**Pouring out of one vessel into another:**

**Originality and Imitation in Two Modern Adaptations of *Tristram Shandy***

**Abstract**

Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1759–67) appears to resist adaptation. Its verbal density, narrative complexity, and self-conscious bookishness mark it out as intensely medium-specific. However, its richly allusive style, scepticism about conventions of representation, and involvement of readers may make it a model for contemporary approaches to adaptation. This essay analyses two re-mediations: Martin Rowson’s 1996 graphic novel and Michael Winterbottom’s 2005 movie. It argues that these artists use Sterne to fashion virtuosic originality within a culture of mimicry and pastiche. To this end, they produce self-conscious adaptations that reveal and reflect on their own creative processes. The essay proposes that moving beyond axiological and teleological views of adaptation will be facilitated by recognizing literary classics as themselves acts of appropriation which in turn solicit acts of adaptation.

**Keywords**

Laurence Sterne; *Tristram Shandy*; adaptation; Martin Rowson; Michael Winterbottom; *A Cock and Bull Story*.

I

Originality is a vexatious topic in the field of adaptation. As an honorific status bestowed on the earlier work, it is the condition of being ‘the original’ which privileges one text in relation to its adaptations. For those adaptations, originality in the familiar sense of innovation and particularity is inevitable but not necessarily desirable. Changing medium automatically introduces difference, but an adaptation may be impugned as unfaithful when ‘too free’ with its source or as derivative when ‘too close’ to it. Perhaps we concentrate too much on the adaptation rather than the source text. If we conceive of the prior work, in its distinctive and context-bound way, as itself a work of appropriation and one that invites adaptation, then adaptations may be taken better on their own terms.

A good case study is *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), because that work is renowned for its resistance to adaptation. Ostensibly, Laurence Sterne’s novel is so unique in its narrative style and medium-specific in its bookishness that it defies transferral to a new medium. However, *Tristram Shandy* actually fashions originality out of imitation and appropriation. Sterne takes ample liberties with the tradition of Renaissance humanism that includes Cervantes, Rabelais, and Montaigne, and with contemporary philosophy, homiletics, encyclopaedias, and popular fiction. He often hides his borrowing in plain sight, as with Tristram’s apostrophe decrying modern authors’ unoriginality: ‘Tell me, ye learned, shall we for ever be adding so much to the *bulk*—so little to the *stock*? Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another? Are we for ever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope?’ (275). Sterne’s joke was untwisted in the 1790s when John Ferrier noticed that this attack on plagiarism is itself lifted from Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Tristram’s wish that ‘every imitator in *Great Britain*, *France*, and *Ireland* had the farcy for his pains’ is joyously ironic because Sterne’s artistry depends on mimicry. Pouring from one vessel into another constitutes productive repurposing: healthful medicine is made by mixing substances.

*Tristram Shandy*’s imitative originality is adopted in two self-reflexive adaptations which are the subjects of this essay: Martin Rowson’s graphic novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1996) and Michael Winterbottom’s movie *A Cock and Bull Story* (2005).[[1]](#endnote-2) Each produces an allusive, intertextual aesthetic suited to Sterne’s novel though they eschew fidelity to the source as it is conventionally understood. Sterne supplies these artists with an impetus for virtuosic originality in a postmodern culture of quotation and pastiche, a clash of high and low cultures, and a resistance to linearity and closure. The adaptations indicate that approaches to the original as sacrosanct are misguided. They do so, taking their cue from Sterne, by promulgating a fissured, fragmentary understanding of personal identity, objective reality, authorial originality, and the artwork. Though *Tristram Shandy*’s playful narrative and its self-conscious bookishness render it resistant to orthodox adaptation, the novel does invite and encourage creative responses, signalling its own incompleteness without the participation of readers. In taking up Sterne’s invitations Rowson and Winterbottom re-visit the Shandean fascination with discrepancies between a life lived and a life captured in writing, but they also tailor this interest to reflect on the slippage between original and imitation, source and adaptation. They extend Sterne’s concern with clashes between intention, execution, and reception. Ultimately, Sterne’s novel provides not a limit-case for modern adaptation—a work whose uniqueness thwarts adapters—but rather a prototype of work that stimulates and facilitates them.

II

Sterne’s plagiarized denunciation of plagiarism typifies *Tristram Shandy*’s demand that each reader exert themselves in making sense of it. This is the lesson for the ‘inattentive’ female reader sent back a chapter to ascertain Mrs Shandy’s religious persuasion (47). Helen Ostovich observes that the relationship between narrator and reader in *Tristram Shandy* is fruitful because it is disputatious (325). Tristram drills us on how to read the novel rather like Walter Shandy directing Trim’s reading of Yorick’s sermon. Re-reading, cross-referencing, skipping sections, slowing down, pressing on, and pausing to do research are commanded at various points. Sterne jokes about supervising the reading act but leaves interpretation comparatively unpoliced. John Preston explains that as well as berating and befuddling readers Sterne ‘wishes to bring the reader’s creative imagination alive’, so ‘Tristram is always asking for the collaboration of his reader’ (134). Tristram calls liberally on the reader’s faculties: ‘The truest respect which you can pay to the reader’s understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself’ (87). Dr Slop’s being cleaned and re-clothed after his muddy collision with Obadiah is passed over with a series of solicitations, like ‘Let the reader imagine…’ and ‘Let him suppose…’ (88); and we must conceive entirely by ourselves the journey undertaken in the missing chapter 24 of volume 4. ‘The book is more perfect and complete by wanting the chapter, than having it’, Tristram impishly assures us (251), as the pagination leaps by ten and chapter 25 follows 23 (the disorienting effect is that subsequent recto pages are evenly numbered and verso ones, oddly, are oddly numbered). Tristram is an ‘original’ in the eighteenth-century sense—‘a singular, odd, or eccentric person’ (*OED*)—but his narrative paradoxically undermines any notion of *Tristram Shandy* as the definitive ‘original’.

