The Aposiopesis in *Tristram Shandy*

by George Samuel
Chapter I: The Infinite Book

In Volume II, Chapter 6, Uncle Toby may inadvertently use the aposiopesis (a rhetorical "figure in which the speaker suddenly halts, as if unable or unwilling to proceed", O.E.D.) when in any case Walter snaps his pipe in anger, making Toby unable to proceed whether he were unwilling or not. The evidence that he is unwilling is his modesty:

-- "My sister, mayhap," quoth my uncle Toby, "does not choose to let a man come so near her ****. Make this dash, -- 'tis an Aposiopesis. -- Take the dash away, and write Backside, -- 'tis Bawdy.

The cause of Walter's anger is this same modesty, which is a kind of silence characteristic of Toby. Various kinds of silence are characteristic of Tristram Shandy, and indeed the aposiopesis is its most characteristic figure. Tristram's explicit explanation of why Chapter 24 of Volume IV is missing contains an implicit explanation of all the silences. He has "torn out" the chapter, he says, because "the book is more perfect and complete by wanting the chapter, than having it" (IV,25). We must understand then that all of the silences--everything that is missing from the book, the whole world beyond its covers--all things help complete the book and thus are part of it.

If Tristram Shandy contains the whole world, then it is infinite. Indeed, Tristram announces at the end of Book IV that it is not until now that Tristram Shandy begins ("'tis from this point properly, that the story of my Life and Opinions sets out", IV,32), at about the middle. There may be a parody here of the epic practice of beginning in "the middle of things, as Horace advises" (IV,13); there is certainly a regression to infinity, for in a work that begins in the middle, the first half does not exist; likewise the first half of the second half, and so on, the work continuing to divide itself into existent and non-existent halves, to infinity. "Knowledge, like matter", Walter insists, "is divisible ad infinitum" (II,19): this infinite book contains the infinite world. However little Walter may offer in the way of behaviour worthy of imitation, he is at least a notable example of human liberation: his eccentricity is an "infinitude" and "altogether different" and although difference is what causes the "eternal squabbles" of "all the world" (V,24), it is also what causes human beings to be able to speak to one another ("Now if I might presume, said the corporal, to differ from your honour-- --Why else do I talk to thee, Trim? said my uncle Toby, mildly--" VIII,28).

If space is infinitely divisible, so also is time: the "true scholastic pendulum" is "the train and succession of our ideas". Time is all in the mind. This liberating thesis is part of Tristram's dispute with the "hypercritic" who would insist that Tristram's narrative obey the literary rule of the "unity, or rather probability, of time" (II,8). Tristram frequently pretends a nervous fear that the critics will condemn his digressions and other violations of the unity of time. For instance he puts off writing his preface until, far into the narrative, Walter and Toby have both fallen asleep and Dr. Slop and Trim have become engaged in actions Tristram feels no obligation to describe in detail: "All my
heroes are off my hands;--"tis the first time I have had a moment to spare--and I'll make use of it, and write my preface" (III,20). Hilariously absurd though it be to imagine an author's real-world real time stuck in this way to the fictitious time lived by the fictitious characters he creates, nevertheless we do create time for ourselves, in which to do the things we wish to do, within real time, but with just the same freedom as that enjoyed by an author with regard to his fiction. Time is fictitious. Time reverses itself: Confucius escapes the charge of digression, for "provided he keeps along the line of his story,--he may go backwards and forwards as he will" (V,25). Tristram's mention of Confucius illustrates his own practice of digression. Uncle Toby's possibly unintentional aposiopesis leads to the revelation that Tristram's own narrative is reversed: in the dispute that follows, Walter maintains that Toby does not know the right end of a woman from the wrong, and Toby agrees (disputing that there is a dispute at all), citing the case of the widow Wadman (II,7). Tristram's narrative begins with his conception and birth and ends with the earlier Wadman episode: it reverses itself. Reversal is the perfect or paradigmatic digression.

Unlike the non-existent chapter (IV,24), which we cannot read, the digression of no location appears in plain view: it is Tristram's testimony of love and veneration for Uncle Toby, and "why here--rather than in any other part of my story--I am not able to tell" (III,34). Although it may be read within a certain chapter, it must be thought of as a digression from every single passage in Tristram Shandy; it is ubiquitous, not non-existent; yet it is of a piece with the non-existent chapter that makes the book complete, for all things in the world also digress from the narrative of Tristram Shandy, as well as together making up its non-existent completing chapter. Between the digressive and the non-existent is the very small: one of the very short chapters gets its abbreviated form from Walter's "Pshaw! . . .'tis not worth talking of" (II,13), which ends the conversation and thus the chapter very soon after they begin; indeed they can hardly be said to have begun; the chapter records a very brief conversation that hardly takes place at all, a barely existing thing that gives its (tiny) form to something that assuredly exists, the chapter, though it is a severely truncated chapter. Part of the conversation is missing, and this content of absence lends form of absence to the chapter.

**Chapter II: Liberation**

Tristram must be wearing his cap and bells when he denies any intention to satirize militarism, predestination, free-will, or taxes (IV, 22), for these are among his main targets. In the story of Tristram's conception, a main target is the scientific materialistic deterministic view of human destiny. For, in blaming his life's misfortunes on his parents (I,1), Tristram is clearly in cap and bells--he contradicts himself. The mechanistic view of the universe expressed by his story of his conception releases his parents from any blame; they too are merely part of the machine. Indeed even blaming Fortune "the ungracious duchess" (I,5) is contradictory: she is a mechanical goddess, innocent, as machines are. Triste Tristram, sad clown, is in the world to show us its tragedy and comedy, its innocence, its liberation. For the way to liberate ourselves from the machine is to stop blaming it, to acknowledge and forgive the machine in ourselves. The liberated part of us Tristram calls "whimsical". Of this whimsical quality of the famous English
eccentrics Tristram names Uncle Toby as his example and explains it as caused by the English climate. It is the "great inconsistency in our air and climate . . . . which has furnished us with such a variety of odd and whimsical characters" (I,21; Tristram quotes an authority his memory will not permit him to name). " . . . In this unsettled island . . . nature . . . is most whimsical and capricious; fortune herself not being more so . . . " (I,11). Fortune herself--mechanical, "ungracious duchess" though she seem to those who complain--is whimsical, and creates that liberated, whimsical quality in human nature. The machine liberates.

