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The Rhetorical Sources of *Tristram Shandy*

The original style of *Tristram Shandy* has been an issue of investigation ever since it was first published. It has given rise to interpretations that place the work among the musical, philosophical, dramatic or rhetorical novels. Peter J. de Voogd proves that the marbled pages in the third volume are different not only from each other but from all the other volumes as well in the early editions (de Voogd 284). He explains the significance of the singular visuality of the novel: "Each marbling is unique, as is each reading of *Tristram Shandy*. It is fitting that your copy of *Tristram Shandy* is different from mine, since your subjective experience of the book is different" (de Voogd 287). Many of the approaches focus on the problem of how all the rhetorical devices, typographical oddities and syntax in the novel are there to serve Sterne's intention: to convey the characters' thoughts to each other in the most authentic way and to the reader who is free to interpret them in his/her own way. The ambiguous success of such an undertaking is expressed in the comic misinterpretations of words by the members of the Shandy family or in the narrator's imaginary dialogues with his fictional reader. Sometimes the characters have the greatest difficulty carrying their meaning through in an intelligible way. They try to bridge the gap between thoughts and words with "gestural eloquence" (Holtz 80). The success of communication turns upon their oratorical knowledge which they presumably shared with the majority of contemporary readers. My argument will be that certain rhetorical figures such as double entendres, puns and aposiopesis in *Tristram Shandy*, while pointing out the impossibility of autobiographical writing

in the conventional sense, also serve to parody the elocutionist concept of rhetoric in Sterne's time.[1]

When depicting his father's rhetorical skills, Tristram recalls several rhetoricians whom Walter Shandy unconsciously follows in his orations:

> But, indeed, to speak of my father as he was; - he was certainly irresistible, both in his orations and disputations; - he was born an orator; - qeodidaktoV. - Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of Logick and Rhetorick were so blended up in him, - and, withall, he had so shrewd a guess at the weaknesses and passions of his respondent, - that NATURE might have stood up and said, - "This man is eloquent." In short, whether he was on the weak or the strong side of the question, 'twas hazardous in either case to attack him: - And yet, 'tis strange, he had never read *Cicero* nor *Quintilian de Oratore*, nor *Isocrates*, nor *Aristotle*, nor *Longinus* amongst the antients; - nor *Vossius*, nor *Skioppius*, nor *Ramus*, nor *Farnaby* amongst the moderns.
>
> (*TS*, I.19)

Although Walter Shandy does not know the rhetorical works of these writers, several times he refers to Aristotle and Cicero and on the occasion of his son Bobby's death, he quotes at great length from Sercius Sulpicius's consolation letter to Cicero. Also, he likes to make allusions to entirely spurious works that never existed.[2] He proves to be profoundly well read in philosophy, logic and ethics but his rhetorical knowledge is a "gift of God," he is born to be the master of elocution. Since the appearance of John Traugott's influential study, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric*, Sterne scholarship has extended its research in the rhetorical direction. Traugott calls Sterne a "rhetorician and not a 'novelist'" (Traugott xiii) and argues that rhetoric in *Tristram Shandy* is the leading principle of characterisation[3]. Agnes Zwaneveld gives a close analysis of the rhetorical figures in the first chapter of the novel and claims that "under the surface of his spontaneous outburst the narrator displays a sufficient command of

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[1]In his analysis of Sterne's style, J. M. Stedmond traces the characteristics of the anti-Ciceronian prose in Tristram Shandy. ("Style and Tristram Shandy." *MLQ 20* (1959): 243-251.)

[2]Judith Hawley collected all the works, genuine, partially or entirely spurious, to which allusions are made in Tristram Shandy. ("'Hints and Documents' I: A Bibliography for Tristram Shandy." *The Shandean 3* (1991): 9-36.)

[3]"Every character of the book, indeed, is primarily a rhetorical effect, a device by which Tristram explicates his life and opinions" (Traugott 115).

rhetoric to hold our attention" (Zwaneveld 66). The changed role of oratory in Sterne's day is mirrored in the playful use of rhetorical devices in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne's plan was to assign dramatic roles to his characters in which they would act, unknowingly, as skilled orators (Traugott 113-15).

