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**STERNŮV *TRISTRAM SHANDY*: PRVKY
POSTMODERNISMU V ROMÁNĚ Z 18. STOLETÍ**

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Undergraduate Thesis

**STERNE'S *TRISTRAM SHANDY*: POSTMODERNIST
FEATURES OF THE 18TH CENTURY NOVEL**

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Plzeň 2011

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ABSTRACT

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The subject of this bachelor thesis is the British novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–1767) written by Laurence Sterne. This work endeavours to introduce this novel but in a very specific point of view. Many contemporary theorists consider *Tristram Shandy* as an exceptional literary work which had outrun its times by whole two hundred years. The reason for this assumption of theirs is the fact that this novel embodies very innovative and unrestrained characteristics which are very similar to those which can be found in postmodernist literature of the late 20th century. On account of that, Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is often labelled as a postmodernist novel. This statement is a basis for this entire work, which establishes the two core objectives. The first one is to identify and to describe these presupposed postmodernist features within the novel itself. Its second purpose is to attempt to deliver a satisfactory answer whether or not it is possible to label this novel as a postmodernist one on the condition that it was written whole two hundred years before the term "postmodernism" itself was invented. In order to fulfil these two intentions, this work provides: 1) concise information on postmodernist literature, especially on its formal aspects; 2) a literary analysis of *Tristram Shandy* against the knowledge background about postmodernist literature; and 3) an underpinned contradictory point of view maintaining that regarding *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodernist work is wrong and misleading.

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INTRODUCTION

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman (or more briefly *Tristram Shandy*) is the first novel of a British writer and clergyman Laurence Sterne (1713–1768). Together with the works of such great writers as Daniel Defoe, Samuel Richardson, Henry Fielding and Tobias Smollet, this nine-volume novel represents one of the founding works of British novel-writing tradition. The individual volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were published in sequence between the years 1759–1767, and the first two of them gained Sterne almost immediate popularity and celebrity among the reading public in England and France, and afterwards even in further European countries. *Tristram Shandy* is not Sterne's only work. Besides, he is also known for his another novel, *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy* (1768), which is written in a very similar way to his first novel, yet it is less eccentric, more straightforward and also less influential. Furthermore, Sterne as a vicar wrote many sermons, which were published in a collection called *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (1760). In the winter one year before his death, he started to keep an illegitimate love-affair with Mrs. Eliza Draper, whom he dedicated his letters to; they were posthumously published under a title *Letters from Yorick to Eliza* (1773). Nonetheless, *Tristram Shandy* is the most outstanding and the most significant work of Sterne's, and this novel represents not only a supreme life work of his but at the same time a milestone for the British literature as a whole.

Although the novel is obviously finished and counts almost six hundred pages in its first edition, its storyline still seems to be unclosed in some respect. In view of that, it is very uneasy to deliver any satisfactory summary of the plot. However, instead of the question what *Tristram Shandy* is about, it is more essential to ask where the great exceptionality of it lies in. *Tristram Shandy* has so far become a subject of a careful consideration of many literary critics and theorists. What is the exact reason for this imperishable attention of theirs? First of all, it is a fresh and lusty sense of humour, which could be felt from its each page; and secondly, it is a peculiar, very innovative way of writing, which Sterne was not afraid to fully dispose of. The following part attempts to render at least a general conception of *Tristram Shandy*.

As the full title of the novel reads, the reader would expect to learn something about experiences of the main character, which would be inwrought with his thoughts, attitudes and views. Nevertheless, the contrary is the case, and the fact that our hero and the narrator in one

person will not be born until the third volume testifies that very plainly. Even though the narrator starts to relate his story literally from the outset of his conception, his discursive thinking results in a number of incredible digressions, which have hardly anything in common with his life and so far with his opinions. As Tristram attempts to reveal his life to us, he wanders from a moment of him being begotten, through the contemplation of an influence of a name or of the shape of nose on one's character, to a depiction of untying half a dozen hard knots. In the same way, the style of narration continues throughout the whole book. While the narrator interlaces his narrative with many additional amusing stories about other characters, with a series of philosophical musings in a more or less humorous tone, with several sermons, or furthermore, with a tale by Sterne's fictional German writer; the main character is placed more and more in the background of the whole of it. Thus the book, seemingly primarily dedicated to a gentleman Tristram Shandy, eventually abounds with many other different heroes; paradoxically, more than with Tristram himself.

Fortunately, in any case this does not mean negative consequences to the novel as such. Conversely, it sustains its attractiveness for the reader because these characters are depicted very skilfully with such a hearty sense of human weaknesses. Sterne thus creates many entertaining colourful characters, which with the peculiarities of their own, must be nothing but loved by the reader. It would be a great mistake not to introduce at least few of them. The most amusing character is a figure of Tristram's uncle Toby. His greatest hobby-horse is to reconstruct over and over again, or at least to constantly talk about, the siege of Namur, where he suffered his war-wound, which is very close to a secret part of his body. Moreover, the greatness of uncle Toby's lies in his warm-heartedness and bashfulness bordering almost on naivety but in the best sense. Another figure which merits to be taken in notice is Tristram's father, Walter Shandy. His serious philosophizing about subjects that are far from being serious and vital for a common life makes his character very eccentric and comic as well.

Furthermore, as the content of *Tristram Shandy* is very heterogeneous and always humorous and playful, the same may be observed even more clearly within its form. By this, the uniqueness of this novel also consists in Sterne's unrestrained experiments with the structure of novel. The arrangement of this novel disrupts all traditional conventions, which usually facilitate the organization of any narrative into an intelligible, meaningful discourse. These following examples may perfectly illustrate this consciously disturbed storyline: the

dedication placed within the 18th chapter, the author's preface occurring within the 20th chapter of the third book, a deliberate omission of one of its chapters and its additional appearance over several chapters further, the insertion of blank pages, or paragraphs consisting only of asterisks or dashes. In addition to that, Sterne is also known for his original exploitation of both conceivable and implausible means of typography. On account of that, the two black and marbled pages, the special layout of the text, the use of footnotes and diagrams is nothing unusual in *Tristram Shandy*.

Along with all of that, it is important to realize that *Tristram Shandy* had originated in the times when the novel in general was at its entire beginnings as a newly established literary genre; and, as stated by Spacks, "the novel in its newness enjoyed few rules of composition" (18). In spite of this, it almost may seem that Sterne in his *Tristram Shandy* tampers, at least a bit, even these few rules. Nonetheless, it is fairly in accordance with many literary critics and theorists, who are aware of its great extraordinariness. For example, a Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky labels *Tristram Shandy* as "the most typical novel in world literature" (qtd. in Neubauer and Stewart 275). The reason for this quite shockingly resolute statement is the fact that, according to Neubauer and Stewart:

It [*Tristram Shandy*] openly displayed the characteristics of the genre, stringing together all sorts of materials and applying devices for their own sake without even seriously pretending to tell a story. *TS*, we may say, simply did what all novels do, only it did so unashamedly, in broad daylight, which made it the quintessential novel, the most authentic, and thus the most 'typical'. (276)

What is more, this view that *Tristram Shandy* embraces in itself all techniques ever existing in novel-writing and flaunts it openly has inspired a lot of literary academics to propose the idea that Sterne and his masterpiece *Tristram Shandy*, especially, embody a sort of foretaste of postmodernism. As Patricia M. Spacks asserts, this novel is "a diverting, wilful, rule-breaking work that bears few obvious similarities to other fiction of its own period or to anything else before postmodern inventions" (254); or that its playfulness "foretells that of postmodernism" (276).

Eventually, this brings us to the subject of this bachelor thesis. It is based on the assumption that Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* dated back to the second half of the 18th century displays numerous characteristics typical of postmodernist writings of recent times. On account of that, the aim of this work is to

recognize, define and assort these putative postmodernist features ascribed to *Tristram Shandy* – to the novel, which had been written whole two hundred years before the own term of postmodernism has originated. Afterwards, on the grounds of the analysis of this novel of Sterne's, it attempts to deliver an answer whether or not *Tristram Shandy* is comparable to postmodernist literature as such, and thus if it is possible to consider this particular novel as a postmodernist one.

Along with that, it needs to be said that this writing focuses not on all postmodernist aspects of the novel but only on formal ones. Generally, it discusses all the external qualities of the novel, such as its language, narrative techniques, or also the arrangement of its printed text. On the other hand, the work puts aside the question of postmodernism's relationship to *Tristram Shandy*'s content as well as to the circumstances which had led Sterne to compose this extraordinary novel. The reason for this decision is that all of these elements have a very strong and close connection to a historical context of the 18th century. In other words, between the age of postmodernism and that of Sterne's there is a gap of two centuries. Then, it could be expected that also the culture, the philosophy, the social setting typical of each age differs, too. For example, the purposes, the motives, and the inspirations of both, postmodernist and the 18th century novels are established on diametrically disparate spiritual, cultural, social and political bases. Consequently, this work seeks to detect and to describe particularly the formal postmodernist features of *Tristram Shandy*, while the functional differences or similarities shall be omitted.

As the work is focused on comparison of formal aspects between the novel *Tristram Shandy* and postmodernist literature as a whole, it is essential to refer to the first edition of the involved novel. The problem is that its different editions always represent at least a little departure from the original, what concerns mostly the field of typography. As it shall be demonstrated in this work, Sterne was really a pedant as for this matter because he designed an appearance of each page of his work, and supervised it with an eagle eye. According to Peter J. de Voogd, *Tristram Shandy* was thought as an aesthetic object, whose merits, however, dissolve in its bad modern editions as the original layout of the pages or the initial sizes of the font are modified (109). For the purpose of being as precise as possible, this bachelor thesis works with the publication which follows the first edition preserving Sterne's peculiar perfectionist typographical arrangements.

The work is divided into three main parts. The opening chapter is dedicated to postmodernism but principally to postmodernist literature alone with its own peculiarities. The most important moment of this passage is that describing the most recurrent techniques and formal attributes within postmodernist prose because on this entire knowledge, the following major part of this writing is based. The second chapter constitutes the key section of this entire work. The content of this part is based mostly on the work with the novel *Tristram Shandy* itself for it attempts to reveal within it the qualities which are thought to be characteristically postmodernist ones. All of these observed features are described and supplemented by several examples selected especially for the purpose of delivering the most apposite illustration as possible. The last chapter of this bachelor thesis is designed to present briefly a contradictory view on this discussed approach to *Tristram Shandy*. It is an idea that the conception of Sterne as a grandfather of postmodernism is very exaggerated and artificial. This opinion is rather important for this work because it has been defended by more and more supporters recently. Moreover, it bears a new different point of view on the relationship between *Tristram Shandy* and postmodernism in general. The conclusion of this work comprises a summary of postmodernist features distinguished in *Tristram Shandy*; and subsequently, on the basis of the conducted analysis, it attempts to bring the verdict on the question whether this extraordinary work of Sterne's may be entirely labelled as a postmodernist novel or not.