Some have gone so far as to supply ‘missing’ material, such as that omitted chapter (see Nace). This is apt because Tristram takes the idea of collaboration beyond our merely imagining action or speech he has omitted: he requests the reader to write, draw, vocalise, or perform parts of the novel. For instance, he enjoins the reader to ‘throw yourself down upon the bed, a dozen times—taking care only to place a looking-glass first in a chair on one side of it, before you do it’, so that she or he may both enact and observe the predicament of the inconsolable Walter upon learning of his newborn son’s crushed nose (218). Readers’ actions are not just belated enactments of *Tristram Shandy* but part of it: ‘Rub your hands thrice across your foreheads—blow your noses—cleanse your emunctories—sneeze, my good people!——God bless you——Now give me all the help you can’ (515). As well as actors, we are enlisted as stagehands, as Sterne breaks down genre boundaries and imagines his narrative as a play: ‘I beg the reader will assist me here, to wheel off my uncle *Toby*’s ordnance behind the scenes,——to remove his sentry-box, and clear the theatre, *if possible*, of horn-works and half moons, and get the rest of his military apparatus out of the way’ (365). *Tristram Shandy* is interactive rather than immersive, and Sterne intimates that without our participation the text remains unfinished, such as when Tristram leaves a ‘void space’ within a sentence so that ‘the reader may swear into it, any oath that he is most accustomed to’ (425). This oath is called for when Tristram misplaces his ‘remarks’ during his French journey, another acknowledgement of textual incompleteness that accentuates the gap between in-the-moment experience and subsequent writing. Sterne’s elliptical and aposiopestic devices actively invite adaptation, be this further writing, vocal or physical performance, or illustration.

In the eighty or so years after *Tristram Shandy*’s publication, these requests for re-mediation were accepted by a host of imitators, adapters, continuators, and illustrators (Gerard; Oakley; Newbould). Such re-workings tailed off in the Victorian period, an era more hostile to Sterne. Though recuperated by the Modernists, and a major influence on Joyce, Woolf, Beckett, and others, Sterne did not receive the ‘heritage treatment’ on film accorded to classic realist novels in the later twentieth century. A novel once considered eminently portable, a veritable fund for other artists, had come to seem unique, challenging, and inimitable. Reflecting on adaptation, Milan Kundera announced in 1985 that ‘in all literature there are only two novels that are absolutely irreducible, totally unrewritable: *Tristram Shandy* and *Jacques le fataliste*. How can one simplify such brilliant disorder and be left with anything? What would be left?’ Kundera’s conception of adaptation as reduction, simplification, and residue now feels outmoded: modern scholars stress the gains rather than losses of adaptation (Sanders; Hutcheon; Stam, “Introduction”). The fact that Kundera himself adapted Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste* for the stage suggests that his statement should be taken with a pinch of salt. However, Kundera was right that adapters long avoided *Tristram Shandy*. It gained a reputation as an ‘unfilmable book’, which as Kamilla Elliott shows is a problematic concept tending to reinforce literature-film hierarchies and untenable notions of medium specificity.[[2]](#endnote-3) Though ignored by filmmakers, *Tristram Shandy* was an inspiration for 1980s novels such as Fuentes’s *Cristóbal Nonato* and Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*; fragments of Michael Nyman’s opera have appeared since 1981, and there have been several stage versions. Recent artists have evidently been energized by the challenge and licence Sterne’s work presents, and postmodern adapters turned to Sterne at the turn of the millennium. Rowson and Winterbottom make adapting *Tristram Shandy* their central focus, reflecting on the workings of their own media; they take idiosyncratic approaches to the task without jettisoning the allusion and mimicry intrinsic to Sterne’s novel.

III

*Tristram Shandy* is famously self-reflexive in pondering its own composition and revealing the workings of its medium. Rowson and Winterbottom replicate this feature: both are adaptations about adaptation—‘metadaptations’ in Eckart Voigts-Virchow’s phrase. They use Sterne’s metafictional qualities to reflect on the forms they use and so disclose rather than conceal processes of re-mediation. They draw attention to the roles of readers in giving Sterne’s novel meaning and thematize the constraints of and scope for creativity in the context of adaptation. Both adaptations feature *Tristram Shandy* itself in the realities they assemble, constructing an image of ‘the original’ with which they deliberately tussle. In Winterbottom’s movie, the novel is alternately dispensable and tyrannous. The movie’s flippancy about *Tristram Shandy*—its suggestion that no-one making the film has read it properly, if at all—belies a careful engagement with the novel. In particular, the questions *Cock and Bull* poses about the construction of fictional reality are cued by Sterne. Similarly in the graphic novel, the original is by turns apotheosized and derided, but between these extremes Rowson establishes a grounded appraisal—appreciative but not self-involved—which is both indebted to Sterne’s readerly ideal and which parallels a desire for adaptation that is neither subservient to nor irreverent towards the original.

Rowson’s *Tristram Shandy*, according to its author, is a ‘comic book about the writing of a comic book about a novel about the writing of a novel’ (“Hyperboling” 69). The domineering narrator leads a trio of narratees through the book, at one stage literally by their noses. His auditors are Joyce, Woolf, and a figure later revealed as Death, all in eighteenth-century clothing. The larger perspective is deliberately modern, marked by an awareness of the novel’s intellectual influences and place in literary history. Early on, Tristram piggybacks on John Locke—whose theory of the association of ideas shaped Sterne’s novel—himself atop a hobby-horse, being gestured to enter ‘Ye Narrative’. Tristram throws out a baby with its bathwater and a copy of Richardson’s *Pamela* while Horace struggles to fry an egg, as Tristram has pledged to depart from Horace’s advice and tell his story *ab ovo*. Horace’s *obscurius fio* (‘I become obscure’) reflects Sterne’s digressive style plus the challenge of making sense of *Tristram Shandy* in an adaptation. So, Rowson’s images gloss as well as depict the novel, visualizing features like its badgering treatment of readers, intertextual allusions, and its reception history. Rowson sets the narration in surreal landscapes that criss-cross with the Georgian Yorkshire of Shandy Hall where Tristram is conceived and eventually born.

