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Clocks, Calendars, and (regulating) Desire in Sterne and Fragonard

"You say that *Tristram Shandy's* misfortunes began nine months before he was born, and I really believe that your perverseness and prophane turn began nine months before you were born. Pray then for a new birth; there will be no occasion for winding up a clock, regeneration does not depend upon wheels and springs; it depends only upon the spirit, it depends upon grace, and not upon mechanism."[1i]

Marked by a profusion of ribald jokes and literary allusions, Tristram's autobiography, like his father Walter Shandy's *Tristapædia*, functions as a jocular parody of the "Enlightenment" urge to account for everything *ab ovo*, as Tristram notes. Few of Tristram's jokes have garnered more attacks, and critical attention, than the grandfather-clock joke with which he opens the novel, a joke which undergirds the novel's attempt to detail with certainty, a life begotten uncertainly. In tracing the joke's philosophical background, Ian Donaldson notes, "Sterne's learned joke beautifully gathers, shuffles, and sabotages such grave philosophical analogies [of souls and dead bodies]: Locke, Descartes, and Leibniz are all fleetingly, bizarrely recalled as Walter Shandy most unluckily attempts to keep in harmony his two clocks, corporeal and mechanical...".[2] Tristram's mockery of his father's conflation of the family clock and his sexual relationship with his wife, Elizabeth, reflects the novel's temporal obsession with origins as located in the mechanical tickings of the female body, an obsession which necessarily disrupts the text's emphasis on the narrative, and Tristram's hubris in believing he can master his origins.[ii] Sterne's novelistic experiment displays a displacement of narrative centrality similar to the illustrations of French artist and illustrator, Jean-Honoré Fragonard, specifically his *Le Calendrier des vieillards*, which dates to as early as 1760.

The profusion of editions of La Fontaine's *Contes* and Fragonard's illustrations in London prior to the publication of *Tristram Shandy* as well as "the fact that their careers

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[1] "The Clockmakers Outcry Against The Author Of The Life And Opinions Of Tristram Shandy" London 1760.
[2] Donaldson, Ian. "The Clockwork Novel". The Review of English Studies Vol. 21, No. 81 (Feb., 1970), 14-22. p.18.

overlapped, that Sterne paid two long visits to France and that their works were discussed in the same Parisian circles" seems to suggest a clear bi-directional influence, though any direct biographical connector is, in a sense, beside the point.[3] Illustrating the failure of traditional patriarchy to understand female sexual desire as anything but the economic desire of and for objects, both Sterne and Fragonard offer a cultural critique that relies on temporal, mechanical descriptions of the body. As aging patriarchs, both Sterne's Walter Shandy and Fragonard's Richard de Quinzica attempt to manage the body conceptually as "regular and predictable," a strategy that, because of the body's resistance to constancy and conformity, ultimately fails. Sterne locates this failure at the narrative level in *Tristram Shandy*, through the jumbled series of digressions, which upset the novel's attempt at mastery in any form; similarly, Fragonard points to Bartholmée's desire for sexual fulfillment and rejection of the material world with which Richard associates her as undermining Richard's attempt at mastery. Struggling to manage multiple discourses of objects, temporality, and patriarchy, both Sterne and Fragonard employ the erotic as a method by which to distance themselves from the mechanized, temporal visions of sexual desire represented in the philosophies of Walter and Richard. Inevitably arriving at descriptions of the female body, which struggle with the human body's resistance to control and conformity, both works confront the problems of agency which plague the faltering patriarchs; by aligning the bodies of Elizabeth and Bartholmée with domestic goods—the clock, the calendar—both Walter and Richard implicate themselves in a objective world, a world whose irregularity threatens their tenuous grasp on subjectivity and control.

"Mention of Fragonard's drawings for the *Contes* of la Fontaine," Marianne Roland Michel writes, "is to evoke the craze indulged in by the wealthy of the eighteenth century for

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[3] Ogée, Frederic. "Sterne et Fragonard: Escapades of Death" *Icons, Texts, Iconotexts.* Ed. Peter Wagner. (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1996) p. 137

