TRISTRAM'S IDENTITY REVISITED *

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> *It was a commissary sent to me from the post office, with a rescript*
> *in his hand for the payment of some six livres odd sous.*
> *Upon what account? Said I. – 'Tis upon the part of the king,*
> *replied the commissary, heaving up both his shoulders-*
> *-My good friend, quoth I, -as sure as I am I – and you are you-*
> *-And who are you? Said he. – Don't puzzle me, said I.*

> (Sterne 2003: 473)

        This article briefly connects the postulates of four authors from very different backgrounds with the manner in which the issue of personal identity is dealt with in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. The chosen thinkers are John Locke, David Hume, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard. Locke's ideas on language, knowledge, and personal identity will be contrasted with those of Sterne. Then, the article will discuss Hume's theories on associationism and his conviction that the notion of the "I" is a mere illusion created by human memory. As to Lacan and Baudrillard, the former's theory of "the mirror stage", and the concepts of simulation and hyperreality put forward by the latter will be compared with the ideas underlying *Tristram Shandy*. In this manner, by the end of the article I will have elaborated a gradient in which Locke is very distant from Sterne's world view and Baudrillard occupies the closest position, while both Hume and Lacan can be placed in the middle of that gradient.

        Key words: *Tristram Shandy, Sterne, Locke, Hume, Lacan, Baudrillard, personal identity.*

        Este artículo compara las teorías de John Locke, David Hume, Jacques Lacan, y Jean Baudrillard con la

manera en que Sterne trata el tema de la identidad personal en *Tristram Shandy*. En el mismo se tienen en cuenta las reflexiones de Locke acerca del lenguaje, el conocimiento, y la identidad personal; las teorías de Hume sobre la asociación de ideas y la noción del "yo" como ilusión producida por la memoria; la teoría del estadio del espejo desarrollada por Lacan, y las nociones de simulación e hiperrealidad formuladas por Baudrillard. Las conclusiones de este breve estudio comparativo permiten la elaboración de una escala en la que, con respecto a la visión del mundo de Sterne, Locke ocupa el extremo más distante, Baudrillard el más próximo, y Hume y Lacan una posición intermedia entre los otros dos autores.

Palabras clave: *Tristram Shandy, Sterne, Locke, Hume, Lacan, Baudrillard, identidad personal.*

Along with the issues of language, knowledge, or the use of metafiction, the problematic point of personal identity occupies a central position within Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Indeed, Sterne's novel is conceived as the unfinished autobiography of the character of Tristram Shandy, who, despite his promise of giving an exact account of his life, ends up writing about episodes from the lives of his father and his uncle Toby. By the end of the book, however, it seems as if the main reason why Tristram attempted to write his autobiography were, precisely, a personal need for self-knowledge; and the analysis of his father's and uncle's lives and opinions, the only means to achieve his purpose. In any case, the means Tristram uses to puzzle out the riddle of his own personal identity have been a great source of debate and comparison with various philosophical postulates.

In this article, I am going to connect the theses of four different thinkers, with the manner in which Sterne deals with the issue of personal identity in *Tristram Shandy*. Thus, I will discuss the postulates defended by John Locke, David Hume, Jacques Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard in this respect. There are several reasons for my selection

of these four authors. First, both Locke and Hume are essential in any writing that aims to deal with this issue. They are two of the greatest exponents of British empiricism of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the connections between their theories and *Tristram Shandy* are so strong that they are impossible to obviate. Hence, in this article, I will start by presenting the different views Sterne and Locke had upon the subjects of language, knowledge, and personal identity. Regarding Hume's position, I will comment on the main points of his empiricist system, and then, I will demonstrate how *Tristram Shandy* appears to be closer to his argument that personal identity is merely an illusion produced by the different impressions stored by our memory.

Since this paper also intends to consider the matter of personal identity in Sterne's masterpiece from a new angle, it also includes some of the most distinctive ideas of two controversial authors who stand out within two influential currents of thought of the twentieth century: Jaques Lacan and Jean Baudrillard, who respectively belong to the backgrounds of psychoanalysis and postmodernism. I will fundamentally centre my attention on the notion of "the mirror stage" developed by the former, along with the notions of simulation and hyperreality put forward by the latter. Indeed, my main motivation for including them in this analysis is that this article intends to go beyond both the traditional framework provided by British empiricism, and the typical postmodernist or psychoanalytical approaches that have been so recently in vogue in literary criticism.

