RW* 10)

Bakhtin goes on to elaborate more specifically upon some of the more dominant attributes of carnival in the following passage:

During the century-long development of the medieval carnival . . . a special idiom of forms and symbols was evolved—an extremely rich idiom that expressed the unique yet complex carnival experience of the people. This experience, opposed to all that was ready-made and completed, to all pretense at immutability, sought a dynamic expression; it demanded ever changing, playful, undefined forms. All the symbols of the carnival idiom are filled with this pathos of change and renewal, with the sense of gay relativity of prevailing truths and authorities. We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the “inside out” (à

*l'envers),* of the “turnabout,” of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings.” (RW 10-11)

We cannot help but see many of these traits reflected in *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*, extant in their structures like the recessive traits of a more distant ancestor.

Bakhtin notes that, consistent with the canons of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, a grotesque concept of the body as contradictory, ambivalent, and incomplete prevailed. While the grotesque underwent a transformation, as Bakhtin suggests, the resultant carnival-grotesque of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries yet retained many of the grotesque’s earlier qualities. Citing the works of Molière, Voltaire, Diderot, and Swift, Bakhtin writes:

In all these writings, in spite of their differences in character and tendency, the carnival-grotesque form exercises the same function: to consecrate inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a new order of things. (RW 34)

Again we are reminded of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*, the inventive freedom of their writing, their unconventionality and their freshness. As Kristeva coincidentally remarks,

The novel incorporating carnivalesque structure is called *polyphonic*. Bakhtin's examples include Rabelais, Swift, and Dostoevski. We might also add the "modern" novel of the twentieth century—Joyce, Proust, Kafka—while specifying that the modern polyphonic novel, although analogous in its status, where monologism is concerned, to dialogical novels of the past, is clearly marked off from them. A break occurred at the end of the nineteenth century: while dialogue in Rabelais, Swift, and Dostoevski remains at a representative, fictitious level, our century's polyphonic novel becomes "unreadable" (Joyce) and interior to language (Proust and Kafka). Beginning with this break—not only literary but also social, political, and philosophical in nature—the problem of intertextuality (intertextual dialogue) appears as such. (71)

The idea of "making the rules" by "breaking the rules" as the novels of Sterne and Joyce suggest, is utterly in keeping with the spirit of the carnival and with Bakhtin's notion of the plasticity of the ever-developing novel. Perhaps more appropriate for Joyce than Sterne, Kristeva registers the following idea, "Carnivalesque discourse breaks through the laws of a language censored by grammar and semantics and, at the same time, is a social and political protest. There is no equivalence, but rather, identity between challenging official linguistic codes and challenging official law" (65).

As stated previously, we will not be arguing in this thesis that *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* represent the carnival in its purely historical sense, as Bakhtin does when he limits it to a stage in the developmental history of the novel. Instead we will concern ourselves with the "spirit of the carnival," those carnivalesque elements of play,

inversion, subversion, and perversion (in terms of grotesque realism) that endure beyond that strictly historical boundary in which Bakhtin places his discussion of carnival in Rabelais and Cervantes. Simon Dentith makes exactly this point when he states that it is possible to go farther than the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and “talk of carnivalized writing, that is, writing that has taken the carnival spirit into itself and thus reproduces, within its own structures and by its own practice, the characteristic inversions, parodies and discrownings of carnival proper” (65).

We have, therefore, chosen to approach *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* from three, but not necessarily discrete, angles which appear to emerge naturally out of Bakhtin’s conceptions of the novel and of carnival—digression, intertextuality, and reflexivity.

Digression, in its frustration of the expectation of a straightforward, linear narrative is a classic manifestation of the “spirit of the carnival.” It is but one way in which Sterne and Joyce break the rules of convention in order to establish the rules of their own creations. It constitutes a form of experimentation that is tantamount to a playful disregard for the satisfaction of the reader’s desire for coherence and completion.

Bakhtin’s theory of the novel *a priori* contains within it the seeds of intertextuality as we have noted from his comments regarding the dialogic nature of the words, or utterances, in it (the novel) as being half someone else’s. If the words or utterances are those of the authorities, or of official language, the “spirit of the carnival” inspires their inversion and parody, exposing their weaknesses, their monologic limitations, and their absurdity in the face of dialogic (i.e., heteroglossic) diversity, variety, and inclusiveness.

The subversion of conventions, authorial intrusions, and profusion of intertextual allusions in *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* all function in the name of reflexivity, questioning narrative assumptions and exposing the artificiality of the work of art.

We make no pretense here of conducting an exhaustive analysis of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* vis-à-vis the carnival spirit, but have limited ourselves to those portions of *Tristram Shandy* that best illustrate this characteristic. We have taken a similar approach with respect to *Ulysses* by narrowing our focus to the “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun” episodes, which are perhaps the richest in “intertextual parody” throughout the novel (González).

## CHAPTER 2

### THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING DIGRESSIVE

To even the least sophisticated of readers, it should be glaringly obvious that neither *Tristram Shandy* nor *Ulysses* conforms to the model of a straightforward, chronologically linear narrative. Rather, what informs their structures has less to do with plot or epistemological conclusions than with the liberating potentialities of linguistic play. Through digression and intertextual parody each of these works turns back upon itself reflexively in a labyrinthine manner, emphasizing at all points the journey of writing and reading over the satisfaction of any desire for a destination in the form of closure or completion. Sterne and Joyce, it would seem, are much more concerned with exploring the creative or “plastic possibilities” (Bakhtin 3) of the novel form, and their approaches to the genre in *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*, respectively, are infused with radical experimentation and a subversive disregard for literary conventions. In fact, literary conventions in the hands of these authors become the clay of parody, which each artfully molds to his purposes.

Early in *Tristram Shandy* we are treated to a fine example of the type of reflexively labyrinthine digression Sterne employs. Tristram chides his “lady” reader for being insufficiently attentive to the details of a previous chapter and punishes her by turning her back to read it over—a digression which, in itself, forces yet another digression insofar as Tristram feels compelled to opine on his rationale for doing so:

—‘Tis to rebuke a vicious taste which has crept into thousands besides herself,—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. (*Tristram Shandy* 41; vol. 1, ch. 20)

Not only is the narrative being turned back upon itself in this instance, but so too is the supratextual reader who naturally wishes to know what he/she and the “lady” have missed. As it so happens, the detail that both readers, textual and supratextual alike, have failed to detect is so oblique as to be missed again upon a second perusal. The detail (“—and if it was not necessary I should be born before I was christened”) comes at the very end of the chapter rendering the re-reading of the chapter in its *entirety* an inanely redundant exercise (*TS* 40; vol. 1, ch.19).

Sterne effectively retards the progress of the narrative and draws attention to the very act of writing. Both narrative and reader are entirely his playthings, and he seizes upon this opportunity to indulge in further digression and flouting of convention. Tristram’s “lady” reader, being textualized, can engage in discourse with her author and dispute the facts of his narrative:

—But here comes my fair Lady. Have you read over again the chapter, Madam, as I desired you?—You have: And did you not observe the passage, upon the second reading, which admits the inference?—Not a word like it! Then, Madam, be pleased to ponder well the last line but one of the chapter, where I take upon me to say, ‘It was *necessary* I

should be born before I was christen'd." Had my mother, Madam, been a Papist, that consequence did not follow. (*TS* 41; vol. 1, ch. 20)

Here, Sterne has completely turned the tables on literary convention. His narrator discourses openly and simultaneously with the reader of the very text he is in the midst of writing and adds, where he deems necessary, footnotes to his own work (a very postmodern technique). As Ann Ridgeway notes, "Such conversational by-play in which Madam is allowed to talk back is prevalent throughout the novel" (43). The footnote itself is an intertextually parodic reference to the Romish (Roman Catholic) rituals which allow for the baptism of a child, "in cases of danger, *before* it is born," with the proviso that some part of the infant's body be visible to the "baptizer" (*TS* 41; vol. 1, ch. 20). The footnote continues with an explanation of how the "Doctors of the *Sorbonne*," in 1733, had enlarged the baptismal powers of midwives to perform baptisms *in utero* by means of a "small injection-pipe" or "squirt" (*TS* 41; vol. 1, ch. 20). Its inclusion in the narrative is clearly for comic purposes since the entire discussion strikes the reader as grotesquely absurd. The practice, like the Catholic practice of crossing oneself (as when Dr Slop falls off his horse while making the sign of the cross) is recast in an absurd light. The intertextual parody is then hyperbolically heightened in the final pages of the chapter by the inclusion of the "MEMOIRE" in French presented to the "Doctors of the *Sorbonne*" and the Doctors' "RESPONSE" written in French and Latin, as though the footnote itself were not enough. González observes that Tristram's use of footnotes, initiates "that common practice in postmodernism of inventing references: Jorge Luis Borges would be a good example in this respect" (62-63).

The reader is disarmed and delighted by the seeming chaos and whimsy of such digression throughout *Tristram Shandy*, but as Viktor Shklovsky suggests, “Sterne was a radical revolutionary as far as form is concerned. It was typical of him to lay bare the device” (147). And indeed this is so, as the following reflexively indicates:

I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;—and, what’s more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits. (*TS* 52; vol. 1, ch. 22)

In an uncanny, but not entirely surprising way, this statement bears great resemblance to one made by James Joyce in regard to *Ulysses*: “I’ve put in so many enigmas and puzzles that it will keep the professors busy for centuries arguing over what I meant, and that’s the only way of insuring one’s immortality” (Gifford v).