In England classical rhetoric underwent an essential change before the eighteenth century and that change might be reflected in how Sterne represents his characters in the story. The parodic way he treats Walter Shandy, Uncle Toby or Trim, and Tristram's unsuccessful attempts to write an autobiography, create a paradox that reveals Sterne's idea of autobiography writing. The narrator makes the characters expressive through their orations and gestures: they communicate their eccentricity through carefully composed rhetorical speeches, which, however, never reach their purpose because they are most of the time misinterpreted. Any attempt to communicate their own life turns into failure. Tristram's presence in *Tristram Shandy* is restricted to being the explicit mover of the story, the intruding narrator. The reader receives little information about his life compared to the lives of the other characters. Instead he appears in the role of the stage director that is responsible for putting an end to the scenes.[4] His opinions express what lies behind elocution, the non-verbal matter of what a life turns out to be after the curtain is dropped: what is the meaning that continues where language is cut by an aposiopesis and only dashes refer to the unspeakable.

STERNE'S RHETORICAL EDUCATION

The reading of most of the rhetoricians referred to in *Tristram Shandy* were prescribed to students in the general syllabus for the colleges at Cambridge University in the first half of the eighteenth century. Sterne studied at Jesus College, Cambridge, between 1733 and 1737. As an undergraduate, his tutors must have followed a contemporary work on recommended readings, Daniel Waterland's *Advice to a Young Student. With a Method of Study for the Four First Years* (1706-40)[5]. Tristram refers to him when he talks about how Yorick always commented upon his own sermons:

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[4]Traugott writes, "The only possible way to imagine Tristram Shandy as a play is to imagine Tristram in front of the curtain as a chorus or commentator pointing to the stage action..." (Traugott 133).

[5]See Cash, Arthur H. Laurence Sterne. *The Early & Middle Years.* London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1975, chapter two.

> For instance, This sermon upon the jewish dispensation - I don't like it at all; - Though I own there is a world of WATER-LANDISH knowledge in it, - but 'tis all tritical, and most tritically put together. - This is but a flimsy kind of a composition; what was in my head when I made it?
>
> (*TS*, VI.11)

Waterland lists the courses in philosophy, classical and divine studies. His list of the classical studies includes the reading of the rhetorical works of Cicero, Vossius, Isocrates.[6] For those who intended to be preachers, an additional list was offered, in which Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, Plutarch, Longinus, Curtius, and Pufendorf were found among others (Wordsworth 337). In *Tristram Shandy*, there is an allusion to Jesus College as well, where Tristram continues the description of his father's rhetorical skills:

> ... he knew not so much as in what the difference of an argument *ad ignorantiam* and an argument *ad hominem* consisted; so that I well remember, when he went up along with me to enter my name at Jesus College in * * * *, - it was a matter of just wonder with my worthy tutor, and two or three fellows of that learned society, - that a man who knew not so much as the names of his tools, should be able to work after that fashion with 'em."
>
> (*TS*, I.19)

Sterne shared the classical rhetorical knowledge that he received at Jesus College with any educated reader of his day. As a preacher, he wrote sermons and had a great oratorical practice. Traugott writes about his skills: "Sterne's pulpit oratory was as full of rhetorical tricks as Hume could have wished, had he wished for a pulpit oratory at all, and Cowper allowed that if any rhetoric could save souls, Sterne's could" (Traugott 85). The characters' inability to make themselves understood might illustrate the loss rhetoric suffered by the elocutionist movement.

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[6] I have found the syllabus in the appendix of Christopher Wordsworth's study, *Scholae Academicae: Some Account of the Studies at the English Universities in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1877: 333-334).

THE BRITISH ELOCUTIONISTS

In the third volume of *Tristram Shandy*, where Tristram explains an aposiopesis from the previous chapter, he makes a remark upon the dying out of eloquence in those days (the cause of which is that orators do not wear mantles any more):

> All which plainly shews, may it please your worships, that the decay of eloquence, and the little good service it does at present, both within, and without doors, is owing to nothing else in the world, but short coats, and the disuse of trunkhose. - We can conceal nothing under ours, Madam, worth shewing.
>
> (*TS*, III.14)[7]

The passage ironically refers to the changed concept of classical rhetoric. This change began with Petrus Ramus in the sixteenth century and resulted in a limited concept of rhetoric.

