WEEKLY STUDY MATERIAL

English (Hons.) II year

Paper 8: British Literature: 18th Century

Unit 4: Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*

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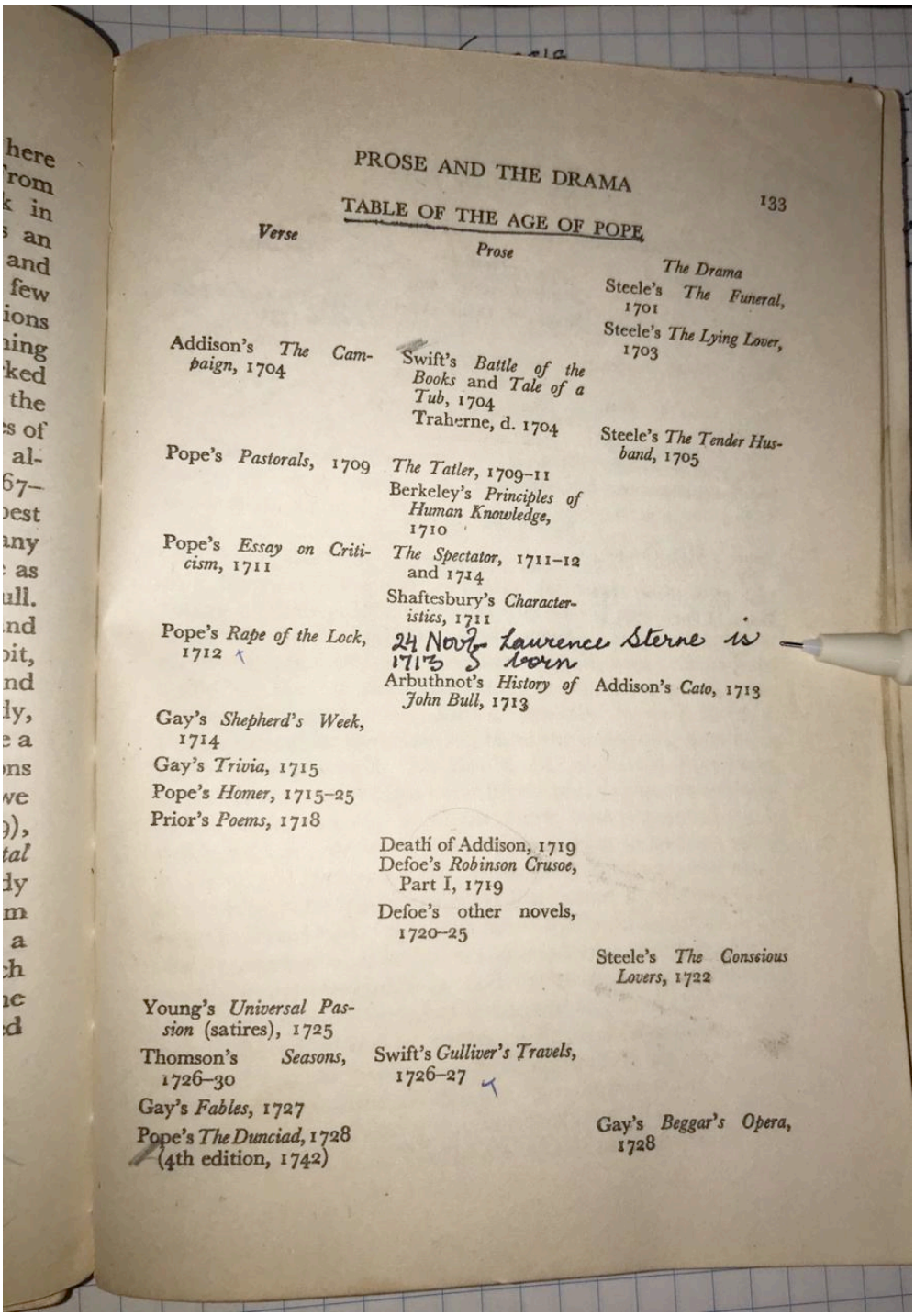