1 LITERATURE IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTMODERNISM

It is necessary for a proper apprehension of this bachelor thesis to achieve some level of awareness of postmodernist literature. A certain general knowledge about this subject helps to realize which postmodernist features Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* really possesses or not. Along with that, the main design of the following chapter is to introduce the most characteristic and the most important formal aspects recurrent within postmodernist literature. Nevertheless, it is also essential to gain a little information about postmodernist writing as such. This passage therefore, while depicting the formal characteristics of postmodernist literary works, also introduces very briefly postmodernist authors and their aims. In addition, these pieces of information are contextualised into postmodernism as a whole but this is done very generally and marginally. The reason for that is that postmodernist literature is a much wider topic than as it is presented here; and furthermore, it is not the principal subject of this work. In short, it must be highlighted that this chapter discusses postmodernist literature only in that extent necessary for being able to build on it in the second chapter, which embodies the major section of this work.

Firstly, it is important to define postmodernism as such. Postmodernism is one of the most influential artistic and intellectual movements of the second half of the 20th century, which have prevailed namely in highly technically and economically developed countries of Western world (Nicol 3). Butler states that postmodernism could be distinguished by its extremely radical incredulity towards all universal totalizing truths, which overshadow other different minor opinions. It struggles for recognition of these neglected points of view within those predominating ones, and thus calls into question all principles, which have been hitherto assumed as unshakeably truthful (15–6). It could be said that postmodernism wants us to be more sceptical, cautious and attentive about that what actually happens around us. In short, in postmodernist thought, nothing is always unambiguous, simply transparent, objective or unbiased; on the contrary, everything is invariably the matter of relative, subjective, individual and pluralistic point of view.

Despite this previous rather general delimitation of postmodernism, this movement as such has always been very ambiguous, and has raised a lot questions about itself. The reason is that postmodernism is very hard merely to be defined properly (Malpas 4). What makes the

situation difficult is that postmodernism has been involved in a wide range of areas, from vision arts, architecture, literature, to philosophy, sociology, history, political theory and also theory of science. Consequently, almost each theorist concerning the question of postmodernism, according to what the aims of their studies are, sees postmodernism's concept and its starting point more or less differently (Butler 2; Connor, "Introduction" 1– 2; Malpas 3–4; Nicol 1). Moreover, some authors even speak about postmodernism in plural in order to point out and emphasize the existence of numerous different forms of postmodernism. In accordance with that, Hans Bertens states in his book mapping the whole postmodernist history that the emergence of postmodernism happened in each branch individually in different speed, time and intensity (3-17). On all accounts, postmodernism appeared at the turn of the 1950s and the 1960s as an opposing reaction to contemporary modernist techniques (New 161; Sim 339–40) exploited in architecture, literature and painting; and had spread over the other fields of art including photography, film or dance, and also in the sphere of philosophy. In recent years, the same unclearness about postmodernism suits the question about postmodernism's actual stage. While some people claim that postmodernism is right by the turn towards its exhaustion or at least that it loses its influence (Nicol 2), the other ones see it still as a living phenomenon (Malpas 6). Yet, Connor and Simon Malpas agree to a certain extent that postmodernism reached its zenith throughout the years of late 1970s to the early 1990s (Connor, "Introduction" 1-2; Malpas 5).

From all of that it can be seen that postmodernism is surrounded by a lot of ambiguity. On the other hand, it is really inevitable to clarify all of those shadows above its definition and substantiality at least as for postmodernist literature. Unfortunately, the same what was said about difficulties of defining postmodernism could be said about characterizing postmodernist literature. Bran Nicol states that he personally "treats 'postmodern fiction' as a category which contains a number of different kinds of postmodern fiction, a range of *postmodernisms*, in fact, rather than alternative ways of expressing a single, unified postmodernism" (XV-XVI). On the other hand, there yet must be some principles enabling to label postmodernist fiction as *postmodernist* one; for how would we have ever known that the particular piece of literature is postmodernist one? In spite all of these foreshadowed confusions and obstacles, this chapter as a whole attempts to describe the most evident characteristics of postmodernist fiction,

which have proved themselves as the most commonly prevailing ones among postmodernist writings.

Nevertheless, before embarking in seeking of attributes of postmodernist fiction, it is convenient to introduce postmodernist literature very generally. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, postmodernist writing represented a core of the literary works of that time in Europe and the South and Northern America (Lewis 121–3). Among the well-known postmodernist authors are often ranked, for instance, Samuel Beckett, Salman Rushdie, Gunter Grass, Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Vladimir Nabokov, William Burroughs, Kurt Vonnegut, John Fowles or Thomas Pynchon. Postmodernist literature comprises many traditional literary genres, such as parody or mock allegory, but few of genres are peculiar only for postmodernism. These are *magic realism* (Butler 69; Nicol 121; Sim 310) that joints realistic atmosphere with magical elements; and *historiographic metafiction* (Butler 70; Hutcheon 105–23), which attempts to reconstruct a real history from different points of view and so create its alternative versions. Along with that, all postmodernist writers, no matter what genre they do prefer for their writings, share the same thoughts with other postmodernists (Butler 69). It is to show that there is nothing like an absolute truth what leads into higher incredulity towards everything what is perceived. Many theorists specify that the distinguishing element of postmodernist fiction is its inherent scepticism towards realism (Nicol 19). To put it differently, the effort of postmodernist authors is to show that the reality projected by the text does not have to be necessarily as transparent as it seems to be at first glance, and thus arise some degree of ontological suspicion towards the nature of the depicted reality (Butler 27). On account of that, it may seem that postmodernist fiction is strongly against realism but it is not the whole truth. The theorists agree that there is a sort of ambivalence towards realism rather than opposition. As McHale states, “...postmodernist fiction *does* hold the mirror up to reality; but that reality, now more than ever before, is plural” (39). Apropos, this corresponds to the general postmodernist trust in pluralism of beliefs and opinions. The last thing which needs to be mentioned is that, according to the preceding information, one might notice that all of the above stated authors and genres concern only the field of prose; and one would be right, at least nearly. Postmodernist writing really, but for a few exceptions, consists of works of fiction. Still, it is important to be aware that, according to Connor, postmodernist literature comprises also poetry and drama, though in a less significant

role (“Postmodernism and Literature” 66). However, with relevance to the topic of this bachelor thesis, this work is focused only on postmodernist fiction.

1.1 The Techniques of Postmodernist Fiction

In principle, postmodernist texts are very distinctively laboured in order to suit demanding postmodernist aims, what is also in accordance with the literary techniques applied within them. The amount of these literary techniques is infinite, ranging from traditional literary figures and tropes, such as alliteration, antithesis, metaphor or irony, to surprisingly shocking plays with the text and even with typography. Despite of that, this section attempts to deliver at least a list of those literary devices, which have been proved as peculiar ones for postmodernist fiction, or at any rate as often recurrent in it. With the intention of presenting a well-arranged and comprehensible summary of them, they have been divided into four groups according to their chief function within the postmodernist text. Nevertheless, this type of systematization is not as straightforward and uncomplicated as one could wish. Some techniques may be motivated by two or even more purposes at the same time, so they do not come under only one particular group. A perfect example of that is an unrestricted playfulness inherent in postmodernist literature. Playfulness is very natural for most of the postmodernist texts (Butler 5, 21–3; Malpas 28; Nicol 2). Postmodernist writers are aware of its power, and they use it in various ways and forms in order to: first, point out the ontological question of multiple realities which we live in; second, highlight the unreliability of language as a bare system of signs; third, demonstrate self-awareness of texts that they are nothing more than fictitious realities; and four, sustain the interaction with the readers. Accordingly, playfulness is really hard to be classified within the only one group of postmodernist techniques. Therefore, playfulness as a resulting effect of all intentions and strategies within postmodernist fiction is a common feature to all of the four groups. Consequently, the four classes of postmodernist techniques are named: playing with realities, playing with language, playing with printing and playing with reader.

Finally, there two things left to be said before proceeding to description of individual techniques and features of postmodernist writing. First, it is a notice that the following examples of postmodernist attributes are very largely, but not only, based on an influential work of Brian McHale’s, *Postmodernist Fiction*. This comparative study of postmodernist

works is one of the major publications concerning literary theory of postmodernist literature, and thus has become an inexhaustible source to many other writers dealing with the same topic.¹ The second and the last point is that it is necessary to clarify the terminology relating to postmodernism in order to foreclose any possible misunderstanding. According to Nicol, there is a great difference between the two problematic terms: “postmodern” and “postmodernist”. While the first one refers only to a period of time which is a part of our very recent history (or, as mentioned formerly, for some people postmodernism is still contemporaneousness); the latter one conveys the meaning of, in terms of Nicol, “a set of ideas developed from philosophy and theory and related to aesthetic production” (2). In other words, “postmodernist” signifies thoughts, assumptions and artistic strategies related to postmodernism as a whole but without the restriction of its time delimitation associated with its own specific social, political and economic conditions. This is the reason why the adjective “postmodernist” is preferred throughout this whole work. While it implies the possibility that postmodernist features may be found also in earlier literature, the term “postmodern” excludes this option entirely.

1.1.1 Playing with Realities

In postmodernist literature, playing with reality embodies a significant device of postmodernist literature (McHale 45). These techniques thus involve creating and subsequent highlighting of pluralistic reality of a fictional world within the text. Their purpose is to “echo” (qtd. in McHale 38) the discontinuous reality of everyday life, which has happened to be common to people living in a highly developed world. According to McHale, this new lifestyle of the second half of the 20th century is constituted by several different levels of realities, such as watching television, listening to radio, chatting on the Internet etc., and people thus deliberately live on the edge of reality and unreality also called hyperreality or virtual reality. For postmodernist writing this means to imitate not as much the content of this contemporary life as it was common for realism, but to reproduce its multiple levels and multiple realities, which switch over one another (38). The second purpose of these techniques is, as stated by Nicol, to make reading more difficult and thus more challenging and

¹ Many of the guides to postmodernism listed on Works-cited page of this work repeatedly refer to McHale’s *Postmodernist Fiction* which is the reason why his book has become to represent a central source of information in this chapter.

encouraging for reader to become more involved in the process of constructing a fictional reality (XIV).

First of all, the easiest way of creating an atypical fictional reality is a *disordered narrative*, also denoted as *fragmentation* (Lewis 126–8), whose aim is especially to complicate reading and make it thus more attractive and motivating for the reader. This may involve an uncommon treatment of time, such as, travelling in time, or an inappropriate usage of cause and its resulting effects. However, both of these instances shall be discussed further in more detail as parts of other postmodernist techniques.