Samuel Howell describes the main trends running parallel in Sterne's time.[8] The Ciceronians tried to restore the classical rhetorical tradition, the five arts that Cicero defined as the five major procedures of rhetoric: *inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria* and *pronuntiatio*. The reform known as Ramism consisted in detaching the first two arts, *inventio* and *dispositio*, from rhetoric and referring them to logic. Tristram's statement, "we can conceal nothing under ours, Madam, worth shewing," might refer to this loss. It meant, Howell argues, that rhetoric remained without the "considerations of content and form:" "Limited to delivery and to the mere externals of style, rhetoric no longer had anything of real importance to say or do" (Howell 78-79). Extreme Ramism in the eighteenth century saw rhetoric as the art of voice and gesture alone. The elocutionist movement considered the art of speaking, oratory, as restricted entirely to the elegance of style. The elocutionists regarded Cicero's third art, elocutio, as an equivalent of the fifth art, *pronuntiatio* (Howell 145).

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[7]Cf. Hume's essay, "Of Eloquence" (1742): "It may be pretended that the decline of eloquence is owing to the superior good sense of the moderns, who reject with disdain all those rhetorical tricks, employed to seduce the judges, and will admit of nothing but solid argument in any debate or deliberation..." (Quoted from Traugott 85).

[8]See Howell, Samuel. *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971.

In *Tristram Shandy*, the characters are often presented as actors, orators. The circumstances of the reading of the "Sermon on Conscience" symbolise well the whole structure of the novel. The "subject matter" (*inventio*) accidentally falls out of Stevinus and the eloquence of the speaker seems to gain greater emphasis than the content of the sermon. In Chambers' *Cyclopedia* there are two articles on elocution. The first defines it in the Ciceronian sense, as the "choice of words." However, there is a more restricted, second meaning of "elocution" that Chamber also offers, where the term is defined as "the just and graceful management of the voice, countenance, and gesture, in speaking," which was identical with the fifth art, *pronuntiatio*, for the Ramists. Chambers considers gesture as a requisite of good delivery, which he discusses in detail in a separate article ("gesture") referring to Quintilian, Cicero, Ward, and Sheridan's *Lectures on Elocution*.[9] Sometimes Walter Shandy is unable to overcome his greatest affliction through an oration. He then decides to take a walk to the fish pond or -- when he learns about Tristram's flat nose -- he throws himself on his bed "in the wildest disorder imaginable, but at the same time, in the most lamentable attitude of a man borne down with sorrows, that ever the eye of pity dropp'd a tear for" (*TS*, III.29). The narrator devotes page after page to the detailed description of similar scenes to exemplify the role of non-verbal devices in characterisation. When Trim is reading out the sermon, Tristram paints his gestures and posture:

> He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon; - which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence;
>
> (*TS*, II.17)

The description of Trim's posture has two sources: gestures are discussed as the second part of pronunciation, and the passage also alludes to William Hogarth's theory of the line of beauty ("...his knee bent, but that not violently, - but so as to fall within the limits of the line of beauty.") The allusion to Hogarth is ironic: the over-sophisticated description serves to instruct orators about the right posture. However, those who would want to embody the line of beauty in their postures would in fact fall on their noses ("unless they practise it"). This comic remark

[9]Sterne must have known Sheridan's *Lectures* since he possessed an 1762 edition of them (see Whibley's Catalogue, item 567).

places the whole subject of elocution in an ironic context. Cicero discusses gesture as the necessary accompaniment of emotion. In Chambers' *Cyclopedia* gesture is a "motion of the body, intended to signify some idea or passion of the mind." Gestures are intended to complement or substitute language: they are to convey feelings in a non-verbal way and they can also be expressive of thoughts, not merely emotions. Whenever he gives a speech, Trim's gestures and voice comply with the rules of pronunciation and elocution. In the second book, he is portrayed as a faithful servant of Uncle Toby with great affection. The only flaw in his character is that he is too eloquent:

> ... he was voluble; - the eternal interlardings of your Honour, with the respectfulness of Corporal Trim's manner, interceding so strong in behalf of his elocution, - that tho' you might have been incommoded, - you could not well be angry.
>
> (*TS*, II.5)

Trim's hobby horse is his elocution, his characterisation is built around his voice, bows, gestures and postures. The gestures of the other characters are also expressive of the ruling passion of their bearers. In Sterne's day a deeper connection was assumed between the art of elocution and national character. Addison, in the *Spectator* (No. 407), emphasises the importance of gestures:

> Most foreign writers who have given any character of the *English* nation, whatever vices they ascribe to it, allow in general, that the people are naturally modest. It proceeds perhaps from this our national virtue, that our orators are observed to make use of less gesture or action than those of other countries. Our preachers stand stock-still in the pulpit, and will not so much as move a finger to set off the best sermons in the world.