Tristram says that he cannot escape his bondage to his whimsical nature, in a passage where he anticipates criticism for using too many chapters to describe Toby and Walter descending the stairs: " . . . There may be as many chapters as steps:--let that be as it will, Sir, I can no more help it than my destiny . . . " (IV,10). Freedom is compulsory. Tristram's eccentricity is a burden to him, a boon to his readers: to him it is his melancholia, to them a gift that promotes long life: "True Shandyism, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and . . . forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run through its channels, makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round . . . Unless this vile cough kills me in the mean time . . . " (IV,32). Tristram is an innocent sacrificial victim of his own freedom. Tristram's father's case is the reverse of Tristram's. A burden to others, and indeed himself though he be, the burden Walter places on himself promotes his long life: "his health [is] rescued by . . . disquietudes" (IV,31). There is no justice. But after all "it was ordained as a scourge upon the pride of human wisdom, That the wisest of us all should . . . outwit ourselves, and eternally forego our purposes in the intemperate act of pursuing them" (V,16). There is an imp of the perverse, in human nature.

Yet it is no perversity in Uncle Toby, that the two complementary sides of him are his resignation and his courage. He fears nothing, he says, "but the doing a wrong thing" (V,10). If failing to make contact with the widow Wadman be seen as doing a wrong thing, then it is the victory of the passivity, the modesty, over the courage: that imp of the perverse. Yet it is not that he has not does not love the widow Wadman. His great gift after all is his loving nature, which makes him outstandingly susceptible (V,29). And the passivity even works with the courage at first, for a time, rather than against it: once fallen in love, Toby "took it like a lamb--sat still and let the poison work in his veins without resistance . . . [and] incommoded no one mortal" (VIII,26). So, when the passivity defeats the courage, then it is simply that Toby must be judged for his intentions rather than his achievements. For, against Walter's argument that our power to resist evil is within us, Toby insists "Tis by the assistance of Almighty God . . . 'tis not from our own strength, brother Shandy" (IV,7). Toby's piety, which so irritates his deistical and scientific brother, is renunciation of control. Walter's passion for control is expressed in the way he characterizes his inner strength as a machine: "that great and elastic power within us of counterbalancing evil, which [is] like a secret spring in a well-ordered machine" (IV,8). Walter believes he is a clock.

Toby's modesty, his silence, is his liberation, though it benefits others more often than himself. Walter's controlling is his liberation, that tyrannizes over those around him.
"Now, of all things in the world, I understand the least of mechanism", Tristram says (VII,30). Tristram's father blames Tristram's sad life on Tristram's mother's "interruption" of Walter's attempt to make Tristram's conception as near to clockwork as possible (I,1). Indeed there are too many causes, in the story, assigned to the one effect of Tristram's sad life: which is the cause, the bungling of the mechanistic conception, the shortening of Tristram's nose, the giving of the wrong name, or the accidental circumcision? But perhaps the least understandable of the doctrines of mechanism is that of perfection, which Tristram sarcastically describes as:

the wise and wonderful mechanism of nature,—of which,—be hers the honour. --
All that we can do, is to turn and work the machine to the improvement and better manufactory of the arts and sciences.--

(VI,17.)

This theory of "improvement" that Tristram spoofs here is the theory of capitalism, of accumulation, and against the "manufactory" view of the "arts and sciences" as pointed toward a goal, an ever receding donkey's carrot of perfection, Tristram sees the human creative imagination as already perfect. "Endless is the search of Truth" (II,3), there is no progress. Another spoof of perfection is the passage in which Tristram imagines himself and all his readers to be great wits:

... With what raptures would you sit and read--but oh!--'tis too much--I am sick--
I faint away deliciously at the thoughts of it--'tis more than nature can bear--lay hold of me--I am giddy--I am stone blind--I'm dying--I am gone.--Help! Help! Help!

(III,20.)

This fantasy, which we might call Tristram's Apocalypse, proceeds with great inventiveness for several pages and in several contrary directions. In another fantasy, the arts and sciences reach perfection and inevitably fall away again in endless recurrence: for, when perfection is reached,

it will put an end to all kind of writings whatsoever;--the want of all kind of writing will put an end to all kind of reading--and ... in time, As war begets poverty; poverty peace,--must, in course, put an end to all kind of knowledge,--and then--we shall have all to begin over again; or, in other words, be exactly where we started.

(I,21.)

The "end" of learning, it seems, is its beginning again.

Or, put another way, the perfection, the ultimate order, is brought about by a chaos of random causes:

Let no man say from what tags and jags hints may not be cut out for the advancement of human knowledge. Let no man ... say ... from collision of what kinds of bodies light may or may not be struck out, to carry the arts and sciences up to perfection.

(VI,26.)

Here Tristram ironically pretends to say that the glorious effect eclipses the cause, causes itself; but this is plainly nonsense because it is the essence of machinery that it separates effect from cause. Indeed Tristram seems really to be saying that the liberated and creative mind, that women's minds for instance, do not separate effect from cause, for
Walter says, in exasperation: "You never will distinguish, Mrs. Shandy, nor shall I ever teach you to do it, betwixt a point of pleasure and a point of convenience" (VI,18), in other words, between ends and means. Tristram refutes cause and effect: perfection cannot be the effect of the random. Thus perfection is the present condition of things, and it is chaos.

Thus Tristram calls his book a perpetual-motion machine: "... My work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time ... I have ... so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going ..." (I,22). The next time Tristram refers to "my book as a machine" he mockingly promises to write by the rules: "laying my pen and ruler down cross-wise upon the table, in order to gain the greater credit to it" (VII,1). But in the story of Dr. Slop's encounter with Obadiah's coach-horse in the lane, making the sign of the cross is represented as a mechanistic and useless gesture, dangerous in a crisis (II,9). But all acts of will are mechanism, as, Tristram maintains, is shown by a human tendency to make decisions for their own sake when any other reason is lacking: the third road from Calais to Paris has nothing to recommend it except that "you may" take it "if you will"; and "for this reason a great many choose" it (VII,3). The human will is a perpetual-motion machine, for if other sources of energy fail it will be its own.