For the same purpose, postmodernist writers also create a lot of interesting *contradictions* within their fictional worlds, which may take various forms (Butler 80; McHale 114). For example, they could range from the inconsistency of simple facts to great illogical paradoxes. Beside contradictions, a different technique of reality-multiplying is *juxtaposition* (McHale 45–6). This term means to put side-by-side two or more realities, which differ in the sense of their time or place framework. Thus, juxtaposition of characters from past and present is nothing unusual within postmodernist fiction. What is frequent too is the enriching of one reality by the insertion of an unpredictable event, which seems to belong to totally different story, world or level of reality. This method is called *interpolation* (McHale 46). An analogous technique is *misattribution*, when impossible and unreal attributes are ascribed to an object for which these attributed characteristics are unlike or even implausible (McHale 47– 8).

Along with that, postmodernist texts are rich in another strategy of creating plural reality, which is *recursive structure* (McHale 112–4). This method is more complex and elaborated than the previous ones in that it creates multiple levels of a fictional reality. The principle of this device is again to create a multilevel text. As a result, we have a fictional story within another fictional story, which exists only within the framework of the paramount² world. This can be achieved, for example, by reading a story about someone who is reading a story about someone who is reading a story about someone who, and so on. This recursive structure is very difficult to read because it may be extremely hard to not get lost among so many levels of

² The term comes from sociologists Berger and Luckmann; it denotes the reality of everyday life, which we inhabit, and share with other people, and which we escape from to experience other realities (McHale, 37; Nicol 8).

reality, and still know which one of them is that paramount one. The effect of multiple realities can also be reached by the methods of *forking paths*, when the reader is enforced to choose only one option from many other ways (McHale 106–9). Similarly serves the method of *multiple endings or beginnings* of the text, which require the reader to cooperate in constructing of a fictional world (McHale 109–10). Another option may also be *circularity*, when the text has neither ending or beginning (McHale 110–11).

Concerning the treatment of reality in postmodernist literature, another very recurrent feature is *intertextuality* (McHale 56). This term refers to the idea that writing a new text means nothing more than referring to or merely reproducing of earlier thoughts. Paul Sheehan asserts that any text holds its “more or less hidden debt to its predecessors” (31), and is “seen as perpetually referring to other ones [texts]” (32). In postmodernist literature, intertextuality is really common, and it is manifested, for instance, by quotations from works of past, by various referring to them, or else by stylistically different styles, which are mixed up together, even though they are typically viewed as incommensurable ones (Nicol 2). In connection with intertextuality, postmodernist literature is also typical for its technique, or rather a genre, called *pastiche*. According to Malpas’ definition, pastiche works on the very similar principle as parody does in borrowing of other authors’ works and styles; on the other hand in contrast to parody, pastiche is without an intention to mock or criticize them (135). For some postmodernists, pastiche may lie on the boundary with pure conscious plagiarism, as borrowed characters and even whole chapters are plentiful within postmodernist literature (Nicol 60). However, the writers defend themselves that it is only, as Nicol calls that, “an aesthetic strategy” in their works (158, 159). Along with that, if they really copy the ideas of other authors’ on purpose, what is then the reason of this deliberate unoriginality of theirs? Frederic Jameson, a literary critic and theorist, brings the answer: “in a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and with the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum” (qtd. in Storey, 150). This statement is completely in accordance with many other theorists and also writers who often label postmodernist literature as the age of “the death of the novel” (Hutcheon 40; Lewis 125) or as the “literature of exhaustion” (Barth; Lewis 122).

Next, in the connection to intertextuality, the method called *transworld identity* is also frequently noted for postmodernist writings. Transworld identity expresses the ability of

character to transgress one level of reality to others (McHale 57). Thus it is rather often that the hero may travel from past to present, and from present to future; or that a famous historic person passes from the real world to a fictional one, or else, that the character from a famous literary work wanders to another literary fiction. In respect of that, McHale adds that postmodernist authors seek to foreground this boundary between the real and a fictional world utmost obvious (90), what may be even more disorientating and frustrating for the reader.

Lastly, the list would not be complete without one more very important postmodernist technique foregrounding various degrees of reality. It is *self-reflexivity*, which is a greatly distinctive feature of postmodernist texts (Butler 30; Nicol XVI, 35). This term means to be conscious of one's own self and to be directed backwards at oneself. Nicol states that in the field of postmodernist literature this involves, "a self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text's own status as constructed, aesthetic artefact" (XVI). Thus, this self-consciousness is not merely present in the text proper; moreover, its presence is extraordinarily obvious in it. Postmodernist writers by no means conceal that writing a fiction is only an act of constructing a new reality and that they create just a particular world among many others. By contrast to realist authors, they foreground this fact and draw reader's attention to it as often as possible (Nicol 35). As a result of that, postmodernist texts are full of various strategies to underline their self-reflexive nature. Then, it is not surprising that this quality is ranked among the techniques, which play with realities within a novel. The reason for that is that self-reflexivity is so distinct and unusual feature that it definitely must attract reader's attention and distract it from the reality of a fictional world upon itself; and thus a new level and kind of reality is introduced into a fictional world. One of the methods of foregrounding this aspect of postmodernist texts is self-advertisement of the author, when the author enters and leaves the fictional world which he or she has created. The writers reveal and display themselves to the reader in the situation as they are working on the text (McHale 199). Moreover, McHale says that sometimes, the authors prove their "ontological superiority" over the fictional world, as if they were the masters or gods of it; they have power to control, manipulate, create, de-create and over and over again recreate their characters, objects and events within a fictional world before reader's eyes (210–1). Along with that, self-reflexivity concerns also the characters of postmodernist fiction. They already are or slowly become conscious of their unreality. This characters' self-consciousness may appear in different degrees; sometimes only as a

momentary thought of a character, next time as a suspicion, and another time as a strong conviction (McHale 213–5). In other cases, a character is not convinced about his fictionality until the author him- or herself reveals it to a character. As McHale states, this “face-to-face interview between the author and his character” is very widespread among postmodernist writings (213).

On the top of all of that, reflexivity also concerns the readers themselves. The author’s addressing the readers creates a powerful effect because it bridges reader’s real world together with a fictional world projected by the text. Nevertheless, as it is peculiar to postmodernist literature in general, even in this case the authors try to make a situation more uncertain and difficult. On account of that, McHale says that their texts often include the second-person pronoun “you”, which is used very ambiguously and uncannily. As the result, it is not clear who exactly is meant by this addressing; whether it is the reader him- or herself, or merely a character performing in a fiction (224). Eventually, it creates another kind of perspective upon reality.

1.1.2 Playing with Language

Within the context of language, there must be mentioned that postmodernism’s approach to it is, to a great extent, inspired by Jacques Derrida’s theory of deconstruction. The central idea of his concept is that the relationship between language and the reality described through the medium of language is a suspicious and imprecise one. Butler states that language is nothing more than a “cultural construct”, which appears to be unreliable, misrepresenting and highly relative because to apprehend it always means to insert into it own subjective interpretation (17–21). In other words, language is incapable to describe the reality precisely the way it is. The constructivist nature of language has become one of the most principal matters of fact which attracts the attention of postmodernist writers. In their writings they attempt to acknowledge that, as McHale puts it, any fictional world, character, object or action depicted in a novel or a story is nothing more than a construct realized by the signs of language (45). For the sake of foregrounding this fact, they deconstruct the plausibility of a text, and subsequently incite readers’ incredulity towards language’s power of reliable description. Postmodernist authors employ many of those deconstructive techniques, most of

which are virtually unlimited experimentations with language; so the resulting text may seem disrupted and completely illogical.

The first strategy is connected with the disorganization of postmodernist narrative. This may involve, for example, very uncommon sentence constructions, which are usually disarranged and devoid of a syntactic control (154–6). As a result, the postmodernist texts seem to be deliberately disrupted, discontinuous or fragmentary. Together with that, they may also appear to be arbitrary ordered, but in fact, they are not. According to McHale, all postmodernist texts are “precisely in order to flaunt their haphazardness” (157). In this sense, this ordering principle can be an alphabetical order or another concealed system, which is usually known only to the author of the text.

Other techniques of, in McHale’s terms, “the foregrounding of the linguistic medium” (148) are *lexical exhibitionism* (151–3) together with *cataloguing* (153–4). In these cases, one possibility is that the authors name a mere list of words without any obvious logical order. They also may use very striking words which are either mutually stylistically incommensurable or very bizarre themselves. These words usually come from peripheral vocabularies and so work repulsively upon readers. In addition, a closely related technique to all of those previous ones is a method called *heteroglossia* (166–71), which is also often involved in postmodernist texts. This strategy is based on injection of a very specific register of language, such as the language of criminal circles or language used in military, into a common everyday discourse. This strategy is very similar to lexical exhibitionism discussed above, but with one difference. In this case, due to the more authentic presence of different view and voices which are enabled through heteroglossia, the plurality of reality is much more evident.

For the same effect, postmodernist authors use another strategy. It is the method of taking the text literally, *letter by letter*, as mere signs (156–9). What is exploited here is the shape of the letters for evoking some resemblance with different objects, their sounds for the purpose of alliteration, and sometimes the letters are used only, as expressed by McHale, as means of foregrounding “a transparently pointless and empty formalism”(158).

The last recurrent technique within postmodernist literature focused on trifling with language is the experimentation with *metaphors*. This can be, for example, their absurd or mocked exaggeration, when it is transparent that the meaning of these types of metaphors

must be taken cautiously (McHale 144–5). Conversely, aggravating of metaphors is also often used in postmodernist fiction. The meaning of metaphors of this particular type is very unclear and therefore it could be very confusing for the reader to decide whether the expressions are meant to be purely metaphorical, or on the other hand, to be wholly literal (McHale 134). As a result, the reader must be really cautious and open to all possible connotations of every word or phrase within the text.

As it was said, the reason of all these techniques is to foreground the linguistic medium. The problem is that this is not always the only aim of theirs. As they draw our attention on language and its deconstruction, they simultaneously drive away our attention from the reality of a fictional world to the reality of that constructed text. Consequently, this fact brings us back to the first group of techniques used by postmodernist writers – that of the creating of a plural reality.

1.1.3 Playing with Printing

The following techniques are based on playful, uncommon and very innovative exploitation of typography. For postmodernist fiction, plays with printing are very typical and make it so distinguishable from other types of writing. The purpose of theirs is closely related to those discussed above: to point out consciousness of a fictional world that itself is only a reality projected by the text comprised in the book, to mirror a language deconstruction and to transgress among different degrees of reality. Within the framework of printing, the easiest way to fulfil these intentions is to draw reader's attention towards the materiality of the book, what can be realized by several different processes: placing a visual accompaniment of the text, special layout of the text and a distinctive utilization of typography.