illustrated books; and it also highlights Fragonard's taste and his talent for these types of production as well as his exceptional powers, compounded of his sense of humour and his competence, when faced with the graphic interpretation of a particular author or his text".[4] For Fragonard, illustrating Jean de La Fontaine's *Contes et nouvelles en vers,* a popular collection of darkly bawdy and comic tales and fables first published in 1668, promised financial rewards and provided personal satisfaction. Over the span of his career, Fragonard drew five distinct groups of illustrations for engraving, all reflecting differences in style, medium and level of completion. Around 1789, Fragonard contracted with the publisher Pierre Didot to produce an ornately illustrated edition, a project which Michel notes "never came to fruition for reasons concerned with both illustration and printing" (ii). Despite a lack of financial reward, Fragonard continued to come back to the *Contes*, perhaps out of a fascination shared by La Fontaine with accounts of the failures of patriarchal power. One of Fragonard's most popular illustrations of the *Contes*, *Le calendrier des vieillards* depicts an early tale, "*How Old Men Count the Days* (2.8)," which recounts the story of the elderly Pisan judge Richard de Quinzica and his new bride, the beautiful, young Bartholmée de Galandi.[iii] Opening with a metaphor for dissymmetry in marriage, La Fontaine's poem revolves around the disparity in age and vigor of the two newlyweds:

> Plus d'une fois je me suis étonné / Que ce qui fait la paix du mariage / En est le point le moins considéré / Lorsque l'on met une fille ménage...Jeunes tendrons à vieillards apparient. / Et cependant je vois qu'ils se soucient / D'avoir chevaux à leur char attelés / De même taille, et mêmes chiens couplés [More than once, I am astonished that that which makes peace in marriage is considered less once a girl is

[4] Michel, Marianne Roland. "Fragonard--Illustrator of the *Contes* of La Fontaine." *L'Art du Dix-huitième Siècle*. *The Burlington Magazine* No. 25 (Oct. 1970). p. i.

> made to marry...a tender young thing is paired with an aging man. And, yet, I see that they care to have the horses joined to their carriage be a matching pair of the same size].[5]

La Fontaine's tale follows the couple's early marriage, detailing the pirate Pagamin's capture of Bartholmée, Richard's hopeless attempt to regain, and Bartholmée's eventual rejection of Richard's offer of what appears to be domestic chastity. "Although generous with gifts to her, de Quinzica is unable (or unwilling) to acquit his conjugal duties more than four times a year" and, in order to justify his inability, "has created a calendar 'Cluttered with dates demanding man's abstention/From husbandly pursuit'".[6] In Richard's efforts to regain Bartholmée, he offers to her a kind of contract which equates objectification and temporality: unchanged by her capture, the calendar remains as the regulator of their sexual relationship, a regulator which demands from her an object-like obsequiousness to the terms of the temporal contract. Relying on a discourse of timeliness to avoid intimacy within marriage, de Quinzica's reluctance to "acquit" his conjugal duties to a younger wife mirrors Mr. Shandy's recourse to the calendar to avoid sex.

Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* opens with Tristram bemoaning the circumstances of his conception, in a way which calls into question the novel's chronology. "I wish," he writes ironically, "either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me"—ironic, of course, because Walter minds *too much* what he is about and is consequently unable to share in the physical lives of his wife and children.[7] For Tristram, whose "*misfortunes began nine months before ever he came*

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[5] La Fontaine, Jean de. *Fables Contes et Nouvelles.* René Groos et Jacques Schriffrin ed. Tours, France: Mame. 1954. p. 430

[6] Bailey, Colin B. et. al. *Watteau to Degas: French Drawings from the Frits Lugt Collection.* New York: The Frick Collection, 2009. p. 80.

[7] Sterne, Laurence. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman.* Robert Folkenflik ed. New York: Modern Library, 2004. p.1.

into the world," the *how* of his conception and birth relates murkily to the *when* (Sterne 3). Walter Shandy, who, through another great joke, is only possibly Tristram's father, has brought his two "little family concernments to the same period," so that he discharges his conjugal duties to Elizabeth Shandy and winds "up a large house-clock which we had standing upon the back-stairs head, with his own hands" "on the first *Sunday night* of every month throughout the whole year"——unless, of course, he has been incapacitated by a Sciatica, as was the case at the time of Tristram's conception, were he indeed a full-term baby (Sterne 4-5). Though Tristram and Walter struggle to present a linear history of his generation, birth, and life, the body intrudes into their narrative as the realities of his genealogy suggest an origin that is questionable at best. Walter's habit of being "one of the most regular men in everything he did" would have disastrous effects on the future Tristram:

> It was attended but with one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that, from an unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up,——but the thoughts of some other things popp'd into her head,—*& vice versa.* (Sterne 5)