Unlike Sterne, however, Joyce is not quite so blatant in the laying bare of his devices, such that where Sterne is “outward” in doing so, Joyce is “inward” (Lampkin 143). *Tristram Shandy* is a “conversational” and therefore more extroverted work, whereas *Ulysses* is to a large degree an internally monologic, and therefore more introverted one (Ridgeway 41). Despite this distinction, both Sterne and Joyce presuppose and rely upon an active relationship with their readers. Ridgeway explains:

For all their would-be looseness of plot, there is never any question but that Joyce and Sterne exercise careful control over their work. Sterne’s conversational format allows him to keep a watchful eye on his readers at

all times, to guide them, to play cat and mouse with them, to manipulate them—always with the readers' best interests at heart. Joyce, in a paradoxical accomplishment made by stream of consciousness devices in *Ulysses*, enters his characters' levels of mental experience so penetratingly that he seldom intrudes at all; thus he can control his readers so subtly that they feel they are fending pretty much for themselves. (47-48)

Joyce is indeed subtle, but in his subtler applications of labyrinthine digression and intertextual parody in *Ulysses*, he never fails to echo Sterne. Although less intrusive, Joyce's hand is no less felt in the text, a classic example of which is provided in the form of the “Cyclops” episode. The narrator in this chapter is the unidentified “I,” who doubles, perhaps even trebles, as a multivalent allusion to the “Noman” of Odysseus, the single “eye” of the Cyclops in Homer’s *Odyssey*, and even the obliquely intrusive presence of Joyce himself as a living, breathing, cursing character within the text. The latter possibility may find support in the fact that the obvious command that the narrator has of the parodies incorporated in the “Cyclops” episode betray an intellect or consciousness that seems entirely too sophisticated to be that of the average patron of Barney Kiernan’s pub. David Hayman is credited for suggesting that, “a self-reflexive narrator, an ‘arranger’” (McArthur 141) is at work in the text. Nevertheless, as Gifford points out, the parodies are in most instances “general—parodies not of specific works but of generalized stylistic conventions,” and are exaggerated for the purposes of not only replicating the gigantism of Homer’s mythic Polyphemus, but of satirizing the

hypocritical and overblown nationalistic attitudes of the “Citizen” and his cronies in the hyperbolic atmosphere of a barroom (314).

What begins in the “Cyclops” episode as a seemingly straightforward recounting of events by the narrator, “I,” quickly becomes hijacked by parody. No sooner does Joe Hynes relate in conversation with the narrator the legal troubles between Moses Herzog and Michael Geraghty than the language of the text shifts to legalese, parodying the style of a “legal document in a civil suit for nonpayment of debts” (Gifford 316). As the chapter progresses, the relatively straightforward account the narrator provides is interpolated at intervals by parody on no fewer than thirty-three occasions, and while these parodies are directly linked to the content of the narrative in the chapter, they nonetheless retard its linear progression and turn it back upon itself reflexively. Like the labyrinthine movement of *Ulysses* as a whole, weaving its way around and through the streets of Dublin, the “Cyclops” episode operates as a mirror image of this movement, though on a much smaller scale, as digressive parody weaves its way around and through the main narrative line of the episode.

Of the many forms of parody Joyce enlists in this episode, perhaps one of the cleverest and disarmingly humorous is the parody in the style of the Theosophist’s account of a spiritual séance. The parody is a digressive link to the discussion among the pub patrons at Barney Kiernan’s about Paddy Dignam’s demise. Alf Bergan, a character of local color and a practical joker (Gifford 164) is confused over this matter. He is incredulous that Dignam has passed on and says, “—Sure I’m after seeing him [Paddy Dignam] not five minutes ago . . . as plain as a pikestaff,” to which Joe Hynes retorts, “You saw his ghost then” (*U* 12.323-24; 12.326), effectively conjuring up an image of

the walking dead that seems to inspire the parody. The séance is essentially a communiqué with the recently departed Dignam, providing one of the most hilariously memorable moments in the entirety of *Ulysses*:

Questioned by his earthname as to his whereabouts in the heavenworld he stated that he was now on the path of prālāyā or return but was still submitted to trial at the hands of certain bloodthirsty entities on the lower astral levels. . . . Interrogated as to whether life there resembled our experience in the flesh he stated that he had heard from more favoured beings now in the spirit that their abodes were equipped with every modern home comfort such as tālāfānā, ālāvātār, hātākāldā, wātāklāsāt and that the highest adepts were steeped in waves of volupcy of the very purest nature. (12.344-47; 12.351-55)

The delightful humor in this particular parody, however, is not fully deployed until the following passage:

Before departing he requested that it should be told to his dear son Patsy that the other boot which he had been looking for was at present under the commode in the return room and that the pair should be sent to Cullen's to be soled only as the heels were still good. (*U* 12.366-70)

While the entire Theosophic satire may seem patently silly and ridiculous, closer examination reveals that Joyce is artfully connecting the sublime with the trivialities of human experience in a manner echoing the grotesque realism of the carnival. The dead and the living are present here at once, engaged in an absurd dialogue with one another, recalling what Bakhtin says of the grotesque,

Death is included in life, and together with birth determines its eternal movement. . . . In the system of grotesque imagery death and renewal are inseparable in life as a whole, and life as a whole can inspire fear least of all. (*RW* 50)

Though on another plane of existence, Paddy Dignam yet looks after his son, and what at first seems merely funny acquires a tragicomic poignancy, a humanizing of death that strips it of its abstract otherness, its distance, and familiarizes it in a manner unique to the spirit of the carnival.

Correspondingly, Robert Janusko notes that, “The opposite, yet complementary, themes of life and death are present throughout [“Oxen of the Sun”], as they are throughout Ulysses” (9). Janusko further remarks that Joyce “restates the theme that birth is the beginning of death” (18) and cites the following as evidence:

And as the ends and ultimates of all things accord in some mean and measure with their inceptions and originals, that same multiplicit concordance which leads forth growth from birth accomplishing by a retrogressive metamorphosis that minishing and ablation towards the final which is agreeable unto nature so is it with our subsolar being. (*U* 14.387-92)

In the “Oxen of the Sun” episode, Joyce marries this grotesque notion of the proximity of birth to death with a multi-layered narrative that tracks not only Mrs. Purefoy’s labor in childbirth, but the general “ontogeny” of the human fetus, paired with the more abstract evolution of the English language as a series of stylistic imitations. Elaborating on this, Gifford writes:

In effect, the sequence of imitations is a sustained metaphor for the process of gestation; Joyce would have assumed that in that process ontogeny (the development of the individual organism) recapitulates phylogeny (the evolutionary history of the species)—what Joyce called “the periods of faunal evolution in general” [*Letters* 1:140]; thus the development of the embryonic artist’s prose style recapitulates the evolution of prose style in literary history. (408)

For the reader expecting, if not a fully transparent but at least a relatively comprehensible narrative, “Oxen of the Sun” presents a rather formidable challenge. Joyce’s digressions take on an even subtler form than previous ones. He does not signal his digressions as Sterne does, but conceals them in a dense canopy of voices and styles, and paronomasic indulgences. By Joyce’s own account, the “Oxen” episode constitutes the most difficult piece of writing in the entirety of *Ulysses* (Ellmann 475). The digressions in this episode occur more often as a result of the frequent and often extreme shifts in linguistic styles from beginning to end, than from any of the types of interruptions, or outright omissions, that we find in *Tristram Shandy*. Gifford counts as many as thirty-two different prose styles, ranging “in chronological sequence from Latin prose to fragments of modern slang” (408), what Joyce himself has described as a “frightful jumble of Pidgin English, nigger English, Cockney, Irish, Bowery slang and broken doggerel” (Ellmann 475). What makes the digressions in this episode so subtle is the manner in which they constantly force the reader to turn back upon the text to reestablish the continuity (or a fractured version thereof) of the narrative line. We practically need a compass (Sterne would take great delight in this image since he exhorts

the “criticks” to throw away their compasses and rulers) to determine where we are in the text. Bowen, in acknowledging Eliot’s view that “Oxen” exposes “the futility of all English styles,” suggests that “most of the utility is produced by the reader’s having to make repeated correctives to the distortions of successive narrators in order to ascertain the action taking place” (62).

As readers we are often at a loss as to whom the particular prose style represents or is being spoken by because interpolated among these styles is a veritable “jumble” of voices—authorial intrusions, interior monologues, and intertextual allusions in the form of musical fragments. Close reading of the previous thirteen episodes provides at least something of a lifeline for the reader inasmuch as particular details and motifs are repeated in this fourteenth chapter, clueing us in at various points as to who the speaker or “muser” might be. For instance, we can be reasonably certain that the following passage belongs to Stephen Dedalus not only because the sentence preceding it signals an exchange between “Master Dixon” and “Young Stephen,” but also because it contains a repetition of details from previous episodes that are specifically associated in their aggregate with Stephen:

Greater love than this, he said, no man hath that a man lay down his wife  
for his friend. Go thou and do likewise. Thus, or words to that effect,  
saith Zarathustra, sometime regius professor of French letters to the  
university of Oxtail nor breathed there ever that man to whom mankind  
was more beholden. Bring a stranger within thy tower it will go hard but  
thou wilt have the secondbest bed. *Orate, fratres, pro memetipso.* And  
all the people shall say, Amen. Remember, Erin, thy generations and thy

days of old, how thou settedst little by me and by my word and broughtedst in a stranger to my gates to commit fornication in my sight and to wax fat and kick like Jeshurum. Therefore hast thou sinned against my light and hast made me, thy lord, to be the slave of servants. Return, return, Clan Milly: forget me not, O Milesian. Why hast thou done this abomination before me that thou didst spurn me for a merchant of jalaps and didst deny me to the Roman and to the Indian of dark speech with whom thy daughters did lie luxuriously? . . . And thou hast left me alone for ever in the dark ways of my bitterness: and with a kiss of ashes hast thou kissed my mouth. (*U* 14.360-80)

This passage practically drips off the page it is so saturated with literary and extra-literary references. Both intertextual, in its allusions to biblical scripture, philosophical figures, and Irish history, and intratextual, in its self-referentiality to other episodes in *Ulysses*, the passage is digressive in its divergence from the locus of conversation between Dixon and Stephen, expanding outward into radii of stream-of-consciousness associations. The first line, beginning with “Greater love” is an intentionally parodic mistranslation of the scriptural “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Gifford 418). It also obliquely points back to the question of Shakespeare’s cuckoldry discussed at the National Library in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode, to which the “secondbest bed” is a direct allusion. “Zarathustra” returns us to the “Telemachus” episode wherein “stately, plump” Buck Mulligan strips Stephen of the tower key and ‘twopence’ in the going: “—He who stealeth from the poor lendeth to the Lord. Thus spake Zarathustra” (*U* 1.727-28). “And with a kiss of ashes thou hast kissed

“my mouth” recalls the dream in “Telemachus” wherein Stephen’s dead mother’s breath has the “faint odour of wetted ashes” (*U* 1.105), which Joyce then conflates with the kiss of his poem in “Nestor:” “He comes, pale vampire, through storm his eyes, his bat sails bloodying the sea, mouth to her mouth’s kiss” (*U* 3.397-98). “*Orate, fratres, pro memetipso*” (“Brothers, pray for me myself”) constitutes a play on the “Orate, fratres, ut meum ac vestrum sacrificium acceptabile fiat apud Deum Patrem omnipotentem” (“Brothers [and sisters], pray that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father”), which the celebrant says to the congregation at the end of the offertory of a Mass (Gifford 418). In a manner typical of the spirit of the carnival, Stephen’s blasphemous wordplay represents a direct challenge to the official Latin discourse of the Roman Catholic Church, of which he declares himself a servant in “Telemachus.” He conflates the cuckoldry of Shakespeare with his own betrayal by Mulligan (who has essentially exchanged him for Haines by dispossessing him of his key to the Martello tower), and also with the betrayal of himself and Ireland by both the British Crown and the Roman Catholic Church—Stephen’s English and Italian “masters” (*U* 1.638).