First of them may be an occasional insertion of *blank pages* or the text printed on *coloured* sheets of paper (McHale 183). The text accompanied with some provocative illustrations or photographs can serve as the second way of foregrounding the physical corporeality of the book. However, postmodernist writers more often than illustrations use so-called *anti-illustrations*, which do not possess any obviously relevant reference to the text (McHale 187–90). According to this, the same effect can be caused by the *text's arrangement* into some abstract ornaments or other shapes, which may or may not correspond with the content of the text (184–7).

In addition, another playful and exceptional employment of printing is the strange *layout* of the text, which fully mirrors a disrupted narrative created by postmodernist authors (McHale 181–2). This type of method may include an uncommon spacing of the text supplemented by incorporated wide stripes of the blank, or interposition of some illogical clusters of signs, e.g. exclamation marks together with slashes, dashes and commas. Among postmodernist works, a very frequent alternative to that is the text divided into extremely short, often only one sentence long, chapters or paragraphs.

The last typical postmodernist method of highlighting of a physical nature of the book is a very special employment of the means of *typography*. The first technique is in general nothing uncommon in literature; it is the use of various types of font in headlines and titles, but with the respect to postmodernist works, this may linger throughout the whole text (McHale 182). The second technique itself is a peculiarity of postmodernist literature and it is that type of printing which, according to McHale, literally forces the reader to manipulate the book in order to read it. This involves all different arrangements of the text than that classical one, which read from left to right line by line. Thus postmodernist texts may often be printed upside-down, from the right bottom corner of the book upwards left upper corner, or diagonally or in a spiral. Simply, there are no limits for the text's arrangement, so when the reader wants to read the book, he or she has to turn it completely around or sideways, or tilt it in various angles (183). Moreover, a technique called *simultaneity* is bound up with these derangements (McHale 190–3). In postmodernist literature, simultaneity means that the text projects two or more parallel stories at once, and the reader is encouraged to read these narratives simultaneously, which is infeasible in fact. The purpose of this schizophrenic organization is again to heighten book's materiality and to introduce another level of a fictional reality. Consequently, many postmodernist works are typical for a very unusual text layout. For example, the text may be divided into several columns, or the main text is accompanied by footnotes, whose text represents a different point of view than the main text does. Additionally, simultaneity induces in the readers the feeling of tension because they are forced to choose what to read as the first. Yet, how the following section is going to reveal to us, evoking tension and other feelings, which may be perceived as very unpleasant by the reader, is another one most typical technique of postmodernist literature.

1.1.4 Playing with Reader

As a whole, it may seem so far that postmodernist writers love to play with readers' alertness. It is very true, but beside alertness, they also tempt their patience by evoking the feelings of hesitation and even annoyance (McHale 102, 192, 206, 226). The purpose of that is to intensify reader's incredulity towards the possibility of a plausible knowledge of truth. Moreover, Steven Connor and Bran Nicol agree that one of the chief aims of postmodernist literature is to strongly oppose consumerist society (Connor, "Introduction" 6; Nicol XIV). This attitude is absolutely common for whole postmodernist art, but in literature this confrontation is especially obvious. According to the latter two mentioned theorists, consistent and logical narrative does not require any sophisticated way of reading. Consequently, the readers of these standard texts do not have to exert too much effort to understand their meaning; and thus, they only consume them passively without any thorough thinking. As a result, postmodernist writers seek to challenge their readers to be more critical, enquiring and active during the process of reading. They require an active participation from their readers in the construction and interpretation of texts (Nicol 61). In relation to these statements, all of the previously mentioned techniques recognizably serve to create reader's uncertainty accompanied by tension, which may sometimes overgrow into his or her irritation. This happens especially, when the reconstruction of a fictional world becomes owing to those methods very difficult and complicated. However, postmodernist fiction employs some other techniques designated particularly for attaining these effects.

One of the techniques warranting readers' growing hesitation is their deliberate *mystification* (McHale 115–9). The readers are all the time of their reading incited to be thinking about a fictional world about which they are reading to be of some sort, but out of the blue, there occur some new facts in the text which throw completely new light upon that reality and the readers are utterly demystified. They do not know what to think about the reality projected by the text, whether to believe it or not. The readers have no guarantee where a genuine truth lies. Together with that, they are rather aggressively reminded that they should be more wary while reading and interpreting a fictional reality projected by the text.

The feelings of readers' wondering tension, doubts and insecurity may also be evoked by, as McHale says, a *contrastive banality* (76–7). It expresses a discrepancy, which occurs quite often in postmodernist works, between the projected reality and the emotional state of the

projected character. McHale calls this situation as “characters’ failure to be amazed by [e.g.] paranormal happenings” and he states that it “serves to heighten *our* amazement” (74). For illustration, a very thrilling and dramatic situation in which the characters are found is perceived by them coolly, impersonally and without any deep interest. Consequently, this evokes in the reader a tension and a sort of annoyance because the projected state does not correspond with his or her stereotypical apprehension of the world.

In postmodernist literature, the feelings of vexation are often achieved through other means. One way is the involvement of *highly-charged text’s content* (McHale 152, 158). For example, sexual, sadomasochistic and violent motifs are very common in postmodernist fiction. Especially, when scenes with this kind of provocative and sometimes even very unpleasant content are inserted in the text unexpectedly, aggressively, shockingly and impudently, then it excites the reactions and attracts attention of readers immensely. To intensify this tension in the reader, this technique is used predominantly only together with language which at the same time draws reader’s attention towards itself. “The juxtaposition,” as McHale states, “between this highly charged sexual material and the coolly arbitrary formal pattern is intensely strange and disorienting” (158); and he adds: “The result ... is electrical: we are arrested by the contents of this text—whether attracted or repelled makes no difference—and simultaneously alienated, distanced, by its transparently arbitrary form” (159). A different technique of making the reader feeling irritated is to address him or her directly and more or less aggressively. The reader is then much more emotionally engaged when constructing and interpreting a fictional world because, as it is now obvious, even annoyance serves as a reliable postmodernist technique of attracting reader’s attention. The extract from “Offending the audience”, a play by Peter Handke, who is a postmodernist Australian novelist and playwright, summarizes this idea very precisely: “We will insult you because insulting you is one way of speaking to you. ... The distance between us will no longer be infinite” (qtd. in McHale, 226).

To conclude this chapter, it is important to highlight again that it is not possible to list here all of the features of postmodernist literature. The reason is simple: the number of theirs is huge and the extent of this bachelor thesis is rather restrained. Together with that, not each of them would be relevant to the topic of this work. There are mentioned only those postmodernist qualities which are denoted by McHale as the most frequented ones within

postmodernist fiction. In addition to that, the second criterion for this particular assortment is the relevancy of selected postmodernist attributes to the topic of this work, the novel *Tristram Shandy*. Consequently, the features which had to be omitted are, for instance, paranoia or the fantastic bordering with science-fiction for they are too specific and thus too irrelevant to *Tristram Shandy*. On the other hand, the most essential features of postmodernist fiction are intertextuality, reflexivity and playfulness (Butler 5, 21–3; Nicol 1–2; Malpas 28) which are at the same time also the three most distinguished attributes of *Tristram Shandy*'s.

2 **TRISTRAM SHANDY IN THE CONTEXT OF POSTMODERNIST LITERATURE**

It is claimed by many literary theorists and critics that the eighteenth-century novel *Tristram Shandy* shares comparatively many features with postmodernist literature of the 20th century. For instance, Simon Malpas suggests that *Tristram Shandy* is one of the texts which employ “many of the formal techniques identified by McHale”, although it was “written earlier than what tends to be recognised as the era of postmodernism” (28). This chapter undertakes a task of detecting these postmodernist characteristics in *Tristram Shandy*. Nevertheless, due to a length restriction of this paper, it is unthinkable to write out each example occurring within this extensive book and therefore the individual postmodernist moments involved in *Tristram Shandy* will be summarized to some extent, and in either case supplemented by several clear examples. At any rate, the most obvious postmodernist aspects inherent to *Tristram Shandy* are: an ever-present self-conscious reflexivity, playing with different levels of reality in the form of uncountable digressions within the main narrated story, a full exploitation of typography, jesting with the reader, and finally, a resulting inevitable playfulness of this novel.

However, in order to show an evident indication of the continuity existing between the novel under our consideration and postmodernist literature, and to demonstrate it as systematically as possible, the postmodernist elements appearing in *Tristram Shandy* shall be discussed in the same order as it was in the case of the most frequent techniques employed by postmodernist writers. It means that these attributes will be again divided into four groups according to their main merits alleged in *Tristram Shandy*. First, these are postmodernist features which are connected with the process of a reality capturing; next, those related to playing with language; those associated with the process of printing; and lastly, those features which are involved in hoaxing on the reader. On the top of it, there need to be stated that all of these four categories represented in *Tristram Shandy* have one thing in common. It is an ensuing sheer playfulness, which could be really felt from each page of the novel – no matter whether it stems from a playful language, typography, or disordered narrative. More importantly, playfulness is a very distinctive hallmark for postmodernist writings (beside reflexivity and intertextuality), and thus it could be regarded as the first postmodernist feature

of *Tristram Shandy*. Over and above, this statement is in accordance with Spacks' words that "the playfulness of *Tristram Shandy* ... foretells that of postmodernism" (276). Considering the range where *Tristram Shandy*'s playfulness is present, its nature will be demonstrated subsequently throughout the following chapter as a fruit of Sterne's effortless treating of various techniques, which appear to be surprisingly similar to postmodernist ones.

2.1 Playing with Realities

According to the previous chapter of this work, the hallmarks of postmodernist literature are reflexivity, intertextuality and playfulness; and the same could hold for *Tristram Shandy*. Although it may not seem, each of these three qualities is very closely connected to the matter of dealing with realities. In this part, the attention will be focused on reflexivity, and intertextuality, along with other postmodernist formal aspects sustaining various levels of realities incorporated within the novel.

First of all, what is very often considered as the most obvious postmodernist feature of *Tristram Shandy* is its all-pervasive self-reflexivity. As notified in the chapter dealing with postmodernist fiction, self-reflexivity means that a novel or any other form of writing is conscious of the fact that itself it is nothing more than a part of a fictional reality. As regards *Tristram Shandy*, some readers might find it very unusual that Sterne tries to in no way conceal but openly confesses the fact that what he does is a mere generating of a narrative. It is this very feature which so much attracts the readers' attention when reading this novel. This self-awareness of the novel is present throughout all the nine volumes, and proves itself in different forms. For example, the writer continuously addresses his readers: "The world at that time was pleased to determine the matter otherwise. Lay down the book, and I will allow you half a day to give a probable guess at the grounds of this procedure" (I, 10, 17). Furthermore, he refers very directly to his critics and even to his publisher in order to remind us that what we are reading is only a content of a published book whose purpose is to earn money. *Tristram Shandy*'s self-reflexivity could be observed also in a frequent entering of the author into the fictional story as he reveals and describes motives and train of thought, which led him to write in the exact way he did and not otherwise. This extract from the 14th chapter of the first book, may serve as an illustration of that as the narrator explains why his narrative is so extensive and detailed:

- - - 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: - - I have just been able, and that's all, to tell you *when* it happen'd, but not *how*; - - - so that you see the thing is yet far from being accomplished.