This joke, a thoughtful parody of eighteenth-century thinking about the association of ideas as described in the work of philosophers Gottfried Leibniz, John Locke, and David Hartley, structures the ways by which Sterne represents sexual desire in the novel. Tristram implies that his mother's association of winding the clock with sex has effected him. The idea, conceptual by nature, leads to the more material conception of Tristram, who struggles with the question of what it means to live between body and mind. In his comic version of this query, Tristram

explores Hartley's ideas about the relationship between mind, body, and sexual desire, a relationship that hinges on sexual desire as mental, yet diffused throughout the body. Examining "how far the desires of the sexes toward each other are of a factitious nature," Hartley writes that "we are to observe, first, that when a general pleasurable state is introduced into the body, either by direct impressions, or by associated influences, the organs of generation must sympathize with this general state, for the same reasons as the other parts do…".[8] Hartley's description of the diffusion of pleasure and pleasurable sensations situates desire, like Tristram, between mind and body. Associating these ideas in an attempt to manage the gap, Hartley's definition reconciles the bodily reproductivity of Elizabeth and Walter's world of mental and material mastery, though this reconciliation fails to extend throughout the novel as both characters veer too far toward the extremes of the mind-body problem.

As Bonnie Blackwell has observed, Tristram's description of his mother's association of ideas suggests that Mrs. Shandy represents the internalization of Walter's structure of objectified sexuality, which relies on temporal exactness and regularity. Blackwell notes "there's a lot of distress occasioned when Mrs. Shandy notices right in the middle of their begetting Tristram that she and the clock are commensurate domestic objects that make equivalent demands on Mr. Shandy: he could hardly have been more surprised than if the clock had asked him, "Pray, dear sir, have you forgot to **** your wife?'".[9] Similarly, La Fontaine, in his *How Old Men Count The Days*, presents a faltering patriarch and lover, Richard de Quinzica, who constructs Bartholmée as a domestic object, an object whose sexuality Richard feels he can sublimate to material, economic concerns, through the substitution of material goods for Bartholmée's sexual fulfillment. Attempting to win back Bartholmée's love from Pagamin, Richard mistakenly asks

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[8] Hartley, David. *Observations On Man, His Frame, and His Expectations.* London 1749. p. 239.
[9] Blackwell, Bonnie. "*Tristram Shandy* And The Theater Of The Mechanical Mother." *ELH* 68 (2001). p. 104.

her, “T’ai-je jamais refusé nulle chose, / Soit pour ton jeu, soit pour tes vêtements?” [Have I ever refused you anything, either for your play (gambling) or for your clothes] (La Fontaine 435). Sternly rejecting Richard’s attempt at substitution, Bartholmée replies to Richard’s query, “J’y suis de chair; les habits rien n’y font: / Vous savez bien, Monsieur, qu’entre la tête / Et le talon d’autres affaires sont” [Clothes are not enough, as I am made of fleshier stuff: You know well, Monsieur, that there are things between the head and the heel] (La Fontaine 436). Though contemporary editions of the *Contes* took pain in detailing Richard’s substitution of material objects for desire, the trend was to focus on more sexually charged scenes with Pagamin and his ship, such as was done in the so-called “Fermiers généraux” edition of 1792, with engravings by Charles Eisen and Romeyn de Hooghe. In his critique of patriarchy, Fragonard, instead, focuses his illustration on Bartholmée’s rejection of domestic objecthood. Colin Bailey notes that, while “previous publications of the *Contes* had illustrated the later confrontation between Bartholmée and Richard” wherein Bartholmée rejects Richard’s offer to buy her back from the pirate Pagamin de Monègue who had abducted and seduced her, “Fragonard’s originality was to show the beginning of the story, setting the composition in Bartholmée’s bedroom, with the sun streaming in, as the judge points to an Almanac on the wall and lists the days of abstention to his demure, yet frustrated, wife” (Bailey 82). Setting the lovers against a lavishly decorated room, Fragonard’s illustration suggests Richard’s attachment to a world of things, especially to the calendar that offers him a regimented substitute for his wife’s irregular desire, over the body of his wife. Problematically for Richard though, the calendar represents the mutual objectification of both Richard and Bartholmée, functioning as the sign of Richard’s sexual objectification and locating him firmly within his own world of objects.

Bartholmée's frustration with her husband's interest in the material world of standardized objects—his calendar and his bag of money, which David Adams suggests "shows both that he is devoted to his wife, and that he is mistaken in supposing too that happiness can be measured in terms of financial generosity"—mirrors Mrs. Shandy's reluctance to accept Walter's insistence of Dr. Slop, with his forceps, as her obstetrician.[10] Walter Shandy justifies his attempts to control the birth process through obstetric technology, as well as his desire to have her lie-in at Shandy Hall for Tristram's birth, out of a deep concern "for the publick good":