The characters pursuing Tristram include Martin Rowson himself, so that Tristram’s narration and Rowson’s commentary compete for authority. As David Richter observes, ‘Rowson’s *Tristram Shandy* is an antinovel not about writing but about reading Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*’ (71), and the primary reader-figure is the author’s self-portrait. (To avoid confusion with the real-life Rowson, I refer to his character as ‘the artist’.) The artist enters the narrative accompanied by his dog, Pete, a character from Rowson’s political cartoons, who serves as a sceptical foil to his enthusiastic master (Figure 2). The artist is soon pictured riding his own hobby-horse, the Shandean emblem of eccentricity. He labels *Tristram Shandy* an ‘anti-novel’ and identifies his intention ‘to reveal our controlling hands astirring the fictional cauldron’. This comic strip is pasted on the back of an antique volume of *Tristram Shandy*, an appropriate placement for the genre but also playing with the idea of tarnishing a valuable original with a frivolous imitation. While the dog is distracted by ‘typographical conceits’—vermicular dashes and floral asterisks—which are hallmarks of Sterne’s book, the artist switches from armchair reader to author and exegete. He styles his work not ‘a mere comic book’ but a ‘graphic thesis’.[[3]](#endnote-4) So, he decides that to adapt *Tristram Shandy* he must tackle the mountains of scholarship it has occasioned. Academic criticism, however, is constantly pastiched, useful only when weaponized against those who pontificate about Sterne’s novel, here in a fashion that mimics the recurring brick-to-the-head shot from the classic comic ‘Krazy Kat’.

*A Cock and Bull Story* meanwhile is a film about making the film version of a novel about writing a novel. It depicts a film crew in the process of adapting *Tristram Shandy*, confronting the creative, technological, financial, and personal/personnel difficulties that entails. Steve Coogan plays father and son, Walter and Tristram, but also an unflattering version of himself, as does Rob Brydon, who plays Uncle Toby. (For clarity, I refer to ‘Steve’ and ‘Rob’ for the on-screen characters, ‘Coogan’ and ‘Brydon’ for the real-life actors.) Coogan and Brydon have extended their ambiguous self-impersonations in *The Trip* (2011–), also directed by Winterbottom. *Cock and Bull*, then, sits within the mode of celebrity mockumentary for which Coogan is most recognizable to audiences, particularly in his guise as media lightweight Alan Partridge, a role Steve is unsuccessfully trying to shake off in the movie.

*Cock and Bull* begins with Steve and Rob in make-up, bickering over their billing in the movie, arguing about the size of their ‘parts’. It proceeds to expose Steve as narcissistic but fragile: in short, as Shandean. After the frame opening, *Cock and Bull* launches into a manic and diffuse twenty-minute segment depicting the film within the film, interweaving the novel’s action and the to-camera narration of Steve as Tristram. Even here, the division between the work and its frame, ‘fiction’ and ‘reality’, is blurred as Tristram’s assertion that his is the ‘leading role’ extends the dressing-room debate in which Steve participated. Indeed, this is a film about making a *metafilm* wherein the periwigged narrator comments acerbically on the suitability of the child actors portraying him and indulges in anachronisms such as updating Locke’s theory of the association of ideas to Pavlov’s of classical conditioning when explaining his mother’s sexual arousal by the winding of a grandfather clock. The soundtrack suits a period film, though closer inspection shows it accentuates *Cock and Bull*’s self-referential intertextuality by taking us to other movies—costume dramas like Greenaway’s *The Draughtsman’s Contract*, literary adaptations like Kubrick’s *Barry Lyndon*, and metafilms like Fellini’s *8½*. During Tristram’s birth scene the camera pans to reveal a film crew, and the remaining hour is a mostly naturalistic depiction of events on the set. Scenes from the putative adaptation continue to appear but in surreal dreams or ‘how-we-might-have-done-it’ cutaways. These undermine the status of the original novel as the reality the film aims to reproduce. *Cock and Bull* draws attention to its own cinematic processes and features, as well as its vamping of Sterne, rather than giving the novel the kind of heritage-adaptation treatment that predicates dependence on the source text and a unified, realistic aesthetic (Hudelet). It does not aim to present a definitive film version of a novel but rather depicts several individuals’ relationship to *Tristram Shandy*, though apparently only a few characters have read it.

IV

It will help to have some examples of how the film and graphic novel tackle Sterne. The challenge of adapting *Tristram Shandy* lies in its ludic narrative style, its verbal playfulness, its learned and faux-learned allusions, and its awareness of itself as a physical book, as in the famous examples of black, blank, and marbled pages and diagrams that represent the swish of a cane or the ‘digressive and progressive movements’ of the narrative itself (58). Stam’s point that ‘questions of material infrastructure’ are irrelevant to the novel, a ‘single-track, uniquely verbal medium’, as opposed to ‘a multitrack medium like film’ simply does not hold for *Tristram Shandy* (“Introduction” 16). Such features require that an adapter work by analogy. The life/writing dilemma is one example. Tristram sets out to write his life and opinions, but the opinions soon overwhelm the life, as digressions about his father and uncle ensure that he barely gets beyond his own birth. Tristram gets so caught up with how he might tell his story that his reflections on narration trespass on the action:

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 … It must follow, an’ please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. (228)

As well as alluding to the book as a tangible thing, Tristram retards narrative progress by fretting about doing just that. In this, he somehow gives a more revealing impression of himself than would be captured in a conventional account.

However, it does not lend itself to adaptation in any straightforward sense. Bruce Bennett suggests that ‘Sterne’s novel is a limit case for the transposition of narrative across media, an example that demonstrates the futility of aspirations to fidelity and the unbreachable media-boundary that makes it impossible to transfer a narrative intact from a novel to the screen’ (135). Or, presumably, to a graphic novel, though that mode shares features like printed text and physical form. Whereas Stam, commenting in 1992 on cinematic adaptations of self-reflexive literature, noted that ‘they do not metalinguistically dissect their own practice or include critical discourse within the text itself’ (*Reflexivity* 159), this is precisely what the more recent *Tristram Shandy* adaptations do. The treatment of endings is an indicative example. In the graphic novel, the artist realizes halfway through volume 4 that he has an overwhelming amount left to cover and insufficient space, whereas the film within the film of *Cock and Bull* stops abruptly to the bafflement of those watching the cast screening. Sterne’s question about capturing anterior reality in writing is reframed as that of adequately rendering an antecedent text in a new medium. In *Cock and Bull*, the ‘making of *Tristram Shandy*’ abuts on the making of *Tristram Shandy*; in Rowson’s graphic novel, commentary on *Tristram Shandy* impedes the reproduction of the novel.