PROSE AND THE DRAMA 133

TABLE OF THE AGE OF POPE

Verse	*Prose*	*The Drama*
		Steele's *The Funeral*, 1701
		Steele's *The Lying Lover*, 1703
Addison's *The Campaign*, 1704	Swift's *Battle of the Books* and *Tale of a Tub*, 1704	
	Traherne, d. 1704	
Pope's *Pastorals*, 1709	*The Tatler*, 1709–11	Steele's *The Tender Husband*, 1705
	Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1710	
Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, 1711	*The Spectator*, 1711–12 and 1714	
	Shaftesbury's *Characteristics*, 1711	
Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, 1712	24 Nov 1713 Laurence Sterne is born	
	Arbuthnot's *History of John Bull*, 1713	Addison's *Cato*, 1713
Gay's *Shepherd's Week*, 1714		
Gay's *Trivia*, 1715		
Pope's *Homer*, 1715–25		
Prior's *Poems*, 1718		
	Death of Addison, 1719	
	Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Part I, 1719	
	Defoe's other novels, 1720–25	
		Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, 1722
Young's *Universal Passion* (satires), 1725		
Thomson's *Seasons*, 1726–30	Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726–27	
Gay's *Fables*, 1727		
Pope's *The Dunciad*, 1728 (4th edition, 1742)		Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, 1728

TABLE OF THE AGE OF POPE *Continued*

Verse	*Prose*	*The Drama*
	Death of Steele, 1729	
	Death of Defoe, 1731	Lillo's *The London Merchant*, 1731
Pope's *Moral Essays*, 1732–35		
Pope's *Essay on Man*, 1732–34		
Pope's *Imitations of Horace*, 1733–37		
Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, 1735		
	Butler's *Analogy*, 1736	
Young's *Night Thoughts*, 1742		
Blair's *The Grave*, 1742		
Death of Pope, 1744		
	Death of Swift, 1745	

Note how the author straddles 'The Age of Pope' and 'The Age of Johnson'. This indicates the ideas and energies that impact the author and his work.

character of the man and his creed, his poetry is filled with indications of social unrest, and thus in a rough way points forward to Byron. The most important figure in English poetry between Pope and Wordsworth, his life serves to connect the age of the former with that of the latter. When he was born, Pope was at the height of his power. When he died, Burns had been four years in his grave and the *Lyrical Ballads* two years before the world.

Meanwhile, a writer unlike all others of the period had been producing poetry which is now regarded as being on a much higher level than his contemporaries thought it to be. CHRISTOPHER SMART (1722–71) was educated at Cambridge, but he spent most of his later life in poverty, was for a while insane, and towards the end of his life went into a debtors' prison. Yet his *Song to David* (1763) is one of the greatest among English religious poems, and Robert Browning's *Saul* owed much to it. Smart's most remarkable work, *Jubilate Agno*, was left as a jumble of manuscript, which the editor of an edition published in 1954 has endeavoured to arrange in proper order. Even though, as a whole, *Jubilate Agno* is difficult to interpret, it contains much that is worth pondering; while the sections addressed to 'my Cat Jeoffrey' delight every lover of cats as well as every poetry lover.

TABLE OF THE AGE OF JOHNSON

General Prose	*The Novel*	*Verse*	*The Drama*
	Richardson's *Pamela*, 1740 Fielding's *Joseph Andrews*, 1742	Pope, d. 1744 Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 1744 Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, 1748	
	Richardson's *Clarissa*, 1748		

>>The tradition of a more consistently realistic mode of narrative fiction was fully established by the time that Sterne came to write.
>>Refer to this portion while reading Ian Watt's "Introduction" Section titled III. Tristram Shandy as a Novel in your primary text.

