

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Study Guide

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy by Laurence Sterne

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Volume 1.....	5
Volume 2.....	7
Volume 3.....	9
Volume 4.....	11
Volume 5.....	13
Volume 6.....	15
Volume 7.....	17
Volume 8.....	19
Volume 9.....	21
Characters.....	23
Objects/Places.....	28
Themes.....	30
Style.....	32
Quotes.....	35
Topics for Discussion.....	37



Plot Summary

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy promises the life story of the fictional Tristram Shandy, but over nine volumes and with a number of digressions and narratives, the reader learns more about his family, and in particular his Uncle Toby and his father, than Tristram. The main characters swap such fanciful opinions and adventures that by the end, Tristram labels his epic story cock and bull.

The first volume begins with the conception of Tristram. His mother spoils the moment by asking his father if he has wound the cuckoo clock. The remainder of the chapter introduces all the main characters that take part in his birth, and characters from some of the stories he promises to tell later. He introduces the mid-wife, Dr. Slop, the parson, Yorick, Tristram's faithful servant, Eugenuis, Uncle Toby and of course his own mother and father. However, through many digressions that have no real relevance to Tristram's birth, he never quite gets to the moment of his birth.

The second volume begins a tale about how his Uncle Toby sustained a groin injury in battle, and his subsequent recovery at Shandy Hall. Finally, he gets to the day of his birth where his father and uncle chat in the parlor. Tristram's mother is upstairs in labor, with the servant Susannah and the mid-wife in attendance. Tristram's father decides that Dr Slop should also to be present, so he tells his servant Obadiah to fetch him. When the Doctor arrives, the men continue their philosophical discussions; however, the Doctor has not brought his medicine bag, so Tristram's father sends Obadiah to fetch it.

In the third volume, Dr Slop practices using his forceps on Toby's hand and takes Toby's skin off. This causes great concern for Tristram's father, but before he can voice his concerns, Susannah comes down to request Dr Slop's assistance. The Doctor leaves and Toby and Tristram's father fall asleep. Toby's servant, Trim, wakes them up when oiling the hinges of the parlor door. They ask what the noise is from the kitchen and Trim explains Tristram's nose has been damaged by the doctor's forceps, so the doctor is making a new nose bridge. Tristram's father is distraught and gives a lengthy lecture on the importance of noses.

The fourth volume begins with a tale by the nose scholar Swalkenburguis. However, this story is merely a digression. Upon its completion, we return to the Parlor where Tristram's father decides he must give his son a strong name. Susannah runs downstairs to say that the baby may not live, and the curator wants to baptize the child immediately. Tristram's father tells Susannah the child's name is Trismegistus. Unfortunately, when she relays this information upstairs, she gets the name wrong and they call the child Tristram. Tristram's father asks Yorick if he can change the child's name. Yorick refers him to the church lawyer, who tells him they have to keep the name Tristram. Upon arriving home from the meeting, Tristram's father finds his aunt has left him a sum of money. Just as he is thinking of using the money to pay for his eldest son Bobby's trip to Europe, he receives news that Bobby is dead.



The fifth volume looks at the household's reaction to Bobby's death. Firstly Tristram details his father's reaction as he speaks to Toby and then Tristram looks at the servants' reactions in the kitchen. In wake of Bobby's death, Tristram's father decides to concentrate on Tristram's education, so he begins to write a book detailing how to teach his younger son. Unfortunately, Tristram's father neglects Tristram's education because the father is too busy writing the book. When Tristram is five, a falling sash window circumcises him. Susannah, who is with Tristram, flees from the scene, but it turns that the falling window is Trim and Toby's fault.

In the sixth volume, Tristram's father is talking to Toby about finding a governor to educate Tristram. Toby suggests his adopted son Le Fever. Tristram then recounts the tale of how Toby met Le Fever's dying father and became Le Fever's guardian. Tristram tells us the war with France has finished and with it his Uncle Toby's hobby of recreating his battle scenes. Tristram explains his Uncle's boredom leads him into an affair with his next-door neighbor, the Widow Wadham.

In the seventh volume, Tristram thinks he is dying. Upon consultation with Eugenuis, he decides the only way he can outrun death is by traveling through Europe. Tristram heads off to France and travels to Paris, Bologne, Lyon and finally to the southern parts. It is only when he is in Southern France that he feel he has defeated death.

In the eighth volume, Tristram details the beginning of Toby's affair with the Widow Wadham. During the refurbishing of Toby's house, he stays at the Widow's place next door. Over the course of three days, the widow falls in love with him and tries to work her way into Toby's affections. However, it is not until the end of the war that Toby returns the love. Once Toby realizes he is in love, he concocts a plan with Trim to win her over. Tristram's father writes Toby a letter detailing how to act with ladies, delivering it just as Toby is about to visit the Widow.

In the final volume, Tristram follows his Uncle into the Widow's house. The Widow is anxious about Toby's groin injury and whether it is has left him impotent. After a misunderstanding, Toby assures her he is fine. Meanwhile, Trim wins over the affections of the Widow's servant, Bridgett.



Volume 1

Volume 1 Summary

The volume begins with the conception of Tristram Shandy. His mother and father are partaking in sexual intercourse when his mother asks if there is a problem with the cuckoo clock. From here, Tristram criticizes his mother's ill-timed question and wonders the effect it had on his father's performance. Tristram credits his Uncle Toby for the anecdote, whereon Tristram quotes a conversation between Toby and his father that claims Tristram's problems started nine months before he ever came into the world.

The narrator, Tristram Shandy, is prone to moving away from the facts of the subject of which he is writing and stating his own opinions. In the first volume, Tristram talks about how he does not care and how he is going to give his opinions and say what he likes. Often these opinions take the form of anecdotes. The next tale is about the midwife his mother wants at his birth. The midwife lives nearby Tristram's village, and Tristram explains how the parson and his wife took pity on the widowed midwife and helped finance her license. After another digression, Tristram introduces Yorick, the Parson. He compares Yorick to his namesake in Hamlet and the main character in Don Quixote. Yorick is a kindly and witty man, but his straightforward talking means he is misunderstood and generally unpopular. The villagers borrow his horses to ride the seven miles to the doctors, leaving him with nothing but an old slow horse. Consequently, the villagers presume he is helping the midwife, so they do not have to borrow his horses and he can start riding his faster, stronger steeds. However, the vicar proves them wrong by keeping to his old horse. At the end of the anecdote, Yorick dies with his faithful friend Eugenuis by his side.

Tristram continues by detailing arguments and disagreements between his father and mother. Firstly on the laws of their marriage, secondly on how and where his mother can give birth and thirdly the name they want to give the child. Tristram's father alludes to many strange philosophical ideas to argue his case, but his mother has a legal document to back herself.