I will carry out in this article a brief survey of the chief theories of these four thinkers, highlighting the points they share with Laurence Sterne, and those in which they disagree. Hence, by the end of my essay I will have proved which of these four authors are closer to Sterne's ideas on personal identity when writing *Tristram Shandy*, and which are further away from them.

1. JOHN LOCKE AND TRISTRAM'S TAUTOLOGICAL QUEST FOR IDENTITY

Locke's influence on *Tristram Shandy* goes beyond the explicit reference to his name or his writings, for it pervades a considerable part

of the novel. Indeed, Sterne borrowed numerous ideas and longer passages from Locke which he afterwards modified to achieve comic or satiric effects, and so, to criticise and to parody the philosopher's thesis (Day 1984: 75-83; Moglen 2001: 87-108). Their opinions about language are their main point of disagreement, and the source of the majority of their other discrepancies. On the one hand, Locke stressed the importance of clarity, and the absence of ambiguity and obscurity, to avoid equivocations and achieve transparent communication. In fact, Locke's insight into human understanding depended on a strictly denotative use of language, in which each word stands for a distinct idea:

> [...] We shall better come to find the right use of words, the natural advantages and defects of language, and the remedies that ought to be used to avoid the inconveniencies of obscurity or uncertainty in the signification of words; without which it is impossible to discourse with any clearness or order concerning knowledge: which being conversant about propositions, and these most commonly universal ones, has greater connection with words than perhaps is suspected. (Locke 1997: 363)

On the other hand, however, we find the style used in *Tristram Shandy*, in which the comic and bawdy images at the heart of the book's humour are the consequence of a distinctive obscurity and ambiguity in the use of words. Hence, even though both Locke and Sterne agreed that language is the fundamental means we have of achieving knowledge, their different views respecting this issue determine and explain the ways in which they explored human understanding. Thus, while Locke relied on a strictly denotative use of language, Sterne explored the human mind through the way in which it associates ideas, which requires accepting the role of ambiguity and confusion. This is why Sterne stressed the importance of subjectivity in the perception of the world, and why he believed that our knowledge of it could only be fragmentary. Consequently, for Sterne, language is far from being an ideal and objective tool of communication, for it is as faulty, fragmentary and subjective as the knowledge we transmit when using it.

Indeed, language becomes in *Tristram Shandy* an obstacle on the way to knowledge (for it leads to equivocations and misunderstandings), but also the means to achieve it. Moreover, words and reality are so inseparably intertwined in *Tristram Shandy*, that words become reality itself. An example of this may be found in Walter's obsession with finding an appropriate name for his son, since he thinks that "good or bad names...irresistibly impress'd upon our characters and conduct" an indelible influence all throughout one's life (Sterne 2003: 47). Extending what is asserted in relation to Christian names to words in general, it seems as if, rather than words adjusting themselves to the task of representing reality, it were just the other way round. Truth and reality are determined by words: If words change, reality changes. Locke's position contrasts with this theory, for he does not put the stress on words but on what we perceive from the outside world. According to Locke, when we are born our mind is a *tabula rasa* on which nothing is written. We start filling our minds with contents only when we get impressions from the external world through our senses. Thus, reality is ultimately responsible for writing on the blank page of our minds, and, in this way, for determining our character.

Both Sterne and Locke's views on language and knowledge condition their respective theories on the issue of personal identity. Consequently, since they have not agreed in any of the two previous points, it is impossible for them to do so in this other one. But this did not discourage Sterne from using Locke's thought as a quarry for his novel; far from it, according to some critics, "Tristram's account represents Sterne's comic exemplification of Locke's views of identity" (Simpson 1984: 143). So, in order to continue exploring the issue of personal identity in *Tristram Shandy*, we should start by considering Locke's position. In Locke's own words:

> For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and it is that that makes everyone to be what he calls 'self', and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that

person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by
the same self with this present one that now reflects on
it, that that action was done. (Locke 1997: 302)

From Locke's viewpoint, being the same person consists in
being conscious of being the same person. The interesting thing about
this statement is that it is tautological, in the same way Tristram's quest
for his identity is bound to be tautological. As has been said, Tristram
writes his "autobiography" in order to discover who he is. Hence,
language becomes the only way he has of discovering his identity, which
lies nowhere but in the words themselves: the words he uses to try to
find his identity are the proof of its existence. As a consequence,
Tristram is trapped in a vicious circle: his quest for identity is based on
the use of language, which brings his self to light, which, again, is made
of nothing but language. This is the reason why some critics have
stated, for instance, that "there is for Sterne no reality outside
language", or that "Sterne rejects the possibility that definitions can
be anything but tautological" (Moglen 2001: 98-99). So, rather than
language being the mirror of reality, it becomes reality itself.