This issue of the betrayal of Ireland by the British Crown and the Catholic Church resurfaces in “Oxen,” and receives a searingly satirical treatment after the style of Jonathan Swift. The passage takes the form of a digression from a discussion about the issue of hoof and mouth disease that Lenehan raises in reference to Mr. Deasy’s letter (of the “Nestor” episode), which has made it into “that night’s gazette” (*U* 14.530). Tangential to this, M. Keith Booker observes from a postcolonial perspective that

one of the crucial strategies used by Joyce in his assault on Catholicism throughout *Ulysses* involves the suggestion that the Catholic Church operates in complicity with the Protestant British Empire, each helping the other to maintain its power in Ireland. For example, in one of the most important segments of the virtuoso exercise in style that makes up the “Oxen of the Sun” chapter of *Ulysses*, Joyce relates, through the conversation of Stephen Dedalus and his medical-student pals, a brief history of the origins of British rule in Ireland. After the manner of Swift, this history is presented as an ironic allegory, literalizing the punning potential of the various meanings of the word “bull” to turn a discussion that ostensibly deals with the tending of livestock to a comment on the British treatment of the Irish as cattle. (2-3)

What Booker does not emphasize here is the more grotesque image of Ireland as being shat upon by both the British Crown and the Catholic Church, which the following colorfully conjures up:

It is that same bull that was sent to our island by farmer Nicholas, the bravest cattlebreeder of them all, with an emerald ring in his nose. True for you, says Mr. Vincent cross the table, and a bullseye into the bargain, says he, and a plumper and a portlier bull, says he, never shit on shamrock. (*U* 14.582-86)

In “farmer Nicholas” Joyce is alluding to Nicholas Breakspear, Pope Adrian IV, who retained the papal seat from 1154 to 1159, as England’s first and only pope (Gifford 424). As Pope, Adrian IV issued a papal bull, or “*Laudabiliter*” in 1155, granting the

“overlordship of Ireland to Henry II of England,” whose reign lasted from 1154 to 1189 (Gifford 424). Gifford, elaborating further on this matter writes,

Henry, in seeking the papal permission for invasion, had argued that Ireland was in a state of profound moral corruption and irreligion. The bull approved Henry’s “laudable” determination “to extirpate certain vices which had taken root.” (424)

In addition to issuing this *Laudabiliter*, Adrian made the gift of an emerald ring to Henry II as a token of Henry’s newly granted authority over Ireland. As Booker notes, “Joyce’s placement of this ring in the nose of the Irish bull suggests both the domination of the Irish by the English and the domination of Henry II by Adrian IV” (3). In no uncertain terms, Joyce is making a politically powerful and subversive statement as to the damnable state of Irish history. Gregory Castle acknowledges this when he argues that

Joyce’s struggle against history (which is, more precisely, a struggle against the master narratives of history which determine social conventions of all kinds) is not a rejection of history *per se* but rather an agonistic relation with history whenever it functions as a monological, authoritarian legitimization of social power. . . . Joyce’s primary goal is to critique this mode of history by a number of narrative (even anti-narrative) strategies, all sharing one significant characteristic: a resistance (sometimes fierce, sometimes playful) against the tendency of historical points of view to converge and dissolve in the absolute logic of a master discourse. (307)

Indeed, and especially in this JoySwiftian/SwiftJoycean instance in “Oxen of the Sun,” the critique is at once fierce and playful, and anti-narrative in all the ways that an internalized spirit of the carnival might suggest.

By contrast, Laurence Sterne’s digressions tend more toward the playful than the fierce, and are on nearly all such occasions deployed by Tristram with tongue well-lodged in cheek. While these digressions set in high relief the artifice of the novel, they also manage to capture the very real human experience of time and its duration. In a particularly humorous instance, Tristram describes the frustration of being distracted from his work, essentially a digression about a digression:

When a man sits down to write a history,—tho’ it be but the history of *Jack Hickathrift* or *Tom Thumb*, he knows no more than his heels what lets and confounded hinderances he is to meet with in his way,—or what a dance he may be led, by one excursion or another, before all is over. Could a historiographer drive on in history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward;—for instance, from *Rome* all the way to *Loretto*, without ever once turning his head aside either to the right hand or to the left,—he might venture to foretell you to an hour when he should get to his journey’s end;—but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually solliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly; he will moreover have various

Accounts to reconcile:

Anecdotes to pick up:

Inscriptions to make out:

Stories to weave in:

Traditions to sift:

Personages to call upon:

Panegyricks to paste up at his door:

Pasquinades at that:—All of which both the man and his mule are quite exempt from. (*TS* 26; vol. 1, ch. 14)

Appearing very early in the novel, this passage presages the course that the remainder of the story will take. Sterne is announcing the impossibility, at least for Tristram, of writing a straightforward, linear narrative, a fact which the novel's form is already beginning to evince. We have the sense, playing on Rabelais, of the “gargantuan” task before Tristram of wrestling out of all the competing interests, obligations, and distractions of his daily affairs, a history of his own life and opinions.

Acknowledging the inevitability of digressions and in defense of them, Tristram holds forth thus,

Digressions, incontestably, are the sunshine;—they are the life, the soul of reading;—take them out of this book for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them;—one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer;—he steps forth like a bridegroom,—bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail. (*TS* 52; vol. 1, ch. 22)

Nothing speaks more directly to Bakhtin's concept of the "plastic possibilities" of the novelistic form. Here, Sterne is ransacking the warehouse of literary convention and piecing together, in his *own way*, a story that is both varied and entertaining. He breaks the rules of writing and flouts his readers' expectations, only to create his *own* rules and establish new expectations. Curiously, by the end of the novel, the reader has acquired exactly the expectation of having his/her expectations frustrated in an almost masochistic denial of narrative catharsis. We as readers find ourselves enjoying the journey that such writing affords—the opportunity that only a traveler has of taking in the view without necessarily being concerned with a destination. We have been apprised in advance that we are meandering on a Sunday afternoon's drive through the countryside.

In this regard, we are reminded of Kenneth Burke's musings in "Psychology and Form" (29) on the subject of creating and fulfilling appetites in an audience. It seems not a little coincidental that he begins his essay by discussing Shakespeare's *Hamlet* since Sterne has named his parson Yorick and has made free with intertextual references to the play. We cannot help but surmise that Sterne was keenly sensitive to Shakespeare's methods in devising his own. But we digress.

In Volume 9, Chapter 25, Tristram tells his readers, "When we have got to the end of this chapter (but not before) we must all turn back to the two blank chapters, on the account of which my honour has lain bleeding this half hour—" (TS 446), and then anticipates their criticisms for his having left Chapters 18 and 19 with "only nothing" in them:

Shall I be call'd as many blockheads, numsculs, doddypoles,  
dunderheads, ninny-hammers, goosecaps, jolheads, nicompoops, and sh--

t-a-beds—and other unsavory appellations, as ever the cake-bakers of *Lerné*, cast in the teeth of King *Gargantua*'s shepherds—And I'll let them do it . . . for how was it possible they should foresee the necessity I was under of writing the 25<sup>th</sup> chapter of my book, before the 18<sup>th</sup>, &c.? (TS 446; vol. 9, ch. 25)

What all of this amounts to—the blank chapters, the anticipation of the readers' rebukes—is one, dare we say it again, “gargantuan” digression, the purpose of which is to underscore (to play on Tristram's orthographic indulgences) the following: “—All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, ‘*to let people tell their stories their own way*’” (TS 446; vol. 9, ch. 25). To hell with *Horace* and his method of telling a story, Tristram seems to be saying by starting from the beginning, “*ab ovo*” or, more accurately, *ab conceptio*:

*Horace*, I know, does not recommend this fashion altogether: But that gentleman is speaking only of an epic poem or a tragedy;—(I forget which)—besides, if it was not so, I should beg Mr. *Horace*'s pardon;—for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived. (TS 4; vol. 1, ch. 4)

His dismissive disregard for literary convention, emphasized in “I forget which,” echoes the blithe disrespect of the jester who makes light of what others hold solemnly dear.

The unconventionality and sheer playfulness with which Sterne and Joyce approach the works discussed herein are unconcerned with anything like a tidy ending or a grand conclusion: *Tristram Shandy* is ultimately a “cock and bull story,” while *Ulysses* ends with the scarcely punctuated musings of Molly Bloom, whose final “Yes” fails to

provide an unambiguously conclusive notion as to what she is affirming. And yet, it is in this very sense that these works reflect the nature of the novel as Bakhtin conceives it—a “genre that continues to develop, that is as yet uncompleted” (3). *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* are successful and enduring precisely because they engage in an exploration of the “plastic possibilities” of the novel as a genre, because they experiment with form and disregard literary conventions, because they embrace a “carnival spirit” that is virulently antithetical to authority and hierarchy; and resistant to rigidity and closure.