Tristram takes the side of his father and goes into another digression about his women readers and then how his digressions are actually progressions. In between, he starts the story of his Uncle Toby. Tristram's father and his Uncle are close brothers, but unfortunately, Toby has a sensitive disposition due to a stone hitting him in the groin when he was a captain in the British army. While Tristram's father is fond of telling everyone about his sister's affair with a coachman, Uncle Toby often has to take Tristram's father aside and, with tears in his eyes, beg him to stop for the sake of the family. Tristram promises to continue with his Uncle's story in the next volume.



Volume 1 Analysis

From the onset, Laurence Sterne makes the reader aware they are reading a book; the narrator is constantly communicating directly to the reader about what he is writing. This sets the tone, and in the remainder of the novel, the narrator rarely allows the reader to become involved in a narrative. In this first volume, the narrator, Tristram, tells stories about the Parson, the midwife, his own conception, Toby's injury and his parent's arguments, but often he interrupts these narratives to impart irrelevant opinions before returning to a completely different narrative. In this first volume, Tristram starts a story about his father and Toby waiting in the parlor but does not return to it until the second volume. He backs his right to do so through a long discourse about how his digressions are actually progressions.

However, this conversational and rambling style is part of Tristram's wit and tells us more about Tristram as a person than the actual story of his life. For example, in the beginning chapters, he shows disrespect not only for his mother, but women in general, humorously blaming her question about the cuckoo clock on his later problems. Further on in the volume, Tristram says the only woman with character in his family was his Aunt Dinah, and then only because she caused a family scandal. It actually turns out Tristram could not have met Aunt Dinah because she dies at the end of the second volume. In comparison, Tristram has a high regard for the men in the story. He chronicles the relationship between his father and Toby with high romanticism and claims his father would not let anyone else stay in the Shandy house but his brother. This is not the only male relationship Tristram romanticizes; later on he works a similarly fond relationship between Trim and Toby. In this volume, such male bonding serves to highlight the distance Tristram feels from his mother and perhaps hoped his father did as well. While Toby and the father provide good-hearted banter, shown particularly when Toby pleads with his brother not to mention the relationship between Aunt Dinah and the coach man, the legal argument between his father and mother has a more satirical edge. The legal document that Sterne inserts into this volume, detailing how his mother wanted to have birth in London, not only foreshadows the formality within the Shandy's marriage, but also the formality between men and women in society in general at that time Sterne penned Tristram Shandy. It is interesting to note Laurence Sterne's marriage was no exception.



Volume 2

Volume 2 Summary

Tristram makes good with his promise, continuing with the theme of his Uncle Toby. He explains that his father gave Toby a room in his house while he recovered from his groin injury. Tristram's father brought many friends and acquaintances to the house to inquire about the battle and Toby's injury. Unfortunately, the battle was so complex that Toby finds it impossible to recount his tale accurately. In the end he decides that knowing where and how he became injured is an important part of his recovery. He buys a map and uses it to plan out all his old battles. Toby becomes so obsessed that he reads countless books, studying such facts as the projectile of a cannonball.

Toby goes about his new hobbyhorse with little thought to his injury, but feeling more alive, he suddenly decides he has to get better. After passively taking the doctors word for so long Toby now, to the doctors shock, virtually commands the doctor to cure his groin. After only a period of six weeks, Toby is better. At this point Toby's servant, Trim, joins the story. Toby and Trim are actually great friends, and Trim, seeing his friend so full of life again, suggests they move to the country and to a space where they can recreate battle scenes. Toby excitedly agrees and states his intention of writing a history book.

Tristram then returns to a scene from the previous volume where Toby and his father wait for Tristram's birth. The servant Susannah has fetched the mid-wife and now Tristram's father orders his other servant Obadiah to fetch Dr. Slop. In Obadiah's absence, Tristram's father becomes annoyed at Toby's ignorance of women and is just about to put him right when the Dr. arrives. Unfortunately, Dr. Slop has no medicine bag, and Obadiah has to go back to get the bag.

At this point, the men have an argument about science, and Tristram's father insults Uncle Toby. However, they soon make up and Toby, to show he feels no hard feelings, continues with what caused the argument in the first place. Toby shows his appreciation for the engineer Stevinus and Trim brings in a copy of Stevinus' book. When Trim shakes the book, a copy of a sermon falls out, which Toby and Tristram's father encourage Trim to read aloud. Trim reads the sermon eloquently, though Dr. Slop, a protestant, shows offense at some of the details.

Obadiah returns with the medicine bag just as the sermon finishes. This prompts the men to talk about child birth and the problems that can occur. Tristram's father worries his wife's pelvis will crush his son's head, and he explains he once suggested a cesarean. However, his wife went white at such a prospect, so she is having a normal birth. Dr. Slop assures the company that medicine has made great advances, particularly in delivering babies.



Volume 2 Analysis

The second volume opens the theme of hobbies. Tristram thinks hobbies are essential to a man's life and particularly someone like Toby, who is an injured soldier. Here Tristram details how Toby's hobby saves his life. He explains Toby did not start getting better until he found something that could replace his much-loved life as a soldier. Tristram does not limit this theme to Toby but gives all the main characters a hobby. Tristram's father develops a hobby writing an educational book; the servant Trim shares Toby's hobby, and Tristram's hobby is writing this very novel. The importance he places on such past-times foreshadows the problems later on that occur when their hobbies are defunct. The reader hears what happens to Toby when his war is over and then how he relives his glorious past, but he also shows the reader the opposite effect in the final volume. When the war is over for real, Toby's hobby becomes pointless, leading Tristram to suggest that the only way to solve his boredom is through marrying the Widow Wadham. This suggestion of marriage as a mere hobby again highlights Tristram's distrust of formality.

In fact, the whole book attempts to completely do away with formality and convention. In this volume, Tristram shows this by first taking the reader away from the original subject of his birth and relating a tale about his Uncle. He interrupts this tale to write a short discourse on the writer John Locke before suddenly deciding to go back to the parlor where Toby and his father wait for the announcement of his birth. Rather than talk about the coming of a newborn baby, the men argue about philosophy and other sciences. Tristram's father worries about potential damage to his son's head, but in such a philosophical way, the reader begins to wonder if Tristram's father just enjoys spouting his opinions. This foreshadows the book that Tristram's father writes later on how to educate Tristram. He spends so much time writing the book and reading aloud passages to his friends, he ends up neglecting Tristram.

Such pontificating is a characteristic of all the men in the story, including Tristram. The narrator gets away with it because of his self-awareness, but at the same time, he regards it as a virtue. In this volume, Trim reads a serious sermon, but the men's interest in the sermon seems to be more in the book's phrasing and Trim's eloquent recital, rather than any deeper meaning.