Sterne’s play with the nature of the book also demands interpretation rather than replication by adapters. The black page that commemorates Parson Yorick is one example. The producers in *Cock and Bull* discuss how they might adapt it, agreeing that a black screen would make for bad film; to prove the point, unbeknownst to the discussants, the screen is blacked out during their conversation. The movie thus comments on its own construction, reminding us that film is subject to post-production interventions: at another time, a voiceover directs us to DVD bonus features as comparable to Sternean annotative footnotes. Even the ‘making of’ is something made, just as Sterne shows us that a book is made subsequently to the production of the author’s text. In Rowson’s version, the hot air balloon carrying Tristram and the biplane carrying Rowson crash into the black page, suggesting the arresting effect this feature has for adapters: a graphic novel could reproduce the black page exactly but to do so would be duplication rather than adaptation. Moreover, in a motif that theorists have linked back to *Tristram Shandy*, the black panel in modern comics can signify a traumatic moment that defies representation (Romero-Jódar). Both Rowson’s and Winterbottom’s adaptations therefore comment on the challenges they have encountered, mimicking Tristram’s equivalent reflections on the difficulty of converting experience into writing.

A different example of the adapters approaching Sterne’s medium-specific novel in self-conscious ways flags up the difference between verbal and visual representation. The indescribable beauty of the Widow Wadman remains undescribed in Sterne, as the reader is commanded to call for pen and ink and ‘paint her to your own mind——as like your mistress as you can——as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—’tis all one to me—please but your own fancy in it’ (376). A blank page is duly provided. Some eighteenth-century readers accepted the challenge, though even the imperative ‘paint’ is ambigious: one sketched the Widow in their copy, while another provided a verbal description (Brewer; Bandry-Scubbi). The film within the film in *Cock and Bull* pleases its own fancy by casting Gillian Anderson; the joke is that she signs on in a heartbeat and jets in from Hollywood, showing up the jaded egotism of her less famous co-stars. But we later see Gillian’s consternation following the cast screening because all her scenes have been cut. The request to ‘paint’ this character to suit your desires is thus fulfilled even as the novel’s refusal to describe her is (sort of) honoured. Moreover, this episode indicates *Cock and Bull*’s larger interest in the marginalization of women in the film industry and in *Tristram Shandy*. A harried Keeley Hawes as Mrs Shandy spends days of filming just screaming in labour. Jennie (Naomie Harris) is a knowledgeable film buff and *Shandy* aficionado but works as an under-appreciated assistant whose enthusiasm is derided and whom Steve tries to seduce. Another Jenny (Kelly MacDonald), Steve’s girlfriend, visits him on set but is restricted to massaging his ego, telling him the plot of *Tristram Shandy*, and caring for their baby, even as the fact of Steve’s philandering comes to light. The doubling of Jennies alludes to Sterne’s ‘dear, dear, *Jenny*’, Tristram’s non-appearing lover in the novel (38). *Cock and Bull* thus critiques the masculinist focus of *Tristram Shandy* and its occlusion of female experience amd agency.

Rowson meanwhile follows Sterne’s unwillingness to describe Widow Wadman by drawing her with her face concealed by a fan. This nice hint at her modesty is undercut by the thought-bubble giving Sterne’s salacious text, as Toby prepares to show her the ‘very place’ in which he received his injury (Figure 3). She is disappointed when he gets out a map rather than lowering his trousers. Sterne’s novel stages a tension between the described and the depicted, between the verbal and the visual, which is apparent even in those eighteenth-century interpolators’ decisions respectively to draw or describe Widow Wadman. This tension between types (or degrees) of abstraction from the real—words and images—is key to understanding comics (McCloud 46–47). The graphic novel engages head-on with that tension, combining Sterne’s language with original images, heeding the original as well as augmenting it.

V

Both Rowson and Winterbottom stated that they were drawn to *Tristram Shandy* because it defies and paradoxically therefore *demands* adaptation. Rowson initially considered the offer to adapt Sterne unfeasible, but ‘after a while, the very fact of the apparent impossibility of the project began to appeal’. This was because ‘*Tristram Shandy*’s … failing to adhere to the kind of sequential narrative structure which the comic book exemplifies … provided plenty of scope for subverting the accepted structures of comic book narrative and design as effectively as Sterne had subverted the structure of the novel’ (“Hyperboling” 64). Rowson saw his project as an opportunity to experiment with comics’ shape and appearance, their sequencing and framing, and Sterne’s novel serves as a touchstone for generic tinkering. Of course, experimentation with genre can be guilty of positing a stable norm, and panel-transitions in comics are often complex, meaning that the ‘accepted structures’ are imaginary rather than actual. Nonetheless, Rowson’s play with panel shapes, ordering, gutters, bleeding, and interactions between layers of action is pervasive rather than occasional, so his claim stands up. In the first volume alone, Tristram and his interlocutors clamber between frames, previous frames take physical form in subsequent ones, and at one point Tristram yanks a brake that squelches a frame like a vehicle emergency stopping. Finally a band of French deconstructionists literally dismantle pictorial features like framing and speech bubbles. As in Sterne’s novel, genre conventions exist to be exposed.

Winterbottom also stated that the apparent impossibility of a ‘straight’ adaptation attracted him to *Tristram Shandy*. However, his and screenwriter Frank Cotrell Boyce’s initial attempt to write the script yielded only thirty pages (Calhoun). So, they decided to do something in the *spirit* of *Tristram Shandy*. ‘The spirit of the book is to be chaotic and anarchic’, Winterbottom says: ‘The idea was to turn out something with the same attitude that Sterne has in his book’ (Nayman). Winterbottom reflects that a literal adaptation would go against the ‘spirit’ of the book, the clash of nature and art, Tristram’s mistaken belief that writing can or should match life step for step. Stam is among those to reject the notion that works have an inherent ‘spirit’ or ‘essence’ that adaptations can or should capture (“Introduction” 24). Undoubtedly, certain qualities of artworks are ascendant at certain times during their reception (rather than a transhistorical spirit prevailing), and Winterbottom, like Rowson, focuses on bawdy and bodily aspects of *Tristram Shandy* rather than the sentimental or moral features that informed much early Sterneana. In interviews Winterbottom tended to downplay his movie’s status as an adaptation, such as by saying that ‘the book … doesn’t really give you background material’, and disavowing dependence on Sterne by stating, ‘I don’t think there’s that much connection’ between his film and the novel, as ‘the source material’s just one part’ of the many things that go into a film (D’Arcy). Echoing Winterbottom’s statements, *Cock and Bull* itself suggests that Sterne can provide only a limited steer for the filmmakers, and so the prestige of the original is undercut.