Chapter III: Hobby-horse and Digression

The hobby-horse is "no way a vicious beast ... the sporting little filly-folly which carries you out for the present hour—a maggot, a butterfly, a picture, a fiddlestick—Uncle Toby's siege". But a vicious beast indeed is "my father's ass—Oh! mount him ... not:—'tis a beast concupiscent—and foul befall the man, who does not hinder him from kicking": a beast of obsession and violent tyranny (VIII,31). A comparison then is unavoidable, between the hobby-horse and the "Digressions ... [which] are the sunshine ... the soul of reading" (I,22). The hobby-horse then is the contrary of the machine, so that "in giving you my uncle Toby's character, I am determined to draw it by no mechanical help whatever ... I will draw my uncle Toby's character from his Hobby-Horse" (I,23). The materialistic psychology which Sterne satirizes makes a machine of the mind, prone to mechanical disorder: "... A plaguing thing ... to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of equal strength ... in what a degree such a wayward kind of friction works upon the more gross and solid parts, wasting the fat and impairing the strength ..." (IV,31.) Yet the truth is that inner conflict is a human not a mechanical affair. If everything in the world were machinery, nothing could ever happen, for all things would merely run on in straight lines: "... Millions of ... simple proposition[s] ... are every day swimming quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man's understanding, without being carried backwards or forwards, till some little gusts of passion or interest
drive them to one side" (III,9). Pure reason could not produce life. This little swerve in the steady rain of the atoms is the digression, the sunshine.

Tristram attempts as nearly as possible a silent use of words; he digresses as often as possible from his words in interruptions of gesture, mime, music, dance, sign, signature, symbol, and signal. Even when digression and silence are themes rather than stylistic features of Tristram's work they are also demonstrations of themselves, self-dramatizations, gestures toward themselves, dumb show, showing off. The hobby-horse is harmless amusement, of self or if possible shared. But Tristram's father's ass is male dominance, which Tristram's father argues is the basis of father-dominance: the father, he says, "acquires ... right and jurisdiction" over the son "1st, by marriage. 2nd, by adoption. 3rd, by legitimation. And 4th, by procreation", and he explains that the mother enjoys no such power, because "She is under authority herself", and also because (in procreation) "she is not the principal agent" (V,31). This cruel misogynist actually believes he is a clock. "I wish there was not a clock in the kingdom", he says, because he sees no "use or service" in human beings except the measurement of time through "the succession of our ideas": "we are so used to clocks", he says, that he fears that "in time to come, the succession of our ideas" may be of no "use or service to us at all" (III,18).

Dr. Slop, the Catholic, is the mirror-image of Walter, who is a sort of ultra-Protestant: the reversal of left and right means nothing, for they are both tyrants. For Dr. Slop, the end (salvation through the Seven Sacraments) justifies the means; for Walter, the means (extreme individualism) justifies the end. Sacramentalism is mechanistic (baptism in utero and Tristram's cap-and-bells proposal of baptism of the homunculi, I,20). As well as Catholicism, Dr. Slop represents also the patriarchy's campaign to establish the scientific forceps in the place of the midwife, although she has never failed (I,18). Walter is a supporter of science against the midwife; indeed the (ancient) theory of the homunculi is itself an attempt by the patriarchy to deny that there is motherhood. Little does Walter know, however, that science plans eventually to replace fatherhood also: Dr. Slop dreams of becoming also the begetter of the child, as well as its deliverer into the world (II,18).

The critics who might criticize Tristram's digressions would be as whimsical as Tristram himself: there is strictly no way to tell the digression from the straight line. Hence the general air of hoax in Tristram Shandy: the book is a machine; Tristram punishes "Madam Reader" (she must go back and re-read the whole of the previous chapter, a punishment which is particularly cruel because the matter she seeks is in "the last line but one": I,20. Later on, this cruelty is repeated in another context: Walter insists Dr. Slop read the curse of Ernulphus aloud because "there is something so whimsical, especially in the latter part", but this means that the reader must read the whole of the dreary curse in order not to miss the latter part: III,11). The hoax is the idea that the book controls the reader. Readers are not controlled, but are free to come and go. When Tristram predicts a developing friendship between himself and the reader, he seems perhaps to be referring to a fictitious reader, even as he himself is a fictitious author (I,6). On the other hand, oddly enough, when Tristram predicts that the reader will read of the collision between Obadiah and Dr. Slop ("which you are just going to
Tristram is correct, for if there is a reader at all then she is already well launched in the process of reading about the accident, for the prediction is imbedded in the description of the accident (II,9).

Tristram delights to say that as a writer he is in several places at once: "getting forwards in two different journeys together, and with the same dash of the pen . . . and . . . moreover . . . I now sit rhapsodizing all these affairs" (VII,28). It is a digressive world, a perpetual motion machine:

With what velocity . . . shall I fly down the rapid Rhone . . . And what a fresh spring in the blood! to behold upon the banks advancing and retiring, the castles of romance . . . and see vertiginous, the rocks, the mountains, the cataracts, and all the hurry which Nature is in with all her great works about her.

(VII,29.)

There can be no control by clock in a world where (it is no wonder that Tristram hates disputes, V,11, for) both sides are false (III,38), and, as well, both sides are true ("the stranger's nose was neither true nor false. This left room for the controversy to go on", IV, "Slawkenbergius's Tale"). And although society seems to have so much invested in the difference between true and false, it understands affirmation and denial to be the same thing (VI,14). Hence Walter's system of education, by "thesis and hypothesis" (VI,2).

Although the French may boast "that they who have seen Paris, have seen every thing", it is in fact not possible to see Paris, for it is too complicated (VII,18). Tristram finds it impossible even to see his own life, for he lives "364 times faster than" he writes (IV,13). Knowledge races in vain to keep abreast with reality: the Trista-Pedia becomes obsolete more quickly than it can be written down (V,16). No wonder then that art avoids reality: "that all-powerful fire which warms the visionary brain, and lights the spirits through unworldly tracts" (VII,6). In cap and bells, Tristram proves that things are not what they are, in reverse, by insisting on the absurd notion that whiskers are whiskers and noses are noses (V,1). By using real things as symbols of what they are not, metaphor contradicts reality. Thus nature follows art: Toby and Trim cannot fortify or destroy what they have not first read: "my uncle Toby, with Trim behind him, sallied forth;--the one with the Gazette in his hand,--the other with a spade on his shoulder to execute the contents" (VI,22).

Thus Tristram must begin to mourn Toby's death even before he "arrive at" the "page" where he shall do so:

--Gracious powers! which erst have opened the lips of the dumb in his distress, and made the tongue of the stammerer speak plain--when I shall arrive at this dreaded page, deal not with me, then, with a stinted hand.

(VI,24.)