Volume 3

Volume 3 Summary

he story continues in the parlor where the gentlemen chat. Dr. Slop is angry with Obadiah, who has tied too-tight knots in the doctor's medicine bag in order to carry it safely back. The doctor unties the knots with a knife, but cuts his thumb in the process. Tristram then proceeds with the Doctor's lengthy abuse of Obadiah.

Once the bag is open, Susannah arrives to request the doctor's assistance upstairs. The request offends the Doctor, who feels the mid-wife should come to him. Just before he takes his leave, the Doctor tests his forceps on Toby's hand and takes off Toby's skin. Tristram's father is aghast, wondering aloud what damage that will be done to his son. Soon afterwards, the doctor leaves with Susannah and almost immediately Tristram's father and Toby fall asleep. At this point, Tristram takes time out from the scene to write his preface. In his preface, he writes a discourse on wit and judgment.

Tristram's father wakes to the sound of Trim oiling the door hinges of the parlor. The men comment on the sound coming from the kitchen, and Trim tells them that the Doctor is in there creating a bridge. Toby presumes that the doctor is making a drawbridge for his battle scene and announces his great thanks. From here Tristram talks about the real draw bridge that his Uncle actually builds at his country house. Back in the parlor, Trim says the bridge is for Tristram's nose, which Dr. Slop has damaged with his forceps.

Tristram's father cannot believe his bad luck. He places great importance on noses and attributes his family problems to their traditionally-small nose. The reader hears his father's well-read opinion on the subject. At the end of the volume, Tristram promises to tell the reader one of nose scholar Slawkenburguis' tales.

Volume 3 Analysis

In this volume, Tristram makes the reader aware of time, an important theme throughout the novel. When Obadiah goes out to fetch the Doctor's bag, Tristram states that Obadiah comes back after a certain length of time, but that amount does not equate to the amount of time Tristram claims Obadiah was gone. (An hypothetical example: The narrator, Tristram, writes that Obadiah left at 2 and returned at 3, but Tristram says that Obadiah was gone two hours.) Tristram goes into a digression about how our concepts of time are different. This is a reminder that this book is consciously unconventional and refuses to follow any pattern. As concerns time, Tristram states that he will begin and finish where he wants. It is, after all, his novel. The placement of his preface in the middle of the volume proves this very point.

Obadiah's arrival begins a catalogue of injuries that are akin to a farce. First Dr. Slop cuts his hand opening his bag and then his forceps damage Toby's hand and then the



newborn baby's nose. The nose injury sets off a series of disasters that continue over into volume 4. At first, everyone thinks Tristram will die, and then Susannah christens the baby the wrong name. Tristram's father is desperate to change the name, but the church lawyer claims the name has to stand. The fact that the child is born healthy just proves Tristram's love for embellishing every event. So much so, it has taken him a quarter of the novel to get to the first moment of his life.



Volume 4

Volume 4 Summary

The fourth volume begins with Slawkenburguis' story. It tells the account of a man with a big nose who travels to Strasborg for a nose convention. The man's nose and his polite manner shock the residents of the city and a discussion of the nose's virtue leads to a debate between the Catholic and Protestant churches.

This tale has little significance on the remainder of the volume as Tristram returns to his Father in the parlor. His father decides that because of the misfortune of Tristram's nose he must give the child a strong name, finally deciding upon Trismegistus. Following a discussion with Toby on the virtues of the name, Susannah interrupts to say the child has gone black in the face, and the curator needs to baptize the child before its death. Tristram's shocked father gives Susannah the name Trismegistus, and she rushes back upstairs, giving the curator a different name that makes no sense. They decide that Tristram's father must have meant Tristram. It soon becomes apparent the child will live and upon hearing the name now given to his child, Tristram's father is most upset. He decides to call for Yorick to see if they can change the name.

Yorick tells Tristram's father that he does not have the authority to change the name and they must go and see the Church lawyer Diduis. Tristram's father, Eugenuis, Yorick and Toby all head off to see him. During their discussion, Yorick drops a hot chestnut into the writer Phutatoruis's lap, burning his groin. Phutatoruis is unhappy with the incident and thinks Yorick did it on purpose. This incident dies down quickly and from the resulting discussion, Diduis decides they cannot change Tristram's name.

His father's spirits lift when he discovers his Aunt Dinah has left him a large sum of money. He wonders whether to use the money to fund a trip for his other son Bobby or to fix the Shandy's estate. Unfortunately, he then receives news that Bobby is dead. Tristram ends the volume teasing the reader of what he or she can expect in later volumes.

Volume 4 Analysis

The only relevance of the Slawkenburguis story is that it continues from his father's discourse on noses. The story itself is pointless, but Tristram tells it with such suggestion of metaphor, the reader searches for meaning. What does Slawkenburguis's tale have to do with Tristram's nose? It provokes many different thoughts, but really it is just another digression and, if anything, proves the narrator's need to say what he likes. If there is any meaning, it is that Tristram is trying to imitate his Uncle Toby and his Father because they continually digress in their discussions. In fact, with Tristram making so few appearances, the reader can see this novel as homage to his two close relatives, and Tristram's opinions and digressions are just part of the respect.



Tristram highlights his respect of his father by a discussion of his father's discourse on why he wanted to name Tristram, Trismegistus. A subject initially propelled by anger at his son's nose now turns into a complete digression on the importance of names. In Tristram's father's absence Toby and Trim trash Tristram's father's theory, saying in war the name of a man does not matter. This not only shows the difference between the practical Toby and his more philosophical brother, but also where Tristram inherits his love for digressions. Tristram's father addresses the important issue of the baby when he comes back. He is determined to change his son's name, but such determination soon changes to interests when he listens to the Church Lawyer's legal discourse.

When something bad really happens the father's response is matter of fact. For example, the father philosophizes endlessly on Tristram's nose misfortunes but he responds to his elder son's death by being thankful that he can use his inherited money for rebuilding the Shandy estate. This shows the superficiality around a lot of Tristram's father's opinions and they how they serve to hide the lack of true meaning in his life.



Volume 5

Volume 5 Summary

After a brief digression on whiskers, Tristram looks at the reactions to his brother's death. Tristram's father, as usual, takes it philosophically, but Suzanne runs to the kitchen most upset. A moment later, Tristram's mother overhears the word wife when she walks past the parlor door. She presumes that Toby and Tristram's father are talking about her, and she stays by the door to listen.

Tristram promises to come back to this scene before moving to the kitchen. In the kitchen, Suzanne relays the news about Bobby's death to Trim, Obadiah, the cook and Jonathan the coachman. Trim is not overly upset, but seeing Suzanne's feelings, he begins to feel sorry. At this point, as Tristram states, Trim goes on a harangue about Bobby's death. In the middle of the speech, Tristram returns to his mother who heard nothing that she expected and now finds herself listening to her husband talking about Socrates.