It is also interesting to remark the importance of Tristram's
speaking about his father and uncle in relation with the discovery of his
own identity. Indeed, while the title of the novel promises an
autobiographical work, in *Tristram Shandy* we do not really read about
Tristram's life (although his opinions are always present), but about
episodes from the lives of his father and uncle. If we translate this to
the problematic of personal identity, what we get is that Tristram is
unable to describe his own life and opinions unattached from his
father's and uncle's. This does not mean that we do not get any
knowledge of Tristram's life and opinions in his book; that would be
admitting that by the end of it we know nothing about Tristram
(which is not true), and it would imply Tristram's being an objective
narrator (if a such thing can exist). Indeed, Tristram does not report
in a clinical way the situations in which his family is placed or the
thoughts they have, for he "pollutes" the narration with his own
subjectivity. The truth is that Tristram explores his own identity by
exploring those of his father and uncle.

The exploration of his family background becomes, thus, the

starting point for Tristram to discover more about himself. It is no wonder then that this fundamental premise is clearly stated in the opening sentence of *Tristram Shandy*: "I wish either my father or my mother,... had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;– that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind". Moreover, further on in his reflection, Tristram ends up concluding "that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his success and miscarriages in this world depend upon their motions and activity, and the different tracks and trains you put them into" (Sterne 2003: 5). Bearing this statement in mind, it is then coherent that the greatest part of the book is devoted to describing in detail the characters of his closer relatives, the crucial moment of his conception and birth, the choice of his name and his christening, and his early childhood, for the sum of all those elements makes up ninety per cent of Tristram's actual personal identity.

Locke's position respecting that same issue can be summarized in the following sentence: "Because I am conscious of myself I may distinguish myself from other thinking beings and have a concept of myself" (Priest 1990: 87). Locke thus locates the starting point of identity in oneself: in order to have a consciousness of myself I must distinguish myself from the others. The "I" comes before "the others". However, what Sterne is saying in *Tristram Shandy* is that we have a consciousness of ourselves precisely because we have a consciousness of the existence of the others; that the process of discovering the others is parallel to discovering oneself. Thus, the "I" does not appear to myself before the "others", but at the same time the "others" appear to myself. It seems that we are learning about Tristram not only at the same time we are learning about his uncle or his father, but that Tristram is learning about himself. In this respect, it is possible to say that the views on personal identity presented in *Tristram Shandy* do not agree with those put forward by Locke. Even though Sterne ridicules and moves away from the kind of empiricism Locke defends, it seems, on the other hand, that he is closer in various points to Hume's position on this subject.

2. DAVID HUME AND THE ILLUSION OF THE IDENTITY OF THE "I"

The ontology developed by Hume only admitted one kind of entity: the perceptions, which are divided into impressions and ideas. Impressions are the irreducible perceptions, and they are the sensations, the passions, and the emotions. They are the intense perceptions we have when we see or listen, or when we feel pain or pleasure. Ideas are, however, the faded images of sensations in our minds: thoughts or memories which are merely copies of previous impressions. Thus, an impression must always constitute the foundation of an idea. When an idea is not based on an impression, then, according to Hume, it is a false one.

Hume also denies the ontological value of the principle of causality. This principle states that two events connected to each other through a cause-effect relationship are related to each other in a necessary way. But, according to Hume, we only have an impression of the phenomenon that is the cause, of the one which is the effect, and of the relationship of spatial-temporal closeness that exists between both. For example, when we see a billiard ball hitting another one, what we really see is the movement of one of them followed by the movement of the other. What we do not see is that the first one causes the second to move. So, when certain phenomena always happen just after another, we tend associate both (Belaval 1976: 262). Consequently, we end up by acquiring a habit and always expect to witness how certain events take place after a specific phenomenon occurs. In this way, the unique basis for the validity of the knowledge we obtain from the principle of causality is that of habit and custom.

