John Fowles's "A Maggot" and Laurence Sterne's "The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentelman": Restitution of Autotelic Narration in the English Novel

„Larwa" Johna Fowlesa oraz „Życie i myśli JW Pana Tristrama Shandy" Laurence'a Sterne'a: restytucja narracji autotelicznej w powieści angielskiej

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Key words
autotelic narration, Laurence Sterne, John Fowles, english novel

Słowa kluczowe
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Abstract

This article is an attempt to address the issue of autotelic narration. This aspect will be discussed on the basis of two novels: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentelman* (1759) by Laurence Sterne and *A Maggot* (1985) by John Fowles. Experimental Sterne's novel is an inspiration to many writers and I put forward the claim that Laurence Sterne's innovations, as introduced in his novel, have their restitution in more current literary efforts. A spectacular demonstration of possibly one of the most representative illustrations of the restitution of Sterne an innovation emerged in the modern and postmodern period in the form of Fowles's novel.

The most important feature of autotelic narration is the specific way of communication between the narrator and the reader. Both examples show that narrator is a part of the text but also he or she might be a creator of the text.

Abstrakt

Artykuł omawia w sposób komparatywny główne cechy narracji autotelicznej i autotroficznej, występujące w dwóch powieściach angielskich: *Tristram Shandy* Laurence'a Sterne'a i *Larwa* Johna Fowlesa. Eksperymentalna powieść Sterne'a od lat jest źródłem inspiracji dla wielu twórców – jednym z nich jest dwudziestowieczny pisarz angielski, John Fowles.

Najważniejszą cechą narracji autotelicznej, która stanowi łącznik między omawianymi powieściami, są wszelkiego rodzaju próby nawiązania relacji między narratorem i czytelnikiem. W obu wypadkach odbiorca wciągany jest przez narratora w swego rodzaju grę. W wypadku powieści Sterne'a polega ona na zabawie intelektualnej z czytelnikiem, który zostaje zaangażowany w proces narracyjny; w wypadku utworu Fowlesa – czytelnik przyjmuje rolę detektywa, który polegając na wskazówkach narratora, jest w stanie zrozumieć rozwijającą się fabułę.

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John Fowles's *A Maggot* and Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentelman*: Restitution of Autotelic Narration in the English Novel

This article is an attempt to address the issue of autotelic narration. Its main point is related to specific ways of communication between the narrator and the reader. This aspect will be discussed on the basis of two novels: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentelman* (1759) by Laurence Sterne and *A Maggot* (1985) by John Fowles. I put forward the claim that Laurence Sterne's innovations, as introduced in his novel, have their restitution in more current literary efforts. A spectacular demonstration of possibly one of the most representative illustrations of the restitution of Sternean innovation emerged in the modern and postmodern period in the form of Fowles's novel.

By autotelic activity, we refer to that which finds its purpose in itself (not outside itself), a concept which requires the suspension of the referential mode in order to focus on itself[1]. A product of autotelic activity is

> an artistic work with no end or purpose beyond its own existence. The term was used by Thomas Eliot in 1923 and adopted by New Criticism to distinguish the self-referential nature of literary art from didactic, philosophical, critical or biographical works that involve practical reference to things outside themselves[2].

Sometimes autotelic writing is compared to automatic writing, but this comparison fails to recognize the strong distinction between (autotelic writing and automatic writing) these two concepts. Automatic writing refers to an author's seemingly "unconscious" creation, and is more likely to occur in stages of hypnosis or under the influence of drugs. Autotelic narration presents a different idea and thus the process of creation is more conscious[3]. The reader may sometimes have an impression that the narrator of the text

[1] A. Burzyńska, M.P. Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku*, Kraków 2007, p. 125, my translation.

[2] J.A. Cuddon, *A dictionary of literary terms*, London, 1979, p. 67.

[3] As A. Kluba refers "many definitions of autotelic narration concentrate on the determinants which are not constitutive, i.e. do not constitute a literary work. Rarely do the definitions indicate the elements of a constructive profile which shows the literariness of the described work and its purposeful language layer, which demonstrates the distinctions in the sign-meaning correlation. In other words, the definitions focus on oddities which are untypical in the literary work, but not on the purpose

is completely lost because of the shifts between narrators, non-chronological order, retrospections or digressions about digressions, which makes the narration complicated, hard to follow and chaotic. However, this impression is merely superficial.