Tristram's father decides to concentrate on his newborn son and begins writing a book on how to educate him. Tristram remarks that his father spent so much time on the book that he neglected the first few years of Tristram's life. At the age of five, Tristram is in his bedroom with Susanna, sitting under a sash window. Unfortunately the window falls and circumcises him. Susanna runs from the incident, thinking she was to blame, taking refuge with Trim. Trim tells her it was not her fault as he had taken the lead from the window to use for Toby's fortification. He goes as far to say that himself and Toby are nothing but murderers.

However, Tristram claims he felt little pain and when his father sees that he is fine, he gives orders to get Dr. Slop and goes back downstairs. In the presence of Trim, Toby and Yorick, the father reads from his book. Dr. Slop joins them after he has finished with Tristram and Tristram's father reads some more.

Volume 5 Analysis

Everything in this novel is self-conscious, but Tristram even goes so far as to point out to the reader when he is foreshadowing an event. So much so that feels it likes an advertisement. In reality, Sterne released this novel in nine volumes over a number of years, so in many ways, his witty and stylistic techniques work to promote the book. In the previous volume, Tristram talked about writing a chapter about whiskers and here includes the chapter as promised.

Such a lighthearted chapter, made more so by its serious tone, lends an element of farce to his brother's death. In this volume, Tristram looks at the reaction of Bobby's death on the household, but apart from Susannah, no one is really that upset. Tristram does not give his opinion on his family's reaction, but Susannah's tears amidst such



indifference gives her the appearance of being overly sensitive. When Trim goes on a harangue on Bobby's death, it is just another example of a character hiding his superficiality behind opinions. Tristram's father emphasizes this further by deciding to dedicate his life to writing a book on how to educate his newborn son. However, he shows more interest in the intelligence of his own ideas than Tristram's education.

Ignoring reality, though, is a major theme of the novel. Tristram articulates it here when a falling sash window circumcises him. Susannah, presuming it is her fault, runs away from the scene and the 5-year-old Tristram has to scream to get any attention. Even then, his father just looks in on his son before consulting a book. Trim does defend Susannah, putting the blame on himself, but the defense is really to honor himself as a soldier. In fact, Trim's defense of Susannah leads Toby into a story about the war. Interestingly, Tristram claims he was not hurt, though the reader begins to wonder if this is not just denial and a way of surviving the eccentricities of his family.



Volume 6

Volume 6 Summary

Dr. Slop and Susannah attend to Tristram's wound. The two of them do not get on and fighting and bickering breaks out between them. Meanwhile, Tristram's father is discussing with Toby how to educate his son. Toby mentions Le Fever's Son would make a good tutor to Tristram. Toby is Le Fever's guardian, and Le Fever is currently making his way back from the war to Shandy House.

The mention of Le Fever leads Tristram into a story about how Toby became the boy's guardian. Tristram describes how Le Fever's father took ill in the village inn. Toby gets word of him and hearing he is a war casualty and a good man, sends Trim to find out more. Trim comes back with the news that the man is dying and his son cries at his bedside. Toby refuses to accept the man will die and tries to help him recover. Unfortunately, nothing can be done for him, so the boy moves in with Toby, who puts him through school.

Tristram's father thinks Le Fever will make a great teacher for his son. Later on, in bed with his wife, he holds what he calls his "beds of justice." The topic is whether Tristram should wear breeches to make him seem more manly, but despite his efforts to start an argument, his wife agrees to everything. After a few more digressions, Tristram takes up a new topic in the book.

He starts telling the reader about his Uncle's fortifications on his bowling green and follows Toby and Trim's love for recreating the battle scenes, including the building of towns and churches. To Toby's horror, the war ends and so does his hobby. Tristram's father and Yorick question why Toby is so upset and that war is actually a bad thing. In reply, Toby enters into a dialect on the virtues of war that impresses Tristram's father so much he writes it down.

Without his hobby Toby becomes bored. However, this boredom lifts when he meets Widow Wadham. Susannah surprises everyone when she returns with news of the couple's forthcoming marriage. Tristram ends the volume illustrating his plot digression with lines. He tells the reader he will write the next volume in a completely straight line.

Volume 6 Analysis

This volume is the turning point in the novel. Tristram moves away from the events surrounding his birth and early life to concentrate on developing the character of his Uncle Toby. This development has more of a serious tone, the wit moving away from the farce of the previous volumes into something more surreal and eccentric. For example, Toby builds huge battle scenes on his bowling green including building churches and houses. In fact, his hobby makes his character less silly than he seemed earlier, Tristram making obvious his respect for his uncle. He articulates this respect by showing



his father becoming more responsive to Toby's ideas. First, Tristram's father accepts his brother's offer of Le Fever as his son's tutor and then shows his appreciation of Toby's pro war speech, the only time in the novel Tristram's father appreciates an opinion opposite to his own.

The move towards Toby's character, and particularly the positive side his character, leads Tristram to explore the negative aspects of his parents' relationship. At one point, his father holds his bed of justice, which means a discussion with his wife in bed. Unfortunately, while the father tries desperately to give their conversation meaning, the mother shows no interest. However, while this is amusing, the humor is tinged with sadness, foreshadowing the darker and more conventional volume that follows. Tristram's decision to concentrate almost entirely on Toby therein shows as much of an embarrassment of his parents relationship as it shows the love he has for his Uncle.

At the end of the volume, Tristram introduces Widow Wadham and the narrative for the rest of the novel. Using illustrations, he then talks about how so far he has told his story with so many digressions, that the narrative resembles a squiggly line. He draws a straight line and promises the reader that this is how the story will continue. This is the first the narrator thinks about the readability of his style. In light of the next chapter, where Tristram flees from death and moves away from his father in this volume, the reader is beginning to get the impression Tristram has uncovered things he does not like.



Volume 7

Volume 7 Summary

The volume begins with Tristram lamenting his ill health, worrying that there is a possibility he will not be able to finish his book. Upon consultation with Eugenuis, he decides he can run away from death by traveling abroad. Immediately after making the decision, he travels to the port in Dover.

Tristram's first port of call is Calais. He writes a report on the history of the town and then moves on to Bologne. He then sets off to Paris, and, via Montreal and Abbeville, he arrives there by stagecoach. Tristram expects much from Paris, but immediately complains that the streets are ugly and the place smells. He moves to Lyon in order to run further away from death. In between Lyon and Paris, Tristram recounts a tale of a previous trip to France with his father, Uncle Toby and Trim.

In Lyon, he encounters a few problems. First, he sells his damaged carriage and then makes friends with an ass. He plans to make his next trip by boat to Avignon, but a man forces him to pay money for a carriage, saying he has a legal obligation to pay. After a disagreement, Tristram sees no way out and pays the money. Unfortunately, as he is about to leave on his new journey, he realizes he has forgotten his travel notes. Eventually he finds them all crumpled up under a lady's hat.

In the South of France, Tristram feels confident he has outrun death and travels happily around the region on a mule. By the end of the volume, he promises to go back to the story about his Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadham.