These unforeseen stoppages, which I own I had no conception of when I first set out; - - - but which, I am convinced now, will rather increase than diminish as I advance, - - - have struck out a hint which I am resolved to follow; - - - and that is, - - - not to be in a hurry; - - - but to go on leisurely, writing and publishing two volumes of my life every year; - - - which, if I am suffered to go on quietly, and can make a tolerable bargain with my bookseller, I shall continue to do as long as I live. (I, 14, 35)

Beside reflexivity, the next highly dominant postmodernist feature trifling with multiple realities in *Tristram Shandy* is the issue of intertextuality. The novel abounds utterly with references to world literature, starting with the works of great Greek philosophers, through Homer, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Rabelais, to modern thinkers, such as Locke, Hume or Voltaire, and many others. There can be distinguished several forms of these references in the novel. These are: a direct quotation, which is often stated in its original language (especially in Latin, French, or Greek), an indirect quotation, footnote, or a mere subtle allusion to the original work. In most cases, the references are displayed explicitly but there are also many of them, which are very implicit and may even verge on plagiarism. Apropos of this, in the end of the 18th century Sterne was really accused of plagiarizing by John Ferriar. However, nowadays it is widely believed that to plagiarize was not Sterne's original intention but, as Walsh states, a "part of a self-conscious ironic textual strategy" ("Sources, Imitation, Plagiarism" 120); and Jackson adds, "it is perhaps the strangest part of Sterne's complicated joke that it went undetected, or at least unpublicized, for almost thirty years, and that when the borrowings were recognized, the jest was not" (133). In other words, it is assumed that Sterne had appropriated all of these borrowings from other writers, whether he fully confessed them or not, principally in order to parody them or, what may be more probable, to point out the self-parody of his own novel. This assumption seems to be quite reasonable because as claimed by McHale, "parody is a form of self-reflection and self-critique, a genre's way of thinking critically about itself" (145). Besides, H. J. Jackson adverts to Sterne's own remark included in *Tristram Shandy* in which he seemingly condemns stealing or borrowing from other writings but at the same moment he does so through the stolen words of Robert Burton's, an English scholar (124). Moreover, Aloys Skoumal, a translator of *Tristram Shandy* into Czech, asserts that even Burton himself had borrowed this passage from other

authors, which means that it is the matter of “triple plagiarism”³ what as a result has even more humorous and parodic effect:

Tell me, ye learned, shall we for ever be adding so much to the *bulk*—so little to the *stock*?

Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?

Are we for ever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track—for ever at the same pace?

Shall we be destined to the days of eternity, on holy-days, as well as working-days, to be shewing the *relics of learning*, as monks do the relics of their saints—without working one—one single miracle with them? (V, 1, 309-10)

Additionally, in the light of the fact that many postmodernist writers were also blamed for stealing somebody else’s thoughts for they availed of intertextuality to create parody or pastiche of other literary works, *Tristram Shandy*’s overwhelming exercise of intertextuality may thus be regarded as another postmodernist feature of this novel.

Along with reflexivity, intertextuality, parody and even self-parody, *Tristram Shandy* embraces another very typical element of postmodernist writings which is an unusual treatment of reality endeavoring to create its plurality. Sterne, as well as many postmodernist authors, attained this effect of manifold-reality by narrative disorganization. The scheme of the plot of *Tristram Shandy* is characterized by a temporal disorder, in which the narrator strides backwards in time, forwards, then again backwards and sometimes he departs in a completely different direction from the chief subject. Sterne’s use of digressions, which enrich and from time to time even build up his narrative, is so extraordinary that it is very often considered as a masterful one. Then, it is not surprising that due to this digressional tendency of the narrator, he comes at the point of his own birth, when apprising us of his life, no earlier than in the third volume of the novel. The problem is that the novel comprises so enormous amount of these excursions that it is really hard not to get lost within them. The resulting multiple-level reality could seem very confusing and it may eventuate in that we do not know on which level of reality we are momentarily occurring within our reading. It may be difficult to be able to follow up and to orientate oneself in the story line. The reader is thus forced to speculate if it is still a digression or the main story proper. On the account of that, René Bosch

³ ... toto horlení proti plagiátorům převzal Sterne téměř doslova z Burtona a ten zas z jiných autorů. Tedy trojnásobný plagiát s humoristickým záměrem (Sterne, 543).

applies the term “labyrinth of digressions”, which fully suits this puzzled and confusing style of narrative which is so much characteristic to Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*. Let this excerpt of the novel speak for itself; it involves novel’s digressive nature and its reflexivity at once:

My mother, you must know,——but I have fifty things more necessary to let you know first,—I have a hundred difficulties which I have promised to clear up, and a thousand distresses and domestic misadventures crowding in upon me thick and three-fold, one upon the neck of another,——a cow broke in (to-morrow morning) to my uncle *Toby*’s fortifications, and eat up two ratios and half of dried grass, tearing up the sods with it, which faced his horn-work and covered way.—*Trim* insists upon being tried by a court-martial,—the cow to be shot,—*Slop* to be *crucifix’d*,—myself to be *tristram’d*, and at my very baptism made a martyr of;——poor unhappy devils that we all are!—I want swaddling,——but there is no time to be lost in exclamations.——I have left my father lying across his bed, and my uncle *Toby* in his old fringed chair, sitting beside him, and promised I would go back to them in half an hour, and five and thirty minutes are laps’d already.——Of all the perplexities a mortal author was ever seen in,——this certainly is the greatest, for I have *Hafen Slawkenbergius*’s folio, Sir, to finish——a dialogue between my father and my uncle *Toby*, upon the solution of *Prignitz*, *Scroderus*, *Ambrose Paræus*, *Ponocrates* and *Grangousier* to relate,—a tale out of *Slawkenbergius* to translate, and all this in five minutes less, than no time at all; —such a head!—would to heaven! my enemies only saw the inside of it. (III, 38, 211-2)

In addition, *Tristram Shandy*’s digressions occasionally serve in the similar way as postmodernist usage of contradictions within the narrated story itself, and as such they may be seen as another means of playing with realities. As the readers proceed in their reading, they perceive the submitted reality in a certain way, but then after several various digressions and chapters, a different viewpoint upon a whole situation is revealed and their primary estimation is dispersed. Along with that it must be admitted that, in contrast to postmodernist fiction, in *Tristram Shandy* this has always only a humorous effect. For instance, uncle *Toby*’s misunderstanding of the word “bridge” may serve as an ideal example of that – all we know is that Dr. *Slop* is making a bridge in the kitchen but which type of it or what for is not mentioned. Consequently, *Toby* in all his all goodness and under the influence of his hobby-horse thought that he is making a dummy draw-bridge. Despite of this, seven chapters further it is disclosed that Dr. *Slop* was making a bridge for newborn *Tristram*’s nose because as he was bringing him into the world, he accidentally broke him a nose. However, before the

reader is informed about this matter, a number of stories connected to warfare had been detailed.

Sterne exploits also another technique occurring in postmodernist literature, which is called interpolation. It is the method of an unexpected and surprising insertion of one event beside the other one. In the case of *Tristram Shandy*, the main narrative is rather frequently disrupted by the narrator's unanticipated associations and thoughts, which lead to his famous digressional stories and chapters or into the utterances to his critics and readers. The example of this may be the instance when Tristram is relating his story and suddenly, in connection to what he is talking about, he starts to think about a girl named Jenny whom he is in love with very probably. Eventually, because the readers do not know who the mysterious woman is, or what her role in the story is, this may have a fairly confusing effect on them.

What else brings into the novel a next level of reality and is consistent with one of the techniques within postmodernist fiction is the highlighting of physicality of the book. Sterne forces his readers during their reading to browse through the book backwards and forwards, and thus to manipulate it. The attention of the reader is again attracted in a different direction than that of the reality of the main story. It needs to be said that Sterne employs this strategy less often than the other methods (also in contrast to postmodernist authors); but it has no impact on the fact that it still proves his creativity. The following example serves to illustrate the previous two phenomena occurring in *Tristram Shandy*, which may be considered as postmodernist ones:

———How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, *That my mother was not a papist*.——Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to repeat it over again, That I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing.—Then, Sir, I must have miss'd a page. - - No, Madam,—you have not miss'd a word.——Then I was asleep, Sir.—My pride, Madam, cannot allow you that refuge.——Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter.—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 stop, and read the whole chapter over again.

...

———But here comes my fair Lady. Have you read over again the chapter, Madam, as I desired you?—You have: And did you not observe the passage, upon the second reading, which admits the inference?——Not a word like it! Then, Madam, be pleased to ponder well the last line but one of the

chapter, where I take upon me to say, “It was *necessary* I should be born before I was christen’d.” Had my mother, Madam, been a Papist, that consequence did not follow. (I, 20, 51-2)

Here, the imaginary dialogue between the writer and a fictional woman-reader may represent a sort of interpolation, and the book’s materiality lies in the matter that as she is compelled to read again that certain passage, the real reader is inconspicuously forced to do the same.

Nevertheless, the most extraordinary example of Sterne’s incredibly conscious utilization of a physical feature of the book is the blank page in the thirty-eighth chapter of the sixth volume, where the readers are invited to paint a picture of widow Wadman on their own as how they imagine her.

To conclude the list of postmodernist techniques encouraging a multiple-reality of the story of *Tristram Shandy*, there remains to mention the last two but completely different techniques. First, there also could be found a very slight flicker of misattribution in the novel. Namely, that may be in the instance of uncle Toby and his man, corporal Trim. Both of them as military conducted men should give impression of vigour, stubbornness, stiffness and courage; on the contrary, they are depicted in the novel as the two gentle, amiable men, who are full of humanity and charity. Especially for the character of uncle Toby, this witty attribution of a soldier as a sensitive man, who is inexperienced and extremely shy in the delicate matter of women, creates a very comical effect. However, this misattribution is probably the only one occurring within the whole novel.

Finally, the last *Tristram Shandy*’s postmodernist feature ranked into the category of playing with realities could be seen in the absence of the novel’s proper ending. Its final discussion about father’s bull kept for the service of the parish ended up with the statement that “all this story is about—— A COCK and a BULL——and one of the best of its kind” (IX, 33, 588) may signify both, a witty self-reflexive ending of the book, through which the reflexive essence of the novel is highlighted, or merely, the end of one digression and the beginning of another one at once. Although, it is hard to judge of Sterne’s real design of that, the situation may closely remind of postmodernist texts which, in terms of McHale, “seem both open and closed, somehow poised between the two” (109).