## CHAPTER 3

### AT PLAY IN THE FIELDS OF INTERTEXTUALITY

It seems rather curious that what we in our current literary clime accept with relatively few reservations as “intertextuality” was once regarded, in the tamest of instances, as benign borrowing, and in the most egregious, as outright plagiarism, even creative or moral bankruptcy. Of Laurence Sterne, in respect of this, David Pierce observes:

At the end of the eighteenth century, John Ferriar in his *Illustrations of Sterne* (1798) excoriated Sterne for being a literary thief; today, we are delighted when we find evidence of Sterne’s use of past writers and we are frequently amused when he misquotes his sources. Sterne the plagiarist has become Sterne the parodist. As with Shakespeare and Joyce, nothing is lost by seeing his sources displayed. (14)

Perhaps what Ferriar and other such critics failed to appreciate in Sterne was that the latter’s borrowings did not result in a mere inept cobbling together of “fragments of other comic writers” (Watts 22) but were rendered into a uniquely artful mosaic without parallel in the mid-eighteenth century. Even today *Tristram Shandy* strikes us as refreshingly original. We do not mind that Sterne borrows from other writers, be they Rabelais, Cervantes, or Swift, because we can appreciate the manner in which he has brought these fragments to bear—to engage in discourse with one another; to support or

explode the preconceptions, misconceptions, and apperceptions of the novel's characters, as well as our own. Pierce rightly cites Joyce insofar as Joyce's intertextual virtuosity—his “borrowings” in terms of their sheer number and diversity—overwhelms the expectations of even the contemporary reader. The issue of borrowing or plagiarism seems altogether irrelevant if we recall what Bakhtin suggests in “Discourse in the Novel”:

As a living, socio-ideological concrete thing, as heteroglot opinion, language, for the individual consciousness, lies on the border between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes “one's own” only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that the speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (*DI* 293-94)

Such a perspective certainly casts a different light on matters, and it seems only natural for Julia Kristeva to have coined the term “intertextuality” after her exposure to Bakhtin's work. In her 1966 essay “Word, Dialogue, and Novel” Kristeva writes, “what appears as a lack of rigor is in fact an insight first introduced into literary theory by Bakhtin: any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of *intertextuality* replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least *double*” (66).

As we observed in the previous chapter, intertextuality is key to the structures of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* in that it operates as a catalyst of and provides the matériel for digression. Under the control of Sterne and Joyce intertextual references serve as one of the most effective devices in shattering the illusion that their works are anything other than creatures of artifice. Such reflexivity in the opinion of González is “one of the ultimate consequences of intertextuality” (LS 56). We will pursue this idea, however, at more length in the following chapter, which deals more exclusively with reflexivity in the two novels.

In Chapter 2 we discussed how Sterne incorporates languages other than English into *Tristram Shandy*, as in the case of the “MEMOIRE présentée à Messieurs les Docteurs de SORBONNE” (TS 42-4; vol. 1, ch. 20), integrating French and Latin in a manner that is for *Tristram Shandy* a characteristically oddball touch. This merely hints at Sterne’s inventive intertextuality, for he also enlists a dazzling array of disparate types of “texts,” ranging from the ecclesiastical (suspiciously so, as in Ernulphus’s “book of curses,” Walter Shandy’s cheeky joke at Dr. Slop’s expense), to the legal; from the astronomical to the musical; and from the militaristic on to the philosophic. Particularly fruitful in terms of the humor and irony they generate are the interpolations of aural effects, musical terminology and actual songs. As John Leslie cleverly muses in *Music’s Sentimental Role in Tristram Shandy*:

We may consider ourselves lucky that Laurence Sterne did not have the modern musical greeting-card at his disposal. Imagine opening Tristram Shandy at volume six and hearing a recording of asses braying “G-sol-re-

ut" until the page was turned, or listening to an electronically whistled "Lillibullero" through much of volume three. (55)

Of all the musical threads in the novel, perhaps the most sustained and productive, at least in terms of comic effect, is that of the Lillabullero. The tune is almost exclusively associated with Tristram's Uncle Toby who resorts to whistling it at various points in the text when either his modesty or his sense of compassion is compromised. Toby's sense of modesty is in fact so keen that Tristram goes to great lengths to describe it:

My uncle TOBY SHANDY, Madam, was a gentleman, who, with the virtues which usually constitute the character of a man of honour and rectitude,— possessed one in a very eminent degree, which is seldom or never put into the catalogue; and that was a most extream and unparallel'd modesty of nature;—tho' I correct the word nature, for this reason, that I may not prejudge a point which must shortly come to a hearing; and that is, Whether this modesty of his was natural or acquir'd.—Which ever may my uncle *Toby* came by it, 'twas nevertheless modesty in the truest sense of it; and that is, Madam, not in regard to words, for he was so unhappy as to have very little choice in them,—but to things;—and this kind of modesty so possess'd him, and it arose to such a height in him, as almost equal to, if such a thing could be, even the modesty of a woman: That female nicety, Madam, and inward cleanliness of mind and fancy, in your sex, which makes you so much the awe of ours. (TS 48; vol 1, ch. 21)

The irony of all this lies in the fact that the Lillabullero is anything but a compassionate or sentimental tune, and is rather more, to quote the related footnote in the Norton

Critical Edition of *Tristram Shandy*, “a song used by Protestants, . . . with its title drawn from what had originally been a Catholic slogan, as an infuriating taunt against their opponents in the Irish wars of the late seventeenth century” (*TS* 50). Many of the instances in which Uncle Toby is provoked into whistling the tune involve contentious arguments between himself and his brother Walter, an infuriatingly insensitive and tunnel-visioned armchair philosopher. The first of these instances in the novel is triggered by Walter Shandy’s inability to let rest the matter of Aunt Dinah’s “affair;” that is, the story of Tristram’s “great aunt Dinah, who, about sixty years ago, was married and got with child by the coachman” (*TS* 47; vol 1, ch. 21). Any mention of the affair, and especially in “mixed companies, . . . would set my uncle *Toby*’s honour and modesty o’bleeding” (*TS* 49, vol. 1, ch. 21).

In contrast to Toby, we have Tristram’s father, Walter, who, as Tristram observes, is a man guided almost entirely and blindly by his own systematizing mind:

—My Father, as I told you, was a philosopher in grain,—speculative,—systematical;—and my aunt *Dinah*’s affair was a matter of as much consequence to him, as the retrogradation of the planets to *Copernicus*:—  
 The backslidings of *Venus* in her orbit fortified the *Copernican* system, call’d so after his name; and the backslidings of my aunt *Dinah* in her orbit, did the same service in establishing my father’s system, which, I trust, will for ever hereafter be call’d the *Shandean System*, after his. (*TS* 49; vol. 1, ch. 21)

What Uncle Toby perceives as a delicate matter of family honor, Walter rationally reduces to a scientific and, therefore, impersonal hypothesis. Tristram attributes this to a

predisposition in Walter, as well as in Copernicus, towards the “truth”: “—*Amicus Plato*, my father would say, construing the words to my uncle *Toby*, as he went along, *Amicus Plato*; that is, DINAH was my aunt;—*sed magis amica veritas*—but TRUTH is my sister” (*TS* 49; vol. 1, ch. 21). Walter’s “construance” is in fact an intentional misconstruance of an intertextual fragment in order to bolster his own argument. His life is so preponderantly the life of the mind that all is abstracted to a “hobbyhorsical” extreme. The so-called “truth” is more important to him than compassion or honor, or even family character, for as Walter himself poses to Toby, “—What is the character of a family to an hypothesis?” (*TS* 50; vol. 1, ch 21) Clearly, for Walter, reason and science trump all else. When Toby equates Walter’s dismissal of the value of the “life of a family” “in competition of” [i.e., in favor of] “an hypothesis” with “downright MURDER,” Walter responds with characteristic sangfroid, “—There lies your mistake . . . ;—for, in *Foro Scientiae* there is no such thing as MURDER,—’tis only DEATH, brother” (*TS* 50; vol. 1, ch. 21). Toby’s only recourse in this instance is the Lillabullero, as Tristram elucidates:

My uncle *Toby* would never offer to answer this by any other kind of argument, than that of whistling half a dozen bars of *Lillabullero*.—You must know it was the usual channel thro’ which his passions got vent, when any thing shocked or surprised him;—but especially when any thing, which he deem’d very absurd, was offered. (*TS* 50; vol. 1, ch. 21)

And, indeed, we are treated to a hilarious litany of instances throughout the text in which Toby has occasion to make his unique form of argument, as when he directs “the buccinatory muscles along his cheeks, and the orbicular muscles around his lips to do their duty—” (*TS* 117; vol 3, ch. 6), or when he tries to drown out Dr Slop’s infernal

cursing of Obadiah with a “monstrous, long, loud Whew—w—w—something betwixt the interjectional whistle of *Hey day!* and the word itself.” (TS 129; vol. 3, ch. 11); or even later in the book, when he is content merely “with whistling *Lillabullero* inwardly” after Walter has “clapp’d his hand upon my uncle *Toby’s* mouth, under colour of whispering in his ear” in order to stifle the almost certain voluble whistling that would ensue after hearing Kysarcius’s (kiss arse) ridiculous conclusion, “*That the mother is not of kin to her child*” (TS 230; vol. 4, ch. 29).