> He was very sensible that all political writers upon the subject had unanimously agreed and lamented...that the current of men and money towards the metropolis, upon one frivolous errand or another,—set in so strong,—as to become dangerous to our civil rights;—tho', by the bye,——a *current* was not the image he took most delight in,—a *distemper* was here his favourite metaphor,...maintaining it was identically the same in the body national as in the body natural, where blood and spirits were driven up into the head faster than they could find their ways down;——a stoppage of circulation must ensue, which was death in both cases. (Sterne 36)

Despite analogizing the body national with the body natural, though, Walter Shandy remains unable to see the *body Shandean.* Here Walter's reasoning removes notions of control and deliberateness from the discussion of the human body; Elizabeth becomes mere matter, unable to control even the material functioning of her own body. Walter believes that he can act on and, in his own way, control the ebb and flow of "blood and spirits" on a metaphorical as well as on a more anatomically literal level. Walter's efforts to temporalize Elizabeth's objectified body

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[10] Adams, David. "Book illustration, taxes and propaganda: the Fermiers généraux edition of La Fontaine's *Contes et nouvelles en vers* of 1792". *SVEC*. 2006:11. p. 109-12.

suggests that her body ought to conform to an intelligible schedule for both the birth of Tristram as well as her less medically regulatable sexual desires. While Walter Shandy's desire to control Tristram's birth represents an economic decision made in reaction to Mrs. Shandy's having gone erroneously to London to lie-in the year before and his demand that her body and actions be knowable and regular, Mrs. Shandy locates birth and sexual desire within the more bodily medical discourse of the traditional *accoucheuse*. By her decision to reject Dr. Slop, whose technology operates on her as if she were an object in need of repair, or, in Walter's language, winding-up (*aufziehen*), Mrs. Shandy also rejects the more general patriarchal urge of the mid-century to view anatomy, and consequently, sexual expression and desire, as mechanized and observable.[iv]

This urge to account for the mechanics of the body as automatic in nature dominates much of eighteenth-century medical discourse on subjects as varied as the generation of progeny, the circulation of blood, and the path of nerves and ideas from the mind throughout the body. In his *L'homme plus que machine* (*Londres* 1748), Julien Offray de La Mettrie sought to separate his vision of the mechanical human body from descriptions of the automaton, though the English translation of 1749, published as *Man, A Machine,* locates the animating spirit precisely in these mechanized structures:[v]

> The body may be consider'd as a clock, and the fresh chyle we may look upon as the former of that clock. The first business of nature upon the entrance of the chyle into the blood is to raise a sort of fever, which the chemists (who dream of nothing but furnaces) take to be a fermentation. This fever causes a greater

> filtration of the spirits, which are about to animate the muscles and the heart, as if they had been sent out on purpose by the order of the will.[11vi]

Drawing a parallel between his notions of passion and procreation, London's "clockmakers" take offense with Sterne's similar description of the animal spirits: "Thus then he particularly exposes himself, where he bunglingly wanders to the physiology of the generation of the human species...the absurd account of the activity and motion of the animal spirits, &c. must make a tasteful reader yawn, and throw the book out of his hand with contempt…" (Clockmakers 13-4). In her study of the automaton in Frances Burney's novels, Julia Park notes that, earlier in the century, a similar anxiety about the competing accounts of a mechanized and spiritual self that emerges under the sign of "clock-work":

> Ned Ward in *Adam and Eve Stript of their Furbelows* (1714) made a ready equation between the "Machine" and cultural models of femininity when describing the "Devout Lady" who, in her piety, "is so precise in her Deportment, and so mathematically regular in all her Actions, that you would think every Motion in her Limbs, were the Effects of Art, and not of Nature, and that her whole Composition was but a Machine of Clock-work.[12]

Just as obstetrics sought to remove the body from nature by supplanting the female body with precise and infallible mechanized representations, Ward's location of the female body in an order of mathematic regularity suggests a objectivity of the body, rendering the body intelligible and, thus, controllable. Similarly, Alex Wetmore ties the figure of the automaton in popular British imagination to philosophical arguments of liberalism. Following Wetmore's rubric, their desire for "physical toils and needs," including sexual needs and desires, pejoratively define

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[11] La Mettrie, Julien Offray. *Man, A Machine.* London 1749. p. 57.
[12] Park, Julia. "Pains and Pleasures of the Automaton: Frances Burney's Mechanics of Coming Out" *Eighteenth-Century Studies,* Vol. 40.1 (2006) p. 23 – 49. p. 24.