Sterne’s scepticism about literature’s mimetic potential licenses a film suspicious about conventional fidelity in adaptation. The wardrobe supervisor Debbie (Elizabeth Berrington) is among those who invoke the novel in an effort to remain faithful to it, but she meets resistance from actors more concerned with their own image than adherence to the novel. Steve, in one of many complaints about costuming, insists that the pockets on his coat are so low that the comedy will seem laboured when Walter tries to retrieve a handkerchief from his right-hand pocket with his left hand. Debbie reads to him from the novel: ‘In the latter end of Queen *Anne*’s reign, and in the beginning of the reign of King *George* the first—“*Coat pockets were cut very low down in the skirt*”’ (126). When Steve replies that, ‘The pockets can be both technically accurate and still look contrived’, he is being both difficult and perceptive, because the joke in Sterne depends on the delay between our being told what Walter does, being invited to imagine the contortions it occasions, and finally getting the salient sartorial detail that compounds his predicament. ‘The father of mischief, had he been hammering at it a month, could not have *contrived* a worse fashion for one in my father’s situation’, puns Tristram (127; my emphasis). Literal representation of the moment (which on film would invert the order of information) seems less suitable than a conversation about whether they should attempt it at all. The battle coordinator Ingoldsby (Mark Williams) meanwhile bypasses the novel, insisting that the filmmakers’ responsibility is accurately to represent the Nine Years’ War, echoing Toby and Trim’s obsessive efforts to reconstruct Namur’s fortifications on a bowling green in Sterne’s novel. The resultant battle shots are predictably boring: Steve wryly comments that Mel Gibson has no reason to fret, referencing the famous anachronisms and popular appeal of *Braveheart*. *Cock and Bull* thus stages clashes between purism and irreverence in order to ponder how to adapt *Tristram Shandy*. The actors and producers agonize over detail just like Walter planning Tristram’s upbringing or Toby building military models; the filmmakers are shown up, just as his characters are by Sterne, because their control is more limited than they realize.

In another scene, Steve is called away from his girlfriend and son to try out one of the more experimental features of the movie: a large glass-fronted womb into which Steve is lowered, upside-down, by a mechanical harness (Figure 4). ‘Womb with a view’, puns Steve, recalling James Ivory’s adaptation of Forster’s novel and so framing the scene with an allusion to the heritage school of adaptation. The womb indicates the low production costs of the film within the film and exposes efforts to paper over shortcomings with gimmicks. The dialogue establishes tension between the naïve realism demanded by the producers and the comic surrealism demanded by the screenplay. The exasperated Steve points out that he does not actually need to be upside down as the image can be flipped. ‘I think he [Mark the director] wanted the realism’, the producer says. ‘He wants realism?’ Steve rejoins: ‘I’m a grown man talking to the camera in a fucking womb’. The scene responds to Shandean anxieties about the male body. ‘You’ve put on weight’, someone tells Steve as he is being wedged into the womb; ‘I think you’ll look funny naked’, Jennie reassures Steve when he realizes that they plan him to film it nude. The scene also taps into *Tristram Shandy*’s concerns with parturition, particularly the vulnerability of the cranium. And it echoes Shandean failures of communication occasioned by solipsism, pedantry, and egotism: the film producer is insistent about capturing the correct stage of foetal development even when the ‘foetus’ will be adult, but the basics of manipulating a cinematic image baffle him.

As the film proceeds, the novel is increasingly sidelined but starts to take over the characters’ realities. Life begins to echo art. When Steve first looks into *Tristram Shandy*, having realized that the casting of Gillian Anderson threatens to put him in Rob’s shadow, the film cuts to what appears to be a romantic scene between Toby and Widow Wadman, Rob and Gillian, but is actually Steve’s nightmarish vision. In the dream, Rob hits it off with Gillian on and off camera, gaining the plaudits Steve desperately craves. Whereas Toby is able to satisfy Widow Wadman behind the asparagus that his ‘equipment’ is in full working order, Steve is surreally miniaturized on the margins of the set, denuded and eventually drenched with an amniotic gush in his model womb. ‘I didn’t realize he was so small’, says Gillian as she walks away. All this time, Steve is failing to perform his conjugal duties, because he is snoozing on his desk with the novel rather than in bed with Jenny, who has said she has travelled 200 miles by train with a baby just to have sex with him. The pressure of sexual performance reminds us of Walter at the novel’s opening, the disrupted coitus blamed for all Tristram’s misfortunes, including his sexual apathy. Rob intrusively alludes to Steve’s reduced libido since becoming a father. In explaining the novel to him, Jenny joins the list of women with whom Steve feels inadequate. As Brian Michael Goss says, *Cock and Bull* ‘lampoons male status anxiety’ (187); but it also critiques masculine privilege. It alludes to the anxieties about castration and failed virility in *Tristram Shandy* and critiques Sterne’s representation of women as sources of anxiety for men. In a poignant, underplayed scene, Debbie is weeping in the background for an unknown reason while Steve obliviously presses the petty issue of his shoes: despite the fact that Walter is supposed to be short, Steve wants a larger heel to ensure he appears taller than Rob. When a female costume assistant finally provides it, having worked through the night, he casually changes his mind as he has moved on to another minor grievance.