Not only do we as readers delight in the richly absurd transactions between the Shandy brothers, but our enjoyment of this delightful absurdity is compounded by Tristram when first, adopting the scientific tone of his father, he observes that Toby’s method of argument has no formal designation, and then, by offering his own cockeyed, though logically rooted, nomenclature:

As not one of our writers, nor any of the commentators upon them, that I remember, have thought proper to give a name to this particular species of argument,—I here take the liberty to do it myself, for two reasons. First, That, in order to prevent all confusion in disputes, it may stand as much distinguished for ever, from every other species of argument,—as the *Argumentum ad Verecundiam, ex Absurdo, ex Fortiori*, or any other argument whatsoever:—And, secondly, That it may be said by my children’s children, when my head is laid to rest,—that their learned grandfather’s head had been busied to as much purpose once, as other people’s:—That he had invented a name,—and generously thrown it into the TREASURY of the *Ars Logica*, for one of the most unanswerable

arguments in the whole science. And if the end of disputation is more to silence than convince,—they may add, if they please, to one of the best arguments too. (*TS* 50; vol. 1, ch. 21)

Tristram proceeds to name the form of argument “*Argumentum Fistulatorium*,” or “argument of the (musical) pipe,” and declares that it should be ranked among, and as worthy as, the “*Argumentum Baculinum*,” or “argument of the stick (i.e., threat),” and the “*Argumentum Crumenam*,” or “argument to the purse (i.e., self-interest)” (*TS* 51; vol. 1, ch. 21). In addition to inventing the argument of the pipe, Tristram conjures up the sexually charged “argument of the third leg,” the “*Argumentum Tripodium*,” which he cheekily remarks is “never used but by the woman against the man” (*TS* 51; vol. 1, ch. 21). There is little doubt that Sterne is having a great laugh at the expense of reason and all its logical and rhetorical trappings, and that the irreverent influence of the carnival spirit is afoot in all this. Perhaps, however, lying beneath this surface of comic characterization and intertextual parody there runs a deeper and more trenchantly political current.

While John Leslie maintains that music, and particularly the Lillabullero, serves a primarily sentimental role in *Tristram Shandy*, Joan Meyler offers a starkly different interpretation. In a fascinating essay entitled “The ‘Body National’ and the ‘Body Natural’: Tristram Shandy’s History of Ireland,” Meyler posits that *Tristram Shandy* is essentially a political allegory of “English-Irish relations” during the time between the reign of Elizabeth I and the period when Sterne’s novel was published (137-38). Acknowledging Sterne’s Irish roots and his “strong sense of justice,” Meyler makes the disputable claim that Sterne, “although an Anglican clergyman, . . . did not hold

doctrinaire positions” to bolster the following conclusion: “It is thus not surprising that he should identify with Ireland and the Irish, and undertake to write a sympathetic account of the history of the conception, birth, naming and misfortunes of the Irish nation” (137-38). We suggest the claim as to Sterne’s not taking doctrinaire positions is disputable because biographical evidence suggests that, while not a “party man” like his rabidly Whig uncle, the Reverend Dr. Jacques Sterne, Laurence Sterne just the same participated in a particularly nasty letter-writing campaign in the *York Courant* and the *York Gazetteer* during the city of York’s winter by-election of 1741-2, writing in opposition of the Tory candidate for the seat of Knight of the Shire, George Fox, an Anglo-Irishman with considerable landholdings in his home country (Cash and Ross). Ross notes that in Sterne’s “diatribes” against Fox, he characterized the man as not only an “Irishman” and a “foreigner,” but also suggested that his holdings in Ireland represented a threat to the “Yorkshire woollen industry” (87). While Cash and Ross acknowledge that Sterne acted as a participant in this campaign largely under the duress of his powerful and politically zealous uncle, and that he eventually recanted his participation in what he later described as “dirty work” (Cash 87), both biographers provide an account of Sterne’s vehemently anti-Catholic article published in the *Protestant Courant* in 1746, well after he had ceased to do Uncle Jacques’s bidding (Ross 136). So much for Sterne’s not holding doctrinaire positions.

Nevertheless, Meyler draws a sufficient number of compelling correlations between the misfortunes and domestic difficulties of the Shandy family, and those of the Irish people and nation to warrant serious consideration of her assertion that *Tristram Shandy* is a political allegory. She suggests that John Milton, Oliver Cromwell’s Latin

Secretary and prolific pamphleteer in agitation against Charles I's sympathetic policies toward the Irish and the Catholics during his reign, can be read as a "second text" (or intertextual link) from the very beginning of the novel (143):

From the first page, Tristram, as narrator, recounts, in very specific ways, the history of English-Irish relations. In 1659, after Cromwell's scorched-earth policy in Ireland and his six-year suspension of parliament, John Milton, Cromwell's Latin Secretary, addressed the reconvened parliament and called the preceding six years when parliament was not in session a "short but scandalous night of interruption." "[My] mother's" words to her husband at the outset of the novel: "Pray, my Dear . . . have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" parody Milton's image of a six-year period as one night. It is during just such a night of interruption that Tristram (the Irish nation) is conceived by Walter (parliament) and "my mother" (the land of Ireland). (Meyler 137)

Continuing in this vein, Meyler writes,

Laurence Sterne provides confirmation for the conclusion that *Tristram Shandy* is an allegory of the history of Ireland in a number of ways. For example, Tristram's description of himself as having "a crack in my back,—and here's a great piece fallen off here before,—and what must I do with this foot? I shall never reach England with it" (V,xi, p.438) makes no sense if applied to a man; it is perfectly comprehensible, however, if we realise that he is talking about himself in terms of an

anthropomorphised map of Ireland with the Shannon River as the “crack in [his] back.” Likewise, Tristram emphasises his father’s concern with noses and their significance; he tells us that his own family, which has “felt the turn of the wheel” but which “rank’d very high in king Harry VIIIth’s time . . . had never recovered the blow of my great grandfather’s nose—It was an ace of clubs” (III, xxxiii, p.261). It becomes as “plain as the nose on a man’s face” that Tristram’s grandfather was sporting a trefoil, clover, or shamrock—the floral emblem of the Irish—for a nose. However, just in case the reader initially misses the import of the nose on a man’s face, Tristram even includes a story, “Slawkenbergius’s Tale,” which devotes thirty-six pages to problematising the meaning and signification of the nose on a man’s face. (137)

These excerpts provide merely a taste of the remarkable correspondences between what Meyler characterizes as the “great” and the “trivial” in *Tristram Shandy*, in further explication of which she states:

Great events played out on the stage of European politics during the periods when incidents relating to the history of the Shandy family occur are allegorised in the small happenings—such as those in the back parlour when Walter, Toby, Dr Slop, and, on occasion, Trim, await Tristram’s birth—that transpire in everyday life. Seemingly trivial occurrences at home are illustrative of corresponding events played out at the macrocosmic level between nations. (143)

One particularly fascinating correlation has to do with the ridiculously labored contortions Walter Shandy must go through in order to extract his “striped *India handkerchief*” with his left hand (while holding his wig in his right) from the right “pocket cut low-down in his coat as was the custom ‘[i]n the latter end of Queen Anne’s reign, and in the beginning of the reign of King George the first’” (Meyler 143). What, we ask as readers, could be the purpose of such an elaborately drawn and absurd detail if not to create a comic effect? Meyler’s response is that it allegorizes the state of affairs between England and Ireland in respect of the linen industry, and she traces the history of prohibitive trade laws and importation duties that resulted ultimately in limiting the Irish linen industry to the production during this period of linen of only the “coarsest kind” (certainly not handkerchief quality) (144). Meyler remarks:

Handkerchiefs are generally made of linen or cotton, but who would consider making a handkerchief of the coarsest kind of linen? Is it any wonder that Walter is represented as going halfway across the globe—well, struggling to reach diagonally across his body—for this **striped India handkerchief**? Where could he get a soft striped one closer to home? That Walter should be holding his **W[h]ig** with his other hand during his efforts is also not surprising, since it was Whig producers, merchants, traders and shipowners who were the strongest supporters of efforts to bolster English trading profits at the expense of Irish subsistence. (144).

If we accept Meyler’s premise that Milton can be read as a second text and that *Tristram Shandy* is essentially an allegory of England’s abusive policies toward Ireland, is it

possible to conceive that the Sterne of the 1741-42 by-election letter-writing campaign and the anti-Catholic missive of 1746 could have sustained such a dramatic sea change in his sympathies? His published letter of apology (1742) in the first instance certainly seems to indicate that he was capable of such reflection and adjustment in his views. Such an adjustment in the second instance would seem a little more problematic, especially since Sterne rakes the Roman Catholic Church and its rituals over the coals in *Tristram Shandy*. Both Cash and Ross remark on the fact that Sterne changed the religious affiliation of *Tristram Shandy*'s Dr Slop from that of the actual figure who served as his model. As Ross observes:

When Laurence Sterne wrote the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, one of the principal targets of his satire was Dr John Burton, whom he caricatured as Dr Slop, that ‘little squat, uncourtly figure’ of a man mid-wife, ‘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 Sergeant of the Horse-Guards’ (TS ii.ix. 84). . . . Sterne deliberately reminded the Yorkshire readers for whom *Tristram Shandy* was first written of Burton’s dubious activities during the Jacobite Rebellion, and their consequences. He made Dr Slop a “papist”—which Burton was not—and an enemy to the liberty of the press. (135)

Perhaps, ultimately, it was the great leveler of all human endeavor which may have had a hand in Sterne’s penning such a sympathetic and carnivalized political allegory. Sterne’s concern with mortality, having been a consumptive for most of his adult life, is reflected in Tristram’s flight from Death in volume 7, wherein he says, “But there is no *living*,

*Eugenius*, . . . at this rate; for as this *son of a whore* has found my lodgings—" (TS 336; vol. 7, ch. 1).

It is about six minutes' tolerable good reading since John Leslie began to maintain. Returning to him, and his notion that music, especially the Lillabullero, serves a principally sentimental role in *Tristram Shandy*, we consider Meyler's interesting interpretation that, as a song celebrating "English conquests in Ireland," Lillabullero,

the otherwise kind but unthinking Uncle Toby's *leitmotif*, becomes the tragic goat-song between the acts punctuating the novel with a reminder of the events of 1688 when the question of religion determined the history of England, Ireland and Scotland and that of much of Europe in the next century." (150)

It seems ironic that of the sheer number of intertextual interpolations of songs and other musical fragments in *Ulysses*, Lillabullero is not to be counted among them. An omission of this kind strikes us as particularly curious when we consider the broad parodic use Joyce could have made of such a highly politicized motif. It would have found a natural and logical place amidst the bombast of Barney Kiernan's, in the "Cyclops" episode, where it could have poured forth from the mouth of the unidentified narrator like so much combustive accelerant to fuel the flames of the "Citizen's" nationalistic rantings. In "Oxen of the Sun," we could easily imagine its refrain having been whistled by Stephen in a mood of perverse irony during the discussion of "hoof and mouth disease." We can only surmise that for Joyce to have used the song in *Ulysses* may have been a too telling acknowledgment of Sternean influence than he was willing to admit to at the time. We note that later in his career, while at work on *Finnegans Wake*,

Joyce is known to have told Eugene Jolas (Hart 65) that he was “trying to build many planes of narrative with a single esthetic purpose. Did you ever read Laurence Sterne?” (Ellmann 554) It seems extraordinary that this rather cryptic allusion to Sterne, (and we emphasize *to Sterne*, not Tristram Shandy), is all that Joyce is purported to have said of the author that so many postmodernists identify as his precursor. Nevertheless, Joyce acknowledges him more extensively in his assumption of the style of Sterne’s *Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (Gifford 427), which takes up roughly a page and-a-half (lines 738 through 798) of “Oxen of the Sun.”

