Chapter 1. Volume I.

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider’d how much depended upon what they were then doing:--that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;--

--and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost: --Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly.--I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that in which the reader is likely to see me.

--Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it;--you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son, &c. &c.--and a great deal to that purpose:--Well, you may take my word, that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend upon their motions and activity, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, 'tis not a half-penny matter.--away they go cluttering like hey-go mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and as smooth as a garden-walk, which, when they are once used to, the Devil himself sometimes shall not be able to drive them off it.

Pray my Dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?-- Good G..! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time,--Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question? Pray, what was your father saying?-- Nothing.
Chapter 4. Volume I

[...] Shut the door.

Chiudete la porta.

I was begot in the night betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was. - But how I came to be so very particular in my account of a thing which happened before I was born, is owing to another small anecdote known only in our own family, but now made publick for the better clearing up this point.

My father, you must know, who was originally a Turkey merchant, but had left off business for some years, in order to retire to, and die upon, his paternal estate in the county of... was, I believe, one of the most regular men in everything he did, whether 'twas matter of business, or matter of amusement, that ever lived. As a small specimen of this extreme exactness of his, to which he was in truth a slave, he had made it a rule for many years of his life, - on the first Sunday-night of every month throughout the whole year, - as certain as ever the Sunday-night came, - to wind up a large house-clock, which we had standing on the back-stairs head, with his own hands; - and being somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age at the time I have been speaking of, - he had likewise gradually brought some other little family concernments to the same period, in order, as he would often say to my uncle Toby, to get them all out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pestered with them the rest of the month.

It was attended but with one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that from an unhappy association of ideas, which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up, - but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popped into her head; - & vice versa: - Which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious Locke, who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever. But this by the bye.

Now it appears by a memorandum in my father's pocket-book, which now lies upon the table, That on Lady-day, which was on the 25th of the same month in which I date my geniture, - my father set upon his journey to London, with my eldest brother Bobby, to fix him at Westminster school; and, as it appears from the same authority, 'That he did not get down to his wife and family till the second week in May following,' - it brings the thing almost to a certainty. However, what follows in the beginning of the next chapter, puts it beyond all possibility of a doubt.

-- But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all December, January, and February? - Why, Madam, - he was all that time afflicted with a Sciatica.

Fui concepito nella notte, fra la prima domenica e il primo lunedì del mese di marzo, nell'anno di nostro Signore 1718; di esserlo stato non ho dubbi. - Ma come possa essere tanto preciso nel racconto di un fatto avvenuto prima della mia nascita, si deve a un altro piccolo aneddoto risaputo solo in famiglia, ma reso pubblico adesso per meglio chiarire questo punto.

Dovete sapere che mio padre, in origine un mercante Turchesco, ma ritiratosi in origine un mercante Turchesco, ma ritiratosi a tempo per meglio chiarire questo punto. avvenuto prima della mia nascita, si deve a un altro piccolo aneddoto risaputo solo in famiglia, ma reso pubblico adessetto per meglio chiarire questo punto.

Dovete sapere che mio padre, in origine un mercante Turchesco, ma ritiratosi da qualche anno dagli affari per vivere, e morire, nella proprietà paterna della contea di___, era, a quanto credo, uno degli uomini più abitudinari in tutto quel che faceva, si trattasse di affari o di svago. Come un esempio fra tanti di questa puntigliosa precisione, della quale in verità era schiavo, - aveva preso da molti anni l'abitudine, - la prima domenica notte di ogni mese dell'anno, - con la stessa regolarità con cui arrivava la domenica notte, - di ricaricare con le proprie mani una grande pen...
Orbene risulta, da un appunto nel taccuino di mio padre, qui sul tavolo davanti a me, «che il giorno dell'Annunciazione, il 25 dello stesso mese al quale faccio risalire il mio concepimento, mio padre si mise in viaggio per Londra con il mio fratello maggiore Bobby, per iscriverlo alla scuola di Westminster»; e, come risulta dalla stessa fonte, «Che non fece ritorno presso la moglie e la famiglia fino alla seconda settimana del maggio successivo»,-il che taglia praticamente la testa al toro. Quanto segue all'inizio del prossimo capitolo, tuttavia, esclude definitivamente ogni possibilità di errore.

--Ma scusate, signore, che cosa ha fatto vostro padre per tutto dicembre-gennaio, e febbraio?-Ebbene, signora,-per tutto quel tempo soffrì di Sciatica.

1. Briefly answer the questions.
   a) Who are the characters? Tristram and his parents.
   b) What are they doing? Tristram is making hypothesis about his parents' mental state while they were giving him birth.
   c) What is their mental state while they are conceiving Tristram? They are not interested in what they are doing.
   d) What causes the irritation of Tristram's father? The silly question of Tristram's mother (lines 11-12).