Autotelic narration has many determinants. The most recognizable are narrative retrospections, digressions, open composition, explicit presence of the reader and his or her communications with the narrator, the authorial narrator's comments on his or her own writing, many points of view, disrupted chronology, tangled connections between narrators, and plays with narrative omniscience, to name a few. Therefore, autotelic narration requires an active and involved reader who is able to navigate through the ongoing challenge of a metamorphic text.

Many of these determinants will be discussed in the following article, but the main aim is to show the interaction between the reader and the narrator, the methods used to achieve this connection and its results.

The Life and Opinions by Tristram Shandy, Gentelman by Laurence Sterne

In this section, emphasis will be put on the determinants of autotelic features in Laurence Sterne's novel *The Life and Opinions by Tristram Shandy, Gentelman*, published between 1759 and 1767. This literary work is often appreciated because of its paradoxical nature: on the one hand, it is a humorous story, full of satire and parody, while on the other, it is "the labyrinth of digressions"[4] which engages the reader into its creation.

Sterne's novel is untypical, in great part due to its narrative style, which uses digressions, or "the shifting temporal movements between characters and narratives,"[5] technical experiments "or anomalies in the narrative proper"[6]. "Typical" novels tend to emphasize the personality of characters, to specify settings such as place, correlated with time, and to focus on the confusion between fact and fiction. Ian Watt points out that formal realism plays an important role in the novel's structure as it focuses on "the problem

of these oddities" (A. Kluba, *Autoteliczność, referencyjność, niewyrażalność*, Toruń 2014, s. 10, my translation).

4 This quote is taken from the title of Rene Bosch's publication, *Labyrinth of Digressions: Tristram Shandy, as Perceived and Influenced by Sterne's Early Imitators*, New York 2007.

5 S.J. Swein, *"Here's a crown for your trouble": Narrative form in Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" and David Foster Wallace's "The Pale King"*, [in:] https://stephenjswain.wordpress.com/tag/narrative (18.08.2015).

6 J.J. Williams, *Narrative reflexivity in the British tradition*, Cambridge 2004, p. 1.

of the correspondence between words and reality" and "the correspondence between the literary work and the reality which it imitates"[7]. Sterne plays extensively with the concept of "typical," by experimenting with time, place, and action. As a result, the correspondence between his literary work and the reality is far from simple.

Thus, reading *Tristram Shandy* is a "physical pleasure and turning the next page is often full of surprises"[8]. On almost every page, the reader may find an eccentric system of hyphens, dashes, asterisks, occasional crosses and lines or symbols which replace words[9]. The text offers surprises unheard of at the era in which it was produced, such as the blank page on which the reader should draw his or her own portrait of Widow Wadman, or the black page following Yorick's death. But even more interesting is the manner in which the novel is connected with its narrative structure.

The narrative of *Tristram Shandy* is autotrophic. According to Henryk Markiewicz's determinants of orientation, the narrator focuses on himself and he presents his statement from the first-person perspective. The narrator in this novel is a storyteller who presents his thoughts, decisions, and perception of relationships, including those with family members. According to Markiewicz, *Tristram*'s narrator can be described with the following features: he is the protagonist of the novel (immanent narration), and he tells the story from his own standpoint (immediate narration). He is also assertive and presents his statements as his own convictions[10].

Another key fact is that *Tristram Shandy* constitutes literary fiction. As maintained by Henryk Markiewicz, this narrator is also a faking one, demonstrating hyper intelligence that extends beyond the average person's perception. In Markiewicz's opinion, this means that the reader is left with "the impression that the narrator is able to make retrospections about a variety of themes without mistakes. In other words, the narrator has a magnificent memory which is helpful to portray small details from a far distance of time"[11]. For instance, Tristram is able to quote word-for-word the literal dialogues while he was still an embryo living in his mother's womb.

> And what's the matter, Susannah? They have called the child Tristram ---- and my mistress is just got out of an hysterick fit about it -- No! -- 'tis not

[7] I. Watt, *The rise of the novel*, California 2001, p. 11.