In Hume's opinion, we should exclusively use the principle of causality to connect impressions with other impressions. It is not legitimate to use it to talk about predictions about the future, nor can we part from something of which we have an impression to get to something of which we lack one. And this is precisely so because Hume does not accept as true any idea which does not derive from an impression. Consequently, we cannot demonstrate, for instance, that the sun will rise tomorrow morning, that someone who is alive is bound to die, or that the water we have just put in a saucepan will boil at a

hundred degrees centigrade. And we cannot demonstrate this because we cannot start from something of which we have an impression (that, for instance, in all previous cases, water has always boiled at a hundred degrees centigrade) to get to an statement which is not based on any impression (that the water I have in this saucepan will boil when it reaches that temperature). Thus, the knowledge we can get from the acceptance of the principle of causality has only got a probabilistic value, never reaching the level of absolute certainty. For that reason, Hume criticizes all metaphysics based on that principle, attacking, among other points, the idea of the "I".

Hume also asks himself whether there is any impression which provides a basis to the identity of the "I". After looking for an impression which stays in our minds permanently, and being unable to find any, Hume finally concludes that humans are merely a collection of variable impressions. Thus, in Hume's view, the basis of our own consciousness is memory, which is in charge of collecting the succession of those different impressions that constitute our lives. So, in a way, it can be said that the notion of personal identity is just an illusion produced by our memory, since humans are simply the result of the sum of endless and changing impressions:

> Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees, we have no just standard by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. (Hume 2000: 171)

In fact, one of the main difficulties Tristram has to confront when writing the story is to control the wanderings of his mind and the spontaneous and various associations it establishes. There are innumerable examples in the text where Tristram abruptly interrupts what he was saying to explore an idea that has just come to his mind:

-What can they be doing, brother? Quoth my
father, - we can scarce hear ourselves talk.
I think, replied my uncle Toby, taking his pipe
from his mouth, and striking the head of it two or three
times upon the nail of his left thumb, as he began his
sentence, - I think, says he: - But to enter rightly into
my uncle Toby's sentiments upon this matter, you must
be made to enter first a little into his character, the out-
lines of which I shall just give you, and then the dialogue
between him and my father will go on as well again.
(Sterne 2003: 56)

As Tristram promises, he continues with this conversation after
informing us about the main psychological features of his uncle Toby,
although this does not happen until Chapter VI of Volume II.

Tristram does not fight off all the associations of ideas that his
mind establishes as he goes along with his narration. He does not
dismiss them precisely because it seems that, instead of having an
strict outline for his book in his mind, Tristram is creating the storyline
as he writes. As a consequence, those associations of ideas are not an
obstacle to its continuation. Passages from the novel such as the
following give evidence to this argument:

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. (Sterne 2003: 35)

Indeed, those associations of ideas and free wanderings of the
mind are one of the most significant structural devices in the book,
for they give the reader the key for Tristram Shandy's identity. We can
even state that, precisely because Tristram's main aim when writing is
to discover more about himself, he does not elude these associations,

but explores them. Moreover, thanks to the use Sterne makes of associationism, readers feel they know how Tristram's mind works: the way it establishes connections between different ideas, or fights off them in order to organize and present them in a coherent way. Indeed, it seems that readers are following at the same time both the events of the narration, and the wanderings of Tristram's mind.

The stress Sterne placed on associationism takes him closer to Hume's analysis of human consciousness. Hume believed that the human mind is constantly receiving impressions which it associates following the principles of cause and effect, contiguity in time or place, and resemblance (the same principles Sterne uses for organizing Tristram's narration), but that there is not a single unalterable feature in our minds which can resist the passage of time (Ayer 1952: 306-307). So, adding to all this the fact that our mental contents are the pillars upon which we create the notion of identity, then it seems there is no reason why a person could claim to be now the same person he was a couple of years, or even hours ago. The notion of personal identity is merely an illusion created by human memory. Consequently, Tristram's consciousness of himself is nothing more than a collection of variable and endless impressions tied up by his memory. His quest for self-knowledge is doomed to failure, since it is as if he were trying to chase and gather a set of impressions under the illusory unity that the pronoun "I" is able to offer.

Locke and Hume's insights into memory seem inescapable when discussing a narrative like *Tristram Shandy*, whose major founding principle is the linguistic articulation of the memory of past perceptions. But despite its central place in their philosophy, Locke and Hume approach memory from slightly different perspectives. Locke certainly admits that human consciousness and the ability to remember past events and thoughts constitute the pillars of self-consciousness. Moreover, he believes personal identity is based on an individual's self-recognition in spite of temporal and spatial changes. And, of course, this essential premise is the natural consequence of man's faculty of remembering past perceptions. Unlike Hume, however, Locke does not stigmatise memory as a self-deceiving ability of the human mind. He conceives of it, instead, as an innate faculty which goes hand in hand with his rationality and his awareness of his own existence.