Bartholmée and Elizabeth as mechanical. Bartholmée's description of desire, for instance, relies on a rhetoric of bodily, self-interested pleasure: "Pour cet effet j'étais assez aimable, / Et me trouvais aussi digne, entre nous, / De ces plaisirs, que j'en étais capable" [To this end, I was kind, and have found myself as worthy, between us two, of these pleasures, as I am capable] (La Fontaine 435). However, La Fontaine affords Bartholmée a sense of agency that Wetmore's categories do not, as it is her own desire for pleasure, and its pursuit, that causes her to resist Richard's attempts to purchase her from Pagamin. In Sterne's work both the male and female body similarly assume a much more prominent, and autonomous, role, as Elizabeth continuously demands agency over decisions made about her body and the Widow Wadman attempts her own pursuit of pleasure with Uncle Toby.

Returning to Fragonard's illustration, we note a curious absence of rights to passion, or "d'esprits animaux," on behalf of the "demure" Bartholmée. In *Le Calendrier des Vieillards*, Bartholmée asks of Richard "Vous, vieux penard; moi, fille jeune et drue, / Qui méritais d'être un peu mieux pourvue, / Et de goûter ce qu'hymen a de doux?" (La Fontaine 435); though characterized in La Fontaine's poem as sexually desirous, her posture in Fragonard's illustration suggests resignation and quiet acquiescence, not an animating passion of sexual desire. Though Bartholmée sits on Richard's knee, Fragonard's great triumph in this piece was to problematize the already problematic relationship between the couple. Bartholmée's seating suggests both a sexual relationship of intimacy and a father-daughter relationship, which the gap between their ages and Richard's substitution of goods for sexual intimacy further supports. That Bartholmée does not claim a right to passion in Fragonard's piece is particularly interesting in comparison to his other works which address themes of love and sexual longing, particularly the collection of paintings known as his "Allegories of Love," or resistance to sexual advances, such as *The Bolt*

(circa 1777). Writing on "the new conception of the Romantic" which underlies Fragonard's image of the two asymmetrical lovers, Andrei Molotiu notes that "it is in its social specificity that many commentators identify the new paradigm's most profound difference from earlier notions of passionate love, such as the seventeenth century's *amour-passion*," which "held as one of its principal tenets the lover's free choice of a beloved, independent of any social constraints".[13] In both *Le Calendrier des vieillards* and *Tristram Shandy* these constraints appear as obstacles and restrictions, tied to contractual and economic rights of sexuality.

The material reality of objects that frames both *Tristram Shandy* and Fragonard's illustration of Richard and Bartholmée requires an economic registry, which situates the women and their desires within the reality of an exchange and cash-based economy. Mrs. Shandy's marriage contract, one of the more interesting typographical experiments of the first volume, hinges on the economic consequences of Elizabeth's desires:

> That in case it should hereafter so fall out, chance, happen, or otherwise come to pass,—That the said *Walter Shandy*, merchant...shall, in despight, and against the free will, consent, and good-liking of the said *Elizabeth Mollineux*,—make a departure from the city of *London*, in order to retire to...his estate at *Shandy-Hall*...he the said *Walter Shandy* shall, at his own proper cost and charges...pay, or cause to paid,...for the well and truly hiring of one coach, with able and sufficient horses, to carry and convey the body of said *Elizabeth Mollineux* and the child or children...unto the city of *London.* (Sterne 29-30)

This clause, which resulted in disastrous consequences for Tristram, aligns Mrs. Shandy's desires with economic and monetary desires. Just as Walter must, as a result of too-limited

[13] Molotiu, Andrei. *Fragonard's Allegories of Love.* Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum 2007. p. 79.

resources, decide whether to improve his land or send Bobby abroad, he must also moderate his indebtedness to his wife's sexual desires by condescending once each month to dispense his debt. In La Fontaine's poem, Richard similarly confronts Bartholmée's choice of partner as an economic decision, though Richard here is more liberal than Walter can afford to be. Speaking to Pagamin de Monègue, her captor, he notes,

> Mettez un prix à la pauvre captive, / Je le payrai comptant, sans hésiter. / Le compliment n'est ici nécessaire: / Voilà ma bourse, il ne faut que compter [Put a price on your captive. I will pay without hesitation. You need not pay me special consideration. Here is my purse, you need only count]. (La Fontiane 434)

This alignment of Bartholmée with Richard's purse suggests her commodification and reduces her desire for sexual fulfillment and *amour-passion* to questions of value and debt; she becomes an object available for purchase. Fragonard addresses this urge to describe desire in measured and measurable economic terms through the lavishness of his setting. Modeling the setting on an upper-class, Parisian bedroom, Fragonard dresses Bartholmée and Richard in lavish clothing and surrounds the couple with lush furniture and ornate frames. Such a setting locates Bartholmée firmly within a domestic world of luxury goods. Indeed, though the "contours are more detailed and articulated" than in earlier versions, Fragonard's use of pen and brown ink, with a brown wash, over black chalk underdrawing in the Frits Lugt edition blends the figures in the illustration into one another (Bailey 80). Bartholmée's dress overflows the chair and merges with the curtains and tapestry behind her to suggest a continuity of domestic goods, originating with Bartholmée at the illustration's center and sprawling outward.

