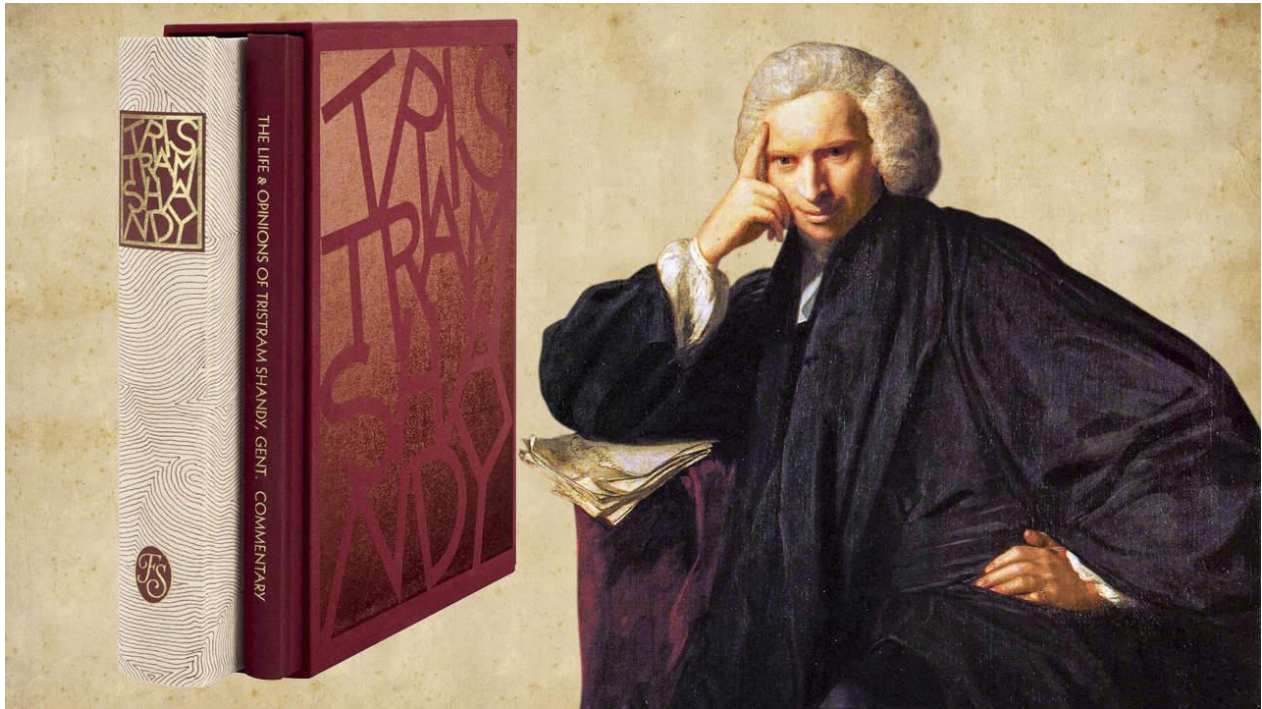


“Tristram Shandy” by Laurence Sterne [B2]

Questo romanzo, pubblicato in diversi volumi, ebbe un successo inaspettato. Lunghissimo, caotico e ispirato al Don Chisciotte di Cervantes, era all'avanguardia del postmodernismo ben due secoli prima dell'arrivo del movimento.



A parody of the biographical form of writing of the time, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* is an experimental book by Anglo-Irish writer and **priest** Laurence Sterne. A **challenge** to follow, even for the 18th century reader, it contains many literary and philosophical references and is full of **double entendres**. The novel **reflects** on serious themes such as **fate** and **free will**, the limitations of language and ideas, literature and science, education and knowledge, and sex and identity. But it is also a very trivial book, sharing intimate aspects of Tristram's life. It is narrated by the author-protagonist in a non-linear, **convoluted** and digressive way, which, Tristram believes, makes it **true** to life. "...there is a fatality that attends the actions of some men: Order them as they will, they pass through a certain medium which so twists and refracts them from their **true** directions." "...vi è una specie di fatalità che accompagna le azioni di certi uomini e, per quanto essi le dirigano in modo degno, sembra che queste

passino attraverso uno strumento che le distorce e le devia dalla giusta direzione”.

CHAOTIC STYLE

The book progresses by jumping backward and forward in time and introducing stories-within-stories. Anecdotes are often unfinished, and whole pages filled with asterisks or dashes, or even left blank. The book begins at the moment of Tristram's conception, but even that is complicated, with Tristram blaming his problems in later life on his parents because they were interrupted in the act. His birth does not actually occur until Volume IV, but Tristram encourages the reader to persist. “I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: as you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.” “Mi son messo in testa, come vedete, di scrivere non soltanto la mia vita, ma anche le mie opinioni, nella speranza che voi, venendo a conoscere il mio carattere e qual genere di mortale io sia, possiate poi apprezzare di più tutto il resto. Senza contare che, proseguendo il racconto, la nostra conoscenza, per ora superficiale, diverrà più intima e, a meno che sorga- no tra noi dei malintesi, sincera- mente assaporeremo il piacere di un'amicizia vera e propria”.