*Cock and Bull* uses *Tristram Shandy* to reflect on the nature of creativity within adaptation, though in ways that extend the novel’s themes and revisit its gender politics. The film also picks up on Sterne’s play with the construction of reality. As Preston observes, in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne ‘is asking about the reality of fiction. What is the reality of a world which need not exist, and which would not exist if we did not say that it did’ (134). The dream sequence already discussed evinces several levels of artifice. Though it is shot in the style of a period drama, the compulsive impressionist Rob performs Toby as Roger Moore, serving up vegetable-based bawdry while Gillian hams it up in the manner of the heritage film, with slight facial inflections and pregnant pauses that stand for intense feeling. These jarring acting styles give an impression of the performance of a performance. The film crew appears in the backdrop, between the actors, at the crucial moment (Figure 5), echoing the earlier revelation of the crew in the birth scene, and extending *Cock and Bull*’s tendency to transform intimate scenes into public ones. Ultimately, of course, this is not ‘reality’ in any sense but is a dream, Steve’s nightmarish projection of how the adaptation *might* develop at his expense, not even a scene from the film being made. There are several such hypothetical scenes in *Cock and Bull*, adapted segments not actually part of the film within the film. The film’s play with layers of reality—how the fictional and real frames interact—gets rather complicated. For instance, Steve is disappointed that he will not get to act the experience of having a hot chestnut burn his testicles. This appears in the film as a gimmick seen in flashback—another breach of the documentary style—because it was used in pitching for funding. However, what we see is a practice effort where Steve is actually burned. After apparently pulling it off for the funders, Steve learns to his dismay that this incident does not happen to Walter or Tristram, so his rehearsing it in a rare moment of professionalism is wasted. However, by this point in the movie, we have earlier seen Steve as Tristram acting groinal agony when showing a child actor how to perform a different scene, one where a falling window-sash crushes the infant Tristram’s penis. That scene makes new sense when echoed: Steve has evidently demanded his showpiece be included, though the boy actor says witheringly of Steve’s demonstration, ‘I was doing it as a comedy, *not* a pantomime’.

The film obscures levels of reality to make us doubt the coherence of character, rather like the erratic narration of *Tristram Shandy* undermines models of personal identity being promulgated by eighteenth-century empiricist philosophy. The affectionate scene Steve shares with his baby son, changing a nappy and lulling him to sleep with ‘My Bonnie lies over the Ocean’, is another instance of intimacy rendered public. When Steve goes downstairs to brag, the crew, to whom he is always performing, have heard it all on a baby monitor. The ‘authenticity’ of this tender parenting is further undermined by the fact that Steve has immediately beforehand pressed for the inclusion in the adaptation of a scene capturing Walter’s affection for his own son, Tristram. No doubt Steve is compensating for his own patchy commitment to his family through his screen image, but the movie again undercuts Steve’s whims. He insists that Walter be present at Tristram’s birth, though his fainting (marking the end of the film within the film) produces sit-com cliché, a man floundering at a birth scene, rather than the image of the modern man (and serious actor) for which Steve has been angling.

The ‘real’ and ‘fictional’ levels of *Cock and Bull* are inextricably intertwined, compromising any sense that a stable reality exists prior to literary or filmic representation. As Bennett observes, *Cock and Bull* ‘refuses ultimately to resolve uncertainties about the relationship between reality and cinematic simulacrum’ (138). For instance, the film alludes to Coogan and Winterbottom’s earlier collaboration *24 Hour Party People* and Tony Wilson, the music producer Coogan portrayed in that work, appears on the set of *Tristram Shandy* to interview Steve. The play with the relationship of art to reality climaxes in the ending, when it turns out we have watched, along with the actors, a cast screening. The director Mark (Jeremy Northam) explains that the foregoing shots of Steve with the baby actor achieved the ‘emotional level’ they wanted, so they ended the project. Authenticity, sincerity, and emotional depth are proffered but whipped away. The metafictional sophistication of this ending has not always been appreciated. The Sterne scholar Melvyn New’s scathing review objects that *Cock and Bull* demarcates ‘reality’ and ‘fiction’ too simplistically:

Of course, these actors are no more real than the characters in *Tristram Shandy*, and probably a good deal less. Much is made of suddenly cutting away to the cameras filming Mrs. Shandy’s birthing, but persuasively to capture Sterne and the shaping of reality, one needed to cut away as well from the scene, for example, where Coogan (playing himself) and Kelly MacDonald (playing his ‘girlfriend’ and mother of his child) come together in a love-making scene—surely, this is as fictional (i.e., a performance) as anything that happens in the recreated eighteenth-century world. This failure to encompass the entire film in self-consciousness is its greatest lapse in its relationship to Sterne’s accomplishment in *Tristram Shandy*. (580–81)

This is a spectacular misreading. The cast screening shows that all that we have hitherto seen *is* fictional: we have indeed cut away from scenes showing film crews or the ones depicting Steve and Jenny as lovers. Steve and *Kelly* (Jenny no more) are co-workers: Steve commends Kelly on her performance (‘I thought you were fantastic, by the way’) and gives her an awkward cheek-kiss in parting. Even now, he is not *the* Steve Coogan, as his patronising praise aligns with the film’s version of Coogan. The sense that this is still not yet reality is confirmed by the director Mark’s justifications of the film to frustrated financiers: ‘Mark’ speaks, not Jeremy Northam (the actor playing him), nor yet Michael Winterbottom, who reacted in a horrified manner when asked if he ever considered putting himself in the movie (Calhoun). If we think too hard about the nature of the ‘reality’ we have watched, we are liable to become dizzy. Gillian’s comments to Dylan Moran (Dr Slop) indicate that she did not feature at all in the screened version though *we* saw her in a couple of scenes. What is the ontological status of the scenes in which Gillian appears? If this feels like peeling layers of an onion, then that fits with the sceptical view of external reality and of coherent personhood promoted by Sterne.[[4]](#endnote-5) The notion of mimesis, resting on a stable and apprehensible sense of antecedent reality, has been shot through. The notion of faithful adaptation, based on the singularity and coherence of the source text, has been exploded. In both cases, this is not at Sterne’s expense but in conjunction with him.

VI

Rowson’s graphic novel similarly works with and not against Sterne in producing a self-interrogating adaptation. Rowson described Sterne as a ‘collaborator’, with whom his relationship was ‘sympathetic and admiring’. He states: ‘I like—love—the book. I came to enhance Sterne, not mock him. Luckily Sterne’s own abiding irony and mischievousness had done part of my work for me: we were in this together against the unsuspecting reader’ (“Hyperboling” 66). Indeed, rebuking readers becomes one of the main themes Rowson takes from Sterne. This sense of partnership stands in contrast to Rowson’s earlier work in adaptation, his 1990 comic-book take on *The Waste Land*, which clashes Eliot’s high Modernist poem with Raymond Chandler’s brand of detective fiction. As Rowson explains, ‘I came to that project with an innate hostility to Eliot and his poem, and the best joke of all was turning this hoary sacred cow into something sleazy and bathetic’ (“Hyperboling” 66). In *The Waste Land*, Rowson vulgarized the cornerstone of canonical Modernism with film noir, incurring the aesthetic scorn and legal ire of Eliot’s estate and provoking a copyright battle. After this experience, he enjoyed the chance to adapt a work not only well out of copyright but that he actually liked. Rowson’s illustrations aim to enhance Sterne, as well as to reflect, like *Cock and Bull*, on the nature of adaptation. But whereas Winterbottom enjoys the license granted by trying to film a supposedly ‘unfilmable’ novel, taking this in directions that depend only loosely on Sterne, Rowson is more earnest in replicating *Tristram Shandy*’s complexity of allusion and verbal play.