For both Sterne and Fragonard, these economic and mechanical descriptions of the body as an object, which attempt to bring the resistant self into order and under control, map onto their

works as narrative questions of temporality and progressive linear plot movement. For Jeffrey Williams, "the "real time" of a novel could never have ontological validity, but we compare, almost automatically, narrative or plot time to the pervasive and powerful trope of chronological time".[14] In his *Sterne's* Tristram Shandy *and the Theory of the Novel* (1921), Victor Shklovsky further notes that "...in novels, ordinary time is usually thought to be suspended, or at least not considered, as opposed to showing the passage of time by explicit appeals to our reason…"Literary time" is clearly arbitrary; its laws do not coincide with the laws of ordinary time".[15] Tristram's urge to escape the confines of ordinary time appears most clearly in his great effort to get his father and Uncle Toby off the stairs and to bed in the fourth volume:

> "Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs? for we are got no farther yet than to the first landing, and there are fifteen more steps down to the bottom; for aught I know...there may be as many chapters as steps;—let that be as it will, Sir, I can no more help it than my destiny;—A sudden impulse comes across me——drop the curtain, Shandy—I drop it——Strike a line here across the paper, Tristram—I strike it…." (Sterne 222)

As a narrative question, Tristram's inability, here, to bring the story of his life under his governance mirrors Walter and Richard's inability to control the female bodies around them. Tristram's inability, or at least hesitancy, to control temporal progression in this passage reflects an underlying inability to control the narrative itself. For Frederic Ogée the notion of atemporal literary time appears explicitly as a question of narrative structure; he suggests that both "Sterne and Fragonard refuse to give the narrative, or narrated event central position. By obliterating

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[14] Williams, Jeffrey. "Narrative of Narrative (Tristram Shandy)" *Modern Language Notes.* Vol. 105, No. 5, Comparative Literature (Dec., 1990) 1032-1045. p. 1034.

[15] Shklovsky, Victor. *Sterne's* Tristram Shandy *and the Theory of the Novel.* Petrograd 1921. Reprinted in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* Trans. Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965. p. 36.

both story and realistic detail, they offer a form of sense which is distinct from its two synonyms, meaning and direction," which "emanates from the sensual...vibration between work and receiver" (Ogée 147). Sterne and Fragonard offer another fiction in the stead of the fiction on the pages or in the print; the act of reading or viewing, the intimacy between the author/artist and the oft addressed audience stands in for the relationships between the characters in the works. In Sternian fashion, reading becomes watching the author struggle to control the narrative and, indeed, his own voice. Fragonard's *Le Calendrier des vieillards*, however, seems dominated by controlled, or at least, realistic details and objects in the figures of Bartholmée and Richard, the painting of the infant behind them, and even in *le calendrier*, an essential element of the "story". While these elements do compose much of the illustration's content, Fragonard foregrounds a chair overflowing with pillows, fabrics, and clothes, casts Bartholmée's head toward the shadow, and obscures Richard's leg and arm with Bartholmée's dress in an attempt to balance the story with the setting, refusing the story of Bartholmée and Richard's relationship a position of centrality in the image and displacing the body to focus on a world dominated by luxury goods. This rejection of the narrative, which appears throughout *Tristram Shandy* as the series of digressions, which form the bulk of the text, reflects "the numerous obstacles to communication which render the merest verbal [or visual] exchange problematic," as well as the resistance of narrative to authorial control (Ogée 138). Specifically, as Tristram approaches his mother's own sense of the erotic, the narrative falters and veers away; able to describe his father's reaction to Uncle Toby's fundamentally misguided attempt, with the aid of Corporal Trim, to court the Widow Wadman, Tristram discovers a need to suspend the narrative, attempting to delay conveying *her* opinions on the matter:

> "----Now what can their two noodles be about?" cried my father to my mother----by all that's strange, they are besieging Mrs. Wadman in form, and are marching round her house to mark out the lines of circumvallation. I dare say, quoth my mother-----But stop, dear Sir------for what my mother dared to say upon the the occasion-----and what my father did say...shall be thumb'd over by Posterity in a chapter apart. (Sterne 494)

Like so many of Tristram's deferred chapters, Mrs. Shandy's opinions on courtship do not appear in the novel.