Volume 7 Analysis

This is the first and only time Tristram's actual life dominates a volume. As a result, it is the most realistic part of the novel and where Tristram leaves behind his bawdy humor. It is not that the volume is without humor, but the comedy is darker. For example, the claim he is traveling to run away from death blackens even the more farcical moments such as when he makes friends with an ass (donkey).

In this volume, Tristram experiments with the theme of reality. For example, he expects the reader to believe he has a close bond with Eugenuis, a character rarely mentioned in the book, and someone to whom Tristram has never shown any closeness. In this regard, he implies that Eugenuis's earlier depiction as Yorick's faithful adviser is just a symbol of Tristram's own relationship with Eugenuis. In fact, as far as the Yorick story is concerned, Eugenuis should be far older than Tristram, yet Tristram presents Eugenuis as someone near his own age.

Similarly, his talk of death recalls his brother Bobby's death. Bobby was about to take a trip to Europe before he died. In these terms, Tristram's death could be seen as homage



to his sibling, but within this theme of reality, the reader wonders how much of the details of Tristram's life is pure fabrication. In other words, was Bobby's death real or just symbolic of Tristram's own sufferings? At the end of the novel, Tristram pronounces his epic as cock and bull, and this chapter, capturing Tristram in a more unguarded moment, foreshadows this statement.



Volume 8

Volume 8 Summary

Volume 8 continues with the tale of Toby and Widow Wadham. Tristram is still wandering South of France on his mule, but Tristram continues the story because he feels that not to tell the story would be a disservice to his Uncle and the reader. As Tristram hinted in the previous volume, Toby did not realize his love for the widow until Susannah points out to Toby that he loves the widow. In fact, Toby is the last to know of his feelings.

Tristram starts from the very beginning of the affair when Toby and Trim move to the country. When they initially arrive, the house is not ready, so Toby moves in with the widow for a few days. The widow quickly falls in love with Toby, but he is too involved with reenacting battles to take any notice. However, the widow does not give up and over many years, she works her way into Toby's sentry. When the war is over, rendering Toby's hobby useless, he finally can give his attention to falling in love.

The day it happens, Trim is telling Toby a story about the King of Bohemia. However, Toby interrupts his story and ruins his train of thought so much that Trim never gets to tell the tale. Instead, Trim describes his knee injury and the nurse that gave back his health. Trim is explaining he fell in love with the nurse when Widow Wadham walks onto the scene. She tells Toby she has something in her eye. As Toby looks in vain, he suddenly notices her eyes are beautiful.

Toby tells Trim he has fallen in love, and they concoct an approach to the widow akin to a battle maneuver. The story gets to Tristram's father and mother, who are both mildly amused. Tristram's father knows his brother does not have much knowledge of women, so Tristram's father writes Toby a letter explaining how to deal with the opposite sex. Tristram's father and mother both go to Toby's house to deliver the letter just as he about to see the widow and declare his love.

Volume 8 Analysis

After the aura of death in the previous volume, Tristram returns to the more light-hearted fare of his Uncle's battle fortifications. However, he returns to this scene having given the novel new meaning. It feels as though he is returning to Toby simply because other aspects of his life are too depressing. This gives a darker element to what the reader could otherwise dismiss as a return to the bawdy humor of earlier volumes.

In fact, the novel is now so over the top that, combined with the darker elements, it is beginning to feel like an avant garde work, i.e., a work ahead of its time. For example, throughout a number of chapters, Trim tries to tell a story about King Bohemia, but Toby keeps interrupting. Tristram constantly returns to Trim's story under headings such as King Bohemia continued, but Toby continues to interrupt. In the end, the story hardly



gets to begin before they move on. The narrator experiments with form throughout the book, but here his digressions are beginning to communicate themselves within the narrative of Toby's story, preparing the reader for the avant garde storytelling in the final volume.



Volume 9

Volume 9 Summary

The volume continues with Toby and Trim making their way to Widow Wadham's front door with Tristram's mother and father watching on from afar. Tristram's mother and father talk about her idea of spying on events through the keyhole. Tristram's father is not completely opposed to the idea but his philosophizing on the subject makes his wife feel like a criminal. Meanwhile, on the steps of the Widow's house, Trim, talks about his brother Tom's misfortune with his Jewish wife. Inquisitors took in his brother due to a problem about his wife, and now Trim presumes his brother is dead. Because of this event, Trim is against marriage.

Tristram then makes a digression in the story, but returns to explain his Uncle's hesitation upon entering the house. Toby tells Trim to wait while he makes up his mind. Behind the door, Bridget waits for the knock and Widow Wadham spies on the two men through a window. Finally, Trim knocks on the door, and the two men enter. Tristram follows this event with two blank chapters.

In the house, Trim goes to talk with Bridget, and Toby follows Widow Wadham. At this point, the two men's injuries become part of the conversation. Widow Wadham, worried about the extent of Toby's groin injury, wants to see exactly where he was injured. Toby misunderstands and orders Trim to get the battle map, so he can point out the exact position. When he returns with the map, Toby places her finger on the exact position in Namur. Meanwhile Bridget tells Trim that she has heard Toby is impotent, and Trim vehemently denies the rumors. The two relationships blossom, and while Trim romances Bridget, Toby asks Widow Wadham to marry him.

Volume 9 Analysis

The final volume degenerates into a complete farce, but as mentioned above, the entire novel is so over the top that the reader should regard it an example of avant garde storytelling. For example, Tristram interrupts an important moment with blank chapters, and then following the blank chapters with the claim he will return to their real content later. This, of course, completely changes the narrative sequence and serves to give Tristram back the self-reflexive poise he had previously lost. Tristram also returns to his earlier theme of groin injuries: Tristram suffers accidental circumcision; a stone hits Toby in the groin during a battle and Yorick drops a hot chestnut in the groin of the writer Phutatorius. In this volume the Widow Wadham insists on seeing Toby's wound, but Toby is so clueless, he thinks she wants to see the exact point on the map were he sustained the injury.

It is interesting here that Tristram presents women as loose and more sexually active than the male characters. The other example is Bridget questioning Trim on whether or



not Toby is impotent. Both women are more sexually aggressive in comparison to Toby and Trim, whom Tristram presents as celibate. This is a further example of Tristram's obvious distrust for women. Even at the beginning of this volume, his mother suggests that she spy on Toby and the Widow Wadham through the Widow's keyhole. By the end of the novel, Walter delivers a discourse about woman's obsession with sex.