[8] D. Gutman, *50 greatest books ever: Understand the 50 most important works of humankind*, New York 2010, p. 165.

[9] Ibidem.

[10] H. Markiewicz, *Wymiary dzieła literackiego*, Kraków 1984, chapter: *Autor i narrator*, p. 81–85.

[11] Ibidem, p. 81–82, my translation.

> my fault, said Susannah -- I told him it was Tristramgistus. ---- Make tea for yourself, brother Toby, said my father, taking down his hat -- but how different from the sallies and agitations of voice and members which a common reader would imagine![12].

Having considered the narrator's features, it is also worth looking at the reader. Stewen. J. Swain has claimed that "the reader must keep in mind the shifting temporal movements between characters and narratives. This technique results in a heavy weight of responsibility on the reader"[13]. If necessary, the reader must help the narrator who repeatedly asks for assistance: "I Beg the reader will assist me here, to wheel off my uncle Toby's ordnance behind the scenes"[14] or "Pray what was the man's name, for I write in such a hurry, I have no time to recollect or look for it"[15]. Moreover, sometimes the narrator directly declares that he is lost himself and unable to recollect the main idea. The reader must then follow this suggestion and assist the narrator.

Such lapses on the part of the storyteller appear again and again. The reader sometimes has a feeling that the narrator does not even know his own intention: "how he dealt with his lordship's opinion, ---- you shall see; ---- but when, -- I know not"[16] or "you shall read, -- but not today -- or tomorrow: time presses upon me, -- my reader is impatient -- I must get forwards"[17]. But the narrator knows perfectly how he can illustrate Tristram Shandy's world for the reader. It can be said that the writer is only a performer who records what his pen and his imagination create: "why do I mention it? Ask my pen, it governs me, I govern it not"[18]. In fact, careful analysis of the novel demonstrates that the only leader is the narrator. The examples which will be given corroborate this statement.

Evidence to support the above position can be found when the narrator of the novel successively addresses his statements to his future critics, for example ("O ye criticks! will nothing melt you?"[19]), or the whole audience ("STAY ---- I have a small account to settle with the readers, before Trim can go on with his harangue. -- It shall be done in two minutes"[20]). Moreover,

[12] L. Sterne, *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentelman*, vol. IV, ch. XI (quotations are based on electronic version of *Tristram Shandy*, [in:] http://www1.gifu-u.ac.jp/~masaru/TS/contents.html (09.07.2015).
[13] S.J. Swein, *"Here's a crown for your trouble"*.
[14] L. Sterne, *The life and opinions…*, vol. VI, ch. XXIX.
[15] Ibidem, vol. I, ch. XXI.
[16] Ibidem, vol. V, ch. XXXIV.
[17] Ibidem, vol. V, ch. XXXV.
[18] Ibidem, vol. VI, ch. VI.
[19] Ibidem, vol. V, ch. XII.
[20] Ibidem, vol. V, ch. VIII.

almost every section of the text is complete with additional comments which explain the idea of this particular part. Also, these comments describe decisions and plans connected with the future publication: "I'll shew you land for when we have tugged through that chapter, the book shall not be opened again this twelve month. -- Huzza!"[21].

The plot is non linear and seems to be very chaotic. But as it unfolds, it becomes clear that the narrator has a concrete plan for the narrative. Even if he starts a fragment which is unconnected to previous information, he is able to explain this unclear part later. Moreover, when needed, the protagonists are required to "hold their pose," as if in a live drama, until the narrator can explain some important aspects which may be helpful to understand the whole situation: "In this attitude I am determined to let her (his mother) stand for five minutes: till I bring up the affairs of the kitchen to the same period"[22] and then, a few pages later, we read of her release from her pose: "I Am a Turk if I had not as much forgot my mother"[23]. When the narrator sees that his story is going in a wrong direction or that part of his story is incomprehensible, he changes the plot, explains his imprecision and returns to the main idea.

The narrator constantly reprimands himself as he wished to avoid misunderstanding. The reader is required to be very careful, patient and he or she should have a very fertile imagination because "Tristram's narration is technically one-sided, but he repeatedly invites the reader into the narrative and engages them in act of narration[24]. Sometimes, the narrator makes an appeal to the reader, considered a more meticulous person than himself, when the narrator's main idea is temporarily lost.