For both Sterne and Fragonard, the problem of the inconstancy and unreliability of the human body reflects a physical problem of visual representation within their mediums. Christopher Fanning suggests that "it is Sterne who crystallizes at midcentury the possibilities of print by creating an unavoidable textual presence supplementary to the supposed referents of the printed words".[16] Sterne explores the text as "performative expression, manifested in such printerly devices as asterisks, dashes, and blank, black, and marbled pages" (Fanning 661). Similarly, Fragonard's consciousness of the canvas reflects an awareness of the physicality of expression. In his *Les dèbuts du modèle* the blank canvas in the middle of the studio, which fills much of the painting, suggests an awareness of the limits of authorial voice beyond creation. Though not explicitly addressed in *Le Calendrier des vieillards*, suspended motion persists as a structural trope throughout Fragonard's illustrations. Fragonard's illustrations of the *Contes,* following the episodic structure of La Fontaine's poems, "belong to an aesthetic of contiguous, isolated vignettes, an aesthetic that shuns the fake linearity and well-marked boundaries of narrative fiction" (Ogée 148). Though this rejection of narrative progression holds true for all still-life illustrations, Fragonard's emphasis on the physicality of the canvas allows him to

[16] Fanning, Christopher. "The Scriblerian Sublime" *SEH.* Vol. 45.3 (Summer 2005). Pp. 647-667. p. 661.

approach, through a reliance on the syntax of images of the body, questions of eroticism and desire as physical questions on par with more abstract philosophical and intellectual questions.

While a sexual energy underlies both Sterne's novel and Fragonard's illustration, both artists remain reluctant to describe, in vivid terms, sexual acts. Though Richard and Bartholmée's narrative relies on a discussion of passion and sexual desire, Fragonard focuses instead on the temporal deferral of sex, via *le calendrier*. This rejection of the body mirrors, at an authorial level, the decisions made by Richard, Walter, and Tristram to focus their narratives not on descriptions of physical desire, but on getting outside of the body to approach desire as mechanical, yet uncontrollable, and therefore indescribable. Corporal Trim's description of his treatment for a wounded knee under, and in, the hands of the young Beguine nun, in Tristram's narrative for example, functions as a deferral of eroticism founded on approaching, but never reaching, explicit sexual expression:

> Let me see it, said she, kneeling down upon the ground parallel to my knee...As she continued rub-rub-rubbing—I felt it [love] spread from under her hand, an' please your honour, to every part of my frame——The more she rubb'd, and the longer strokes she took——the more the fire kindled in my veins——till at length, by two or threes strokes longer than the rest——my passion rose to the highest pitch——I seiz'd her hand————And then, thou clapped'st it to thy lips, Trim, said my uncle Toby——and madest a speech.
>
> Whether the corporal's amour terminated precisely in the way my uncle Toby described it, is not material. (Sterne 463-65)

Though not uncommon to mid-century typography, the long dashes in this excerpt, just as the numerous asterisks and gaps in the text, function to delay the reader's fulfillment of the scene.

Disrupting the ordered text, Sterne renders descriptions of the erotic as somehow beyond language and elusive to the narrative. Similarly, Richard's repetition of the exclamation "soit" ("be it" or "either…or") reflects his inability to define, even for himself, the ways by which he has satisfied Bartholmée's desires, even at a material level. Responding to the argument that the sketchiness of these artists' work invites the audience to "imaginatively complete" them, Ogée resituates the dichotomy of reader response and authorial control, suggesting that "both Sterne and Fragonard use eroticism as an invitation to join in its [the narrative's] essential suspension, to sympathize with the vibrations it provokes, rather than resolve its suspense" (Ogée 144). Ogée, though, still argues that the sympathy to be felt with the work emanates from the work; rather, by extending to their audiences an invitation into the sexual lives of their characters, Sterne and Fragonard attempt to replace the eroticism of the act and the work with the eroticism of intimate reading, or more precisely, of voyeurism, by displacing the narrative. Evasive precisely because of the narrative distance necessary to discuss it, the erotic functions in Sterne and Fragonard as a way to question narrative temporality, as an underlying structure and as a constraint on their works.