Characters

Walter Shandy

Walter Shandy is Tristram's unconventional father. His habit of philosophizing and arguing about every subject usually finds him at odds with everyone else in the room. However, he seems to enjoy such conflict and even looks to create it. When he is arguing with his wife in what he calls his "beds of justice," he cannot accept that his wife agrees with his every word so continues to make his point even though continues to say that he is completely right. In fact, there seems to be little affection between Walter and his wife. For example, at one point when his parents go for a walk, Tristram describes his mother's arm as twisted into his father's arm. However, Walter's philosophizing on every subject often isolates him from the other characters. The first example is when he hears of his son Bobby's death. Upon the news, he decides, almost with relief, that he can now spend his money on fixing up the Shandy Estate. It is not that Walter does not have good intentions, it's just that he gets caught in his own ideas. For example, he writes a book on how to educate his son, Tristram but then spends so much time on the book that he ironically neglects his son's education. Moreover, he seems so pleased that he has written a book that he spends a great deal of time reading his theories aloud to his friends.

Away from his opinions, Walter's main goal in life is to serve the name of his family. He is distraught when Tristram is born with a flat nose and talks about how his family's problems stem from having small noses. His book is designed to help Tristram continue, and even heighten, the name of the Shandy family. In accordance, the one person Walter has complete affection for is his brother Toby. When Toby injures his groin in battle, Walter, without hesitation, takes him in, nursing his brother back to health. Often Walter softens to his kind-hearted brother, and Tristram explains that his father would never have taken anyone else into the family home.

Uncle Toby

Toby's good and modest nature seems at odds with his love of war. However, Tristram presents this as nothing more than naive patriotism. Toby feels that war is a necessity, but this opinion certainly does not take away from his generous spirit. One example of his humanity is when he hears of Le Fever's illness. Toby does not know Le Fever, but when he meets him, he cannot believe that such an honorable person will die. So Toby does everything in his power to prevent Le Fever's death. In the end, he assumes care of Le Fever's son.

Toby sustains an injury to his groin whilst fighting as a captain in the British army against the French. His brother, Walter, takes him in, and Toby's servant, Trim, nurses Toby back to health. Toby develops a new lease on life when he finds a hobby mapping out how and where he was injured. When Trim suggests they rebuild the battle scenes



on his bowling green, Toby demands the doctors give him back his health. It is not long before Toby is out of bed and walking on crutches.

Tristram details the touching relationship between Trim and Toby, more that of friendship than master and servant, as they reenact all the battle scenes from the war. Toby's hobby finishes when the war ends, but he immediately he falls in love with Widow Wadham. Unfortunately, Toby knows nothing about women and acts upon the feeling by developing a plan to win over the widow that is akin to a war strategy.

Toby's other close relationship is with his brother Walter. They are complete opposites; Toby's practical outlook quite at odds with his brother's philosophic ramblings. However, despite the continual arguing between the two, they cannot live without each other. Tristram accentuates this by writing about Walter taking in his injured brother and by having Toby present whenever Walter has a problem.

Tristram Shandy

Tristram is only a main character in that he is the narrator. He appears very little in the story itself apart from the one volume he dedicates to his travels around France. In general, we only get to know him from what the other characters say, in particular his father. As narrator, he is witty and opinionated with a genuine love for all the characters, apart from his mother, who he often criticizes. It is through our knowledge of his family that the reader is able to paint a picture of Tristram as a person. For example, his own philosophical ramblings are similar to his father's and he pays homage to his brother, Bobby, by taking a trip his brother would have taken but for his early death.

Tristram's Mother

Tristram's mother is a source of frustration for his father and perhaps for this reason, Tristram does not look upon her favorably. At the beginning, she interrupts her husband's lovemaking with a question about the cuckoo clock and then exacerbates him further by insisting on having the mid-wife deliver her baby rather than her Husband's choice of Dr. Slop. Tristram suggests that his father and mother were not the perfect match as she constantly frustrates her husband by showing no interest in either arguing or providing stimulating conversation.

Yorick

Yorick is the village parson. The villagers often misunderstand him because he is very straight talking and therefore does not conform to a man of the church. In reality, he is a kind-hearted man even to the point where he lends his best horses to his villagers while he makes do with a decrepit, old horse. When he helps the midwife get a license, the villagers no longer have to borrow his horses to ride the seven miles to get the doctor. However, everyone feels the parson has committed a selfish act, thinking he only wants



to keep his horses for himself. As his Shakespearean name suggests, he is a witty, but tragic figure. At the end of his life, Yorick dies a lonely man.

The Parson's Wife

Tristram only mentions her in the first volume, but she is important in that she persuades Yorick to finance the mid-wife's license.

Bobby

Bobby is Tristram's brother, whose death coincides with Tristram's birth. It is because of Bobby's death that Tristram's father places so much emphasis on educating his second son.

Aunt Dinah

Aunt Dinah is a source of embarrassment for the Shandy family as she married a lowly coachman. However, much to Toby's disgust, Walter loves to recount the tale to guests and actually inherits a large amount of money from her at the end of the second volume. Though he never meets her, Tristram thinks she one the only woman in the family with character.

The Midwife

The midwife is the person chosen by Tristram's mother to deliver him. Early in the book, Tristram describes her as a struggling widow with a large family, but through the kindness of the parson and his wife, she manages to get a midwife license.

Doctor Slop

Dr. Slop is Walter's choice to deliver Tristram. In the end, Walter calls him to the house to act as back up. At the home awaiting Tristram's birth, the doctor talks to Walter and Toby about religion and childbirth, showing a fondness for arguing. He sees himself as a figure of authority and is upset when he has to go upstairs to see the midwife, as he thinks she should come down to see him. His forceps are responsible for damaging Tristram's nose.

Susannah

She is the female of the household and helps deliver Tristram. She is a nosy, but goodhearted woman. When Bobby dies, she rushes to the kitchen in tears. However, she also spreads gossip about Toby and Widow Wadham.



Bridgette

Bridgette is Widow Wadham's servant and ends up having a relationship with Trim.

Obadiah

He is the male servant of the Shandy household.

Eugenius

He is a close friend with Yorick and present at Yorick's death. Tristram asks him whether he should travel around Europe, sealing Eugenius' role as an adviser.

Didius

The church lawyer. He refuses to give permission to change Tristram's name.

Lieutenant Le Fever

Le Fever is a soldier who takes ill in the local inn. Toby and Trim hear of his plight and try their best to return him to health. Unfortunately, he dies, but hands over responsibility of his son, Billy.

Billy Le Fever

Billy is the son of Lieutenant Le Fever. When his father dies, Toby puts Billy through school and then supports him when he becomes a soldier. While he is a soldier, he takes ill and returns to Shandy Hall. Toby recommends him for Tristram's tutor.

Corporal Trim

Corporal Trim is Toby's servant. Like Toby, he fought in the war, but had to go home after he damaged his knee. He now dedicates his life to Toby upon whom he dotes. Despite his lowly position as a servant, Trim comes across as an intelligent man who is not shy to give his opinion on any subject. He often has good-natured arguments with Toby, in particular claiming Trim's injury is more painful than Toby's. However in reality, he shares Toby's kindness and humanity. The one bane in Trim's life is the probable death of his brother, Tom. Talking about his brother often results in Trim crying. Towards the end of the book, Trim courts Bridgett.