As for musical intertextuality, as we suggested before, there is a dizzying profusion throughout the novel as a whole, and between the “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun” episodes we find no fewer than seventy-five such allusions, some of which are repeated in both chapters. At the very end of “Oxen of the Sun,” when the discourse has broken down into slurred speech, elisions of whole words and phrases, the language of the text takes on a purely auditory quality. The printed words on the page are but slurrings and blurrings of proper spelling and syntax. A multiplicity of extra-literary elements enters the scene. We can almost hear the “chap puking” “yooka,” “yook,” “ook,” and the “Pflapp! Pflaap! . . . Pflaaaap!” of flatulence that recalls Bloom’s windiness in the “Sirens” episode. Someone, most likely Stephen, says in Latin “*Laetbuntur in cubilibus suis,*” (“Let them sing aloud upon their beds,” from Psalms 129:5) (Gifford 449), followed a few lines later by “Strike up a ballad.” “Then outspake medical Dick to medical Davy” (*U* 14.1574-78) recalls the bawdy song, “Medical Dick and Medical Davy,” first introduced in the “Scylla and Charybdis” episode.

Though music figures prominently throughout *Ulysses*, it does so more often as sound bytes than as a single, sustained note, that is, for the great exception of “Sirens,” the brilliant *tour de force* of narrative rendered in the style of a fugue. We would stop to reflect on this longer, but our commitment remains to “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun” in this discussion.

The “Cyclops” episode presents us with a veritable wealth of intertextual parodies, ranging from the legal to the biblical, as we have noted earlier. They are of particular interest from a subversive standpoint inasmuch as McArthur identifies them as having emerged out of a “genetic seed” of “mockery of the popular literature of the official Revival,” a movement for which Joyce had no small lack of affection (139). McArthur suggests that Joyce employs a “biocular” strategy in the narration of “Cyclops” as a corrective counterpoint for the excesses of the “militant nationalism” of the Citizen and his bibulous cronies. The catalogs, or lists, that explode the parodies are centrifugal in nature and serve to “contest the exclusivity of the Citizen’s monocular or Cyclopean vision. The Citizen’s discourse is exclusive, cellular, and closed; the lists, in contrast, are inclusive, expansive, and open. They exclude nothing” (McArthur 139). We would suggest that, in addition to this, they assume a similar, but comic, gigantism as represented by the Citizen/Polyphemus in order to drown out or dilute a discourse that is in essence centripetal, and which seeks to establish dominance through violence.

In one of the earliest of these parodies of what Gifford identifies as a “late-nineteenth-century reworking of Irish legend” (320), Joyce describes the imposing figure of the Citizen in Cyclopean terms:

The figure seated on a large boulder at the foot of a round tower was that of a broadshouldered deepchested stronglimbed frankeyed redhaired freelyfreckled shaggybearded widemouthed largenosed longheaded deepvoiced barekneed brawnyhanded hairylegged ruddyfaced sinewyarmed hero. . . . A powerful current of warm breath issued at regular intervals from the profound cavity of his mouth while in rhythmic resonance the loud strong hale reverberations of his formidable heart thundered rumblingly causing the ground, the summit of the lofty tower and the still loftier walls of the cave to vibrate and tremble. (*U* 12.151-55; 12.163-67)

The reference to Homer's Polyphemus is unmistakable, and Joyce succeeds in caricaturizing the Citizen as a kind of carnival grotesque. He is further described as wearing a girdle from which

hung a row of seastones which jangled at every movement of his portentous frame and on these were graven with rude yet striking art the tribal images of many Irish heroes and heroines of antiquity, Cuchulin, Conn of hundred battles, Niall of nine hostages, Brian of Kincora, . . . Father John Murphy, . . . Goliath, . . . Dante Alighieri, Christopher Columbus, . . . the Mother of the Maccabees, the Last of the Mohicans, the Rose of Castile, the Man for Galway, The Man that Broke the Bank at Monte Carlo, The Man in the Gap, The Woman Who Didn't, Benjamin Franklin, Napoleon Bonaparte, John L. Sullivan, Cleopatra, Savoureen Deelish, Julius Caesar, . . . W. Shakespeare, Brian Confucius, . . . Thomas

Cook and Son, . . . Ludwig Beethoven, . . . Adam and Eve, . . . Jack the Giantkiller, Gautama Buddha, Lady Godiva. (*U* 12.173-197)

McArthur notes that while the list begins with “sixteen authentic Irishmen,” it ultimately includes “at least seventeen other nationalities, ranging from Egyptian (‘Cleopatra’), to Italian (‘Christopher Columbus’), to Indian (‘Gautama Buddha’),” as well as the names of places and works of fiction. (139). We see in Joyce’s use of the Irish legend a parody pointedly critiquing the Irish Revival movement he so disdained, and comically exposing the narrow-minded and brutish sorts that naturally gravitate toward a movement that bolsters their fantasies of racial and nationalist ascendancy.

The carnival spirit is inherent in parodic intertextuality, and in their prolific borrowings, Sterne and Joyce create new and refracted images. They are able to ironize and expose the inconsistencies of “official” languages, of social and cultural attitudes, and of political structures. Their playful and irreverent inversions have a subversive effect, familiarizing and thereby bringing down low, that which was high.

## CHAPTER 4

### THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS OF REFLEXIVITY

The self-reflexive novel has before it an entirely different project from that of the novel driven by standard conventions of story telling. Its purpose, as Viktor Shklovsky relates, is “to lay bare the device” (147). In this context, language, or discourse, is privileged over the Aristotelian architectonics of plot. Language itself steps forward as the central character of the work. The process or journey of writing takes precedence over the realization of tidy conclusions or final destinations. The endings of both *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* attest to this.

We suggested toward the beginning of the previous chapter that the manner in which Sterne pieces together intertextual fragments in order to form his own unique mosaic of narrative in *Tristram Shandy* serves to support or explode our preconceptions, misconceptions, and apperceptions as readers. Carol Watts echoes this thought in terms of Sterne’s deployment of narrative technique:

The invitation to “read, read, read, read” Sterne’s narrative appears to dissuade the reader from seeking a literal meaning to the text. The narrator notes the “vicious taste” 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” (TS: 1.20.65). Yet the habit of “reading straight forwards,” the Archimedean “shortest line . . . from one given point to another” (TS: 6.40.572), is of course precisely what the narrative relies on to ensnare the reader in its games and traps—the euphemisms, the reversed chapters, the dual text Latin and English of the excommunication and so on. All of these techniques force the reader into an awareness of his or her reading practice, bringing about a critical reflexivity. (32)

Sterne challenges our expectations as readers. In his carnivalization of the text by means of deliberate reversals of cause and effect, in digressions and manipulations of time and space, we are forced to submit to *his way* of telling a story. We must abandon our preconceptions of how a novel is structured and read, which has the subversive effect of calling into question the priority and authority of conventional methods of writing and reading. We discover that the novel form is plastic, and subject to all manner of “construance,” to borrow from Sterne.

In “Epic and Novel” Bakhtin asserts that the novel is a genre that is “both critical and self-critical” (10), and that, “It is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review” (39). *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* teach us that we must learn to read anew, to read in a manner that rejects the rigidity of established modes of approaching literature. Apropos of this, Leo Bersani remarks in “Against *Ulysses*,” “*Ulysses* is often hard to read, but, more than any other work of literature, it is also a guidebook to how it should be read” (211). We might add that this is true of *Tristram Shandy* as well, that it, too, serves as its own guidebook.

From the very outset of Sterne's peculiar novel we are informed by our narrator, Tristram, that he shall not confine himself to "Mr. Horace's rules," "nor to any man's rules that ever lived" (*TS* 4; vol. 1, ch. 4) in the composition of his work. He taunts his audience with cheeky remarks such as, "I have a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter very nonsensically, and I will not balk my fancy" (*TS* 52; vol. 1, ch. 23); and with invitations to participate in the writing of the novel itself, as in volume 6, when he suggests that his male reader should describe the "concupiscent" Widow Wadman to his own specifications:

To conceive this right,—call for pen and ink—here's paper ready to your hand.—Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind—as like your mistress as you can—as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—'tis all one to me—please but your own fancy in it. (*TS* 330; vol. 6, ch. 38)

Later yet, in volume 9, Tristram completely skips over chapters 18 and 19, leaving two pages entirely blank, reserving the chapters for insertion until after chapter 25, the chapter in which he, if we recall, remarks, "—All I wish is, that it may be a lesson to the world, "*to let people tell their stories their own way*" (*TS* 446; vol 9, ch. 25). This is quite obviously **not** a novel that conforms to any of the standards of novelistic convention observed in the mid-eighteenth century. Neither does it, but for certain postmodern texts, conform to what today's audience usually expects of a novel. As Shklovsky observes,

Everything in the novel has been displaced and rearranged. The dedication to the book makes its appearance on page 25, even though it violates the three basic demands of a dedication, as regards content, form, and place. The preface is no less unusual. It occupies nearly ten full

printed pages, but it is not found in the beginning of the book but in volume 3, chapter 20, pages 192-203. (148)

Throughout the book, a promise made at the end of one chapter is not fulfilled, if fulfilled ever at all, until several chapters later, delaying continuity and frustrating the reader. A case in point can be found in volume 1, where Tristram makes an unfulfilled promise to provide a map of the midwife's professional purview:

—But I must here, once for all, inform you, that all this will be more exactly delineated and explain'd in a map, now in the hands of the engraver, which, with many other pieces and developments to this work, will be added to the end of the twentieth volume,—not to swell the work,—I detest the thought of such a thing;—but by way of commentary, scholium, illustration, and key to such passages, incidents, or inuendos as shall be thought to be either of private interpretation, or of dark or doubtful meaning after my life and my opinions shall have been read over. (TS 25; vol. 1, ch. 13)

Even the least attentive reader will note that Tristram's work does not continue past volume 9, chapter 33, let alone stretch on for eleven more volumes. Moreover, there is no evidence of such a map in any of the other volumes. What the *most* attentive reader, however, will catch and call into question is Tristram's remark that he "detests such a thing" as swelling a work. What *is* Tristram's work but a series of swellings linked together along a labyrinthine narrative line? What are the Latin Slawkengbergii Fabella and Slawkenbergius's Tale of volume 4, but swellings? What of the Latin Excommunicatio that appears on the facing pages of volume 3, chapter 11? or the

Memoire présent à les Docteurs de Sorbonne and the Réponse rendered in French and Latin? Tristram's self-contradictions are both humorous and intentional. Sterne is indulging in a hearty self-reflexive chuckle.