In order for Sterne and Fragonard to ask the meta-narrative questions that their works formulate, both need the critical distance that arises, paradoxically, from the creation of narratives. Just as Tristram and Walter need to get outside of the body in order to describe it and to describe the body as mechanical in order to understand its desires and yearnings, Sterne and Fragonard can only understand aesthetic questions of representation by getting outside of their works, an act made impossible by the constraints of reflexive narratives. In his "Narrative of Narrative (Tristram Shandy)," Jeffrey Williams works to expand Gérard Genette's narrative analysis set out in *Narrative Discourse* (1980):

> Gennette's distinctions do not hold when dealing with the question of explicitly reflexive narratives like *Tristram Shandy*, since it is precisely the narrating or act of narrative that forms the *rècit* of *Shandy.* The act of narration is inseparable from the narrative, and, although frequently hidden, necessarily inscribed in any narrative, most obviously through narrative frames and digressions, but also implicit in linguistic structure (in control of tense, use of mood, change of voice, etc.). (Williams 1034)

Similar questions arise in decisions made by Fragonard in illustrating La Fontaine's poem. Fragonard's decision to illustrate the beginning of the poem, rather than the more visually vivid scenes with Pagamin later in the poem, both represents Fragonard's understanding of the poem's *récit* and underlies his illustration. For Fragonard, the poem's value lies not with the more fantastic scenes marked by pirates and escapades, kidnappings and bribes, but, rather, with the problematic domestic life of Bartholmée and Richard; the failed attempts of patriarchy to understand and control the register of female desire appear, to Fragonard, as a source of greater cultural value and interest than even Richard's failed attempt to buy outrightly Bartholmée's obedience and companionship, an attempt that reflects his inability to realize that it is passion, not objects, which matters to Bartholmée.

At the midcentury, when physical, mechanical descriptions persist, *de rigueur,* as the explanation for the body's tickings, Sterne's novel and Fragonard's illustration evoke an urge to control and explain all aspects of the body temporally, especially such an elusive concept as desire, while also parodying it. Walter and Richard's attempts to manage the body conceptually reflect this cultural urge to account for the body mechanically. They reject the "blood and spirits" in favor of temporal accounts of desire, tied, for both, to the calendar. At a narrative level,

questions of progression and linearity appear in both Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Fragonard's *Le Calendrier des vieillards* as consciousness of the physicality of expression, reflecting an uncontrollability of the text and the medium. For Elizabeth and Bartholmée, whose bodies reject the temporal precision demanded by their faltering husbands, the expression of uncontrollability manifests as desire located in the flesh. Missing Sterne's joke and unwittingly aligning himself with Walter, Ned Paradox, one of the characters evoked by London's "clockmakers" in their outcry against Sterne, succinctly summarizes the position of expressed female desire at the midcentury. "No modest lady now dares to mention a word about *winding-up a clock*, without exposing herself to the sly leers and jokes of the family, to her frequent confusion," Paradox writes, "Alas, reputable, hoary clocks, that have flourished for ages, are ordered to be taken down by virtuous matrons, and be disposed of as obscene lumber, exciting to acts of carnality!" (Clockmakers 42). Reflected in the *modest* lady's confusion at the literary reference, Paradox's assertion expresses the problematic cultural prominence to which *Tristram Shandy* rose. As a critique of patriarchal power and figures unable to discern female desire, both Sterne and Fragonard present bumbling husbands unable to satisfy their wives; their constant recourse to calendars filled with days of abstention, rather than, like Pagamin, recognizing and fulfilling Bartholmée and Elizabeth's "natural" desires, ultimately locates Richard and Walter within the mechanical discourse of regularity to which they had mistakenly attempted to assign their wives.

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[i] Attributed fallaciously to George Whitefield. For attribution cf. *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle* (London, England), Monday, October 20, 1760; Issue 510.

[ii] Ruth Marie Faurot offers an early argument for Mrs. Shandy's critical role in the Tristram Shandy narrative in "Mrs. Shandy Observed" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 10, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 1970), pp. 579-589

[iii] There are several commonly used translations of la Fontaine's "*Le Calendrier des vieillards"*, including "The Greybeard's Calendar" and "The Calendar of the Aged". Randolph Runyon's translation seems, to me, to best capture La Fontaine's spirit and sense of humor.

[iv] For Bonnie Blackwell, this urge appears most clearly in the field of obstetrics. Reflecting on the profusion of discourse about the female body in university departments of medicine, she writes that the medical theater [of the

mechanical mother] brought the capricious womb and its fragile contents under the controlled setting of a university hall, and offered to obstetric students the promise of a total, visual mastery of the female body...” (82).

[v] “Parce qu’un poids fait battre la caisse à l’Automate de *Vaucanson,* & frapper les heures à l’horloge de *Huigens,* il faudra que mes paroles partent d’un même Principe. Mais j’ai dèjá fait voir l'insuffisance des conclusions, fondées sur les apparences.” p. 84

[vi] Though the *OED* defines chyle as “the white milky fluid formed by the action of the pancreatic juice and the bile on the chyme, and contained in the lymphatics of the intestines, which are hence called *lacteals*,” La Mettrie’s usage can also be viewed as referring to contemporary usages of the terms “passions” and “humors” or what La Mettrie calls “d’esprits animaux”.