Phutatorius

He is a writer who is present at the meeting where Walter Shandy tries to change Tristram's name. Yorick accidentally drops a hot chestnut in Phutatorius' lap, which Phutatorius believes Yorick does so intentionally.

Dr Slop's Forceps

Dr. Slop damages Tristram's nose with his forceps.

Walter's Book

Walter writes a book detailing how he will educate Tristram, reading it aloud to anyone who will listen.



Objects/Places

The Parlor

The men often gather here to philosophize about life. It is in the parlor that Tristram's father waits for Tristram's birth.

The Kitchen

The place the servants gather to gossip. Susannah runs to the kitchen when she hears of Bobby's death.

France

Tristram travels around France in the Seventh volume. He goes through Lyon, Bologne, Paris and the South of France.

The Village Inn

Lieutenant Fever takes ill at the inn.

The Battle of Navarre

This is the battle where Toby injures his groin.

The Sentry

Toby watches his battles from his sentry. H also falls in love with Widow Wadham here.

Widow Wadham's House

Toby asks the Widow to marry him at her house.

The Shandy's Bedroom

The story starts in Tristram's parents' bedroom. Walter also holds his beds of justice here.



The Bowling Green

Toby and Trim reenact battles on the bowling green

Sash Window

A falling sash window circumcises Tristram.

Tristram's Notes

In France Tristram loses his travel notes, but then find them under a lady's hat.

Shandy Hall

Walter Shandy's house.

Dr. Slop's bag

Walter sends Obadiah get the Dr.'s bag. Obadiah causes problems for the doctor when he ties the bag up too tightly with knots.

Themes

Time and Reality

In the first volume, Tristram gives a discourse about how digressions from the narrative are progressive. On the surface, this sounds like more rambling, but the author is actually saying that by having the story in a different order, he is giving the book a different meaning. There is no doubt Sterne could complete the novel in a few volumes, but by leaving and returning to scenes, the reader is coming back to a scene with a new perspective. Sterne highlights this point when he stops a scene between Widow Wadham and Toby and follows it with two blank chapters and immediately defends his right to do this. When Sterne returns to the content of the two missing chapters, they have to be read with the notion that the novel is breaking the barriers of conventional storytelling.

The author's play with time is evident in the chronological order of the stories. The narrator begins with the story of his conception, nine months before he was born. If this is not strange enough, Tristram then spends the remainder of the volume jumping from one narrative to the other, leaving each unfinished story with the promise he will return to them later. The narrator always returns, and in the end completes the narrative but leaves behind the question of the time frame in which the novel is being told—how much of the novel is actually from first-hand observations of the narrator. For example, it is impossible to tell whether the courtship between Widow Wadham and Toby takes place before or after Tristram's birth.

This leads to the question of reality. The reader is likely to ask how much of the story is a true representation of reality. By the end, it seems Tristram only tells the anecdotes to fit in with his opinions and it is his discourses that give the story meaning. In fact, the stories, though lacking in truth, serve to symbolize who Tristram is as a person. Tristram does not appear much in the story, but the characters increasingly feel like extensions of him, their humorous adventures just example of Tristram's imagination and wit.

Hobby Horses

Tristram mentions hobby horses at the beginning of the first volume, and it remains a constant thread throughout. Most notably his Uncle Toby rediscovers his health and love for life through his hobby of reenacting battle scenes. This proves the emphasis Tristram places on hobbies. In fact, without a hobby to occupy a person, Tristram suggests a person only spends their time thinking about the negative aspects of life. For example, Tristram's father only gets over his eldest son's death through his hobby of philosophizing and putting theories into a book that is intended to educate Tristram. Tristram claims his father neglected Tristram's early years because he spent so much time writing; however, within what looks to the reader a loveless marriage and the tragic early death of his son, Tristram's father probably uses writing as a form of escape.



Moreover, the main characters do not appear to have jobs, so hobbies are the only of taking their minds away from the boredom of their lives. When the war finishes and Toby's hobby becomes pointless, his eyes open to Widow Wadham and the attention she has been giving him for eleven years. However, Tristram does not present this realization as a good thing for Toby because Toby now has to face up to losing his celibacy and the rumors going around the village that he is perhaps impotent.

Authorial Voice

Whereas in most novels an author communicates his opinion through the narrative and the characters, Laurence Sterne makes the reader not only aware of his opinions directly, but that he is writing the book. Many times, Tristram refers to what he is writing and what it means in context to the novel. This extends to Tristram's writing about himself at a desk in present time. Similarly, he explains his digressions as progressive and communicates this point directly to the reader, including explaining why he is using certain techniques in his book. There is rarely a time in the story that the author allows the readers to lose themselves in the narrative, even to the point that he pulls the reader away from an important part of a scene and then tells the reader why it thought it was necessary to do so. In many ways, this is part of the satire of the book, working to present the writer as both a performer and a highly-egotistical creature.



Style

Point of View

Sterne tells the story from the point of view of the narrator, Tristram Shandy. Tristram begins by claiming the story is about his life, but then rarely mentions himself in the narrative. Most of the stories are about his family and often he tells them before his life had actually begun. For example, Toby passes over the anecdote about his conception, immediately rendering the story unreliable. In fact, most of the stories are second hand, coming from when he was either very young or yet to be born.

The only story he tells which has any semblance to reality is when he writes of his travels in France. It is here the reader can see that some of what he said in earlier volumes was merely symbolic. For example, in the third volume, his brother Bobby dies just before he goes on his travels to Europe. By going on a similar trip himself while he is ill, it is plausible that he was just talking about his own illness.

Such confusion about what is real and what is unreal comes from a narrative that attempts to defy time. Throughout the book, the narrative follows no logical sequence, prompting the reader to wonder how much of what Tristram says is true.

Setting

The novel is set in a village in England in the eighteenth century. Most of the scenes take place in Shandy Hall, the estate of the Shandy family. Within this setting, the action mostly takes place in the parlor, where the men argue and philosophize about life. The other main setting is Toby's country house. At this house Toby and Trim build their fortifications on the bowling green outside. Widow Wadham lives next door to Toby, and in the final volume, Toby goes to her house to propose marriage. The main characters rarely move away from these settings—the only exception being in the third volume when Trim, Yorick, Walter and Toby visit the church lawyer. Consequently, the settings work to keep all the characters in their own world. Many of the things they do within this space are highly eccentric, and people are unlikely to tolerate their behavior outside of Shandy Hall. Tristram accentuates this point when Toby goes to propose to Widow Wadham, and she asks if he is impotent. Toby's reaction shows both his naivety and eccentricity, which, outside his own world, only serve only to make him the gossip of the village.

