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+91 9940572462

+91 9940572462

ijarasem@gmail.com

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# ‘The Study of Narrative Techniques of Laurence Sterne in Tristram Shandy’

Gunjan Rijhwani

BA Hons English, Amity School of Languages, Institute – Amity University, Lucknow, India

**ABSTRACT :** This research paper deals with The study of Narrative Techniques of Tristram Shandy. The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy is a well known work by Laurence Sterne. It has been much researched from various perspectives. Tristram Shandy’s character has been researched from various angles over the course of time. However, this research paper aims to highlight the narrative techniques employed in the construction of the plot. The story is digressive and progressive at the same time. This paper is a sincere attempt to explore the writer’s style in Tristram Shandy. The work is autobiographical in nature and follows a fashion of non-linearity and disorder.

**KEYWORDS-** Tristram Shandy, Narrative Techniques, Structure, Form

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, is one of the most popular novels written by Laurence Sterne which was published in nine volumes. The first two volumes were published in 1759, then the third and fourth was published in 1761, then the fifth and sixth was published in 1762, then the seventh and eighth in 1765 and the last ninth volume was published in 1767.

Laurence Sterne was born on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1713 and passed away on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1768. Laurence was an Anglo Irish author, who wrote the thesis on “The Life and opinions of Tristram Shandy.” Laurence grew up in an army family, travelling mainly in Ireland but briefly in England. An uncle paid for Sterne to attend Hipperholme Grammar School in the West Riding of Yorkshire, as Sterne’s father was ordered to Jamaica, where he died of Malaria some years later. Laurence attended Jesus College, Cambridge on a sizarship, gaining Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees.

Laurence with his new talent for writing, he published early volumes of his best known novel. Sterne travelled to France to find relief from persistent Tuberculosis, documenting his travels in a sentimental journey through France and Italy, published weeks before his death.

Tristram Shandy is one of the best novel of prose fiction, in its humour, aggregate and perception into humanity. It reminds one of the Petronius, Rabelais, Cervantes, Swift and Joyce. In its concern with motive and with the psychology of one person in the writers went across the issues of thesis writing, it makes great sense to the modern reader. If we have faith in the thesis, understand in the way we are told to understand it, we will not become annoyed and irritated the way most past readers have. The secret is not to bring usual attitudes or traditional judgement to the book but rather to surrender to the writer.

## **II. PLOT OVERVIEW OF TRISTRAM SHANDY**

In this novel the narrator is Tristram himself and he tells about his life story. The characters in this novel are- Tristram Shandy (son of Walter Shandy and Elizabeth Shandy), younger brother of Bobby Shandy, uncle Toby Shandy who is a warrior, friendly family doctor Dr. Slop, servants, Susannah and Obadiah, priest Yorick.

In the first volume, Tristrams's parents are conceiving baby through making love and the narrator is introducing all the characters. This is how Volume One ends. In Volume Two, Tristram's uncle Toby describes all that has happened in the war and how he got an injury below his thighs in the private part. Dr. Slop who is the family doctor, tries to cut Toby's skin with a forcep. Additionally, there another female character who is a nurse. However, in the novel she is called midwife. She calls the doctor to treat Mrs Shandy but the doctor forgets to bring his surgical bag. Mr Walter Shandy then sends his staff to get the bag and this is how volume two ends. In Volume Three, the staff gets the surgical bag of the Doctor but the bag is entangled in tight ropes and doctor is trying to open it with a knife. By mistake his hand gets cut. At the same time maid Susannah is calling the doctor saying Mrs Shandy's condition is getting critical. The doctor delivers with the help of the forceps. The mother pushes out the baby and the doctor is holding the head of the baby. Accidently, the nose gets cut as a result of which the doctor puts an artificial nose and the third volume ends. The fourth volume starts where Tristram who has a long nose is in Slawkenbergius and Mr Walter is sitting and thinking about the baby's name. In the meantime, the maid Susannah comes and tells Mr Walter about the baby's condition which is critical. The baby needs to be baptized. In this process, the baby needs to get dipped in the holy water to make his or her soul pure. At the same time the name is decided so, Mr Walter asks the maid to Christian the baby's name as Trismegistus. She then goes to priest and on the way she forgets the baby's name and tells the name Tristram. When Mr Walter comes to know about this, he goes to speak with the Church lawyer and asks if the name can be changed but he denies. Mr Walter also wanted to give money to his elder son for the Europe trip as his son lived in London but he comes to know of his elder son's death. This is how volume four ends. In the fifth volume Tristram is now five years old and his dad, Mr Walter is very serious about his son's education. So Tristram writes a book named Tristram Pedia and in that book he writes about all that his dad wants him to learn. One day suddenly, Tristram gets injured as a result of the sliding window and fifth volume ends here. In the sixth volume, Walter goes to Toby to ask if he has an idea about any tutor for Tristram, Toby suggest a name Bille Le Fever who is the son of Lieutenant Le Fever who was an soldier and is no more in the world. The sixth volume ends here. In the seventh volume, Tristram is now 40 years old and is concerned about his own health. So he decides to go to France for his health check-up. In this volume, he describes his journey in France and volume seven ends. In the eighth volume, Tristram talks about his uncle's affair with his neighbour, Mrs Widow Wadman who is married but would still flirt with Toby. Additionally, Wadman was interested in knowing about Toby's past. Meanwhile when Toby's house was under construction he used to stay in Mrs Wadman's house. Suddenly she calls Toby and informs him about some irritant inside her eyes, Toby inspects her eye which leads to an eye contact between them and volume eight ends here. The story culminates in the ninth volume where Toby plans to go to Mrs Wadman's house and propose her. Though he is extremely nervous, still he musters up the courage and goes with his servant, Cooperate Trim. Toby expresses his emotions for Mrs Wadman, and she asks about his injury as she feels that he has become sexually disabled. As Mrs Wadman wanted someone to satisfy her fantasies as she was sexually dissatisfied with her husband. Toby comes to know of Mrs Wadman's true intentions who only wished to use Toby to satisfy her lust. Toby felt really bad and goes to his brother's house and sees Mr and Mrs Shandy, Yorick and Dr Slop are having a discussion and volume nine ends.