With facetious irony, Tristram confuses the real time in which an author digresses from his writing with the fictitious time lived by his characters, and this again with the sequence and shape the narrative gives its events: "I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could,--and am not yet born" (I,14). The point is that it is the critics, who insist on the unity of time (as against digression), that commit these confusions. This erroneous doctrine of the unity of time having come from a
misapprehension of drama, from the illusion of real time afforded by the dramatic stage, in one passage Tristram pretends to impose the unity of time by dropping a curtain (IV,13). But making a drama of the novel is after all only a part of Tristram's agenda of bringing in all of the arts and sciences in silent digression. A human being's relation to his or her hobby-horse is somewhat like the relation of body and soul: they are not divided, they do communicate, and in spite of the "Sceptic" the hobby-horse does move, whatever "the world" may think, as is proven by the way "my uncle Toby mounted him with so much pleasure, and he carried my uncle Toby so well" (I,24). And so it is that "the arts and sciences befriend each other" (II,17). Hence Yorick's use of musical terms to describe his sermons (VI,11) and Tristram's pun on musical and literary "notes" (IV,25).

When Tristram describes his father as having "reddened, pictorially and scientifically speaking, six whole tints and a half, if not a full octave above his natural colour" (III,5) he is both defending the unity of art and science (and incidentally the synaesthesia between painting and music) and at the same time deploring the reduction of art to science that comes out of separating them. Walter's "weakness" such that "he was hourly a dupe to his . . . oratory" (V,3) comes from the separation in his mind between art and science: he would know better how they differ, and when art had carried him away from science, if he didn't arrogantly assume himself to be a man of pure science. Wit and judgment, says Tristram, are "indubitably both made and fitted to go together" and Locke's grave error in separating them "has been made the Magna Charta of stupidity ever since" (III,20). Body and soul, person and hobby-horse, straight line and digression, art and science are useful distinctions but are to be used thoughtfully not mechanically. Walter's violence is a form of that Lockean stupidity, for example when he is seen destroying Erasmus's literal sense with a penknife, in order to get at his "mystic meaning" (III,37).

Tristram's theory of the Unconscious occurs in a passage where he speaks of the "sixth sense" and says "There's often no good understanding betwixt . . . the brain [and] the heart". It is in this moment, of division, that he says, "I felt as if I understood" (IV,1). The distinction is ignored by Walter and all others who assume they are completely rational, but it would be very helpful to them. A society based on reason, however, would be a cruel one, based on dominance. Which is what Walter believes in. But Walter owes his life to the Unconscious. Not that whimsical behaviour itself can save him: his whimsy is no release from his whimsical distresses (III,30). He entered a suicidal despair after writing the Life of Socrates, which caused him to retire from business (V,12,13). But again and again what saves his life is to imagine himself in control of something, or in some other way to distract himself unconsciously from his feelings. Tristram on the other hand vows he never will join "the army of martyrs", and makes a comparison between Socrates and Hamlet that does not flatter either of them (V,11,13). Tristram's hero of course is Yorick rather than Hamlet; is Yorick a more tragic figure than Hamlet, since Hamlet outlives him?--at any rate, Tristram's usual state mixes laughter and tears: " . . . My usual method of book-keeping, . . . with the disasters of life--[is] making a penny of every one of 'em as they happen to me--" and "a score of good cursed, bouncing losses, would have been as good as a pension to me" (VII,29).
Though not in control, Tristram is free, hence responsible for his own existence: for his own birth and the unlucky events connected to it, the flattening of his nose, his false naming, and all the life's misfortunes thus portended. The agreement between Tristram's parents that would have saved his nose ("My mother was to lay in, (if she chose it) in London") contains a clause that protects Walter against the expense in the case of "false cries and tokens . . . and yet, as reasonable as it was, I have ever thought it hard that the whole weight of the article should have fallen entirely, as it did, upon myself. . . . But I was begot and born to misfortunes: for my poor mother, whether it was wind or water--or . . . simply the mere swell of imagination and fancy in her", Tristram chooses to be born at the wrong moment, and there are false cries and tokens. It seems that the father has made Tristram: the father's definition and prognostication: " . . . Unhappy Tristram! child of wrath! child of decrepitude! interruption! mistake! and discontent!" (IV,19.) Therefore Tristram has chosen his father, as a part of choosing to be himself.

Chapter IV: The Silence Gathers

The time where we live, then, is a fiction created by ourselves. Tristram is a fictitious author: he forgives his reviewers, he says, "as long as I live or write (which in my case means the same thing)" (III,4), so dedicated a writer is he, for one thing, but, for another, of so tenuous an existence that it depends on the existence of his text. This conceit has been developing and develops: Tristram threatens to tear the next page out of his book (I,25); but is not the text already complete in the hands of the reader? There is an autobiographical fallacy here: if Tristram the author were present in the text he has created then he could yet be seen, crossing out words, shuffling pages. He does his best at times to persuade us that the craft of writing is a branch of mime or of dance:

And this moment that I last dipped my pen into my ink, I could not help taking notice what a cautious air of sad composure and solemnity there appeared in my manner of doing it.--Lord! how different from the rash jerks and hair-brained squirts thou are wont, Tristram, to transact it with in other humours--dropping thy pen--spurting thy ink about thy table and thy books--as if thy pen and thy ink, thy books and furniture cost thee nothing.

(III,28.)

Elsewhere, Tristram argues that the writing of a clean-shaven man is more youthful and of a clean man cleaner (IX,13). But if the theory of spurting as art is but an expressionistic fallacy, nevertheless art is a kind of autobiography and the writer is necessarily in the text: "Let us leave, if possible, myself--But 'tis impossible,--I must go along with you to the end of the work" (VI,20).

But when Tristram makes a fiction of the reader also, as well as the author, by writing her interruptions into the narrative and making them a part of it (IV,1), then she may feel the joke has gone too far. Yet it seems there is no limit to the game, when Tristram writes the missing chapter of the Tristra-pedia. Unlike the missing chapter of Tristram Shandy, which improves that book by being missing, the missing chapter of the Tristra-pedia improves this book by being supplied by Tristram, for it covers a topic dear to his father's heart, the disaster of Tristram's accidental circumcision, and takes exactly Walter's point of view, as Tristram proudly explains:
he himself wrote that remarkable chapter in the Tristra-pedia, which to me is the most original and entertaining one in the whole book . . . , the chapter Upon Sash-windows, with a bitter Philippic at the end of it, upon the forgetfulness of chamber-maids….in order to render the Tristra-pedia complete . . . .

(V,26.)