Despite the dying out of eloquence, Sterne's characters are skilful orators; they always use proper gestures and know the graces of speaking. Gestures in their communication often prove to be more successful than words.[10]

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[10]See Marie-Paule Laden. "Tristram Shandy: Imitation as Paradox and Joke." In *Self-Imitation in the Eighteenth-Century Novel*: 128-156. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1987 (144): "It is remarkable that whatever communication occurs between Walter's and Toby's monadic universes is achieved through gestures."

THE ROLE OF THE CHARACTERS' ELOCUTION IN TRISTRAM SHANDY

Yorick, Walter Shandy, and Uncle Toby are eccentric characters. The reader gets to know them through their ruling passions which are always associated with either figurative language usage or non-verbal communication. The communicative failure in the characters' speeches reveals Sterne's intention: to show that the human mind and passions are not depictable or communicable by the means of elocution. Although figurative and non-verbal rhetorical means would serve better to convey thoughts than words, the comic effect that always arises proves their failure. They become the individual patterns of Tristram's various attempts to express the continuous flow of thoughts in the mind.

Each of the lives of the three main characters has one feature in common: the life they live is a contradiction of their knowledge. Yorick is introduced in the first book as falling victim to his own wit. His jokes and his role as a jester make him an eccentric among people with no sense of humour. These jokes and his deeds are ambiguous, therefore people always misinterpret them. When he picks up the chestnut that Phutatorius threw on the floor, he innocently becomes accused.[11] Tristram describes his character:

> ... but it was his misfortune all his life to bear the imputation of saying and doing a thousand things of which (unless my esteem blinds me) his nature was incapable.
>
> (*TS*, IV.27)

Phutatorius interprets Yorick's gesture of picking up the chestnut as a "plain acknowledgement (...) that the chesnut was originally his" whereas the reason why Yorick picked it up was simply a trifling incident:

> ...He did it, for no reason, but that he thought the chesnut not a jot worse for the adventure - and that he held a good chesnut worth stooping for.
>
> (*TS*, IV.27)

Yorick seems to be bound by the same language the Shakespearean jester used. He is able to communicate his life only through gestures, riddles and metaphors

[11]Traugott explains this scene as an example of the "rhetoric of existence" (Traugott 109-13).

which people around him constantly misinterpret. The narrator alone knows what is behind Yorick's figurative speech:

> All I blame him for - or rather, all I blame and alternately like him for, was that singularity of his temper, which would never suffer him to take pains to set a story right with the world, however in his power.
>
> (*TS*, IV.27)

Yorick's high spirit is represented in his gestures and the figurative language he always uses but never explains; however, it always results in a comic effect, which proves the failure of possible interpretations.

The second book of *Tristram Shandy* is devoted to the characterisation of Uncle Toby. This is perhaps the most profound place where Tristram reveals the difference between his writing a biography and the characters trying to communicate themselves. Uncle Toby's hobby horse is the fortifications built on the bowling green. Although he has a broad knowledge of military science, his wound makes him unable to practise this knowledge. His life in this wounded state is limited to sitting in the parlour and making odd remarks on Walter Shandy's theories; or he gives a lecture on one of the attacks in the siege of Namur. Tristram depicts him as an eloquent person but Uncle Toby's eloquence fails most of the time:

> ... my uncle Toby was generally more eloquent and particular in his account of it [the principal attack at Namur]; and the many perplexities he was in, arose out of the almost insurmountable difficulties he found in telling his story intelligibly ...
>
> (*TS*, II.1)

The unlucky attempts to explain these attacks to his visitors almost cost Uncle Toby his life. What saves his life and ultimately heals his wound is that he becomes capable of putting his obscure explanations into action, in Tristram's words, "of procuring my uncle Toby his HOBBY-HORSE." Tristram's answer to the critic's question of

> -- How, in the name of wonder! could your uncle Toby, who, it seems, was a military man, and whom you have represented as no fool, -- be at the same time such a confused, pudding-headed, muddle-headed fellow, as --
>
> (*TS*, II.2)

would be "Go look" assuming that the reader will be able to look behind the dropped curtains. However, Tristram writes a biography so he must cope with the rules of rhetoric when drawing the character of Uncle Toby. The "Go look" answer is only possible for the other characters that can afford to use non-verbal devices when they are not able to express themselves. Tristram the narrator must explain himself in an intelligible way:

