Laurence Sterne (1713 – 1768)

Life:

born in Ireland, he studied in Yorkshire (England) and then in Cambridge. He became an anglican priest and was a vicar in a village near York all his life. He got married and had a daughter. He liked music, painting and writing. He became famous with the first 2 volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. The whole work consists of 9 volumes. He moved to France in 1762, to recover from his bad health, and died in London in 1768.
Tristram Shandy

It has been defined as:

- an **anti novel** because there is not a traditional plot: there is **no linearity** in the story but there are many time-shifts (flashbacks and flashforwards) and many **digressions**.

- A **meta-novel**: (= a novel about the novel), it is a reflection on the process of writing itself and on the nature of the novel.
  It doesn’t respect the conventions of the traditional novel.
  It makes the reader aware that a novel is a fictitious work, completely made up, which gives us an artificial illusion of realism.
  It reveals to the reader the mechanisms of writing (plot, chronology, the voice of the narrator etc..).

It is an **experimental novel** for the particular use of time, the kind of narrator, the relationship between reader and narrator and the special typographical techniques.
It was centuries ahead of his time and anticipated many modernist and post-modern writers (Calvino, for example)
Features of the novel

- **TIME**: it doesn’t proceed in a linear way, but it’s very often interrupted. There are many **digressions** and **free association of ideas**. The digressions about the making of the novel puzzle the reader and create a comical effect.

- **NARRATOR**: intrusive, he comments on the process of writing and on himself as a character.

- **THE READER**: is very often addressed to and is directly involved in the making of the novel.

- **TYPOGRAPHICAL TECHNIQUES** are used to make the reader aware of the artificiality of the book (blank page, black page, particular signs...).
Relationship between art and literature

• “Ut pictura poesis” (Horace, 19-13 b.C.) = “As is painting, so is poetry”.
  He pointed out the similarities between the visual arts and literature.

  Poets and painters use different means (global representation in painting, linearity of words in literature), but they share some common features: they both dare to give their personal interpretation of reality or to imagine a different world.

• “Ekphrasis”= a literary description or a commentary on a visual work of art.

  Poets and painters sometimes turn to one another for inspiration and influence one another.
Bruegel: “Landscape with the fall of Icarus”
Bruegel: *The Census at Bethlem*, 1566
Useful words to describe a picture

- In the foreground there is / you can see.....
- In the background......
- In the lefthand corner.. /on the left...
- At the bottom...
- At the top....
- In the middle of the picture....
- The people are outdoors/ indoors/ on a street/ in a town/ in a square...

**Always use the present continuous when describing people’s actions**
(example: the ploughman is ploughing....; children are skating on the pond)
Similarities between Bruegel’s paintings and the poems by W. H. Auden and W.C. Williams

- The main theme is the indifference of the world to individual suffering: everybody goes on with their everyday activities despite the tragedy happening to Icarus (only a marginal figure in Bruegel’s painting) or despite the imminent birth of Jesus (in “The Census...”).

- Difference between Auden’s and Williams’ poems:
  
  Auden comments on the theme and message of the composition (the indifference of the world), while Williams underlines the indifference by expressing indifference himself rather than commenting on it.

- Stylistic similarities: both written in free verse, both use enjambement (but Williams doesn’t use traditional punctuation and capital letters).
William Blake (1757-1827)

- **LIFE:** born in London, he worked mainly as an engraver and painter, but was also a poet. He put the two forms of art together by illustrating his own poems.

- **Main literary works:** two collections of poems, *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*: they express two different stages of life (childhood and adulthood), which are in contrast but are also complementary (one couldn’t exist without the other). They express two different points of view on the same subject (see *The Lamb* and *The tyger* on the subject of creation).

- **His philosophy of contrasts:** both in his painting and in his poetry Blake points out that in every aspect of human life there is a dialectical opposition of forces, that can never be reconciled but must co-exist in eternal balance. Good and Evil, in particular, are opposite forces but they are also complementary: they are present in the same person or situation (see *The Good and Evil Angels*). Also the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* represent “the two contrary states of human soul” (purity, joy and happiness on one hand, selfishness, cruelty, social injustice on the other), elements that will always be present in human existence.

- **His critical attitude towards reason:** reason is in contrast with spontaneity, feeling, passion. According to him, science and reason imprison the natural flow of energy present in human minds and bodies (see “Newton”: his posture is unnatural while he is performing a very intellectual activity).