Tristram uses France as another setting. He travels there alone to get away from death. He travels through Lyon, Paris, Bologne and Montreal. This is the only chapter where Tristram is the main character; the French setting allows Tristram's character to blossom. Up until his travels, the other characters' lives had kept Tristram's life in the shadows.



The novel is very opinionated and its self-reflexive style aims to break down barriers in the world of 18th century literature. Previously, novels kept more or less to conventional storytelling, so its placement in the 18th century is important in understanding how different and fresh Sterne's work is in comparison. Often Tristram moves away from the narrative, explaining he will write what he wants, critical of anyone that disagrees with his avant garde approach. Interestingly Sterne dedicates the novel to the Right Honorable William Pitt, asking him to protect his work. This shows a conscious intent to change the formal approach of 18th century literature.

Language and Meaning

Sterne wrote *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* in 18th-century English. Consequently, the book is occasionally difficult to understand—such words as *betwixt*, for example, are rarely used in contemporary English. However to take away such language would lose the book its meaning, simply because the novel is truly unique for its time. Its thoroughly-modern narrative experiments, later picked up by the likes of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, make it an exciting and refreshing period piece.

Sterne often uses academic language to communicate his philosophical ideas. In particular, he references work from John Locke and Socrates. These opinions are usually digressions from the main narrative, and Sterne uses the opinions to defend the unusual style of his book. Other times, he inserts documents into the narrative written in a formal style. For example, the legal document detailing Walter's marriage rights, and the sermon he reads in the parlor, which is actually one of Sterne's own sermons. This language gives seriousness to the novel, adding a satirical edge to some of the more bawdy wit.

In comparison, he tells anecdotal stories with the informal language this implies. Unlike his philosophical discourses that tend to ramble, the anecdotes are easy to read and do not strive to communicate any great ideas. Again, Sterne uses the comparison as a humorous device. The stories stand at odds with Sterne's serious discourses.

Structure

The structure of the novel is highly unconventional and like so many of the techniques in the book, Sterne uses it as a source of humor. For example, in the final volume, he leaves a scene between the Widow Wadham and Toby just as the Widow asks to see his groin injury, following it with two blank chapters. He returns to the content of these chapters, but not until he has already told the reader what happens in the aftermath of the Widow's question. Even then, Toby's reaction (to use a map to point at where his injury was sustained) is so unexpected, it acts as a parody of structure itself.

This passage is also an example of Sterne using structure to play with time and reality. The novel's narrative never runs in a logical sequence. Even from the beginning, he starts the novel about Tristram's (the narrator) life from his conception. The reader then has to wait two more volumes, almost a quarter of the novel, before Tristram is born. In



the following volumes, Tristram again defies expectation by dedicating the remainder of his novel to his Uncle Toby. The reason it takes him so long to tell the story is because of Sterne's use of meta narrative. He shows this best in the first volume when Tristram introduces a variety of narratives, leaving and returning to them at his whim. The first narrative tells the story of his mother and father and the arguments that take place between them. The second narrative involves the Parson, his wife and the mid-wife. The third narrative is the scene surrounding Tristram's birth, the fourth narrative is the story about Uncle Toby and finally the fifth narrative is Tristram's digressions about writing. Sometimes these narratives cross over. For example, Walter's writing parallels Tristram's own writing.

By the end of the novel, though, the joke is that even though Tristram takes an inordinate amount of time to get to the point, he does complete all the main narratives. He tells the story of his birth in the first three volumes; he covers his opinions and himself as a person through his travels in the seventh volume; he discusses his mother and father's relationship and completes the story of his Uncle Toby relationship with the Widow Wadham in the last volume, and neatly rounds off his father and his own opinions with a final sentence that claims the book was all cock and bull.



Quotes

"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."

"The beginning of the last chapter, I informed you exactly when I was born; but I did not inform you how"

"Did not Dr. Kunastrokius, that great man, at his leisure hours, take the greatest delight imaginable in combing of asses tails, and plucking the dead hairs out with his teeth, though he had tweezers always in his pocket?"

"With all this sail, poor Yorick carried not one ounce of ballast; he was utterly unpractised in the world; and at the age of twenty-six, knew just about as well how to steer his course in it, as a romping, unsuspecting girl of thirteen."

"thou hast got an hundred enemies; and till thou hast gone on, and raised a swarm of wasps about thine ears, and art half stung to death by them, thou wilt never be convinced it is so"

"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 developements of this work, will be added to the end of the twentieth volume"

"For my own part, I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could,—and am not yet born"

"Well! dear brother Toby, said my father, upon his first seeing him after he fell in love- and how goes it with your asse"

"A soldier, cried my Uncle Toby, interrupting the corporal, is no more exempt from saying a foolish thing than a man of letters- But not so often"

"I wish I never wrote it: But as I never blot anything out- let us use some honest means to get it out of our heads directly"

"For my own part, I am resolved never to read any book but my own as long as I live"

"I told the Christian reader- I say Christian reader- hoping he is one- and if he is not, I am sorry for it- and only beg he will consider the matter with himself, and not lay the blame entirely upon this book."

"Twice did my Uncle Toby forget his wound, and cry out, Le Fever! I will go with thee, and thou shalt fight beside me- and twice he laid his hand upon his groin, and hung down his head in sorrow and disconsolation"



"The accusing spirit which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blush'd as he gave it in; and the recording angel as he wrote it down, dropp'd a tear upon the word and blotted it out forever."

"Nature instantly ebb'd again- the film returned to its place- the pulse fluttered-stopped- went on-throb'd- stopp'd again-moved-stopp'd- Shall I go on? No"

"Now don't let us give ourselves a parcel of airs and pretend the oaths we make free within this land of liberty of ours are our own."

"As for the clergy- No - If I say a word against them I'll be shot."

"That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full story and read the next full chapter over again."

It is a singular blessing, that nature has formed the mind of man with the same backwardness and renitency against conviction, which is observed in old dogs- "of not learning new tricks"

"My Tristram's misfortunes began nine months before ever he came into the world"



Topics for Discussion

In what ways do Tristram's digressions change the perspective of the story?

Does Tristram's constant use of humor serve to hide some of his less savory opinions? For example his opinion of women.

Why is the *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* seen as a forerunner to the modernist novels of the early 20th century?

In what ways is the novel an attack on 18th century values?

What function do the legal documents, philosophical opinions and the sermon play in terms of reality?

The *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* was sold in nine volumes. How much does Sterne play with the reader in choosing to break the novel into so many volumes—is the reason purely satirical?

What does the reader find out about Tristram through the other characters?

Why does Tristram place so much importance on hobby horses for his Uncle and Father, but not with the other characters? What does this say about 18th century England?

Do the male characters in the book hide themselves behind their eccentricities and opinions? How much do we really know about them?