3. JACQUES LACAN AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL TEXT AS A MIRROR

Leaving behind Locke and Hume's postulates, I am now going to move in time two centuries forward: from Britain to France, from empiricism to Lacanian psychoanalysis. Lacan, who qualified his work as a genuine "return to Freud", drew on many different sources to elaborate his theories. He was interested in the work of Levi-Strauss, Barthes, and Saussure, and in fields such as those of mathematics, philosophy, and linguistics. Indeed, the great appeal that structuralism had on him enabled Jacques Derrida to affirm that he had adopted a structuralist approach to the psychoanalytical practice. The significant influence of linguistics was also responsible for his key theory that the unconscious is structured like a language, and played a prominent role in the division of the psychic structure into the three elements of the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic. Another central notion developed by Jacques Lacan was the so-called "Mirror Stage", which he presented for the first time in 1936, at the Congress of the International Psychoanalytical Association in Marienbad. I would like to explore this idea and compare it with the views on personal identity as they appear in *Tristram Shandy*.

The mirror stage is a fundamental moment of maturation in the psychological development of the child which takes place between the sixth and the eighteenth month of life. It consists in the encounter of a child, who is not very proficient in controlling his physical movements, with his image. In other words, it is the identification of the infant with the image he sees in the mirror, even though he does not yet possess a sense of unity at the motive and neurological levels. As a consequence of this encounter, the child senses there is a kind of unity in his own body, which until then seemed to be fragmented, and many times, uncontrollable. It is as if the infant compensated in the field of the imaginary representation for the delay in his physical development. With regards to the formation of the individual during the mirror stage Lacan stated the following:

> […] the mirror stage is a drama whose internal
> pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to
> anticipation –and, for the subject caught up in the lure

of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed
from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call
an "orthopaedic" form of its totality. (Lacan 2002: 6)

Moreover, the mirror stage acquires a fundamental role within
the process of establishing "a relationship between an organism and its
reality" (Lacan 2002: 6). In other words, the process of identification
that occurs during the mirror stage is the first step towards the
creation of Lacan's version of the Freudian ego (i.e., the subject as we
typically conceive it). However, due to his inability to master the
language, and to identify himself with the Other, the infant in Lacan's
example cannot be thought of being a proper subject yet.

In contrast with the infant in the mirror stage from Lacan's
example, we find Tristram Shandy, whom we suppose to be completely
in control of his body, more than used to seeing himself in a mirror and
recognizing his image on it, and fully aware of the existence of the
Other: it has already been said that one of the techniques he uses to
explore his identity is that of considering those of his father and uncle.
But, above all, the main difference between Lacan's speechless child
and the garrulous Tristram is the use of language: Tristram is, thus, a
fully formed subject from a Lacanian point of view.

We might then expand the Lacanian notion of the mirror stage
into a new theory which we might call the "textual mirror phase"
theory. This theory amounts to a sort of second phase of the mirror
stage, this time in adulthood, which affects fully formed and
linguistically articulate subjects like Tristram Shandy. As has already
been said, Tristram decides to write his "autobiography" in order to
find out who he is, and so, language becomes his main tool for
achieving this purpose. We may then conclude that Tristram creates
through language a textual mirror in which to see his identity. Thus,
the mirror which he has created for this specific purpose, the tools he
uses to build it, and the image he sees on it, are completely made of
words. In this manner, we go back to the vicious circle we already
mentioned when dealing with the connections between *Tristram
Shandy* and Locke. Tristram sees the image he has of himself in his
written "autobiography", recognizes himself in it, and identifies
himself with the characters he has created of himself, his father, and

uncle. But even though everything seems to make sense now, it is necessary to go further and ask ourselves the key question that still remains to be posed: Why does Tristram choose to create his textual mirror to know more about his identity?

One possible answer is that even though Tristram has a sense of physical unity, he lacks one at a psychological level. In other words, that he feels he is simply, as Hume had stated, a collection of endless and ever-growing impressions; merely a mind continually assaulted by the innumerable associations of ideas which flood his narrative. In this situation, both memory and the process of writing one's autobiography would have a similar function: grouping fragmented impressions and associations of ideas under the illusory notion of personal identity. In other words, the attempt of writing one's life is similar to making a puzzle: one collects a number of fragmented pieces, and then orders them in a specific manner to give them some cohesion and meaning. It is in a way a self-deceiving technique that artificially shapes into a text something which is, by nature, shapeless and disjointed.