Yet if Tristram's chapter of Walter's book was not written by Walter, surely it cannot exist: Walter's book was written by Walter, not Tristram. Then it makes no difference whether the missing chapter (of the Tristra-pedia) is written or (of Tristram Shandy) is destroyed: they both do not exist.

But if the theory of art as spurting is wrong, what then of the theory of writing as struggling to keep silence (V,16)? By this theory, Tristram would be one of the most successful of authors, being a fictitious author, one who has in truth written nothing at all. Or perhaps Tristram is Lawrence Sterne, who so far as we can tell truly has written Tristram Shandy. They are both slender men dying of tuberculosis and possessed of a whimsical sense of humour; who can say they are not the same man, except for certain biographical points in Tristram Shandy which are presumably fictitious? Indeed struggle not to write and struggle to write seem alike to be fictitious. Two chapters (VIII,6,11) show Tristram struggling to write: in both he says he endures the present chapter with difficulty and only for the sake of the next. Why not tear up the difficult chapter and go on to the pleasant one? The answer must be that he cannot; if he could, then the next chapter must become the present one, which it cannot do and remain the next one. It is a nightmare fiction in which Tristram is forced to dance a pattern laid down from the beginning of time. Worse still, the second of the difficult chapters is followed not by the pleasant one expected but by another difficult one.

In another place, it is the present chapter that is pleasant, an interlude of freedom, because there is a plan for the next chapter, namely, a digression. However, Tristram wastes his freedom, in the present chapter, by returning to the theme of the previous chapter. And then, when he arrives at the next chapter, he discovers that he has already enjoyed the pleasure of the digression, in anticipating it (IX,13,14,15): "How our pleasures slip from under us in this world!" (IX,15.) But perhaps it is only to be expected that the chapters of a fictitious author be fictitious too. The chapter for example that begins the previous chapter over again (VI,34) is the previous chapter: here we have another regression to infinity. Another chapter (VIII,4) begins over again the previous but one, except that the opening sentence when it appears for the second time is dressed in quotation marks. These seem to imply a denial that the latter chapter is identical with the former. But denials are not necessarily to be believed: the chapter on sleep denies its own existence and is a digression from this denial ("I wish I could write a chapter upon sleep", IV,15). The chapter (VIII,2) that Tristram begins over again later with a quotation of itself is a non-existent chapter because of a digression that entirely displaces it except for the first sentence, the only scrap of itself left to the chapter to quote in order to identify itself when it makes its reappearance, or first appearance, or reincarnation.

The complications of the question of being open up again when Tristram withdraws a promised chapter (V,8): there must be a special limbo for this chapter for it has been
called into being by the promise that it will appear, the withdrawal notwithstanding. A
text is a static phenomenon, a perfect whole, it does not change before our eyes. This and
other conventional assumptions too Tristram attacks as false structures pretending to
support a false "reason" and "reality" that are mere conventions. Yorick's "BRAVO",
deleted by being scored through, yet not deleted, but printed with the line across it, is a
text changing before our eyes: it is Yorick's expression of approval of his own sermon,
and his withdrawal of approval, and Tristram produces it as example of Yorick's modesty
(VI,11); yet it changes as we watch, for the self-praise becomes after all quite visible
through the crossing-out, and the modesty disappears again. Similarly, when Tristram
writes "further this chapter sayeth not" (VI,18) he writes a sentence that deletes itself yet
still is plainly visible, for it both refers to the chapter to which it belongs and denies that
it belongs.

When Tristram leaves two chapters blank and then places the omitted chapters within
another, six chapters further on, he commits the regression to infinity redundantly, to
many infinities, and creates noughts within noughts (IX,18-19,25). He also confuses real
with fictitious time by explaining that he was unable to write chapters eighteen and
nineteen until he had written chapter twenty-five. Of course we care not in what order he
writes his chapters provided he shuffles his papers adequately afterward. And so, clearly
he does not mean "write" in the ordinary sense: he means, create that fixed and
permanent entity the text. For he believes, he says, that his way of tangling up his
narrative is "a lesson to the world, 'to let people tell their stories their own way'" (IX,25).
This means that the text is complete and without error. It is perfect. Tristram defends
even the blankness of the blank chapters: "I look upon a chapter with only nothing in it,
with respect; and considering what worse things there are in the world--That it is no way
a proper subject for satire" (IX,25). This means that even the lengthy text where the title
"The Story of the King of Bohemia and his Seven Castles" (and the same, "Continued")
is repeated seven times but the story never told, is without error and perfect (VIII,19).

Nothing is not digression, and digression is perfect. The digression that illustrates this
point is the self-contained digression: this is the story of Trim's theft and vandalism of
the heirloom jack-boots to make mortars for a siege. This story fizzles, it has no issue,
oblivion swallows it because Walter's anger vanishes instantly and he forgives Toby and
Trim out of his love of their love: "the zeal and simplicity of Trim--and the generous
(though hobby-horsical) gallantry of my uncle Toby, brought him into perfect good-
humour with them in an instant" (III,22). This dead end is the more anti-climactic and
surprising because the tale of the mortars is so carefully prepared for in the tale of the
creaking hinges and even in Toby and Walter's snooze and the belated preface. A
variation of the self-contained digression is the digression within a digression: the
introduction of a foreign text, in a foreign language, and expressive of a foreign train of
thought. These silent or blank passages exclude themselves in several ways from their
context. Some three pages of legal jargon Tristram quotes in full although they can be
paraphrased "In three words--'My mother was to lay; (if she chose it) in London" (I,15).
Another long digressive quotation, this one in French ecclesiastical legalese, appears five
chapters further on: this quotation, also, could be paraphrased in a few words (I,20).
The foreign language footnote is a special case of this kind of blank digression, since the special position of the footnote both within and outside of the page of text seems partly to invite the reader to ignore it (IV, "Slawkenbergius", Latin footnotes; IV,10, French footnote). The spurious footnote seems to pervert the function of footnotes, which is conventionally to help; yet the idea is not seriously to mislead the reader, but instead merely to share a joke with her; the joke that has the fictitious author Tristram be the real author, mediated to the reader by an editor (Sterne?--II,19,VII,26). The spurious footnote then seriously implies the alarming suggestion, about the whole digressive structure of the text of *Tristram Shandy*, that it is entirely if not spurious mystifying. The whole experience of *Tristram Shandy* for the reader, entertaining, edifying, or whatever, is one of solving mysteries, another on each page. For when Tristram boasts that he does not think (IX,12) what he means is that he is not methodical, not systematic, that he avoids repetition, seeks spontaneity, creativity: "I begin with writing the first sentence--and trusting to Almighty God for the second" (VIII,2). The whole book, being digressive, is in a sense blank, requiring that the reader fill it with herself.

