

TristramShandyWeb

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POSTER

In the last few years the Humanities Laboratory at Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM (Milano) has carried out research in the field of the relationship between humanities and new technologies with particular attention to the valorisation, fruition and interpretation of European cultural heritage. In this context, the Centre has promoted:

1. research programs,
2. conferences (George Landow, Michael Joyce, Padre Busa, Massimo Riva, Claude Cazalé Bérard were some of our speakers),
3. the Internet and the Muses Series for Mimesis Editions.

One of our projects was to develop the *TristramShandyWeb* (<http://www.tristramshandyweb.it>) as a multilingual and multimedia tool for scholars, researchers, and students. Our purpose was to create a virtual space dedicated to the study of a literary work – Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767) – which can be read as a deliberate attack on the emerging canon of the Eighteenth century realistic novel, in so far as it is based on a coherent narration of probable events, an adequate dose of documentary details and accurate chronological references. Since this novel is considered one of those printed texts which anticipated hypertext, that is to say an early demonstration of decentering, fragmentation, network distribution of the plot according to non-linear logic, we enthusiastically agreed that it was the 'ideal' text to be put under the magnifying lens of digital technology.

It was our intention to create a locus of learning and research, a useful tool for scholars and students through the activation and the implementation of a project based on "collective intelligence". The final aim of our site was to create an international and multi-disciplinary agora for the development of a critical digital edition of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Conceived for the web, the project needed to be freely browsable, perpetually in progress, anti-hierarchical, open to a range of methodological and critical approaches, multimedia possibilities and the contributions of specialists in 18th Century English literature and culture. A multi-disciplinary perspective (fostered by digital convergence) defines the way contents are organised in the TSW: Arts, Fashion, History, HyperTS, Irishness, Language and Rhetoric, Music, Novel, Poetry, Science to create a sort of "Sternian encyclopaedia" useful to the development of further knowledge. A group of dedicated scholars supervises the content of each section.

As it is both an anatomy and an encyclopaedia of the Eighteenth century, *Tristram Shandy* can be considered either as a house with many different rooms the reader may enter at will, or, if we want to risk the definition, as an *ante litteram* hyper-novel. Sterne responds to the Eighteenth-century interest in compendia, treatises, dictionaries, encyclopaedias by playing with intertextuality in a manner which has no parallel in the history of the novel. Questions of philosophy, science, medicine, law, theology, astronomy, topography... find their place in digressions which explore the capacity of the novel as a versatile means of communication, featuring different types of discourse, by incorporating scientific debates, legal acts, a marriage contract, theological controversies, a real sermon, an excommunication etc. Some of these have been studied by scholars and students through: essays, computational analysis (available in almost any section), unpublished documents, dissertations, hypertexts and so on.

Our attention on the first edition of the text and the image gallery collecting the typographical elements, as they have been interpreted through the centuries by different publishers, leaves open the possibility of theoretical speculation both on the 'original' text and on a variety of comparable different editions which accessed the reconstruction of the editorial history of the book up to today's hypertext.

We would like to highlight:

In the perspective of cultural heritage, we tried to use digital technologies to valorise the text and its cultural context:

1. the collection of Laurence Sterne's major works and other important texts connected to the author and his writings;
2. the rich gallery of images and prefaces taken from several editions of *Tristram Shandy* and the *Sentimental Journey*;
3. the digitalisation of *The Analysis of Beauty* and an interactive reproduction of the two tables which Hogarth attached to the original text. The Flash videoclip included wants to render Hogarth's aesthetical principles;
4. in the section dedicated to fashion, some interactive Flash clips, taken from *Mariage à la mode* by Hogarth, showing those clothes and fashion accessories mentioned by Sterne. Images are put in a social and historical context and constitute the comment to the novel in order to help the reader get the feeling of an age, but also to keep in the direction of a multidisciplinary cognitive approach favoured by the digital convergence;
5. the TSW Corpus: it is software, designed and realised only for the Web, which allows users to make a linguistic-computational analysis of *Tristram Shandy*, *A Political Romance* and *A Sentimental Journey*.

At last, we want to underline that the TSW is a multilingual website.

References

The Tristram Shandy Web. Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione IULM. <<http://www.tristramshandyweb.it/>>