The reader is further challenged by the storyteller's digressions. Given the novel's title, it seems sure that this literary work is a story about the protagonist Tristram Shandy. In fact, the reader finds a narrator who often deviates from the main plot, to make an additional utterance about buttons, for example. As a result, the protagonist does not manage to be born until the fourth volume. What is more, digressions and shifts between the plots create a situation in which Tristram Shandy is not a central figure of the story. The character of Tristram Shandy links the stories about himself and other co-protagonists, such as Uncle Toby or Widow Wadman, but his is not a typical biography of one character. That is also why the title of this book is misleading: the reader expects the content to be different.

21 Ibidem, vol. V, ch. XLI.
22 Ibidem, vol. V, ch. V.
23 Ibidem, vol. V, ch. XI.
24 S.J. Swain, *"Here's a crown for your trouble"*.

That is why the reader must be active, attentive, and involved. His or her task during the reading process is vigilant observation of the events, reflection, formulation of conclusions and searching for additional information which may be helpful to understand the narrator's idea. This novel cannot be simply read: it must be analyzed all the time.

These narrator's digressions may appear disconnected, but in fact play an important role. There are situations when part of the plot is suspended for some time to allow the narrator to include a few chapters which belong to totally different plots. This can even cause the narrator's problems with continuing what has already been begun: "HOLLA! -- you chairman! -- here's sixpence -- do step into that book-seller's shop, and call me a Day-talk critick. I am very willing to give any one of 'em a crown to help me with his tackling, to get my father and my uncle Toby off the stairs, and to put them to bed[25]". Sterne uses various methods that can be helpful to reach the main idea, which may have been started some five chapters earlier. These methods include playing with the narrative time (retrospections, recollections, non-chronological stories), using additional comments and practical leads which help understand the digressions (or even digressions about the digressions), or simply hints which suggest the conclusion.

It is important to note that *Tristram Shandy* is an open-composition novel. The reader has many opportunities to anticipate what the final chapter is going to contain. Readers normally imagine that the final conclusion will be connected with Tristram Shandy, with his problems or his reflections. But in fact, the final open-ended conclusion appears to be quite contrary. The narrator is not able to write the full "biography" of his protagonist: it is hopeless for his own life is too short to present all the facts and digressions which come to his mind while writing. That is why he ends the story with the chapter relating to his uncle and his love affair. He explains:

> I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume – and no farther than to my first day's life -'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it -- on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back-- was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this -- And why not? -- and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description -- And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write -- It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write -- and consequently, the

[25] L. Sterne, *The life and opinions…*, vol. V, ch. XIII.

> more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. Will this be good for your worships eyes?[26]

The final chapter relating to his uncle and his love affair brings the unexpected. In it, the reader is not given any information about the protagonist but a whole story about an odd acquaintance. Moreover, "when he withdraws the options by saying that none of them are applicable, the narrator makes it impossible for the reader to conclude"[27]. When there is no sufficient possibility to write the whole story or "to create an universal principle"[28], Sterne decides to end his narration with an unexpected final resolution.

Laurence Sterne stated: "I write a careless kind of a civil, nonsensical, good humoured Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good -- And all your heads too, provided you understand it"[29]. To understand his idea, the reader, apart from being careful, needs to have a good imagination to follow the narrator's changing scheme. According to the narrator, the fault of failing to understand the author's intention lies with the reader:

> IF the reader has not a clear conception of the rood and the half of ground which lay at the bottom of my uncle Toby's kitchen garden, and which was the scene of so many of his delicious hours, the fault is not in me, but in his imagination; for I am sure I gave him so minute a description, I was almost ashamed of it.[30]

Apart from a keen imagination, the reader should have a good memory. What was announced by the narrator is not left without response. This is more difficult since individual volumes appeared at different time intervals, so the announced plot might appear in the volume which was published a few years before. The most representative examples to prove this claim are the chapters about Uncle Toby and his love affair with Mrs. Wadman. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator includes selected details of this quaint tale and the last chapters are intended to tell the whole story in detail (the first volume was published in 1759, the last one in 1767).