2.2 Playing with Language

Next postmodernist features recognized in *Tristram Shandy* very frequently concern the matter of language. Sterne is well known for his playing with language and it may be said that *Tristram Shandy* is the novel, which incredibly transcends a standard use of language and explores its possibilities and boundaries. Consequently, the novel is full of experimentation with various syntactical and lexical devices involving a disordered narrative, an unusual sentence structure, figures of speech, puns and other more.

In respect to that, the most obvious characteristic of *Tristram Shandy* is its fragmentary language reflecting a disorganized nature of the narrative itself, which is the same as with postmodernist fiction. On the account of that, *Tristram Shandy* often displays the lack of syntax and an apparently uncommon fragmented sentence construction. In the novel, this fragmentation is demonstrated by the abundant presence of short along with long dashes, hyphens, asterisks, round and square brackets, or semicolons. As regards the use of the short dashes and asterisks, they represent words, phrases or even sentences, which Sterne does not want to announce openly. However, these unknown expressions very much appear to be naughty and bawdy and the fact that they are not stated explicitly encourages wildly the readers' imagination of what these mysterious passages are supposed to mean. Along with that, the use of brackets plays also a very important role in Sterne's narrative. Through them, he often marks the individual levels of reality comprised in *Tristram Shandy*. As the result, there is possible to find, for example, several whole half-pages or, in the case of the seventeenth chapter of the first volume, almost two pages of text given in brackets. Considering the latter instance, square brackets indicate here the conversation ongoing while Trim is reading "The Sermon". Furthermore, the discontinuity of sentences is also very often caused by intertextuality, one of the already mentioned qualities typical of the novel. The reason is that the abrupt occurrence of a foreign word in the middle of the sentence interrupts its flow even more.

In the link with that, citing of foreign words in the form of their original language throughout the text may also be regarded as the postmodernist strategy called lexical exhibitionism. In the context of *Tristram Shandy*, this includes three alternatives. First, as indicated above, it is the presence of Latin, French, Italian, and even Greek words written in Greek alphabet within the English text. Next, it is the use of various interjections and

onomatopoeias, e.g. “—Lend me your penknife—I must e’en cut the knots at last - - - - - pugh! - - - psha! - - - Lord!” (III, 10, 151), “——Poo—poo! said my uncle Toby—” (VIII, 19, 510), or “Ptr . . r . . r . . ing twing—twang—prut—trut——’tis a cursed bad fiddle.—Do you know whether my fiddle’s in tune or no?— trut . . prut . . —They should be *fifths*.——’Tis wickedly strung—tr . . . a.e.i.o.u. twang.—“ (V, 15, 335). The third way of this lexical ostentation, but not so frequent and distinct in the novel, is the occurrence of surprising words and expressions, such as, “my mother knew no more than her *backside* what my father meant” (I, 3, 8), “a *pimple* on the nose” (IV, *Slawkenbergius’s Tale*, 227), “now, for what the world thinks of that *ejaculation*” meaning a sudden shouting (IX, 9, 556) etc.

Nonetheless, related to the previous phenomenon there could be witnessed another technique which may be nowadays considered as a postmodernist one. It is called cataloguing and its prevalence in *Tristram Shandy* is very frequent and obvious. This notion encompasses listing of various names, things and acts. What is more, Sterne within this literary device also employs a letter-by-letter approach to language as it is shown by the two given examples bellow: 1) “Nor does it much disturb my rest when I see such great Lords and tall Personages as hereafter follow; - - - such, for instance, as my Lord A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, O, P, Q, and so on, all of a row, mounted upon their several horses“ (I, 8, 14), and second:

LOVE is certainly, at least alphabetically speaking, one of the most

A gitating

B ewitching

C onfounded

D evilish affairs of life——the most

E xtravagant

F utilitous

G alligaskinish

H andy-dandyish

I racundulous (there is no K to it) and

L yrical of all human passions: at the same time, the most

M isgiving

N innyhammering

O bstipating

P ragmatical

S tridulous

R idiculous—though by the bye the R should have gone first— (VIII, 13, 500-1).

In addition to that, bearing no relation to cataloguing but to letter-by-letter, *Tristram Shandy* is very rich in puns, too. Along with that, Sterne himself invented several new words; for illustration, the two words “TRISTRA-*pædia*” meaning Tristram’s encyclopaedia (V, 16, 336) and “*ΤΥΠΤΩ*-ing” (V, 42, 363) a bilingual verb used within the part dealing with the study of Greek.

Another type of pun in the novel is represented by metaphors. The essence of Sterne’s metaphors is very similar to those of postmodernist authors’ in respect of their content. It is meant that it can never be positively said which is their true meaning for it is not ever fully evident. An exemplary case of this could be the word “hobby-horse”. Its occurrence throughout the novel is very frequent and it refers to two substances at the same time. Firstly, it implies a hobby as an enthusiastic entertainment in leisure time, or secondly, it serves as an allusion to sex as it is a slang word for having sex. The same holds for words related to it, such as to ride, a horse, a pad, or a rider; now, consider the *Tristram Shandy*’s excerpt here:

A man and his HOBBY-HORSE, tho’ I cannot say that they act and re-act exactly after the same manner in which the soul and body do upon each other: Yet doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind, and my opinion rather is, that there is something in it more of the manner of electrified bodies, - - and that by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the HOBBY-HORSE.—By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill’d as full of HOBBY-HORSICAL matter as it can hold; - - - - so that if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one, you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other. (I, 24, 67)

Moreover, except these words above, the novel comprises other expressions, which possess very similar double connotation. These are, for instance, the word nose, which may stand for a penis: “If the stranger’s nose took this liberty of thrusting itself thus into the dishes of religious orders, &c. what a carnival did his nose make of it, in those of the laity!—“ (IV, Slawkenbergius’s Tale, 230); or other words such as buttonholes, crevices in the wall, slits in petticoats, thing and whiskers. On the account of that, it could be said that almost every word, phrase or at least paragraph occurring in *Tristram Shandy* carries the mark of ambiguity inducing in us sexual and erotic thoughts.

The last postmodernist feature concerning the language of *Tristram Shandy* is heteroglossia, or else, the use of the vocabulary of a special social class in a reference to a

common situation. This quality is very noticeable when uncle's acting in thorny situations is glossed by a military language so much underlining his hobby-horse. Accordingly, his and Mrs. Wadman's courting is described as "a series of attacks and repulses" ending thus that uncle Toby "found it necessary to draw off his forces, and raise the siege somewhat indignantly" (III, 24, 188). Similarly, Corporal Trim's dating with Mrs. Bridget is portrayed as taking and gaining considerable advantages (IX, 30, 583).

2.3 Playing with Printing

In the context of printing, it could be said that it is this very field, where it is possible to find the most of *Tristram Shandy's* supposed postmodernist features. In the view of printing, the novel comprises all formal aspects fully identical with those of postmodernist writings, which were already discussed at the end of the first chapter. Along with that, it is rather interesting to know that Sterne was involved in the printing of his books to a great degree. Concerning *Tristram Shandy*, as stated in Voogd, Sterne designed its spatial layout, its graphic supplements and kept his eye on its observance during the process of printing of each new volume (109).

First of all, what is very typical of postmodernist fiction and occurs also in *Tristram Shandy* is an unexpected insertion of unusual pages. The first remarkable page inserted in the book is a wholly black sheet of paper expressing the death of parson Yorick in the twelfth chapter of the first volume. Another page, which is the most curious one, comes by the end of the third volume. It is a very puzzling double-sided marbled paper, which is commented by the ironic commentary that only a really learned reader is "able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motly emblem of my work!)" (III, 36, 204). Besides black and marbled pages, the novel is unique also for the presence of several blank pages. The purpose of the first one, which lies in the sixth volume, is to offer the readers a space where they could engage themselves in drawing Mrs. Wadman's portrait as was already discussed here. The reason for the other two blank pages in the novel's ninth book is slightly different. Each of them represents one empty chapter, which serves to stir the reader's imagination about what happens in the house between uncle Toby, Corporal Trim and their desirable madams Mrs. Wadman and Mrs. Bridget.

Tristram Shandy shares with postmodernist novels, or the other way round, also a special layout of the text. This involves bizarrely short chapters often only few lines long. In the case of the fifth chapter in volume four, the chapter comprises only one sentence occupying one and a half line. Correspondingly, the layout concerns also the matter of paragraphs for they may consist only of asterisks separated by dashes or commas. Furthermore, mixed-up chapters, the preface placed more than a quarter way of the book onward, a consequent wrong pagination, and wide white stripes occurring in some passages instead of the text are other devices used by Sterne in order to break the conventional views upon the device of book.

Similarly, Sterne's excellent exploitation of typography is another example of an unusual text-arrangement of his writing. Namely, the novel *Tristram Shandy* features different types and sizes of font, capitalization, or italics, which are not applied only in headlines but throughout the whole text. Particularly, the latter two are used to emphasize an individual word or phrase; italics itself highlights terms in foreign language and for the most part, a vast amount of borrowed expressions from other authors and writings. There appears also a range of various symbols in the novel. Besides those already mentioned (dashes and asterisks), one can witness a Greek alphabet, a cross [†] accompanying a situation when someone is crossing oneself, as well as an index hand  used everywhere, where the author gives an important advice to the readers, or a symbol of &c., which occurs in the text very frequently in order to abridge the writing.

As regards printing, the last technique, which is characteristic for *Tristram Shandy* and figures within postmodernist works at the same time, is simultaneity. In *Tristram Shandy*, this quality is rather frequent and takes several forms. The first one may be observed when Sterne quotes longer parts from foreign languages, such as a curse of Ernulphus' book of swearing, or a few pages of Slawkenbergius's Tale, both of them in Latin. In these cases, the text is originally mirrored printed in the way that all the even pages are printed in Latin, whereas the odd ones provide its literal translation in English. The second example of *Tristram Shandy*'s simultaneity is a very recurrent supplementation of the main text by Sterne's own footnotes. These annotations vary greatly in their lengths and content. While some of them are really short, others are so extensive that they must continue on a next page; while some are purely explanatory or referential (and even self-referential), others deepen a humorous quality of the text as they wittily comment on it. The last but the most extraordinary and outstanding

example of the presence of simultaneity in *Tristram Shandy* are the drawings. The exceptionality of theirs is that that they are an inseparable part of the text forming together one whole. The first time of their occurrence in the text is at the end of the sixth book, when Tristram registers the progression of the storylines of his narrative in the previous four volumes (see fig. 1). The second sketch describes Trim's grand gesture when talking about one's liberty, and as such it fills a half of the whole page (see fig. 2).