Rowson, then, thinks of himself as in cahoots with Sterne, but within the text Rowson’s Tristram and the artist (Rowson’s avatar) are firmly at odds. They frequently clash, as the former’s unpredictability wrongfoots the latter’s self-assurance. ‘I am of so nice and singular a humour’, says Sterne’s Tristram, ‘that if I thought you was able to form the least judgment or probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page,—I would tear it out of my book’ (63). And so despite his (superficial) familiarity with the novel, the artist is unable to anticipate Tristram’s antics: like *Cock and Bull*’s filmmakers, he is an adapter being led astray by his source material. For instance, the artist is outraged when there is no space for his dedication because Tristram occupies a full page to auction his own, and again when his ‘25 page fold-out mixed media panorama’ of the missing chapter is torn out (as threatened) by Tristram. Thwarted in his efforts to reproduce Sterne and ridiculous in his attempts to explain *Tristram Shandy*, the artist eventually confesses that he has not even finished the book he has been pretentiously explaining, so he operates Stevinus’s Miraculous Calculating Machine to find out what happens. The machine, however, first digitizes an entire volume as a page of binary code before generating a series of modern versions of *Tristram*, the novel as though written by Martin Amis, Bret Easton Ellis, Gabriel Garcia Márquez, and Raymond Chandler, the last aping Rowson’s own *Waste Land* (Figure 6). With a flair for mimicry that Sterne would have appreciated, Rowson emphasizes textual multiplicity, the numerous ways in which an adapter *could* appropriate *Tristram Shandy*, a text that in Rowson’s reimagining threatens to proliferate and to burst out of its own era.

Rowson’s parodies and pastiches of versions of *Tristram Shandy* critique self-involved responses to Sterne. For instance, he depicts two screen adaptations of Sterne, one a sexed-up heritage film by Andrew Davies with a hunky, open-shirted Toby (perhaps alluding to Colin Firth’s Darcy), the other a Hollywood version by Oliver Stone, a mash-up of *The Deerhunter* and *Born on the Fourth of July* which uses Toby’s war trauma as a pretext for another Vietnam film. The objection to such egotistical, opportunistic, and self-regarding appropriations of *Tristram Shandy* extends to Rowson’s pastiches of academic criticism, especially when the characters crash through the World Congress of Shandean Studies or stumble on the Legendary Lost Wandering Ship of Critics, two collections of pedants made ignorant by their own knowledge and treated far less tolerantly than ‘system-builders’ like Walter in Sterne’s novel. Rowson guns for readers of Sterne—would-be adapters and literary critics—who take it too seriously or who use it hobby-horsically to indulge their own whims. As we shall see, in the figures of the artist and Pete, Rowson rejects other kinds of response—inane enthusiasm and blinkered dismissal—that miss the pleasures of Shandyism.

In proliferating alternative versions within his own version, Rowson follows Sterne’s lead in complicating models of original or originary authorship, embracing allusion and imitation, acknowledging that texts inescapably comprise other texts and take form only when realized by readers. Comics theorists have emphasized the importance for the form of what Groensteen calls an ‘insistence on the active cooperation provided by the reader’ (10). Rowson exploits the comic’s demand on the reader’s role in fashioning sequentiality out of the medium’s ‘jagged, staccato rhythm of unconnected moments’ through acts of ‘closure’ that ‘[allow] us to connect these moments and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality’ (McCloud 67). However, the capacity of the comics form to leave reality unstable and ununified is achieved in Rowson’s *Tristram Shandy* through layering narration and intertextual allusion. For instance, Rowson mimics a range of eighteenth-century art, including Giovanni Battista Piranesi, Joseph Wright of Derby, and John Constable, as well as previous Sterne illustrators including William Hogarth and Thomas Patch.[[5]](#endnote-6) At one point, the artist is asked if he is ‘the author of this work’, to which he responds, ‘Up to a point’, before being slapped with an injunction citing offenses against minority groups (a 1990s jab at ‘political correctness’). Proprietary and ‘accountable’ conceptions of authorship, precisely those Rowson encountered in his tangles with the Eliot estate, are jettisoned in preference for pastiche, mimicry, and a collaborative spirit of composition. Rowson’s adaptation of Slawkenbergius’s Tale (about a traveller with a large nose) as a series of images imitating the styles of Albrecht Dürer, William Hogarth, Aubrey Beardsley, and George Grosz emphasizes *Tristram Shandy*’s richness of possibility for artists. Rowson enhances the novel by combining, imitating, and clashing styles to produce something ingenious and innovative.

Even Rowson’s drawings for the domestic scenes provide scope for original interpretation. His ‘enhancement’ of Sterne is apparent in moments when Rowson’s illustrations supplement the cues offered by *Tristram Shandy*, such as when he depicts the several styles of exhortation Walter employs to no avail to persuade his wife to employ the man-midwife (Figure 7). The illustrations for Walter’s Christian, heathen, paternal, and patriotic methods of arguing are funny enough, but the punchline comes when he begs ‘like a man’; Sterne’s tacit contrast between masculine assertion and emasculating supplication is humorously visualized. Another example is the exaggeration of Toby’s and Trim’s ridiculous attitudes when Walter discovers their impromptu military re-enactment in the parlour. Following the mistake over Tristram’s naming, Toby and Trim aver that they would have acted just the same in battle whatever had been their own forenames, and they unconsciously begin performing the martial manoeuvres they describe, having forgotten the occasion for the conversation. Sterne has Trim ‘presenting his stick like a firelock’ (235) when Walter comes in, but Rowson has him in something like goosestep on a chair holding aloft a tea table and Walter pointing his cane like a gun (Figure 8). In this succession of images, Rowson hilariously acknowledges Sterne’s point about the association of ideas and the relationship of mind, language, and body.