As shown above, in *Tristram Shandy*, the interaction between the narrator and the reader takes different forms: sometimes it is a specific dialogue with the reader, at other times it is instructions prepared for the reader or

[26] Ibidem, vol. IV, ch. XIII.

[27] M. Whiskin, *Narrative Structures and Philosophical Debates on Tristram Shandy and Jacques the fataliste*, [in:] *Modern Humanities Research Association Texts & Dissertations*, vol. 95. London 2014, p. 63.

[28] Ibidem.

[29] L. Sterne, *The life and opinions…*, vol. VI, ch. XVII.

[30] Ibidem, vol. VI, ch. XXI, p. 86.

helpful hints which may be useful to comprehend the narrator's intention. In the next section I will try to show that these methods were later used by the contemporary writer John Fowles in his novel *A Maggot*, but in a different form and structure.

A Maggot: The Lives and Opinions of a Group of Five Travelers

In this section I will focus on similarities between *Tristram Shandy* and *A Maggot,* especially common in the communication between the reader and the narrator. In my opinion, there exist several parallels between these novels, which is it makes sense to speak about contemporary restitution of Sterne's innovation.

John Fowles's *A Maggot* is one of his books which combines science fiction and history, and "like several of his other beginners it is brilliant and compelling"[31]. *A Maggot* is "more conscious of its existence as a fiction"[32] than Fowles's previous novels.

In the prologue, Fowles thus explains the title of his novel: "a whim or quirk, or more precisely the result of an obsession, a desire to create a particular woman and her qualities"[33]. However, "the prologue suggests that Fowles is offering us a novel that is fanciful, but one that also has the capacity to effect a change in the reader's understanding of the relationship between fiction and reality"[34]. Fowles confirmed that the plot was based on a historical event, and some facts presented in the novel are historical (connected with Shakerism[35]), but in the epilogue he explains and disclaims having written a "historical novel":

> I know nothing in reality of her (…) and next to nothing of various other characters, such as Lucy and Wardley, who also come from real history. They are here almost all invention beyond their names. It may be that books and documents exist that might have told me more of them in historical terms

[31] R. Nye, *Magus's maggot*, [in:] http://www.theguardian.com/books/1985/sep/19/fiction.johnfowles (09.12.2015).

[32] B. Winsworth, *The capacity of the change: Transitional Narratives in John Fowles's "A Maggot"*, [in:] *Etudes Anglaises*, 2008/1 vol. 62, p. 19.

[33] L. Sterne, *The life and opinions…*, vol. VI, ch. XVII.

[34] B. Winsworth, *The capacity of the change…*, p. 19.

[35] "Shakerism" denotes the principles, beliefs, and practices of a millennial sect called the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, originating in England in the Shaking Quakers sect and brought to the U.S. in 1774 by Mother Ann Lee, especially an emphasis on communal and celibate living, on the dual nature of Christ as male and female, on their dances and songs as part of worship, and their honest, functional craftsmanship. [in:]: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Shakerism (08.07.2015).

> than the little I know: I have consulted none, nor made any effort to find them. I repeat, this is a maggot, not an attempt, either in fact or in language, to reproduce known history[36].

Given the ambiguity of the title, the reader is not certain of the story's content: it is hard to describe what the eponymous *maggot* is related to. The prologue explains that the story draws on some historical facts but it is only a fiction, produced because of an "apparent motive"[37] which came to the writer's mind. At the end of the prologue Fowles once again explains the title of his novel: "I would not have this seen as a historical novel. It's a maggot"[38]. Still, there is no information as to the purpose of the story.

From the beginning, the reader becomes a witness of the presented events and his or her task is similar to one protagonist's task: to find out what has happened to Lord B. This is very similar to early reader impressions of Tristram. After reading the title of Sterne's novel, the reader is sure that he or she will become familiar with the biography of the main character but, as demonstrated above, the truth is quite different.