2. Identify the narrative technique Sterne employed. Sterne's narrator is a character in the novel trying to cope with the difficulty of rendering the complexity and variety of life. Tristram Shandy is narrated in the first person singular and Tristram's role is twofold: he is both chronicler/narrator and a dull, inconsistent character. He never plays the role of the hero, since his life is uninteresting and his nature and body are faulty; he lacks dignity. The reader has an important role: Sterne addresses him and leaves out words, indicating them by asterisks or . dashes, so that the reader is forced into active participation not only in the reading but also in the "writing" of the novel.

3. Explain the new concept of time developed in Tristram Shandy in not more than eight lines. Sterne does not deal with the concept of time as a realistic writer would do, since his narrative follows the order of the protagonist's free associations of ideas. One of the main problems of Tristram Shandy, both for Sterne and the reader, is that of "chronology". This novel differs from Robinson Crusoe, Pamela and Tom Jones because its events do not occur in chronological order, which is rejected by Sterne as a way of organising his material. He realises that the time of experience is not the same as clock-time.

4. Describe the main features of Sterne's style. The language of this novel is complex: the sentences are long and contain several subordinate clauses. The clauses are separated by commas, semicolons, colons and several dashes and asterisks, with a use of punctuation which seems almost arbitrary. It is as if Sterne is writing as he thinks, following the wanderings of his mind, rather than working out what he wants to say beforehand and suiting his prose to his thought. There are complex philosophical debates, much vivid imagery, quotations from authors and books, English and Latin, ancient and modern, authentic and invented, blank or marble pages, so that a skilled reading is required to grasp its meaning. The chapters vary in length from several pages to a single short sentence.
**BOOK 9 - CHAPTER XX** (p. 216)

Vedrete voi stessa il posto, signora; disse mio zio Toby.
La signora Wadman arrossì --- guardò verso la porta ----- impallidì ----- arrossì di nuovo impercettibilmente ----- riacquistò il suo colorito naturale ----- arrossì più che mai; il che, per il lettore ignorante, traduco così:

«D-o! Non posso guardararlo
Che cosa direbbe la gente se lo guardassi?
Sverrei, se lo guardassi
Vorrei poterlo guardare
Non può esserci niente di male a guardarlo.
Lo guarderò.»

Mentre tutto questo avveniva nell'immaginazione della signora Wadman, mio zio Toby si era alzato dal sofà, ed era uscito dalla porta del salotto, per dare a Trim in corridoio un ordine in proposito

-----Credo che sia nell'attico, disse mio zio Toby ---- Con licenza di vostro onore, l'ho vista proprio questa mattina, rispose Trim ---- In tal caso ti prego, vai subito a prenderla, Trim, disse mio zio Toby, e portala in salotto.
Il Caporale non approvava gli ordini, ma obbedì volentierissimo. Il primo non era un atto della sua volontà, il secondo sì; perciò si mise in testa il cappello Montero, e si avviò tanto in fretta quanto glielo permetteva il suo ginocchio. Mio zio Toby rientrò in salotto, e sedette nuovamente sul sofà.

----- Ci metterete sopra il dito, disse mio zio Toby. ----- Non lo toccherà, tuttavia, disse fra sé la signora Wadman.
Tutto ciò richiede una seconda traduzione: ---- ciò dimostra quanto poco si apprenda dalle sole parole ----- dobbiamo risalire sempre alla fonte.
Ora, allo scopo di dileguare la nebbia che incombe su queste tre pagine, devo cercare di esser il più chiaro possibile.

Strofinatemi tre volte le mani sulla fronte ----- soffiatevi il naso ----- pulitevi gli emuntorii ----- starnutate buona gente! ------Dio vi benedica ----- 
E adesso datemi tutto l'aiuto che potete.

---EX 1. Answer the following questions.
1. Who are the characters of this passage? **Uncle Toby, Mrs Wadman and Trim.**
2. What does Uncle Toby promise in line 8? **He promises to Mrs Wadman she will see "the very place".**
3. Which promise follows Uncle Toby's return to the parlour? **"You shall lay your finger upon the place" (line 30) is the promise following Uncle Toby's coming back to the parlour.**
4. In lines 19-20, Uncle Toby is going to give an order 'about it'. 'It' is mentioned several times in the conversation between Uncle Toby and Trim. When do we understand what 'it' corresponds to? **"It" refers to the part of the body where Uncle Toby was wounded during the war.**
5. What does Uncle Toby ask Trim to do? **Toby asks Trim to go and fetch a map in the garret.**

6. Why does Uncle Toby give him this order? Does Trim approve of it? **Uncle Toby gives him this order to show Mrs Wadman where he was wounded. Trim does not approve of this order but he obeys.**

7. What does Trim look like? What does he generally wear? **Trim has got a lame knee. He usually wears a Montero-cap.**

EX 2. Answer the following questions.