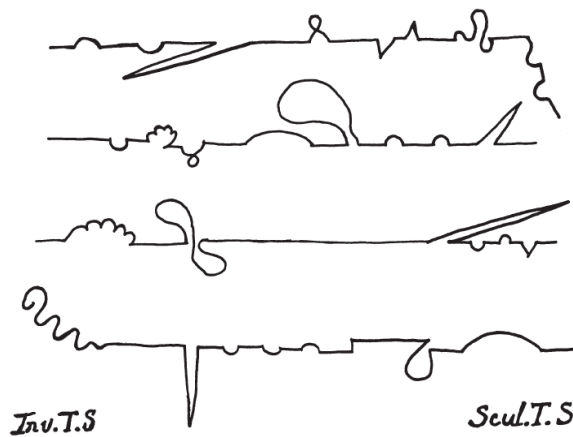


Fig. 1. "These were the four lines I moved in through my first, second, third, and fourth volumes" (VI, 15, 425).

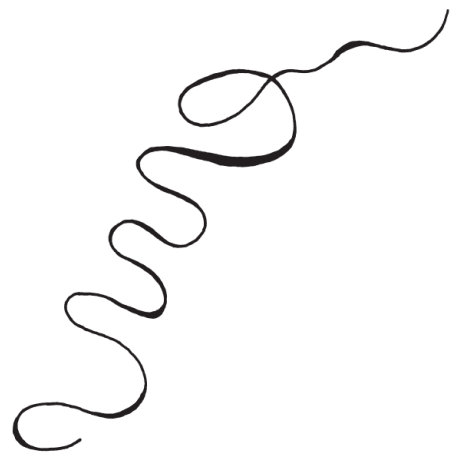


Fig. 2. "Whilst a man is free—cried the Corporal, giving a flourish with his stick thus——" (IX, 4, 549–50).

2.4 Playing with Reader

The last hallmark quality of Sterne's writing is its dialogism with the reader, which corresponds with one of the many attributes of postmodernist fiction to a great extent. In both cases, as for *Tristram Shandy* as well as for postmodernist works, there exist a very intensive personal relationship between the reader and the written work itself, which is formed during the process of reading. Along with that, as far as *Tristram Shandy* is concerned, this feature is very evident in it. As the novel communicates with the readers and encourages their keen participation in a polite and sometimes even impolite manner, there could be again found a similarity to some postmodernist books.

First, the most obvious technique for creating this sort of reciprocity in *Tristram Shandy* is to address the readers directly. On the account of that, it needs to be said that Sterne's technique of doing so resembles the postmodernist way very much. As could be seen from the above mentioned example in the section 2.1 illustrating the occurrence of interpolation in the novel (———How could you, Madam, ...), the author significantly plays with reader's imagination. Since what may initially seem as a direct speech to a female reader, turns out soon to be author's dialogue with a fictional character. This teasing interaction of Sterne's with his readers occurs rather frequently throughout the novel; and in the end, it has a very positive enjoyable effect.

Besides, Sterne in *Tristram Shandy* openly endeavours to compel the readers to participate actively in constructing the text: "The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own" (II, 11, 96). The author perfectly proves this statement of his in several ways. First, it is Sterne's remarkable taste for ambiguous expressions. The text of *Tristram Shandy* is full of words like this and it depends only on the readers themselves how they will interpret these passages. Sterne's mastery of the usage of asterisks and dashes functions alike. They both enable the reader to install into the text whatever he or she imagines there could be. Nevertheless, regarding *Tristram Shandy*, it is a rule that the text usually evidently refers to sexual or other spicy themes. It is up to the readers how much

they will be able to read between the lines and also how much they will be willing and unbound to do so. For example, in this passage: "—He died, said my father, as * * * * * * * * * * —And if it was with his wife, said my uncle *Toby*—there could be no hurt in it.—" (V, 4, 322), the asterisks here probably refer to the fact that he died while having sex. Another way of Sterne's attempt to fully involve the readers in the matter of *Tristram Shandy* is the case of the chapter in volume six, in which it is allowed to the readers to sustain the text with their own drawings. The same applies to the blank space in the thirty-seventh chapter of the seventh book which is left for the reader to ease him or herself by swearing into it rudely. On the whole, as the novel encourages the readers' participation, instead of their mere passive reading, there is another noticeable parallel to postmodernist literature.

However, for the same purpose of involving the reader in a literary work, postmodernist authors work upon readers' negative emotions (McHale 192). By provoking in them negative feelings, their attention is attracted to the same extent as it happens in the situation mentioned above. Again, the same could be said about Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, although it is not in such a great degree as it usually pertains to postmodernist fiction. The reason is that this unfriendly and sometimes even offensive and aggressive approach to the reader in Sterne's case, in contrast to postmodernist writers, always turns out to be both very clever and witty.

When reading this novel, the first negative emotion which can be felt may be impatience followed by uncertainty. According to the existence of so many redundant digressions in *Tristram Shandy*'s storyline, it could happen that the reader will have been feeling by the time rather insecure. He or she may start to doubt about the firmness of a traditional plot scheme consisting of introduction, climax and subsequent conclusion. For example, the reader may be wondering if the main hero will be possibly born at least during the course of the novel; whether the promised chapters about buttonholes or whiskers will be eventually introduced or not; or else, whether the novel itself possesses any paramount plot as such or not. All of this may cause that the reader might feel little incredulous and fooled but entertained at the same time.

Together with that, the reader could also experience a little of disappointment and humorous surprise at once. These ambivalent feelings may occur as the consequence of

readers' later demystification. Naturally, the readers always put their imagination in apprehension of any text. Thanks to the amount of asterisks and dashes, this opportunity for different personal interpretation is much more wishing in *Tristram Shandy* than in the most of other books. On the other hand, the truth is that the text of the novel itself offers so many allusive expressions that the readers are simply tempted to take the words rather figuratively than literally. Nonetheless, several chapters further, the readers are told that the thing is not what they are thinking all the time but something common, entirely arid and completely unexpected. Consequently, in the moment of this revelation, the readers might feel disappointed that they let Sterne to deceive them but simultaneously, they must laugh because his skill of swiftness is, namely in *Tristram Shandy*, really amusing and astonishing.

The third negative feeling which may arise while reading *Tristram Shandy* is the reader's umbrage. However, this is another way of Sterne's communication with his readers. Throughout his narrative, he edifies them repeatedly how to read his novel correctly. Moreover, he impugns general knowledge of the readers' while he represents himself as a very learned man by means of referring to distinguished scholarly works. Then, some of the readers, especially those lacking strong sense of humour, might feel rather offended, uncomfortable and slightly embarrassed. For illustration, this Sterne's bold assertiveness against the reader bordering on causticity could be explored in the following extract from *Tristram Shandy*:

—And pray who was *Tickletoby's* mare?—'tis just as discreditable and unscholar-like a question, Sir, as to have asked what year (*ab. urb. con.*) the second Punic war broke out.—Who was *Tickletoby's* mare!—Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read,—or by the knowledge of the great saint *Paraleipomenon*—I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once ... (III, 36, 203-4)

On the account of that, this boldly outspoken approach of Sterne's to the readers still perfectly succeeds in deepening their emotional involvement in his work. In the case of *Tristram Shandy*, it means that the readers actively participate in its entire constructing and interpreting; and what is more, they create a personal attachment to this unique novel which entails a real appreciation of it as such.

3 POSTMODERNIST *TRISTRAM SHANDY* IN THE CONTEXT OF A CONTRADICTORY VIEW

As it is generally known, nothing is only black or white; and the same could be applied for the case of *Tristram Shandy*'s relationship to postmodernism as well. In *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story*, a British film pertaining to this novel, one of the main characters and actors at once, Steve Coogan, says that "*Tristram Shandy* was a post-modern classic written before there was any modernism to be post about". These words of his express perfectly an opinion common to many academics that Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy* represents a precursor of postmodernism. Of course, that a literary work can be labelled as a postmodernist one, although it was written whole two hundred years earlier than the term postmodernism itself sprang up, this is indeed an attractive and exciting idea for many theorists. Nevertheless, there exist some disagreeing suggestions, which warn against an undue narrowness of this rather widely spread assertion. This contradictory view of *Tristram Shandy* not regarded as an anticipator of postmodernism is based on two different but complementary arguments. First, the supporters of this opinion claim that approaching Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as a supposed forerunner of postmodernism leads inevitably to a tendentious misreading of the novel as such with a prior intention of finding postmodernist features in it. Second, they decided to put aside the idea of Sterne as the only potential grandfather of postmodernism, and subsequently, to consider the contemporaries and even predecessors of his as other equally possible sources of postmodernism, too. In short, these two views sustain fairly a contradictory position that the assumption of *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodernist novel is wrong and misleading.

The first opinion is that that the association of *Tristram Shandy* with postmodernism has resulted mainly from its misreading. As stated by Walter Göbel from Stuttgart University, when two texts are to be compared, the attention is more or less consciously drawn to some desired features within them, while their other qualities are left unheeded. He adds that it is very likely that this comparison will primarily concern the formal aspects of those texts, to the detriment of the highlighting of their possible different cultural and historical contexts (212). However, every formal aspect within a writing, no

matter of what epoch, bears the intention of its author's. Along with that, this intention of usage of particular formal aspects is always derived from the circumstances of the cultural, social and political background of the actual historical period of each author. Accordingly, when discussing two different texts of literature, the supporters of this thought urge the involvement of both aspects, formal and functional, for their significant interconnection. The same could hold for Sterne's writings, especially for *Tristram Shandy*, when it is related to postmodernist works. Sterne is a writer of his time, culture and tradition and as such should be put in the context of his age two hundred years apart from ours. Carol Watts holds the same point of view. She argues that to wrest any literary work from the context of its origin and to put it within the framework, in this case, of almost 250 years younger postmodern thoughts is not conceivable and right for the origin of the work itself would be denied by this act (qtd. in Walsh, "Introduction" 12).

The other theorists who maintain this attitude are, for example, Robert Folkenflik, Thomas Keymer, Melvyn New or Tim Parnell. To prove their standpoint, they have compared independently of each other Sterne's way of writing with his contemporaries' and in doing so, they drew a hoped-for conclusion. It was noticed that formal features of postmodernism are embodied not only in the novel *Tristram Shandy* but also in some other works of that age. Folkenflik sums up this recognition: "From the technical perspective, Sterne's fiction is full of hypertrophied versions of the novel's conventional routines: the prefatory first-person narration, the interpolated tales, the self-conscious digressions, and other characteristic devices that can be observed from Cervantes to Fielding" (52).