## **III. STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES IN TRISTRAM SHANDY**

According to Gerard Genette in his work Narrative Discourse, narrative techniques may be divided into three types namely- Recit (narrative), histoire (story), narration (narrating). Genette defines recit as the oral or written discourse required to tell of an event. Histoire has been defined as events in succession. The third term narration has been defined as "The act of narrating taken in itself".

**| Volume 10, Issue 4, July 2023 |**

In Tristram Shandy the narrative and the act of narration are intertwined entities. This is hidden in the linguistic structure. The story being a historical sequence of events can be called a historical plot. The story begins around the year 1695.

The most evident conventional and practical attribute of Tristram Shandy are its irregular time strategy and its digressive style. Tristram Shandy is anachronic in its form. Tristram continuously tries to protect his authorial right to move backward and forward. Tristram also depends steadily on hostile that plot component occupy into the background. The story is full of lengthy passages about the events that take place in the story or about something else altogether. Tristram claims that despite multiple digressions, the story manages to move forward. Tristram through the skilful juxtaposition of memory and anecdotes manages to connect seemingly unrelated events.

One vital element of this work is the association of ideas. The author often ridicules the perverseness of the characters present in the novel and tries to understand the events from their perspective. At times, Sterne welcomes the readers to make assumptions and express their opinions as they go through the journey of reading.

There was an essay by Theodore Baird called “The Time Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source”. This essay was a landmark essay which helped in establishing the position of the novel. Baird was one of the pioneer essayists who authoritatively established that Tristram Shandy follows an accurate historical time sequence. The novel’s events have been beautifully paraphrased by Baird who sequences them chronologically from the year 1689 up till the 1750. He artistically divides the novel into five narrative sections namely-

- a) From 1695 to 1697 ( the timeline follows Toby’s stay at Namur when he comes to stay with his brother).
- b) Around 1713 (this time period highlights Toby’s adventures with the Widow Wadman).
- c) Around 1718 ( this is the point where the novel actually starts, Tristram is born)
- d) Around 1741 ( this section deals with Tristram’s tour through Europe).
- e) From 1759 to 1766 ( this section often ignored includes Tristram’s narration)

Laurence Stern by his presence inside the narrative brought about a revolutionary change in the traditional narrative structures. Reader’s close engagement with the text and their varied interpretations have been the focal point of Sterne’s narrative style. The narrator is not a reliable one. However, he is an audience conscious narrator and he always uses strange ways which not only arouse suspense and surprises in the minds of the readers but also makes them participate and make guesses about the plot’s trajectory. Tristram Shandy also borrows different passages from works like Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Francis Bacon’s *Of Death*, *Rabelais*. Infact, this observation came very late and later it was discovered that Tristram’s character draws from Burton. The initial chapters of the novel are based on some passages found in Burton.

As for the narrative technique, both the digressive and the similar ones are adopted in the thesis. The digressive narrative technique has the function of making readers experience the lives that the narrator is experiencing as a man and a writer with immediacy. The concurrent techniques of juxtaposition, with the help of the disordered secular order, the timeless surge of life is somewhat vividly disclosed, so is the characteristic of the process of man’s interior experience. Sterne’s existence in the narrative changed the course of traditional author explanation as him impressive structure deviate methods many jumbled and break up event into a traditional, dual overlapping plot. These hostile methods reflect his inability to simply explain each event as it occurs, as he frequently interrupts these events with commentary about how the reader should understand and follow each event.