For Tristram himself is a kind of blank: "... My pen... governs me,--I govern not it" (VI,6). There is no freedom of the will; whim is Destiny. The pen jumps about, squirting, pulling Tristram after it, a helpless puppet. I have mentioned that *Tristram Shandy* is an infinite book; it also contains an infinite chapter, "the chapter of Things" (IV,32). Arguing that he does not commit digression, Tristram promises to follow the chapter of Things with "the chapter upon Whiskers, in order to keep up some sort of connection in my works" (IV,32). At infinity, all things are connected. Chaos is a perfect unity. Toby rejects both history and philosophy (V,3), as also does Tristram's mother (V,14). This embracing of the concrete and particular in the present is the highest wisdom. Toby cares nothing for logical consistency: unconvinced by Walter's argument against the existence of evil (V,3), he nevertheless is sorry for the Devil, that he is "cursed and damned" (III,11). Walter invites Toby to "calculate... the chances [which] the events of this world lay open to us"; Toby retorts "I know no more of calculation than this baluster", by chance striking Walter on the shin, with his crutch, instead of the baluster; by chance, Toby demonstrates that chance is a sudden blow, not a calculation (IV,9).

It is an amazing tour de force that so clear a writer as Tristram (Sterne) may be so digressive and blank. For it is always completely clear how the silences are to be understood. Tristram's spurious instructions in reading the black page (it is emblematic of mourning for Yorick, I,12), the white (for the reader to fill with the most "concupiscible" image of woman he can generate, VI,38), and the marbled (emblem of Tristram's "motley" costume, III,36) are no obstacle to their true and correct understanding, which is the point that black is as "blank" as white, and marbled as much so as either. Silence is eloquent. That Conscience, for example, is silent in the dispute between Protestant and Catholic is a rebuke of the bigoted Papist (II,16). Mrs. Shandy's "way... never to refuse her assent and consent to any proposition my father laid before her, merely because she did not understand it... [which] broke the neck, at first setting out, of more good dialogues between them, than could have done the most petulant contradiction" tells Walter more about what is wrong with his idea of a "good dialogue"
than he would be prepared to hear in his lifetime (IX,11). Toby's silence when he and Trim march back up to Mrs. Wadman's door, Trim prepares to knock, but "My uncle Toby, contrary to his invariable way of treating his faithful servant, said nothing good or bad", is more eloquent of his pain than any words could be.

Rubenius's silence on hooks and eyes Walter interprets as support for his own position on the issue (VI,19): so silence is more vulnerable to abuse than is sound, easier to misunderstand deliberately. Toby defends war as resistance of the "ambitious and the turbulent" by the "quiet and harmless" (VI,32). Unfortunately there is an undemocratic element within Toby's theory, for he says also that war's object [is] to shorten the strides of Ambition, and intrench the lives and fortunes of a few, from the plunderings of the many" (IX,8). Keeping silence is a luxury for the socially privileged. And war is an admittedly noisy affair: loud incoherent exclamations coming from Toby and Trim while thoughts of war excite them cause Yorick to draw "his chair a little to one side for safety", almost as if a real battle were in progress (V,21). Oddly, though, the noisy exclamations are silent too, for they are nonsensical. Yet neither Toby, Trim, nor Tristram defends the slaughter itself. Tristram's sympathetic portrait of Toby and Trim contains a protest against the neglect of the old soldier by society, and Tristram allows Toby to say "The best hearts, Trim, are ever the bravest" (VI,13), and "Pity is a-kin to love,--and bravery no alien to it" (VI,29), and that the brave respect the fortune of war and are kindly toward the conquered (IX,6). The old soldier is a member of the underprivileged class who receives Tristram's sympathy: with the Peace of Utrecht, Toby's hobby-horse "flung him--and somewhat viciously", and Toby enters the road to heartbreak.

Part of the reason for Toby's heartbreak is the confusion generally, regarding love, in the world, which has "half a dozen words for one thing" (VIII,4). Another part is the world's hypocrisy regarding it, of which the fictitious author Slawkenberghius stands as example: he claims to know what women desire in marriage, but when he should be telling takes refuge in the silence of a metaphor (IX,21). Confusion and hypocrisy are two kinds of silence that, first, cause Toby to enter a love relationship with Mrs. Wadman unprepared, and, second, to flee it in shock and pain when he might be expected to begin to delight in it. "The world" cares too little about the brevity of life, and Tristram writes one of his tiny, silent chapters to express through its brevity how little he cares in turn for "the world" (IX,8-9). The brevity of the chapter mimics--the device is dramatic rather than literary--the little value being assigned. Elsewhere Tristram complains at greater length against human carelessness: "--Inconsistent soul that man is!--languishing under wounds, which he has the power to heal!--" (and so forth, III,21). He accuses himself, as well as "the world":

Inconsiderate soul that thou art! What! are not the unavoidable distresses with which, as an author and a man, thou art hemmed in on every side of thee--are they, Tristram, not sufficient, but thou must entangle thyself still more?

(VIII,6.)

Yet, like Toby, who, killer as he may have been is now as innocent as a small boy playing at soldier, Tristram as author is as innocent as a fictitious person must be. The
lies he tells hurt no one. The title of the Sermon appears twice, first at the head of the digression that interrupts it before it can begin (II,17): it is a lying title; yet the second time it appears it tells the truth, although it is also the same title as before. It is the same and not the same, like the world of *Tristram Shandy* and our own. Tristram is innocent in our world, but in his own world he causes himself pain. He is of but not in the world, we know him but could not meet him on the street. Chapter Eleven in the fictitious book by Ernulphus corresponds exactly to Chapter Eleven in the real book *Tristram Shandy* (III,11). Real and unreal texts, universes, intersect; the real book written by Sterne and the unreal book written by Tristram touch at all points, are identical though of different universes. When Tristram gives his reader "half a day to give a probable guess" as to the next part of the narrative (I,10), are we to feel obliged to lay down the book for half a day whether we wish to play the guessing-game or not, or may we feel the time has passed within the narrative, and that we are not ourselves obliged to observe it?