Rowson’s adaptation capitalizes on the vast visual potential of Sterne’s novel, which has inspired artists for many years. Indeed, Rowson’s intertextual relationships to earlier Sterne illustrators, especially Hogarth, indicate the ways in which imitation is tailored to serve originality. For instance, as W.B. Gerard observes, ‘Rowson’s depiction of the sermon-reading scene shows a certain attentiveness to both Sterne and Hogarth that implies a rare perceptiveness of both the text and the tradition behind his work’ (89). To disabuse the reader ‘apt to paint *Trim*, as if he was standing in his platoon ready for action’ as he commences reading, Sterne describes Trim’s oratorical posture as follows:

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon;——which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well to be the true persuasive angle of incidence;—in any other angle you may talk and preach;—’tis certain,—and it is done every day;—but with what effect,—I leave the world to judge! (96–97)

Hogarth’s celebrated frontispiece to the second edition of volume 2 (1760), a drawing requested by Sterne himself in the first edition, profoundly influenced subsequent illustrators seeking to capture Sterne’s humour (Figure 9).[[6]](#endnote-7) In revisiting this image, Rowson exploits gaps between Sterne’s description and Hogarth’s print in order to provide a fresh interpretation of the scene.

In Rowson’s version (Figure 10), a draughtsman’s grid is placed over Trim to highlight the 85.5º angle of his back to the ground. Rowson’s image reveals that Hogarth’s Trim is leaning forward far too much, an exaggerated posture that undercuts the oratorical prowess Sterne attributes to the hapless corporal. So, Rowson shows how at 85.5º, leaning forwards a mere tenth of a right-angle, Trim does indeed appear in ‘an uneasy posture,—stiff,—perpendicular … as if he was standing in his platoon ready for action’ (96–97). The image of the corporal that Sterne wished to *dispel* is presented here with aplomb. Rowson errs slightly in showing six eighths of Trim’s total weight supported by his hind leg, because the text specifies seven eighths, but he extends the parody by adding other angles, such as for the skirt of Trim’s coat. Rowson’s depiction caricatures Hogarth’s caricature via Sterne’s text. The slumbering Dr. Slop is more slumped, even rounder, than in Hogarth. Trim, far from Ciceronian, is an awkward, grotesque figure (perhaps what Sterne wanted us to see all along). And the Shandy brothers are moon-faced, grinning, and attentive, rather than distractedly looking in opposed directions, smoking pipes, as in Hogarth: Rowson even reverses the tendency in *Shandy* illustration to depict Walter as angular and Toby as rotund. His illustration both exaggerates Hogarth and corrects the exaggeration of Hogarth; it claims a greater degree of adherence to Sterne; and it extends Sterne’s mockery of geometrically realist precision.

The sermon-reading scene is also, as J. Paul Hunter shows, ‘part of the general motif in *Tristram Shandy* of watching the responder at work—of using the book’s characters as surrogates for the reader who can learn about his own responsive process by watching the eccentric (but predictable) Shandean responses’ (133). Walter’s intellectual pomposity, Toby’s military fixation, Trim’s maudlin digressions, and Slop’s religious defensiveness each lead them to narcissistic and inappropriate responses to Yorick’s sermon, which they express in a series of interruptions. Rowson does not present those characters’ interjections but instead depicts the artist as an attentive auditor betraying his own hobby-horsical response, pouring academic jargon on Sterne’s novel, while Pete’s disdain leads him to storm out. Like Sterne, Rowson gives extremes of reader-response he rejects—pretentious twaddle and derisive superiority; one slavishly giving himself up to the text, one unwilling to open up at all. ‘I’m not spending another minute listening to those old twats sitting around talking a load of old cock’, says Pete; ‘But Pete! There’s only another 549 pages of it, then we get to the real action’, responds the artist. Rowson’s novel ends with an image of Tristram as the artist who has been drawing the whole thing, less a case of pouring from one vessel into another and more of an echo chamber of allusion and influence that undercuts originality.

VII

Rowson’s and Winterbottom’s approaches to adapting *Tristram Shandy* employ the reflexive, ludic, and sceptical aspects of Sterne’s novel to complicate traditional assumptions about adaptation. They challenge restrictive views of medium-specificity and they forge originality out of fidelity to Sternean allusiveness and mimicry. Like Sterne, they are concerned with the slippage occasioned by attempts to capture an anterior text—for Sterne Tristram’s life; for the adapters Sterne’s *Life and Opinions*—extending this insight about the failure of literary realism to literalistic adaptation. Following Sterne, they take aim at egotistical responses, cultivating good-humoured tolerance. Above all, the tyranny of the original is replaced with a collaborative aesthetic that rubbishes claims to authoritative originality rather like Tristram’s ironic diatribe about Ernulphus’ curse: ‘Like all other copies, how infinitely short of the force and spirit of the original!’ (145).

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**Figure 2.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

**Figure 3.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

**Figure 4.** *A Cock and Bull Story*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. BBC Films, United Kingdom, 2005.

**Figure 5.** *A Cock and Bull Story*. Dir. Michael Winterbottom. BBC Films, United Kingdom, 2005.

**Figure 6.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

**Figure 7.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

**Figure 8.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

**Figure 9.** William Hogarth’s frontispiece to Volume 2 of the second edition of Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760).

**Figure 10.** From Martin Rowson’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. London: Picador, 1996. By permission of the author.

1. This essay was presented at the Authorship and Appropriation conference hosted by the University of Dundee in 2016, and I wish to thank Dr Daniel Cook for inviting me. Dr James Peacock provided comments on an earlier draft, for which I am grateful.

   The movie was entitled *Tristram Shandy: A Cock and Bull Story* in the USA and elsewhere. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
2. Kinder and Houston wrote a screenplay of *Tristram Shandy*, not produced, in the 1970s (see their 1977 essay). I thank Prof. Kinder for sending me a copy. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
3. This joke about genre labels and status remains relevant to a genre that is still torn between ‘comics’ and ‘graphic novel’. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
4. Tavor shows that Sterne’s scepticism is extended to scepticism itself as an epistemological approach, producing therefore a positive affirmation of reality (167–220). [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
5. See Friant-Kessler on Rowson’s use of Patch’s “Tristram Bowing to Death”. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
6. Sterne even alludes to the discussion of caricature in Hogarth’s *Analysis of Beauty*: see Newbould 168–72. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)