Nonetheless, it is also worthwhile to point out the deceitful nature of the "textual mirror", since it is very easy to fall into its trap. In this respect, there is again a parallelism with the child's mirror stage. It is not unusual to see how an adult says "Yes, that is *you*" to the surprised infant who starts to identify the primitive notion he may have of himself with the one the mirror reflects. But, of course, the image projected by the glass is not the child, only an image of him. Hence, the image in the mirror is not comparable with the infant himself. Likewise, it would be deceitful to believe that Tristram's autobiography (i.e., a self-made textual mirror that reflects an image of Tristram created by himself) can show Tristram's true self, when it actually offers nothing more than a mere image. Thus, the conclusions of the Lacanian perspective on this matter seem to agree with Hume's, since according to the theories of these two authors Tristram's attempts to explore his personal identity are doomed to failure. Nevertheless, a slight difference between them must also be pointed out. On the one hand, Hume would qualify as vain all sorts of attempts to defend the thesis of the unity of the "I", describing them as mere illusions, or self-deceiving techniques to convince oneself of the pipe dream of one's psychological unity. On the other hand, however,

Lacanian thought would simply disagree with the specific means Tristram uses to know more about himself, for they imply putting Tristram's true self on a par with the textual image his autobiography reflects of the former.

Indeed, the theories of the three authors we have seen up to this point disagree (or even disapprove) in one way or another with the manner in which Tristram decides to explore his personal identity. In contrast with them, we are now going to deal with the thoughts of Jean Baudrillard, father of the theory of hyperreality, who far from disregarding Tristram's approach to the issue of personal identity, seems to applaud and celebrate it.

4. JEAN BAUDRILLARD: SIMULACRA AND THE THEORY OF HYPERREALITY

Even though the first volumes of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* were published more than two hundred years ago, it presents many devices which are also extensively used by postmodernist writers. Sterne has in common with postmodernist fiction the use of parody and sceptical irony, the techniques of metafiction and self-reflexiveness, together with a taste for eclecticism, redundancy, discontinuity, multiplicity, and intertextuality. Like Sterne, Postmodernist writers also prefer a discourse in which they can play with different points of view, rather than foster a monologic one in which just a single voice is in control throughout the whole work. Among their other common concerns are the problematic representation of the world and the self, their belief in the fragmented nature of our perceptions and knowledge, the limitations and imperfections of language, or the complexity of the issues of time, memory, and history, which in their view are inseparable from individual subjectivity. Indeed, the treatment of the issue of personal identity in *Tristram Shandy* has not gone unnoticed by contemporary critics such as Herbert Klein, who states that Tristram can "be thought to be a precursor of postmodern identity, which is also characterized by 'difference' and does not exist on its own, but only in contradistinction to other identities within a web of relationships" (Klein 1996: 129).

When dealing with the movement of postmodernism it is, in a way, inevitable to make reference to the theories developed by the French critic Jean Baudrillard, whose analyses of the postmodern era have prompted conflicting responses. While many consider him the "high priest" of the "religion of postmodernism" (Woods 1999: 25), others believe that he "increasingly turns away from common sense and skepticism", and have accused him of exhibiting "all the worst traits of poststructuralism" (Bertens 1995: 144). In any case, all this variety of opinions ultimately shows the importance of his theories, whose repercussions can be found in fields such as those of film studies and literary criticism.

According to Baudrillard, we nowadays live in "the third order of simulation", which means that "simulation is the dominant scheme of the present phase of history" (Baudrillard 1988: 135). The essence of this historical period can be found in the new cybernetic technology, the current mass production, the hyper-conformism of the masses, and a fundamental presence of the media in every aspect of ordinary life. In economic terms, Baudrillard believes capitalism is no longer a mode of production, but a mode of political control and domination. Moreover, he asserts that consumption and production have collapsed into each other (Baudrillard 1988: 98-118), and that society is ultimately controlled by the code, so whatever we do is, in a way, pre-programmed by the system. It is also under these circumstances that the notion of what traditionally has been called "real" begins not to make sense, for the constant reduplication of "the real" makes the boundaries that separate reality from unreality fade. In the same way, it is impossible to establish any differences between what is considered to be "true", and "false", or between the notions of "original" and "copy". Indeed, from this perspective, as Baudrillard himself points out:

> The era of simulation is thus everywhere initiated by the interchangeability of previously contradictory or dialectically opposed terms. Everywhere the same 'genesis of simulacra': the interchangeability of the beautiful and the ugly in fashion; of the right and the left in politics; of the true and the false in every media message; of the useful and the useless at the level of

objects; and of nature and culture at every level of meaning. (Baudrillard 1988: 128)

Hence, since "the age of simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials" (Baudrillard 1988: 172), the term "reality" has become an empty word. The concept of "hyperreality" appears to be more appropriate instead, for it conveys the idea of "the state where distinctions between objects and their representations are dissolved and one is left with only simulacra" (Woods 1999: 27). In order to illustrate this point, Baudrillard offers the example of Disneyland, which he says is not within the limits of the "imaginary" or "unreal": it is simply "presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation" (Baudrillard 1988: 172).