1. What is the main narrative mode of this passage? **It is dialogue.**

2. How would you define the narrator? **First-person narrator, obtrusive.**

   From whose point of view is this episode told? **This episode is told from Tristram's point of view.**

   Does the narrator address the reader directly? **Yes, he addresses to the reader directly in lines 35 and 39-43.**

EX 3. Now concentrate on the two main characters of this passage: Uncle Toby and Mrs Wadman.

1. First make a list of 'direct information' given us by the narrator, and then of 'indirect information' which is conveyed by their behaviour. 2. Write your answers in the table.

**UNCLE TOBY**

**DIRECT INFORMATION**

- His promise to let Mrs Wadman see his wound.
- His order to Trim.
- He uses a map to show her where he was injured.
- He points out Mrs Wadman has enquired about his wound several times.
- He whistles quietly

**INDIRECT INFORMATION**

- To please Mrs Wadman.
- To please the woman.
- His obsessions with fortifications and wargames.
- His love for war.
- His embarrassment.

**MRS WADMAN**

**DIRECT INFORMATION**

- She gives a glance towards Uncle Toby's waist-band.
- She blushes.
- She enquires after the wound several times.

**INDIRECT INFORMATION**

- She wants to look at Uncle Toby's wound.
- She wants to look at something she considers embarrassing.
- She is interested in Toby's virility.

EX 3. Answer the following questions.

a) Is there any communication between them? Why?

**No, there is not since they show ridiculous and comic misunderstandings.**

b) uncle Toby's and Mrs Wadman's 'hobby-horses', that is, their ruling passions, emerge from this passage. What do you think they are?

**Mrs Wadman's hobby-horse is Toby's virility.**

**Uncle Toby's hobby-horse is maps and fortifications.**

EX 4. Focus on the language used in the text.

1. What is the prevailing language used? **Informal, indirect, concrete, simple.**

2. The 'Shandean' quality of this language is distinguished by:

   a) the episodic structure: is this text based on a logical order? **No, it is not.**

   b) visual devices: **asterisks, dashes, words in italics, unusual punctuation and incomplete words.**
3. Focus on the use of dashes.
   a) They are eloquent rather than silent (lines 21-22);
   b) their length allows the reader to pause (lines 10-11) and sometimes to feed in meanings which may be implied;
   c) Their use makes the text nearer to conversation and further from writing.

EX 5. State the aim of Sterne in writing this episode.

The aim of Sterne in writing this episode was to show the defects of language as a medium of communication.

EX 6. Class discussion.
1. Discuss the main differences between Sterne's kind of narration and the omniscient third-person narrator used by Fielding. Consider also the different limitations of both methods.

Student's activity. Suggestions:
Sterne's kind of narration takes the question of the authenticity of narrative to its limit; in contrast to Fielding's novel, Tristram Shandy's digressions give the novel a realistic feeling. Fielding's aims were different: his comments and observations showed his view of the novel as artefact rather than fact and real experience.

2. Do you always find it easy to express your feelings through words?
Do you ever use other means such as drawings, scribbles (scarabocchi)?
Do you share Sterne's view that language is not always the best means of communication?

Class discussion.
FILL IN THESE MISSING WORDS IN THE NUMBERED SPACES.


Tristram Shandy has been defined as an ___1___ not only for its lack of a traditional ___2___ and numerous ___3___, or even as a meta-novel because it can be partly read as a reflection on the ___4___ process of writing and the nature of the novel ___5___.

Reading Tristram Shandy is a bit like watching a ___6___ and at the same time seeing the cameraman, the director, the lights and all the artifices that contribute to the ___7___ of the film's 'reality'.

In other words, what the story is about is of ___8___ importance to the ___9___ it is told.

We have already said that time is always ___10___, it doesn't proceed in a ___11___ fashion but, instead, follows the logic of ___12___ and free ___13___ of ideas.

Again, the narrator is always commenting on the ___14___ of writing and on ___15___ as a ___16___ character. Furthermore, the reader is often ___17___ and even invited to ___18___ to the making of the book. We are always ___19___ by surprise. Often we expect a story line to ___20___ in the following chapter only to find that the text suddenly goes off in another ___21___. This is Shandy's logic of 'the life of ___22___'.

Finally, the use of ___23___ techniques to call attention to the ___24___ of the book and undermine the apparent '___25___ ' of its conversational tone.

All of these are not only very ___26___, but show us directly, as we said before, the ___27___ nature of the novel and the illusion of realism that the ___28___ novel tries to present. In its formal experimentation Tristram Shandy was centuries ___29___ of its time. It has been a great influence on many contemporary writers from all over the world including Italo Calvino, Milan Kundera and Salman Rushdie. With its diverse materials, non-linear narrative, regular appeals to the reader, and self-reflexive commentary on the nature of the book, Tristram Shandy anticipates many of the techniques of ___30___ fiction.