> ... for tho' it [the "Go look" answer] might have suited my uncle Toby's character as a soldier excellently well, - and had he not accustomed himself, in such attacks, to whistle his *Lillabullero*, - as he wanted no courage, 'tis the very answer he would have given; yet it would by no means have done for me.
>
> (*TS*, II.2)

Tristram must follow the rules of narration if he wants to avoid the critics' attacks. He must strive to be intelligible and avoid any possibility of misinterpretation of his words. His answer instead of saying "Go look" is comparing his narration with Locke's *Essay*. This is a history-book, he says, on "what passes in a man's own mind." Tristram wants to show that apart from the possible causes of obscurity and confusion in the perception of ideas in a man's mind there is a deeper failure: the impossibility of assigning words to those ideas. He concludes the chapter about Uncle Toby's perplexities by saying, "'Twas not by ideas, - by heaven! his life was put in jeopardy by words."

Walter Shandy is the greatest orator among the characters. His entire life seems to turn on the speeches he gives on every possible subject. His elocution is both the fortune and the misfortune of his life:

> My father was as proud of his eloquence as MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO could be for his life ... it was indeed his strength - and his weakness too. - His strength - for he was by nature eloquent, - and his weakness - for he was hourly a dupe to it...
>
> (*TS*, V.3)

His theories presented in speeches are his hobby horse; they help him overcome the tragedies that happen to the Shandy family: Bobby's death, Tristram's flat nose and his unlucky circumcision. However, his misfortune is that his eloquence most of the time falls victim to the door hinges which creak whenever the door opens and it either puts an end to the oration or gives another flow to his thoughts:

> Never did the parlour-door open - but his philosophy or his principles fell a victim to it; ... Inconsistent soul that man is! - languishing under wounds, which he has the power to heal! - his whole life a contradiction to his knowledge!
>
> (*TS*, III.21)

The same thing happens when someone enters the room and brings a message from upstairs or when Trim returns with Stevinus:

> ... but, to the loss of much sound knowledge, the destinies in the morning had decreed that no dissertation of any kind should be spun by my father that day; - for as he opened his mouth to begin the next sentence, (ch.15) In popp'd Corporal *Trim* with *Stevinus*;
>
> (*TS*, II. 14, 15)

The characters are often silenced by accidents like this before they could ever reach the end of their sentence. The narrator cuts their speeches short by applying the figure of aposiopesis. It is an important element in Tristram's life narrative and is used for different purposes.

APOSIOPESIS AS THE PRINCIPLE OF TRISTRAM'S NARRATIVE

In oratory, aposiopesis serves as a rhetorical embellishment to give a greater emphasis to what has been said: "The emphasis is produced through Aposiopesis if we begin to say something and then stop short, and what we have already said

leaves enough to arouse suspicion" (*Rhet. ad Her.* IV. 54.67). Aposiopesis is the rhetorical principle of Walter Shandy and the other characters' speeches as well. Its various functions are connected with the function of elocution in the presentation of their lives and designates the necessarily fragmentary nature of life writing. Tristram has to cut their speeches because they always deviate from the point at issue. Aposiopesis is also used in cases when something bawdy or ambiguous is meant to be said. In *Tristram Shandy* it is defined as an important ornamental figure in oratory because eloquence many times depends on where the speaker stops:

> – "My sister, mayhap," quoth my uncle Toby, "does not choose to let a man come so near her ****." Make this dash, –'tis an Aposiopesis. – Take the dash away, and write *Backside*, – 'tis Bawdy. – Scratch Backside out, and put *Cover'd-way* in, – 'tis a Metaphor; – and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle *Toby's* head, that if he had been left to have added one word to the sentence, – that word was it. (*TS*, II.6)

It is that type of aposiopesis where the speaker must respect decency and not use expressions which might embarrass the audience.[12] Traugott considers the use of aposiopesis in the novel as "a device of a festive irony," which expresses the characters' emotions but at the same time makes the reader aware of the ironic effect (Traugott 123). Sterne's most ingenious use of aposiopesis of this type is the last sentence of *Sentimental Journey* where the reader can only guess what the end of the sentence might be.[13]