>>> To discuss the question of Tristram Shandy as an anti-novel, this portion helps discuss the ideas pertaining the novel

TABLE OF THE AGE OF JOHNSON *Continued*

General Prose	*The Novel*	*Verse*	*The Drama*
	Smollett's *Roderick Random*, 1748	Thomson, d. 1748	
	Fielding's *Tom Jones*, 1749	Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, 1749	
Johnson's *Rambler*, 1750–52			Johnson's *Irene*, 1749
	—*Amelia*, 1751		
	Smollett's *Peregrine Pickle*, 1751		
	Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison*, 1753		
Hume's *History of England*, 1754–61	Fielding, d. 1754	Crabbe, b. 1754	
Johnson's *Dictionary*, 1755			
Burke's *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful*, 1756			
Robertson's *History of Scotland*, 1758		Blake, b. 1757	
	Johnson's *Rasselas*, 1759	Burns, b. 1759	
	Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, 1759–61		
		Macpherson's *Ossian*, 1760–63	
	Richardson, d. 1761	Smart's *Song to David*, 1763	
		Chatterton's *Poems*, 1764–70	
		Goldsmith's *Traveller*, 1764	
	Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, 1765	Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765	

PERIODS OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

Literary Periods.	Approximate Dates.	Historic Periods.
Pre-Chaucerian Period	500–1340	Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman periods
The Age of Chaucer (Chaucer, 1340–1400)	1340–1400	Middle Plantagenet (or Angevin) period
From Chaucer to *Tottel's Miscellany*	1400–1557	Later Plantagenet (Angevin) period Early Tudor period
The Age of Shakespeare (Shakespeare, 1564–1616)	1557–1625	The Elizabethan Age The Jacobean Age (Age of Renaissance)
The Age of Milton (Milton, 1608–1674)	1625–1660	The Caroline Age
The Age of Dryden (Dryden, 1631–1700)	1660–1700	The Age of Restoration
The Age of Pope (The Augustan Age) (Pope, 1688–1744)	1700–1745	The Queen Anne Age Early Georgian Age
The Age of Johnson) (Johnson, 1709–84)	1745–1798	Middle Georgian Age
The Age of Wordsworth (Wordsworth, 1770–1850)	1798–1832	Later Georgian Age or the Age of the Revolution
The Age of Tennyson (Tennyson, 1809–1892)	1832–1887	The Victorian Age

The tables above illustrate the other novels that were published along with or before *Tristram Shandy*. They indicate the extent to which *Tristram Shandy* departs from or conforms to or even still reformulates the idea of a novel.

The Rise Of The Novel: Studies In Defoe, Richardson And Fielding

By Ian Watt

"But, of course, *Tristram Shandy* is not so much a novel as a parody of a novel, and, with a precocious technical maturity, Sterne turns his irony against many of the narrative methods which the new genre had so lately developed. This ironical tendency is particularly focussed on the hero himself. Pursuing the naming-convention of formal realism, Sterne tells us exactly how his character was named, and how this alone is a symbol of its bearer's unhappy destiny; and yet, of course, poor Tristram remains an elusive figure, perhaps because philosophy has taught him that personal identity is not so simple a question as is commonly assumed: when the commissary asks him' -- And who are you?', he can only reply, 'Don't puzzle me', [1] thereby resuming the tenor of Hume's sceptical thoughts on the subject in the Treatise of Human Nature. [2] But the main reason why Sterne's hero continues to escape us is that his author plays fast and loose with what is probably the most basic of the problems of formal realism, the treatment of the time dimension in narrative. The primary temporal sequence of *Tristram Shandy* is based -- again in accord with the recent tendencies in the philosophy of the time -- on the flow of associations in the consciousness of the narrator. Since everything that occurs in the mind occurs in the present, this enables Sterne to portray some of his scenes with all the vividness which Richardson's 'lively present-tense