Curiously enough, even though *Tristram Shandy* is not a narrative produced in this Baudrillardian era of simulation, it approaches the issue of personal identity as if it were. At first sight, it apparently seems possible to discern in the novel four different Tristrams: the man who lives his life, (who can be considered a sort of ghost, a presence that emanates by default from the text); the writer of his autobiography; the character within the novel that acts as its narrator; and the protagonist of his own autobiography, a character of a work of non-fiction. One may think it is legitimate to wonder which of these four is the "real" Tristram. From the viewpoint of the implications of the Lacanian "mirror phase", it would be a fallacy to believe the authentic Tristram is a character of the narrative, for the latter is simply an image that the real Tristram projects when writing his autobiography. So, in the same way as the infant is not comparable with his image in the mirror, the true Tristram is alien to the image that he projects on his own textual mirror. Nevertheless, this position becomes untenable under the premises established by Baudrillard.

When Baudrillard assumes there is no possible distinction between what was traditionally thought to be "real" and "imaginary", or between "authentic" and "illusory", he is stating that eventually everything is comparable. Consequently, the four Tristrams above

mentioned are just one single Tristram, and none of them is subordinated to the other. Hence, it is impossible to speak about a true and a false Tristram, or about an original Tristram and a reflection of him. Nor is it viable to say that a certain one precedes the rest, for all of them are placed at the same level and are part of the same motion. In other words, Tristram Shandy is not placed in a world of antitheses and oppositions, but within the sphere of the hyperreal, in which it is possible for him to have all those different faces simultaneously and without running into contradiction. In fact, Tristram can be only understood as the total sum of all of them. Once again, the circularity that characterizes Baudrillard's postulates goes hand in hand with the circularity of the tautological nature of Tristram's quest for identity: his autobiography, which is made up of words, becomes both his only means for exploring his identity, and, at the same time, the proof of its existence. The tautological nature of language in *Tristram Shandy* is the definitive proof of the existence of his hyperreal universe.

5. TO CONCLUDE…

Were we to draw a gradient, on the extreme located further away from the principles around which personal identity revolves in *Tristram Shandy*, we would find John Locke's arguments. The source of the great differences between their postulates can be traced back to their views on language and knowledge. On the one hand, Locke believed it was possible to achieve an objective knowledge of human understanding provided that language were used in an strictly denotative way to avoid misunderstandings and confusion. This kind of statement presupposes that it is possible both for human knowledge and language to be objective, and so, independent from the individual's subjectivity. Sterne, however, had a radically different view on this issue: neither language nor human knowledge are ever going to be complete, objective, or aseptic, for they are inevitably dependent on the subject that is perceiving reality or transmitting a message. In other words, language is equally fragmentary, faulty, and subjective in the information we transmit through it. Consequently, the self-knowledge Tristram is able to acquire through writing his autobiography is a fragmentary one as well. Moreover, it is also

tautological, for language becomes both the means he has for discovering his identity, and the final evidence of its existence.

Under these conditions, it seems as if Sterne found in the analysis of the subjective association of ideas the best means to explore the fragmented human mind. In this respect, it is possible to say that he moves closer to David Hume's perspective. Moreover, it can even be thought that as a consequence of the great stress Sterne gives to Tristram's association of ideas, the latter seems to be, as Hume would be eager to confirm, a mere collection of endless and variable impressions which are only given a certain unity by Tristram's memory. Two different arguments can be offered to support the latter thesis. First, there is the fact that those associations of ideas are precisely the major structural device in the book. Hence, it does make sense to think that this is consistent if we assume that is the only possible way for someone to write his autobiography. In the second place, this view is also consistent with the circular and tautological nature of Tristram's quest: if Tristram's consciousness is nothing but a group of impressions tied together by his memory, then, the task of exploring his identity is an example of how these impressions reflect on themselves.