At first, the reader might imagine that *A Maggot* revolves around the leader of the travelers, Bartholemew (Lord B), who is observed by the reader from the very beginning. In fact, the narrative of *A Maggot* is "centred on the figure of the existential heroine, Louise-Fanny-Rebecca, her aristocratic mentor, Bartholomew, and on Ayscough, the lawyer-interrogator, whose task is to discover the reasons behind His Lordship's secret journey"[39]. This shows similarity to Sterne's central character's position since Tristram is not a central character but he acts as the central observer. Frederick R. Karl has claimed that "Sterne broke up the narrative into individual scenes through which he could project personal idiosyncrasies. This method gave him the chance to view his characters from the strategic point of vantage and to develop them through an accretion of detail rather than by means of a limiting chronological narrative"[40]. *A Maggot* presents a very similar point of view. There is no one central character, as already indicated, because individual scenes show individual problems.

A Maggot is divided into parts: the prologue, testimonies mixed with letters and excerpts from newspaper articles, third-person narratives and the

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36 J. Fowles, *A Maggot*, London 1996, p. 6.

37 Ibidem, p. 455.

38 Ibidem, p. 6.

39 D. Costa, *Poetics, Linguistics and History: Discourses of Conflict in John Fowles' "A Maggot"*, [in:] http://www.pala.ac.uk/uploads/2/5/1/0/25105678/dcosta.pdf, p. 389 (15.07.2015).

40 F. R. Karl, *A reader's guide to Joseph Conrad*, New York 1960, p. 63.

epilogue. The parts narrated by the third-person narrator present some features of the protagonists (all of them are anonymous at the beginning) and create a kind of germ of the whole text for the reader. The third-person narrator can be defined, according to Henryk Markiewicz, as an auctorial narrator who presents his own opinions and reflections about the presented story[41]. His knowledge is limited; he is not omniscient.

The prologue and epilogue present the novelist's intention and explain the title's meaning, along with the purpose and the motivations which moved John Fowles to write this text. The testimonies of Thomas Puddicombe, Dorcas Hellyer, Samson Beckford, Francis Lacy, Hanna Claiborne, David Jones, Rebecca Lee, and James Wardley all present the events from their different points of view. Each dialogue between detective Henry Ayscough and his witnesses expand the reader's knowledge, but unfortunately each testimony further complicates the story. To help the reader, the novel includes letters (from Henry Ayscough to Lord B's father), which supplement the plot. What was discovered by detective Ayscough is discussed in his letters. They are very useful as they show yet another point of view – not the same as presented in the testimonies or third-person narrative parts. But, interestingly, the book includes additional documents, such as passages from *The Western Gazette* and fragments taken from *The Gentlemen's MAGAZINE*. This strategy may be intended to strengthen the illusion of reality. John Fowles wrote in the epilogue that his novel is a fiction based on historical facts[42]. Inserting fragments of real magazines into the novel definitely sustains the illusion of reality, and so Fowles's fiction becomes more realistic. The reader is no longer sure if the story is only a fiction.

Fowles's reader must be attentive, alert and able to read between the lines. Documents, testimonies, and narratives complicate the linear plot. Many of the included retrospections, especially in the testimonies, must be analyzed. Undoubtedly, these retrospections are significant determinants in the novel because they widen the reader's knowledge about the events, but they also serve as complications to the story's timeline. The story is non chronological. Something has happened, Lord B has disappeared, and the reader must deduce from the sources, the testimonies and the detective's letters to find out where the protagonist is. What is more, the information included in the testimonies demonstrates many variations of the main problem, i.e. Lord B's secret journey. The reader's task is to solve the riddle. Sterne did the same with complicating the linear story by using occasional dashes and asterisks

41 H. Markiewicz, *Wymiary dzieła literackiego…*, p. 88.

42 J. Fowles, *A Maggot*, p. 455–456.

to strengthen the illusion of chaos, so the reader could be led to make inaccurate assumptions.

A Maggot, like *Tristram Shandy*, makes use of an open-ended conclusion. Fowles's novel ends with the words of a lullaby. This is followed by the statement: "it is clear they [the lullaby's verses] are not rational and can mean nothing"[43]. The interpretation is left wholly to the reader: for example, the whole story might "mean nothing" because it is only a fiction. The ending is also open since the reader does not know what will happen to the child who was born.