First, Folkenflik highlights the anonymous work called *Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates* (1756) (51-2). He suggests that this book proves a very strong similarity with *Tristram Shandy* and presumably, it had become an inspiration for Sterne. Their similarity could be found not only in the titles but also their characters are almost identical in their personalities. What is more, both of these novels also share some very distinct peculiar formal aspects, especially those typographical, such as the use of asterisks, dashes and also an epitaph which resembles that one of Yorick's very closely, varying only in the names of the two deceased. Another similarity of theirs lies in intertextuality, which is typical to both of them; but as Folkenflik asserts, quotations of

and allusions to other classic works was very common for the authors of that period. The main difference between these two writings is self-consciousness, which the earlier written novel lacks. However, as shall be shown, self-reflexivity was nothing rare in that time of Sterne's.

Furthermore, Folkenflik also refers to the fact that *Tristram Shandy's* experimental narrative form was rather recurrent within the eighteenth century literature. For the purpose of that, he quotes the words of Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's: "Stories and novels have flowed in such abundance for these last ten years that we would wish, if possible, to strike a little out of a road already so much beaten" (qtd. in Folkenflik, 53). Folkenflik points out that in all of these novels, and in many more, the features of self-reflexivity (in the form of addressing readers or critics), games with typography (such as the use of asterisks or different sizes of font), along with digressions, could be evidently recognised in them. Then in the link with that, as demonstrated by Folkenflik, self-consciousness may be identified in, for example, the anonymous *Charlotte Summers* (1749), John Hill's *The Adventures of Mr. Loveill* (1750), Sarah Fielding and Jane Collier's *The Cry* (1754), and probably the most familiar ones from these, Smollet's *The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom* (1753), or Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749). Digressions, which Sterne has been renowned for, are also typical for the latter one, or also for Jonathan Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* (1704).

In conclusion, the idea of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* as a precursor of postmodernism has both its supporters and also the opponents. Each of these two contradictory views brings along an interesting approach to this novel. All things considered, these interesting observations about *Tristram Shandy* within the context of other eighteenth century literature perfectly supplement and support the above introduced opinion about the misreading of *Tristram Shandy*. Then, in the view of the fact that Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is called a precursor of postmodernism, the other above mentioned works should be taken into more serious consideration, too. According to this presented opposing opinion, this is the fact which should be taken into account when, as quoted in Walsh, *Tristram Shandy* is approached as "a thoroughly postmodern work in every sense except the period in which it was written" ("Introduction" 12). The reason is that these above

mentioned novels represent the inherent cultural context of *Tristram Shandy*, its inspiration, influence, or in other words, a sort of culture medium for its origin.

CONCLUSION

This bachelor thesis is based on the contemporary assumption maintained by many academics that the 18th century British novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* written by Laurence Sterne embodies certain features which are typical of the 20th century postmodernist writings. On the grounds of their observations, they designate this novel as a postmodernist one; and if not as a postmodernist novel, they label it at least as its influential precursor. Accordingly, this work was designed to focus on this rather widespread presumption and to explore and to evaluate the degree of its legitimacy. For the purpose of that, much of this work was devoted to the issue of postmodernist fiction alone. That particular section (chapter one) introduced the very general characterization of postmodernist writings together with their most frequent techniques and the most distinguishing marks. However the chief focus point of this writing was the formal literary analysis of Sterne's novel *Tristram Shandy* defining and demonstrating so-called postmodernist elements in it. Besides, the attention was also paid to the other side of this entire topic by pointing out that there exists the contradictory opinion, too, which considers *Tristram Shandy's* postmodernism as a nonsense. Now, there remain the two last tasks: to evaluate this work as such and to dare to deliver the awaited answer whether or not it is plausible to speak of *Tristram Shandy* as a typical postmodernist work.

First of all, it is essential to assess a degree of fulfilling the objectives of this work, which were laid down in its introduction. To begin with, the topic of this work is very broad, concerning many different theoretical fields, such as, literary theory, postmodernism, postmodernism in literature respectively, and, of course, also the British literature of the 18th century. Consequently, it could be said that the former intention of this writing to demonstrate a complex analysis of presupposed postmodernist attributes of *Tristram Shandy* was not accomplished. To do so, it would be necessary to dedicate much more time to the literary theory of postmodernist literature in order to represent all the features of its and thus provide an appropriate foundation for subsequent study of the novel. Furthermore, to be able to decide if the novel really embodies postmodernist aspects or not it would have to be compared to other writings of the same time period.

The reason is to foreclose the option that the similar aspects to those of postmodernism comprised in *Tristram Shandy* are not typical also of other 18th century literary works, but on the contrary, to prove that those attributes are really postmodernist ones. Nevertheless, both of these requirements exceed far more the possibilities of the bachelor thesis for they deserve highly elaborate study and certainly much more space than this can afford. On the other hand, this work complies with its defined aims to some extent as it introduces at least the most evident and significant postmodernist qualities of *Tristram Shandy*.

Finally, this work is facing the last but the most challenging task: to determine upon the question of *Tristram Shandy*'s postmodernist disposition. This issue is very problematic for the reason that there exist the two contradictory approaches to this matter as was demonstrated in chapter three. While the first one takes into consideration mainly the formal aspects of the novel, which resemble very closely those used by postmodernist writers, the other viewpoint emphasises mainly the different sociohistorical contexts of these two two-hundred-years remote eras. This great incommensurability of both of these attitudes implicates several problems when one struggles to decide on *Tristram Shandy*'s postmodernity.

First, it is the term *postmodernism* itself with all its possible derivatives which complicate the situation. The reason is, by words of Bosch, that "eighteenth-century readers were not familiar with the terms [and] categories of ... postmodernist analysis" (222). As a result, the expression itself thus gives rise to a great paradox – how is it possible to label a work of art as postmodernist one when it had originated long time before the term *postmodernism*, or even *modernism*, was invented?

This rather serious contradiction leads into the second obstacle. It is the completely different time location of both Sterne's life and the era of postmodernism. Then, speaking about *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodernist novel would mean to project the contemporary onto the past what again conduces to another controversy. As a result, there arises the question to what extent these two far remote stages of the history, together with everything related to them, such as, a general perceiving of the world, thinking, art, social and political setting, are similar or, in contrast, dissimilar. In connection with that, how is it possible to relate the 18th century writing with the intellectual and art movement of the 20th century, when both are based in very different social settings?

Nevertheless, disregarding this fact about the two disparate period contexts and focusing merely on formal literary aspects, there appears the third problem. That is, as it was demonstrated in the third chapter of this bachelor thesis, the occurrence of purported postmodernist features also within the other works dating back to the 18th century. It implicates the question whether these features are really postmodernist ones or, on the contrary, typical of the 18th century literature. Should not be then the other 18th century works comprising the same attributes labelled as postmodernist ones as well?

Similar difficulty can occur when we place *Tristram Shandy* not within the context of the 18th century but within that of modernism. The typical features of this novel, what chiefly means self-reflexivity and playfulness, are, according to Childs, generally regarded as modernist ones (19). On the account of that, would not it be advisable to consider *Tristram Shandy* as a modernist novel, too? For instance, Lamb writes that Virginia Woolf did so because she regarded Sterne as a “protomodernist” (154). But then, how is it possible that this novel is believed to be modernist likewise postmodernist writing at the same time? Especially, on the condition stated at the beginning of the first chapter that postmodernism defines itself against modernism. Consequently, these arguments even more underline the problem of *Tristram Shandy*’s classification as a postmodernist novel.

Overall, on the grounds of what have been said so far in this bachelor thesis, Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* embodies evidently a number of formal features typical of postmodernist literature. The three most obvious ones of them are intertextuality, reflexivity and playfulness. It could be said that these three qualities represent the crucial elements, which have been at the bottom of the presumption that *Tristram Shandy* is a postmodernist work at all, or at least postmodernism’s precursor. However, as was just demonstrated, there is a certain degree of limitations involved in this belief which make this issue rather misleading and more difficult. Therefore the matter whether to consider *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodernist novel or not is insoluble for this moment. Reaching a decision would require, in this case, entertaining all pros and cons, all factors which may play a role in this question. However, the problem is that they are too various and too contradictory that the question would still probably remain open. The same attitude is

held by Bosch, who states that *Tristram Shandy* “is like a Rorschach test plate⁴, on which every individual and every age projects its own motives” (9). In short, everyone sees in *Tristram Shandy* something different depending on what he or she wants to find in it. As modernists recognised in this novel the marks of modernism, postmodernists observe the features of postmodernism. On all accounts, it is always a matter of a particular viewpoint.

To conclude, although the assumption of the novel *Tristram Shandy* as a postmodernist work may appear to be unjustified and exaggerated, one issue is sure. Many postmodernist writers have openly acknowledged this literary work as a strong inspiration of theirs. Furthermore, it will probably become an inspiration to many other writers, along with many other art movements in the future. Then, *Tristram Shandy* might be called as a novel typical of another “-ism” as it happened in the cases of modernism and postmodernism.

⁴ It is a psychological test in which in order to test one’s personality the subjects say what they see in various ink blots of indistinct shapes and thus they project their emotions, characters, thoughts and also experiences into these pictures.

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RÉSUMÉ IN CZECH

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je román *Život a názory blahorodého pana Tristrama Shandyho* (1759–1767; dále jako *Tristram Shandy*), jehož tvůrcem je Laurence Sterne, britský spisovatel 18. století. Sterne je považován mnohými současnými osobnostmi za autora, jenž svým osobitým stylem psaní předběhl svou dobu o celých dvě stě let. Důvodem je, že jeho zmíněný román obsahuje jisté formální prvky, o kterých se tvrdí, že se ve stejném složení a ve stejné míře objevují znovu až u děl postmoderní literatury, jež je záležitostí druhé poloviny 20. století. Na tomto poznatku je postavena celá tato práce, jejímž cílem je pokusit se v tomto románu tyto předpokládané znaky postmodernismu odhalit, smysluplně je utřídit a na základě této analýzy rozhodnout zda je tato domněnka oprávněná.

Práce začíná úvodem, ve kterém je přiblížena podstata tohoto románu, stručně je zde shrnut jeho obsah, a rovněž je zde i popsáno jeho místo mezi ostatními literárními díly 18. století. Na úvod navazuje první kapitola podávající obraz o postmoderní literatuře s důrazem na charakteristiku jejích vybraných formálních znaků. Druhá kapitola, která představuje hlavní část této práce, je věnována literárnímu rozboru samotného románu *Tristram Shandy* se záměrem identifikovat v něm prvky shodné s těmi, které byly představeny v kapitole první jako typicky postmodernistické. Třetí kapitola přináší opačný pohled na tuto problematiku a uvádí řadu argumentů, na jejichž základě je chápání tohoto díla jako díla postmodernistického neoprávněné a mylné. Samotný závěr této bakalářské práce se na pozadí provedené analýzy snaží mj. podat odpověď na otázku, nakolik a zda vůbec je možné o knize *Tristram Shandy* hovořit jako o románu postmodernistickém.