NATURE OF THEORY

The focus changes from the hero himself to background details related to Tristram's family and environment. He introduces his father, Walter, as a country gentleman interested in insignificant subjects; Walter has many documents on the subject of noses, for example, as his son is born with a squashed one. Tristram considers how theories develop and grow strong in a subjective way. “It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates every thing to itself as proper nourishment; and, from the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the

stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand.” “Non so se avete notato che quando un uomo accetta una teoria, l’adatta poi ad ogni caso e situazione. Non solo, ma questa sua idea cresce d’importanza e viene avvalorata da qualsiasi cosa legge, vede o ascolta”. Other characters in the book include Walter’s brother, Uncle Toby, a war veteran with a heart of gold; Parson Yorick, a [priest](#) with a [rude](#) sense of humour; “[man-midwife](#)” Dr. Slop; [Corporal](#) Trim, Uncle Toby’s loyal [valet](#); and Walter’s wife and Tristram’s mother, Elizabeth Shandy, a [down-to-earth](#) woman little appreciated because of her “[lack](#) of imagination.”

DETAILED EDUCATION

When Tristram’s brother Bobby suddenly dies, Tristram becomes the family’s [sole heir](#). Walter begins writing a detailed work called the Tristrapedia, [intended](#) to cover all the topics necessary for the boy’s education. However, Walter finds he can’t write fast enough [to keep up](#) with his son’s growth and [development](#). “He shall neither strike, or pinch, or tickle—or bite, or cut his nails, or hawk, or spit, or snift, or drum with his feet or fingers in company;—nor (according to Erasmus) shall he speak to any one in making water,—nor shall he point to carrion or excrement.” “Non dovrà picchiare né dare pizzicotti, fare il solletico, mordere, tagliarsi le unghie, espettorare, sputacchiare, sbuffare o tamburellare con le dita e coi piedi, in compagnia. Né (sono dello stesso pare re di Erasmo) dovrà parlare mentre sta urinando, né dovrà voltarsi a guardare le immondizie o gli escrementi”. At one point, the narrative jumps forward decades to the present (to about 1765), where Tristram, now in his 40s, is preparing to travel to France in an [attempt](#) to [run away](#) from death. In France he [races around](#), [enjoying himself](#) most in the rural south, where he takes part in fairs, festivals, and country dances.

A LONG ROMANCE

Back to the main plot line, and Tristram tells the story of a romance between Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman, who [prevaricated](#) for decades about starting a relationship. Finally, Toby [realises](#) he is in love and prepares to

visit. Walter gives his brother lengthy [advice](#) in a long “Letter of Instruction”. Tristram observes that education can have the effect of closing the mind as well as opening it. “You are a person free from as many narrow prejudices of education as most men.” “Voi siete una persona immune dai meschini pregiudizi che l’educazione di oggi impone a molti uomini”

TRUTH AND FICTION

In typical style, the novel ends with an absurd, inconclusive tale about a bull and a baby. Mrs. Shandy [delivers](#) the famous final lines, questioning the veracity of the entire story. “—What is this story all about? —It is a Cock and Bull story, and a cock-and-bull story, and various other kinds of story — and it is one of the best of its kind ever heard.” — Che storia è mai questa?— La storia di un FISCHIO e di un FIASCO, — rispose Yorick, — una delle più belle del genere che io abbia mai udito. Sterne became an unlikely celebrity because of Tristram Shandy. Centuries on, its radical [free-form](#) construction influenced literary icons such as James Joyce, Vladimir Nabokov and Salman Rushdie, but also many musicians and visual artists. A film adaptation of the book entitled A Cock and Bull Story was made in 2005 by British director Michael Winterbottom, who [set](#) it in a contemporary [framework](#).

Glossary

- **convoluted** = contorto
- **true** = vero, fedele
- **challenge** = sfida
- **grow strong** = consolidarsi, fortificarsi
- **advice** = consiglio
- **background** = sfondo
- **fate** = destino
- **jumping backward and forward** = saltare avanti e indietro
- **Corporal** = caporale
- **to keep up** = stare dietro, occuparsi di
- **attempt** = tentativo
- **priest** = sacerdote
- **valet** = assistente
- **set** = ambientare
- **man-midwife** = ostetrico
- **sole heir** = unico erede
- **prevaricated** = prevaricare
- **realises** = rendersi conto
- **blaming** = incolpare
- **left blank** = lasciare in bianco
- **down-to-earth** = coi piedi per terra
- **free-form** = spontaneo
- **framework** = contesto
- **free will** = libero arbitrio
- **races around** = correre da un luogo all'altro
- **enjoying himself** = divertirsi
- **squashed** = schiacciato
- **ruminates** = rimuginare
- **dashes** = lineette
- **develop** = svilupparsi
- **rude** = maleducato
- **lack** = mancanza
- **intended** = avere l'intenzione

- **run away** = scappare
- **double entendres** = doppi sensi
- **delivers** = fornire, pronunciare