Laurence Sterne's novel was full of digressions which were intended to comment on some situations, but instead present the narrator's thoughts which have nothing in common with the main plot. *A Maggot* contains digressions as well, but they occur only in the sections of third person narration. Digressions used by *A Maggot*'s narrator explain his intention, but they also show the narrator's attitude to the narrated story. This narrator keeps distance from the presented world; he is ironical but his irony can only be found in the third person sections, for example:

> Eighteenth-century man was truly Christian in his cruelty to animals. Was it not a blasphemous cock that crowed thrice, rejoicing each time the apostle Peter denied? What could be more virtuous than bludgeoning its descendants to death?[44].
>
> The impression is of a profound innocence, such as congenital idiots sometimes display; of in some way seeing her more sustainably, more wholly than normal intelligence could[45].
>
> Above all it was without attraction to an age whose notion of natural beauty – in those few capable of forming such notions – was strictly confined to the French or Italianate formal garden at home and the denuded but ordered (through art) classical landscapes of southern Europe abroad[46].

The narrator's remarks like the above, as well as comparisons (e.g. "he has also taken his wig off (…) and indeed looks like nothing so much as a modern skinhead, did not his clothes deny it"[47]) are the determinants of the narrator's irony. The ironical attitude in *A Maggot* cannot be missed because it creates the dichotomy of a fictional story and some historical facts.

43 Ibidem, p. 454.
44 Ibidem, p. 19.
45 Ibidem, p. 33.
46 Ibidem, p. 15.
47 Ibidem, p. 21.

Apart from the ironical attitude, the first part written in the third person shows another feature of the narrator. He presents the story without details, with an unidentifiable protagonist, in an unspecified place. This story may have occurred at every or any place and time. The story begins in the following way: "In the late and last afternoon of an April long ago, a forlorn little group of travellers cross a remote upland in the far south-west of England. All are on horseback, proceeding at a walk along the moorland track"[48]. The quotation shows that there is no specific time related to the plot (the reader is only given information about the month and the time of the day when the story begins), no specific place ("in the far south-west of England") and no concrete protagonists ("a little group of travelers").

The place where protagonists arrive is unknown: "The cavalcade of five, closely observed crossing West Country moorland in early spring and approaching small town of C---, promise to become the passionately entwined protagonists in a tragic drama of remote provincial life, or in a pastiche of one"[49]. The reader knows that the action occurs in "the small town of C----"[50], but no other information about this city is given. The city remains unknown, the journey has a secret purpose, and the protagonists are mysterious. The whole atmosphere and the dialogues between the characters are secretive.

The reader is thrown into their world, *in medias res*, and he or she does not know the details. It can be observed that the narrator is not omniscient: "A little fringe of white also appears beneath the bottom of her cloak: an apron. She is evidently a servant, a maid"[51]. As the quoted fragment suggests, the narrator does not know who the described girl is, so he can only make conjectures. But in other parts the narrator shows his knowledge about the surrounding world. The reader does not have accurate information about the protagonists, but he or she has specific details related to, for example, sheep: "their sheep, Exmoor Horns, were smaller and scraggier than modern sheep, and tight-coated"[52]. The narrator knows exactly the kind of sheep which is described: he plays with omniscience, but this fact may also suggest that he does not want to tell everything about his protagonists. The first impression of the reader is that the narrator's knowledge may be limited, but other facts deny this premise. The following quotation shows how this game is led by the narrator:

48 Ibidem, p. 7.
49 Ibidem, p. 309.
50 Ibidem.
51 Ibidem, p. 11.
52 Ibidem, p. 13.

> A quarter of an hour later the five came to the outskirts of the small town of C---. It was town more by virtue of being a few hundred inhabitants larger than any surrounding village in this thinly populated area than in any modern sense of the term; town also by virtue of an ancient charter, granted in palmier or more hopeful days four hundred years before; and which still absurdly permitted its somnolent mayor and tiny corporation to elect two members to parliament. It boasted also a few tradesmen and craftsmen, a weekly market, ciderhouses, and even an ancient grammar-school, if one can call school one aged master, also parish clerk, and seven boys; but in all else it was a village[53].

The reader is given an additional piece of information about the city in a later description, and so is able to locate it on the map: "Indeed it was only just becoming anything but a distinctly prosperous time for this county of Devon"[54]. This is a very interesting situation because the name of the city is left anonymous, but its description is quite detailed. That is an opposition, but in my opinion, it may have two sources: playing with omniscience or playing with the reader's attention (it is important to remember that the reader is a "detective" who is looking for some hints).