Jeffrey Williams in “Narrative on Narrative (Tristram Shandy)” remarks rather appropriately that

the novel demonstrates a kind of narratorial excess. In general, reflexive features, such as a narrator's comments, so-called narrative intrusions, frames, etc., foreground the question of narration. By making these features conspicuous and so prominent, *Tristram Shandy* maximally thematizes narrative. *Tristram Shandy* gives overt signals of its status as an allegory of narrative, even if those signals are difficult to decipher, and even if they have been obscured by conventional theories of narrative.

(1043-44)

But to return to promises made and delayed, or entirely unfulfilled, we have other examples. For instance, promises made in the form of the beginning of a storyline that are hijacked by digressions and are not resumed until a later chapter, often beginning with the same catchphrase. Volume 3, chapter 2 begins, “—WHAT prodigious armies you had in *Flanders!*”—Brother *Toby*, replied my father, taking his wig from off his head,” and then digresses into a description of Walter's difficulties in extracting his “striped *India* handkerchief” from his coat pocket (TS 113). It is a digression that continues for four chapters until the beginning of chapter 6, where we read, “—WHAT prodigious armies you had in *Flanders!*”—Brother *Toby*, quoth my father, I do believe” (TS 116; vol. 3, ch. 6). Viktor Shklovsky similarly observes in “The Novel as Parody”:

After a solemn promise to tell the story of Toby's amorous adventures without digression, Sterne brakes the action by introducing digressions into digressions, which are then linked to each other by the repetition of one and the same phrase: "It is with love as with Cuckoldom." (164)

One of the many impressions we come away with from a work like *Tristram Shandy* is a sense of the sheer multiplicity of meanings in a language, and an even keener sense of the problematics of representation. In two quite humorous and illustrative instances in the novel, we are exposed to what amounts to failures in the ability of characters to communicate effectively with one another. While all the characters are essentially speaking the English language, the various languages of their "hobbyhorses" (Walter's rational and scientific, Toby and Trim's tactical and militaristic) insinuate themselves in such a way as to duplicate meaning, as in the side-splitting "misconstruances" of the meanings of "the radical heat and the radical moisture" and "auxiliaries" which take place in volume 5.

In the first instance, Walter Shandy reads aloud from the *Tristapædia* (his system of education for Tristram written "after the example of Xenophon") (TS 261; vol. 5; ch. 16), in the company of Parson Yorick, Uncle Toby, and corporal Trim. The subject is "health," and Tristram quotes his father as beginning in this way: "'The whole secret of health depending upon the due contention for mastery betwixt the radical heat and the radical moisture'" (TS 276-7; vol. 5, ch.33). However, before Walter can continue in his elocution, Yorick interrupts him to ask if he has proven this as a matter of fact. The action devolves into a digression of sorts for two chapters until we reach chapter 36, where Tristram echoes the beginning of chapter 33, "The whole secret of health, said my

father, beginning the sentence again, depending evidently upon the due contention betwixt the radical heat and the radical moisture within us" (*TS* 279; vol. 5, ch. 36). But again, Walter is interrupted, this time by Uncle Toby, who has been reminded of the "radical heat and the radical moisture" of an experience of the flux he and the corporal shared in the trenches at the "siege of *Limerick*" (*TS* 279-80; vol. 5, chs. 37-8). His opinings on health hijacked again, Walter, in an all too comic fashion "drew in his lungs top-full of air, and looking up, blew it forth again, as slowly as he possibly could" (*TS* 280; vol. 5, ch. 38). Sterne has painted the picture of Walter's exasperation masterfully, and with a finishing stroke adds:

—It was heaven's mercy to us, continued my uncle *Toby*, which put it into the corporal's head to maintain that due contention betwixt the radical heat and the radical moisture, by reinforcing the fever, as he did all along, with hot wine and spices; whereby the corporal kept up (as it were) a continual firing, so that the radical heat stood its ground from the beginning to the end, and was a fair match for the moisture, terrible as it was.—Upon my honour, added my uncle *Toby*, you might have heard the contention within or bodies, brother *Shandy*, twenty toises. (*TS* 280; vol. 5, ch. 38)

This by no means concludes the discussion of the radical heat and the radical moisture, which is further mined to great comic effect in chapter 40, wherein corporal Trim expounds on the subject.

In the instance of the "auxiliaries," we have a similar case of "misconstruance" amidst the same company. We are told in volume 5, chapter 41, that Doctor *Slop's*

having been called out of the room, “gave my father an opportunity of going on with another chapter in the *Trista-pædia*” (TS 283). It is not just a little humorous that at this juncture Tristram feels compelled to make the aside, “—Come! cheer up, my lads; I’ll shew you land—for when we have tugged through that chapter, the book shall not be opened again this twelve-month.—Huzza!—” (TS 283; vol. 5, ch. 41). By which he means, of course, the *Tristapædia*.

Half reading from the *Tristapædia* and half “discoursing” with Yorick, Walter Shandy begins to opine on education, which leads to the uncannily familiar: “—The whole entirely depends, added my father, in a low voice, upon the *auxiliary verbs*, Mr. Yorick” (TS 284; vol. v, ch. 42). The gist of this cranky notion is that Walter believes the teaching of the auxiliary verbs to be essential to a child’s education, as the following would indicate:

That those who have been entrusted with the education of our children, and whose business it was to open their minds, and stock them early with ideas, in order to set the imagination loose upon them, have made so little use of the auxiliary verbs in doing it, as they have done—So that, except *Raymond Lullius*, and the elder *Pelegrini*, the last of which arrived to such perfection in the use of ‘em, with his topics, that in a few lessons, he could teach a young gentleman to discourse with plausibility upon any subject, *pro* or *con*, and to say and write all that could be spoken or written concerning it, without blotting a word, to the admiration of all who beheld him. (TS 284; vol. 5, ch. 42)

In this instance, hearing the word “auxiliaries” so often repeated, it is Trim who misconstrues meaning, making the association, “The *Danes*, an’ please your honour, quoth the corporal, who were on the left at the siege of *Limerick*, were all auxiliaries” (*TS* 284-85; vol. 5, ch. 42). To which, Uncle Toby responds, “—But the auxiliaries, *Trim*, my brother is talking about,—I conceive to be different things” (*TS* 285; vol. 5, ch. 42).

These instances of misunderstanding cleverly and comically underscore the implicit dialogical nature of the single word and set in relief the problematics of representation. We are left with the notion indelibly imprinted in our minds of the multiple, or heteroglot, meanings of individual words and the challenges this presents to the author in establishing coherence. If the author has any intention of meaning, his characters take it hostage by means of their own interpretations.

It would be remiss in a discussion such as this to fail in acknowledging Tristram’s/Sterne’s self-reflexive anticipation of the criticisms of his “criticks.” In the following excerpt, Tristram makes no secret of his opinion that critics wouldn’t know a work of genius if it bit them in the “Kysarcius”:

I’ll undertake this moment to prove it to any man in the world, except to a connoisseur;—though I declare that I object only to a connoisseur in swearing,—as I would do to a connoisseur in painting, &c. &c. the whole set of ’em are so hung round and *befetish’d* with the bobs and trinkets of criticism,—or to drop my metaphor, which by the bye is a pity,—for I have fetch’d it as far as from the coast of *Guinea*;—their heads, Sir, are stuck so full of rules and compasses, and have that eternal propensity to apply them upon all occasions, that a work of genius had better go to the

devil at once, than stand to be prick'd and tortured to death by 'em. (TS 132; vol. 3, ch. 12)

Tristram follows this passage with a pastiche of the connoisseurs at work in the application of their rules and compasses:

—And how did *Garrick* speak the soliloquy last night?—Oh, against all rule, my Lord,—most ungrammatically! betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in *number, case* and *gender*, he made a breach thus,—stopping, as if the point wanted settling;—and betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times, three seconds and three fifths by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time.— Admirable grammarian!—But in suspending his voice—was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm?—Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look?—I look'd only at the stop-watch, my Lord.—Excellent observer! (TS 132; vol. 3, ch. 12)

And as though this were not enough, Tristram/Sterne and his “Life and Opinions” face the looking glass directly:

And what of this new book the whole world makes such a rout about?— Oh! 'tis out of all plumb, my Lord,—quite an irregular thing!—not one of the angles at the four corners was a right angle.—I had my rule and compasses, &c. my Lord, in my pocket.—Excellent critic! (TS 132; vol. 3, ch. 12)

Excellent author!

Whereas in *Tristram Shandy*, we see an almost transparent engagement in self-reflexivity, we see in *Ulysses* quite the opposite. Joyce is less overt in the laying bare of his devices, and in good conscience, it may be said that he does much to conceal them in the dense heteroglossia he represents in his novel, particularly in the “Cyclops” and “Oxen of the Sun” episodes.