Another function of aposiopesis in the characters' orations is to raise suspicions in the reader that there is more behind elocution that is not told. The characters constantly make efforts to reach beyond the boundaries of language. When they are not able to put their emotions into words, they turn to non-verbal devices such as Uncle Toby's *Argumentum Fistulatorium* (*TS*, I.21); his infallible method of persuasion is to whistle his Lillabullero. Dr. Slop, intending to give emphasis to his speech, suddenly shows the said thing in question instead of

[12]Heinrich Lausberg calls this type "publikumrespektierende Aposiopese" (Lausberg 439)

[13]The novel's contemporary German translator, Johann Joachim Bode, decided not to leave it up to the readers' imagination as to what part of the Fille de Chambre's body Yorick caught hold of: "Also, da ich die Hand ausstreckte, faßte ich der Kammerjungfer ihre." (*Yoricks empfindsame Reise durch Frankreich und Italien*. Mannheim, 1780.)

talking about it. In the middle of his argument, he pulls out his forceps from his bag but in such haste that, accidentally, a squirt comes out with it, which Uncle Toby immediately misinterprets:

> "Good God!" cried my uncle Toby, *"are children brought into the world with a squirt?"*
>
> (*TS*, III.15)

Even efforts like this, where the characters try to make their argument as clear as possible to avoid any misunderstanding, fail because of the unexpected connections of thought they evoke in others. Walter Shandy's thoughts and actions are entirely unpredictable as well. His thoughts are always ruled by surprising chains of associations. It is impossible, for example, to tell how he will react to the unfortunate circumcision of Tristram:

> There was that infinitude of oddities in him, and of chances along with it, by which handle he would take a thing, - it baffled, Sir, all calculations. The truth was, his road lay so very far on one side, from that wherein most men travelled, - that every object before him presented a face and section of itself to his eye, altogether different from the plan and elevation of it seen by the rest of mankind.
>
> (*TS*, V.24)

It seems what is common in the characters' thoughts is that they lack any kind of logic. Or, when there is logic in the argument, it is not accepted by the other participant of the dialogue: in vain Walter Shandy tries to explain to his wife before Tristram's birth that "the belly of the mother might be opened extremely well to give a passage to the child" (*TS*, II. 19), any reasoning is lost on Mrs. Shandy to agree to the Caesarian section.

Although it does not bridge the gap between meaning and words, elocution plays a most important part in *Tristram Shandy*. The characters seem to be actors with oratorical skills but the content behind their eloquence several times cannot be reached. Whatever they talk about, elocution seems to be equally important to the actual content of their speech. The more they talk the more they deviate from the reader's expectations and the less Tristram learns from them about his own life; that is the reason why he must interrupt them from time to time and cut their speeches short otherwise the characters, and consequently his writing, would elude him. The endless attempts to find his past with the help of

the characters, through their memories, is Tristram's greatest endeavour in *Tristram Shandy*. The characters embody his unsuccessful attempts to put thoughts into words through their elocution. Their eloquence illustrates well what happens if elocution means merely the choice of words and pronunciation (the general management of speaking). In Sterne's day, the main practice of elocution was to find the most adequate way of employing language. At the same time it also meant the removal of the philosophical problem of how to translate thoughts into words. Sterne illustrates this problem when he shows that one's past is unreachable as the subject material for any "life and opinions," in the sense that biographers in his day assumed. In his opinions Tristram expresses his concerns about the deficiency of his subject material, the impossibility of constructing his life from the memories and orations of the characters and family anecdotes. The exaggerated use of oratorical devices function as the deliberate frustration of the narrative movement as well.[14] On a rhetorical level, aposiopesis proves to be the best device to designate the fragmentary and arbitrary nature of life and its communicability as represented in a biography. Its function in *Tristram Shandy* is to raise suspicion in the reader that the philosophical problem cannot be solved on a rhetorical level, that something will always remain unsaid.

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[14]Baldwin explains ecphrasis as a sophistic device of oration by referring to Sterne: "The habit of decorative dilation in oratory confirmed a decadent habit of literature. That the habit is decadent even when indulged with more taste is suggested by certain passages in De Quincey, in Pater, most clearly perhaps in that English sophist Laurence Sterne." To illustrate ecphrasis, he quotes from *A Sentimental Journey* (Baldwin 19).

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