As to the theories put forward by Lacan, it is worthwhile to mention the importance that both the psychoanalyst and Sterne gave to the presence of the external element of the "Other" in the process of the formation of the self. Tristram is Tristram precisely because he sees similarities and differences with other people that surround him (mainly with his father and uncle). Thus, the process of knowing more about himself inevitably includes investigating the figures that have had a greater impact in the formation of his personality.

In addition to this, the tautological nature of Tristram's search for identity should be reconsidered from the Lacanian viewpoint. My thesis of the "textual mirror phase", based on Lacan's concept of the "mirror stage", dealt precisely with the fact that Tristram used language as his main tool to build a textual mirror on which to see himself. Thus, both the mirror itself, and the image projected on it were also made up of words. The "textual mirror" theory implies, like Lacan's episode of the child in front of the mirror, that even though there can be an identification with the image on the mirror, the image

is always other than the original. Consequently the assumption that arguably underlies *Tristram Shandy* is that, like the language used to create that mirror and the information one can get out of the analysis of the reflection, the original object which is being reflected is as fragmentary, disjointed, and uneven as the copy the mirror reflects. Moreover, if we agree that tautology pervades everything in *Tristram Shandy*, and that it seems it is unfeasible to go outside language, I wonder whether it is even possible to make that distinction between "original" and "copy", or between "real" and "imaginary". With this consideration we have already entered the Baudrillardian territory of simulacra and hyperreality.

Indeed, apart from sharing a belief in the fragmented nature of language and knowledge, *Tristram Shandy* shares with postmodernist works a hyperreal universe in which the boundaries between contradictions and dichotomies have been effaced. Sterne presents Tristram Shandy not as a cohesive and solid character, but as a figure who has so many different faces and facets, that he has to make an effort to group them and convince himself of his unity. However, none of these facets (or their linguistic representations in Tristram's autobiography) can be said to be false, imaginary, or a mere copy of some "original" but unknown "real" ones that only the "real" Tristram possesses. Tristram is by definition a hyperreal character whose different selves are placed on the same level, constituting part of the same motion. None of them are "true" or "false", but they are simply part of the machinery of Tristram's fragmented and hyperreal personal identity. One of the facts that support the theory of Tristram's hyperreal world is precisely the tautological nature of the language in the narrative. The tautology that underlies *Tristram Shandy* makes it also impossible to go out of language, to find a "real" world outside it, or even to distinguish an "external" and "authentic" Tristram, from the ones linguistically constructed in the novel. The circular movement which pervades Sterne's masterpiece is what Baudrillard described when he developed his theory of hyperreality.

By way of conclusion, it can be said that from the four authors with which I have dealt, Locke constitutes the one who is more distant from Sterne's world view, not only regarding his considerations on language or knowledge, but also on those that have to do with the

issue of personal identity. In the other extreme of the gradient, however, it is possible to locate Baudrillard's notions of simulacra and hyperreality (even though they are the most recent ones), for they actually agree with the way in which Tristram attempts to discover more about his fragmented and hyperreal self. Hence, the closest author in time is the one that, from an ideological point of view, is more distant, and vice versa. In the middle of the gradient, half way between Locke's and Baudrillard's position, we would find David Hume and Jacques Lacan. Both of them seem to agree with Tristram in some points and disagree with him in others. In this manner, Hume's theories on associationism draw him closer to *Tristram Shandy*, for the narrative seems to be structured according to the free associations Tristram's mind establishes as he writes. On the other hand, however, Hume's extreme empiricist postulates in general, and the consideration of the notion of the "I" as a mere illusion created by our memory in particular, cause a rift between his postulates and the ones that underlie the novel. As has been said, along with Hume, Lacan would be placed in the middle of that imaginary gradient as well. On the one hand, his theory of the importance of the external "Other" is in harmony with Tristram's exploration of his father and uncle's characters in order to know more about his. Nonetheless, from a Lacanian point of view, Tristram's attempt to learn more about his true self by means of analysing the picture of himself shaped in his autobiography is actually a mere fallacy: the Tristram we discover in the novel is just an image, a reflection of the real Tristram Shandy, but not Tristram himself.

Indeed, *Tristram Shandy* has been traditionally approached from the perspective of British empiricism, and more recently, from postmodernist and psychoanalytical points of view. In this respect, the main aim of this paper has been to point out in a brief and general manner that a contrastive analysis of these four readings of Sterne's novel might point the way towards more detailed research and a better understanding of what Sterne was doing.

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