Tristram takes refuge in his non-existent world, behind his silences, from the cruelties of the world. A balance is needed in a book, he says, between wisdom and folly (IX,12). Cap and bells: such a balance could not be wise, would have to be foolish. The satire throughout *Tristram Shandy* of the learned and dignified is a warning that to lose one's sense of humour is to lose one's intelligence. The absurdity of learned argument in general is typified by the argument that "the mother is not related to the child" (IV,29). And then there are the fools who believe the "knowledge and goodness" of a certain child prove he is the Antichrist (VI,2). Cruelty comes from stupidity. In a mock harangue of the learned and dignified, Tristram swears "by the knowledge of the great saint Paraleipomenon" that only by application of great learning will the "truths . . . mystically hid" in his black and his marbled pages be revealed (III,36). "Paraleipomenon" is silence; that which is omitted. Walter claims of his scheme of education by "thesis and hypothesis" that "The force of this engine . . . is incredible in opening a child's head--'Tis enough, brother Shandy, cried my uncle Toby, to burst it into a thousand splinters" (VI,2). After the accidental circumcision, Walter appears carrying not the practical, kindly and expected herbal but the book of rules governing circumcisions (V,27).

Toby's characteristic "argument" is what Tristram names the *Argumentum Fistulatorium* (I,21), the whistling of "Lillabullero", a gentle but telling silence, impossible to ignore. Sign and signal bear simple messages. But when Toby both insists that the Excommunicatio be read aloud and insists upon whistling throughout the performance he is saying something fairly complex: he is demanding that the cruelty of the curse be witnessed and at the same time that he be allowed to register his protest. When Walter prevails upon Toby only to think his "Lillabullero" instead of whistling it, during the learned argument that the mother is not related to the child, because Walter has "a great desire to hear more of so curious an argument", Toby, in making himself content with an inner, private protest, is retreating into a fiction within a fiction. Of course Toby cannot know he is already in a fiction before he invents his fictions for himself, any more than Tristram can know that he never really was "brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours" (I,5) or that his mad flight from (Death) "the man with his gun" (VII,43) never takes place. As far as Tristram knows, his suffering is as real as anyone's
in the real world. But Toby's "Lillabullero" is already a silence, an implied protest only: a silent "Lillabullero" is only a little more silent than a whistled one.

In the second of the two blank chapters that do not appear until seven and six chapters later (IX,19), "Lillabullero" is printed out in full, words and music. The part of the blank chapter in which the song appears, namely, at the end, is the part in the printed out version (IX,25) where Toby has proposed marriage to Mrs. Wadman, been met with silence, and picking up a Bible has begun to read his favourite passage, on the Siege of Jericho: that is, Toby has entered his uncomfortable, silent place, where some part of him is making a silent "Lillabullero" protest, while another is finding what comfort it can in Scripture. "Lillabullero", then, is in a place so deep and quiet that it does not enter the narrative (Chapter 25) but surfaces instead in the blank chapter (19), which touches that place so exactly that it prints the whole song, which narrative would not do, for song would digress from narrative. "Lillabullero" is divided from itself, somewhat like the divided sin: the abbess and the novice divide between them the pronunciation of the words "******" and "******" without which the mules will not budge, thus dividing the venial sin between them, and it "in course becomes diluted into no sin at all" (VII, 20-25). (The asterisks represent words in the French language and thus are doubly silent.) "Lillabullero" singing itself in Toby's unconscious exists and does not exist.

It is when Toby sends Trim to the garret for asterisks (IX,20) that they come their closest to being real things, real at least in the world of Tristram Shandy. Yet throughout this novel the silent symbols of the conventional printer's code struggle to speak, to break out into language or even concrete reality, to digress from and transgress against the conventional forms of narrative and print. Conventionally, asterisks silence or darken secret or risky passages; unexpectedly, Tristram says his asterisks are "the stars . . . which . . . I hang up in some of the darkest passages" (VI,33). Of course, all that the reader need do is count the asterisks to identify the risky word they replace. Another printer's device that threatens to become a real thing is the series of lines across the page that follows the narrative statement "my uncle Toby hummed over the letter": these lines seem redundant, they repeat what the narrative has set out; perhaps they are a pictorial illustration of some kind; perhaps they encode the humming, on the basis that is is "flat" (V,2). Then they become less metaphorical and more concrete as they begin to suggest letters of the alphabet that have been squashed flat because Toby is only humming the letter not reading it aloud; and then they suggest the straight line of Toby's closed mouth, humming. Pictorially there is an analogy between the open look of alphabetical characters and the open mouth.

The printer's symbols silently interrupt the text because they belong to symbolic codes other than printed English and suggest art forms other than the written. In the statement (and more than statement) that Dr. Slop "crossed himself + --" (II,9) the pictorial cross symbol redundantly repeats what the text has said in English, setting up a digression, a diversion, and a subversion. The diagrams of digression (VI,40) are interesting doodles and contribute much to the bizarre and unusual look of Tristram Shandy but tell us nothing about digression as a flaw or as a beauty in literature. Instead, they tell us about the fear of criticism suffered by the spirit of creativity, the power of criticism to kill
creativity, and the power of creativity to spring back to life after death by criticism. Tristram pretends to be so frightened of criticisms of his digressions that he must produce false scientific diagrams to prove that he really is doing something about the digressions and has all but eliminated them. The printer's symbols though neither literary nor verbal have nevertheless as much power as words themselves to express themselves as clearly as they need to in various contexts. Asterisks--and a dash--express the "private reasons" of the ministers of state (VI,34): the dash quite unnecessarily punctuates the asterisks as if they were words arranged in sentences, but then the asterisks too are unnecessary according to the rule previously followed in asterisk use, for here they mask not something in the text and its world but something in the fictitious world that is behind the text and already masked by it. The asterisks merely repeat in a visual signal what is already said by the words "private reasons". Not content with saying that the ministers kept their reasons a secret, Tristram must keep them a secret too, with asterisks. This deliberate confusion of fiction with reality, like the many others, shows the spirit of creativity showing itself, showing that it has nothing else that it need do. Everyone knows the difference between fiction and reality, no labour is required to show that.

Everyone already knows what Tristram tells before he tells it, yet is delighted with the telling. The chapter upon chapters demonstrates the silence of the self-reference of art: So much for my chapter upon chapters, which I hold to be the best chapter in my whole work; and take my word, whoever reads it, is full as well employed, as in picking straws.

(IV,10.)