Beyond the very title itself, the self-reflexivity of *Ulysses* is most evident in what McArthur describes as “the chiasmic movement backward and forward” in the text as Joyce reappropriates “previously used devices and thematic clusters” (128). In repetition, he reveals that what at first appear to be random intertextual fragments interspersed throughout each of the episodes have coherence in the greater totality of the novel.

McArthur observes:

After a certain point, Joyce worked on *Ulysses* in two directions, forward to the end and backward to the beginning. The second half develops logically out of the devices of the first, and the elaboration of those devices is projected backward to “Aeolus” and other early chapters. This principle of construction makes special demands on the reader. As his or her reading experience grows, the wise reader of *Ulysses* learns to look both forward and backward in the novel. The *Throwaway* incident is, within the infrastructure of Joyce criticism, the *locus classicus* of this procedure. When the reader first encounters it, there is no indication of a potential double meaning for Bloom’s simple statement. Only later, when looking backward, can the reader see Hyne’s illicit decoding. The reader

also learns that this incident is only one of a multitude of such complex interweavings. (142-43)

In “*Throwaway*,” McArthur identifies an intertextual fragment that is used reflexively throughout *Ulysses*, beginning in the “Lotus-Eaters” episode and weaving its way through “Cyclops,” “Oxen of the Sun,” “Circe,” and “Eumeus,” and, by inference, through several other episodes. *Throwaway*, as it turns out, was the actual dark horse that ran in the Gold Cup at Ascot on June 16, 1904, and won the race at “twenty-to-one” odds (Gifford 98). In the “Lotus-Eaters,” Bloom is carrying a copy of the *Freeman’s Journal* under his armpit, which he had rolled up into a baton earlier in the episode. As he exits the Chemist’s, he is accosted by Bantam Lyons, a grimy street character who is after a look at the racing odds in Bloom’s paper. Watching the grotesque Lyons unroll the baton with “yellow blacknailed fingers,” Bloom muses in a stream-of-consciousness flow of thought, “Wants a wash too. Take off the rough dirt. Good morning, have you used Pears’ soap? Dandruff on his shoulders. Scalp wants oiling” (*U* 5.523-5). Wanting to be quickly rid of him he decides to leave him the paper and tells Lyons, “—I was just going to throw it away” (*U* 5.534). Lyons misinterprets Bloom, taking “throw it away” as Bloom’s bum tip to place money on “*Throwaway*,” the horse whose name Lyons has no doubt observed in the paper to be an odds-against loser at twenty-to-one. The *Throwaway* thread re-emerges in “Cyclops” through Lenehan who tells the unidentified narrator and Terry, Barney Kiernan’s barkeep, that he has lost on “Sceptre,” another of the horses from the day’s Gold Cup Race (*U* 12.1215-27). During the episode, the Citizen’s cronies have been standing the Citizen and one another drinks. Leopold Bloom, who finds himself among them, neither drinks nor stands drinks for the others, accepting

only a cigar when it is proffered. After he excuses himself for a moment to “head round to the court a moment to see if Martin [Cunningham of the “Hades” episode] is there” (*U* 12.1486), Lenehan, resentful from his loss in the Gold Cup, suggests to the unnamed narrator that Bloom is using his excuse to go to the courthouse as a “blind,” to collect his winnings from the race: “He had a few bob on *Throwaway* and he’s gone to gather in the shekels (*U* 12.1550-51). . . . That’s where he’s gone, says Lenehan. I met Bantam Lyons going to back that horse only I put him off it and he told me Bloom gave him the tip. Bet you what you like he has a hundred shillings to five on. He’s the only man in Dublin that has it. A dark horse” (*U* 12.1554-57).

*Throwaway* proves to be a most effective intertextual device for Joyce. Echoed in Lenehan’s choice of the words “shekels” and “dark horse,” is the leitmotif of anti-semitism that courses its way through the novel in deep reverberation of Dublin’s social politics. Joyce’s use of this motif, of course, is to link the alienated Stephen with Bloom of the alienated wandering Jews, to associate the exiled state of the two. Lenehan’s oblique reference to anti-semitism in “A dark horse,” is deepened and reinforced by Joe Hynes’s more overt, “—He’s a bloody dark horse himself” (*U* 12.1558). The moment marks a significant turning point in the episode inasmuch as the violence, initially general and undirected in the discussion of various newspaper accounts of and grotesque rumors on the subject of corporal punishment, becomes directed at Bloom, the Jew, the “dark horse,” the winner of “shekels,” the hoarder who refuses to stand drinks. The ironic antipathy that arises out Lenehan’s poisonous misunderstanding registers deeply. As the Citizen and his cronies continue to drink, the mood in Barney Kiernan’s pub becomes uglier and more violent, culminating in the Citizen’s hurtling a biscuit box at Bloom as he

makes his escape in the car with Martin Cunningham, Jack Power, and Crofton. The episode ends with a hilarious parody of biblical prose that is both intertextual and self-reflexive:

When, lo, there came about them all a great brightness and they beheld the chariot wherein He stood to ascend to heaven. And they beheld Him in the chariot, clothed upon in the glory of the brightness, having raiment as of the sun, fair as the moon and terrible that for awe they durst not look upon Him. And there came a voice out of heaven, calling: *Elijah! Elijah!* And He answered with a main cry: *Abba! Adonai!* And they beheld Him even Him, ben Bloom Elijah, amid the clouds of angels ascend to the glory of the brightness at an angle of fortyfive degrees over Donohoe's in Little Green street like a shot off a shovel. (*U* 12.1910-18)

The interpolation of this parody is classic Joyce, and is also a classic expression of the carnivalesque. Typical of the carnival spirit, the high language of the biblical fragment is brought low by the final, “like a shot off a shovel,” infecting it with, and familiarizing it through the local patois of Dublin. “Cyclops” as a whole is shot through with the polyphony of conflicting voices, irreverence, and grotesque realism that is so characteristic of Bakhtin’s conception of the carnival spirit.

The *Throwaway* fragment, however, has not yet been fully exhausted, for it continues to rear its horse’s head as *Ulysses* moves forward. In the “Oxen of the Sun” episode, the motif reenters the scene on the hooves of the following passage:

Madden had lost five drachmas on Sceptre for a whim of the rider’s name: Lenehan as much more. He told them of the race. The flag fell

and, huuh! off, scamper, the mare ran out freshly with O. Madden up.  
 She was leading the field. All hearts were beating. Even Phyllis could not contain herself. She waved her scarf and cried: Huzzah! Sceptre wins! But in the straight on the run home when all were in close order the dark horse Throwaway drew level, reached, outstripped her. All was lost now. Phyllis was silent: her eyes were sad anemones. Juno, she cried, I am undone. (*U* 14.1126-34)

The passage parodies the style of Walter Landor Savage, whose *Imaginary Conversations* (1824-53) featured fictive conversations between “figures from classical literature and history” as an artful means of developing “perspectives on the social, moral, and literary problems of Landor’s own time” (434). Hence, the classical allusions to Phyllis and Juno, and the attendant “I am undone.” Gifford comments that “Phyllis” is a conventional name for a maiden in pastoral poetry, but that “the curse ‘Juno . . . I am undone’ suggests the Phyllis in Greek myth who was married to and then abandoned by Demophon when he was on his way home from the Trojan Wars” (435).

To compound the reflexivity of this stylistic parody, Joyce has woven into it an intertextual reference to the actual account of the Gold Cup race as it appeared in Dublin’s *Evening Telegraph* on June 16, 1904 (Gifford 435). Gifford notes, however, that, Lenehan’s description is not particularly accurate (435). Joyce, as is his wont, plays fast and furious with the facts. They exist only as the matériel for his parodic improvisations. Hannoosh perceptively observes in “The Reflexive Function of Parody,” that

reflexivity is inherent in the definition of parody as a comical retelling and transformation of another text, and is demanded by the form itself. In altering a work according to a different, usually contemporary and/or trivialized code, parody challenges the notion of fixed works altogether, and thus leaves itself open to the same playful or critical treatment. It provides a new version of an old story, but cannot legitimately propose itself as the definitive one, since by its own example it belies the concept of a definitive or authoritative work altogether. (113-14)

In their authorial intrusions, their overt (Sterne) and subtler (Joyce) parodies of linguistic styles, their disregard for standard literary conventions, *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* are inherently reflexive works. And in their reflexivity, they manifest those aspects of the carnival that effectively underscore Bakhtin's premise that the novel is as self-critical a genre as it is an ever-developing one. Implicit in this is the carnival notion of renewal from death, creation out of destruction—the “making of new rules” by “breaking” the old.

\* \* \*

In acknowledging the plastic possibilities of the novel as a genre, Mikhail Bakhtin anticipates the radical formal experimentation, the playful transgressions of syntax and grammar, and the spirited challenges to the authority of literary convention that *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* represent so well. As an ever-becoming genre whose “skeleton” is “still far from having hardened,” (*DI* 3) the novel can be compared to a *tabula rasa* of sorts, upon which each age inscribes its own conventions, its own rules for what a novel should look like and do. It is a *tabula rasa* of sorts, because the slate is never entirely

wiped clean from age to age. Fragments of previous inscriptions remain upon it, sometimes ignored, sometimes incorporated into the new inscriptions. The novel reflects, as Michael Holquist so eloquently observes, “the fragility and ineluctably historical nature of language, the coming and dying of meaning that it, as a phenomenon, shares with that other phenomenon it ventriloquates, man” (Holquist xviii).

Sterne and Joyce, each in his turn registering the plasticity of the novel form, have succeeded in creating works that not only break with the conventions of their own respective times, but also set the standard for the creation of new conventions suitable to their purposes. In this respect, *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* represent a literal stretching of the elastic edges of the genre that Bakhtin calls the novel.

We hope in this thesis to have demonstrated some of the ways in which both Laurence Sterne and James Joyce have internalized the carnival spirit in terms of their deployment of digression, intertextuality, and reflexivity in *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses*. In their radical experimentation with form and content, both authors have succeeded in raising provocative questions as to the nature of writing and reading, as to the problems of representation of human thought, of time in space, and of the very possibility of creative originality in a world already suffused with texts. As to the latter question, Mr. Samuel Johnson, Messrs. *Tristram Shandy* and *Ulysses* attest in the affirmative.

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