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Bk. I, ch. 9; Bk. VII, ch. 33.
See Bk. I, pt. 4, sect. vi.

manner' had made possible; at the same time, since *Tristram Shandy* is recounting the story of his own 'life and opinions', Sterne can also command the longer temporal perspectives of Defoe's autobiographical memoir; while, in addition, he adopts Fielding's innovation in the treatment of time by correlating his fictional actions with an external time-scheme -- the chronology of the history of the Shandy household is consistent with the dates of such historical events as Uncle Toby's battles in Flanders. [1] Sterne, however, is not satisfied with this skilful handling of the time problem, and proceeds to take to its logical extreme the ultimate realist premise of a one-to-one correspondence between literature and reality. He proposes to make an absolute temporal equivalent between his novel and his reader's experience of it by providing an hour's reading matter for every hour in his hero's waking life. But this, of course, is a forlorn enterprise, since it will always take Tristram much more than an hour to write down an account of an hour of his own experience, and so the more he writes and the more we read, the more our common objective recedes.

Thus Sterne, largely by taking the temporal requirements of formal realism more literally than had ever been attempted before -- or since -- achieves a reductio ad absurdum of the novel form itself. At the same time, however, this sly subversion of the proper purposes of the novel has recently bestowed upon *Tristram Shandy* a

certain posthumous topicality. Sterne's very flexible handling of the time-scheme of his novel prefigures the break with the tyranny of chronological order in the conduct of narrative which was made by Proust, Joyce and Virginia Woolf, and Sterne therefore found renewed critical favour in the 'twenties as a precursor of the moderns. Nor is this all: the greatest contemporary exponent of philosophical realism, Bertrand Russell, modelled his own statement of the problematic nature of time on *Tristram Shandy* and named his paradox after Sterne's infinitely regressive hero. [2] Sterne's handling of the temporal dimension in *Tristram Shandy* is of crucial importance in yet another context, since it provides the technical basis for his combination of realism of

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1 S ee Theodore Baird, "The Time Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source", PMLA, LI (1936), 803-820.

2 P rinciples of Mathematics (London, 1937), pp. 358-360.

presentation with realism of assessment. Sterne, like Fielding, was a scholar and a wit, and he was equally anxious to have full freedom to comment on the action of his novel or indeed on anything else. But whereas Fielding had gained this freedom only by impairing the verisimilitude of his narrative, Sterne was able to achieve exactly the same ends without any such sacrifice by the simple but ingenious expedient of locating his reflections in the mind of his hero -- the most recondite allusion could thus be laid at the door of the notorious inconsequences of the processes of the association of ideas.

Fielding's realism of assessment did not operate only through direct commentary; his evaluations were also made explicit by organising the narrative sequence into a significant counterpoint of scenes which usually reflected ironically upon each other, although often at the cost of giving the reader a sense of somewhat obtrusive manipulation. Sterne, however, can manipulate until we are giddy without any breach of narrative authenticity, since every transition is part of the hero's mental life which, of course, is very little concerned with chronological order. As a result Sterne is able to arrange the elements of his novel into whatever sequence he pleases, without the arbitrary changes of setting and characters which such a counterpoint would involve in Fielding. This freedom, however, Sterne treats in exactly the same way as he treats his freedom in the use of the time dimension, and as a result his novel's principle of organisation eventually ceases to be narrative in the ordinary sense. The ultimate implications of Sterne's mastery of the technique for achieving realism of assessment without compromising authenticity are therefore largely negative; but even here, of course, objection is impossible within Sterne's fictional terms, since, although we may be entitled to expect some degree of order in an author, it would hardly be reasonable to expect it from the workings of the mind of Tristram Shandy. Sterne's narrative methods in general, then, bear a more central relationship to the main traditions of the novel than at first appears; we may feel that he has undermined the methods of Richardson and Fielding rather than reconciled them, but there can at least be no doubt that he is working within the narrative directions which they originated."