During the story, the reader may learn some facts about protagonists and he or she is able to tell what historical facts are being referred to. But there is one condition: the reader must first know about historical figures such as Ann Lee and John Wesley, who were the beginners of the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing, also known as the Shakers. John Fowles explains his decision to derive an inspiration from the history of the Shakers because

> Ann Lee and the early Shakers foresaw that, if not Antichrist, then certainly Mammon, the universal greed in each for more money, for more personal wealth and possession, would one day rule this world and threaten to destroy it (…) "Gathered" or community of Shakerism is now virtually extinct, its faith too plain, its rules too radical, for twentieth-century Adam and Eve. Yet for me something else in it does not die[55].

This message is clearly universal. In my opinion, perhaps because of this universal appeal, too many details are simply unnecessary. The same story may be related not only to the Shakers, but also to other religious communities which aim at values other than money or power.

Another significant factor is that *A Maggot* is a non-chronological novel just as *Tristram Shandy* is. Story time and narrative time are different, as is illustrated by the following quotation:

[53] Ibidem, p. 14.
[54] Ibidem, p. 16.
[55] Ibidem, p. 459.

> it speaks of a hitherto hidden trait in his character: a sadism before Sade, still four years unborn in the dark labyrinths of real time; and as unnatural as the singeing smell of burnt leather and paper that pervades the room[56].

The narrator is a person who lives in his own day, as is typical of John Fowles, and he comments on the behavior of protagonists and the narrated events from his contemporary viewpoint:

> Closer, beside the roof-supporting outer columns of the market house, groups of children noisily played lamp-loo and tutball, those primitive forms of tag and baseball. Modern lovers of the second game would have been shocked to see that here it was preponderantly played by the girls (and perhaps also to know that its traditional prize, for the most skilled, was not the million dollar contract, but a mere tansy pudding)[57].

Another example may be: "it was town more by virtue of being a few hundred inhabitants larger than surrounding village in this thinly populated area than in any modern sense of the term"[58]. This perspective gives the narrator the possibility to include information which may be helpful to the reader who is not able to understand some parts of the plot. *Tristram*'s narrator did the same with digressions which were very useful to explain some situations.

All things considered, both novels present very similar methods which foster the connection between the narrator and the reader. All narrative determinants are helpful to create the closely-woven labyrinth of the *Tristram Shandy* world and the *Magus's Maggot*[59] world, which are both complicated and full of contradictions. All oddities used by Laurence Sterne "push the history of Tristram into the background to make the reader a wanderer in the labyrinth, which is interesting but sometimes very hard to be followed"[60]. Both novels cannot be simply read, but they have to be analyzed thoroughly.

As indicated above, the readers of both novels should be very careful and ready for cooperation. They have tasks given by Laurence Sterne and John Fowles who rely on the same idea: to instruct the reader and provide helpful hints which may be useful to reconstruct the narrator's intention.

What is different is the fact that the connection between the reader and the narrator in Fowles's novel is subtler than in Sterne's work. *A Maggot*'s narrator does not refer to his readers directly; he does not say, "now my reader

[56] Ibidem, p. 49.
[57] Ibidem, p. 18–19.
[58] Ibidem, p. 14.
[59] This term was taken from *A Maggot's* review, [in:] http://www.theguardian.com/books/1985/sep/19/fiction.johnfowles (09.12.2015)
[60] R.A. Lanham, "*Tristram Shandy*": *the games of pleasure*, California 1974, p. 23.

I need your help", as *Tristram Shandy*'s narrator does. The reader in *A Maggot* has a task and the narrator merely provides him or her with hints to solve the riddle.

Laurence Sterne's novel was lauded as the forerunner of stream of consciousness fiction – "a method of narration that describes in words the flow of thoughts in the minds of the characters"[61]. Many innovations that Sterne introduced in his masterpiece were influential for writers such as Stendhal, James Joyce, and Virginia Woolf. But in my opinion, these innovations were influential for contemporary writers, like John Fowles, as well.

[61] The definition taken from http://literarydevices.net/stream-of-consciousness (26.08.2015).