Like Licetus the foetus, the homunculus who grew to such a height in literature that he wrote a book with a title as long as himself (IV,10), the spirit of creativity silently gestures toward itself. The "Plain Stories" pun (VII,43) is an aposiopesis, for, although it suggests that stories can speak but plains cannot, what it keeps silent about is that stories cannot speak either. On the other hand, in the story about Tristram's remarks dropped, lost, and found (VII,36-8) it is obvious enough that although remarks can be spoken or written they cannot speak. Yet such is the versatility of the silent symbol that many symbolic systems can collaborate, even while interrupting and digressing from one another, or telling a story such as the story of the accident with the sash (V,17), which is told in asterisks, doubles entendres (e.g., "well hung"), and ordinary language.

When Tristram modestly declines the challenge of describing the innkeeper's beautiful daughter, on the grounds that to do so would be to lose a contest with the great Reynolds (Tristram pretends to believe writing and painting are the same thing), he gestures silently instead toward the "original" of the unpainted verbal portrait, whom the reader must travel to Montreuil to see (VII,9). Thus the reader's journey to Montreuil becomes part of Tristram Shandy, together with the rest of the infinitude of things. Truth then is in the silence of the gesture: the "Humph" argument that Toby and Dr. Slop both use against each other with equal effectiveness although its use by each is perfectly understood by the other (II,17); the eloquent stick and hat of Trim (V,7). In the "singular stroke of eloquence" whereby the thing is produced instead of the word for it (III,14) the proof of the argument is that the thing springs so readily to hand: the whole world of things is so structured as to support these words in this present moment. (Although in fact this kind
of eloquence is mere juggling; and Tristram blames the decay of eloquence on the going out of fashion of voluminous clothing in which things can be concealed by orators who plan ahead.)

But perhaps the silent world of things has more to say than the speaking person; the critics seem to think so, with their "heads . . . stuck . . . full of rules and compasses" (III,12). Trim seems to think so, when he shakes the book to see if a wind-chariot falls out (II,15). Walter's mechanistic philosophy is a philosophy of silence: his ideas about names and noses have them act on the world by brute force, no thinking or persuading here. Of course, even when at his most verbal and persuasive, Walter is trying to force an opponent to submit, as his careful gestures sometimes suggest, bringing the physical world into his rhetoric when possible: "laying the three first fingers of his right-hand in the palm of his left, and stooping a little", then "holding fast his fore-finger betwixt his finger and his thumb" (IV,6-7). On the other hand, in telling this tale Tristram shows Walter's mechanism and materialism to be inefficual, for here again the writer digresses into the other arts, of "Raffael" and "Garrick" (IV,7). Thus Trim, who is no tyrant, is aware of the elements of dance mime and music in his oratorical gift and uses his hand and opposite arm to support "the sportable key of his voice, which gave sense and spirit to his tale" (IX,6).

The alphabet itself is proof of the eloquence of things, and Tristram pays honour to the alphabet when he makes a list in alphabetical order of adjectives describing love (VIII,13). Lists themselves make up an important category of digressions in Tristram Shandy, and this alphabetical list in particular shows how the whole world of things pays homage to the tyrant Love. Trim's gesture with his stick shows better than words, better than "a thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms", how preferable is Liberty to the tyranny of Love: the printer's flourish, which represents perfectly Trim's gesture, has then all of this power (IX,4). More power than the alphabet? No; all symbolic systems are of equal power; all symbols are of equal power and exactly as required by context. It is just that Toby is very much moved by this moment, of Trim's gesture and other things. Not the symbol but the feelings are of greater or less power. Tristram avoids using he says the "pedantic Fescue" (I,21): he seems to be saying that to point to the symbol one is using, as well as using it, that is, to insist on the truth of what one is saying, as well as telling truth, is pedantic, tyrannical, attempts to double the power of the symbol by adding another symbol on top of it. Yet the printer's hand is a favourite device of Tristram's (II,12,17,etc.), not only in parody of the tyranny he condemns but even in self-parody, for to condemn anything is itself to become tyrannical. Overtly the pointing symbol, fescue or finger, has no function but to point; however, all symbols point outwards from their centres in all directions toward everything, toward infinity.

Unlike the series of asterisks which hide the ministers' private reasons, the series of exactly one dozen dashes which hide either Tristram's suppositions or his choice not to suppose do not tell us what they are hiding (V,10). There are always new silences to explore. Tristram's demonstration of how phrases may be inserted "betwixt two crooks, thus [    ]" (VI,31) is a false demonstration, it demonstrates nothing, for nothing is inserted between the crooks. In Tristram's printed text of the Sermon, the words "Cases"
and "Reports" appear in black-letter, although the form the Sermon takes in the narrative is that of a handwritten text read aloud by Trim (II,17). Black-letter does not exist in either oral or handwritten language, but Tristram is using it in the print version to express the idea of legalistic stuffiness. The printed version of the same text here interrupts and digresses from the handwritten and oral versions included in the narrative. Print adds an editorial dimension, as indeed does handwriting, oral language, the human voice, body english. A line across the page with the command "Shut the door" injected into it (I,4) stops neither reader nor writer from travelling onward down the page; there is no door, no prohibition, no inhibition. There is no mediation: there is simply a chaotic fugue of all symbolic systems raising their voices at once. Something of the kind Tristram seems to say with his verbal fiddle music ("prut--trut": V,15), his nonsense music from the fool's cap made of scraps of sol-fa, echoic words, and puns, arranged in a stanza (VII,26).

Of the other experiments with the stanza or monument form, this is perhaps the simplest:

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Vexation
upon
Vexation
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(VII,30.)

The words, one sees, are piled up like the "vexations" they represent. Piling up words also helps tell of the tragedy of the Two Lovers, Amandus and Amanda, because they, and their griefs, are so similar that they look like harmony in music (VII,31). On the other hand, piling up can also demonstrate difference, as in:

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My father's ass
and my hobby-horse .
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(VIII,31.)

Or a resemblance so great that it is unimaginable that the phrases could occupy separate spaces in a series, so piling them up gives them a look of simultaneity:

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Zeal or Anger--or
Anger or Zeal--
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(VIII, 2. )

Thus Tristram expresses his utter contempt for both anger and zeal. The piling up of

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The
Reviewers
Of
My Breeches
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(VII,32)

expresses Tristram's contempt for the reviewers, not only in making them a gift of his breeches, but in suggesting they are a monumental pile like the words that indicate them. (These are the breeches that have caused the accident with the osier, in which the "Out upon it!" has had to be replaced, and was "Out upon" the page.)