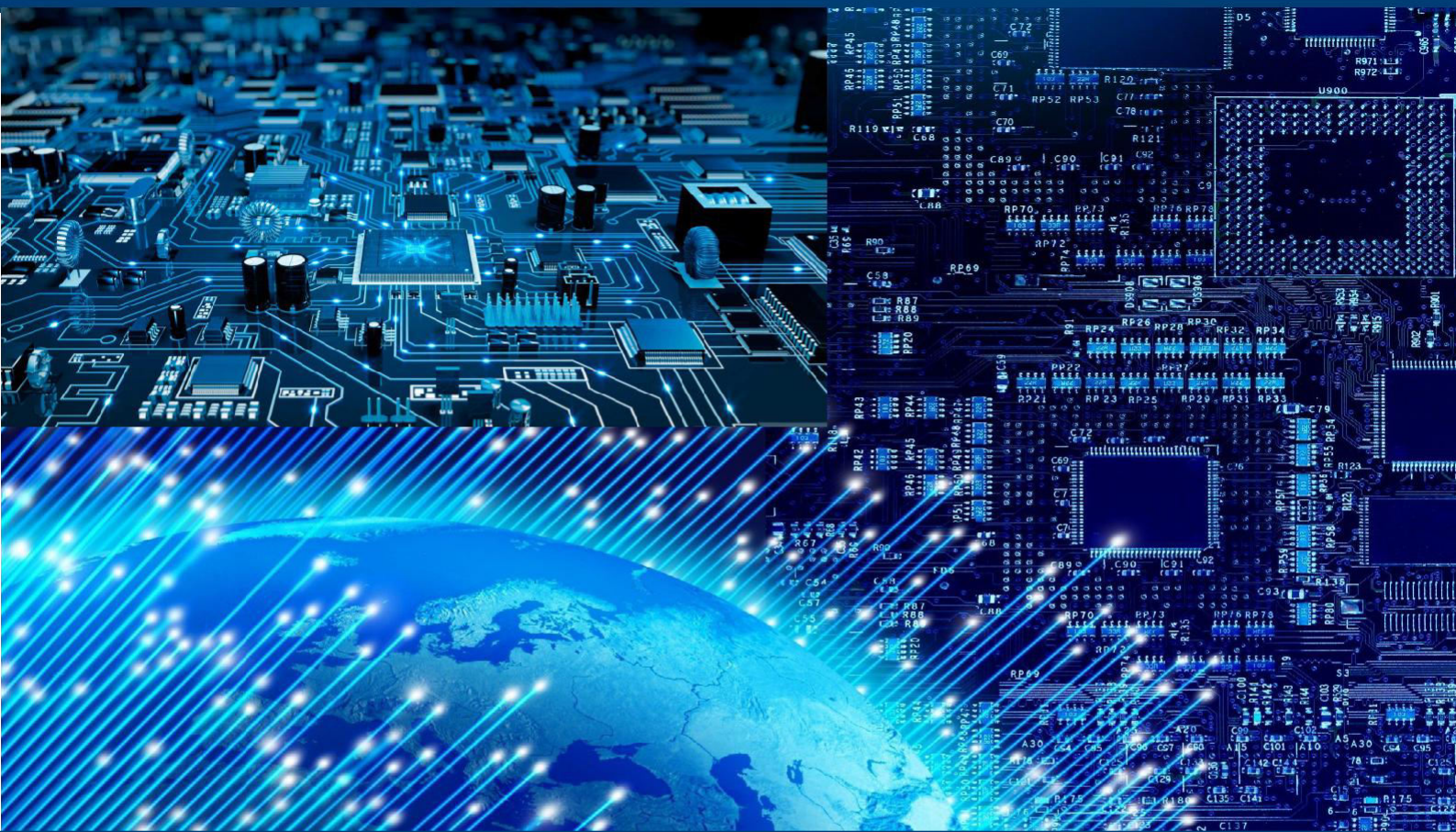
#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

In this novel we get to see and the importance of acceptance we should accept things however it is instead of complaining and giving excuses in life, Laurence created a Political Romance. Also how Toby was been given heart shocking message and was broken so much as was needed physically by Mrs Wadman, still he stood strong and did not take any wrong step. So with this we should learn to accept thing how Toby accepted betrayal and how Mr shandy, Tristram’s dad also lost his son and still he stood strong and didn’t become weak.



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