Probably not all offices have regular arguments about which states are the most literary. Or maybe they do. In any case, our office does, and it's a never-ending discussion, not least because there are a hundred different metrics you could use to determine the \textit{literariness} of a state which is itself a made-up distinction, of course. Still, it's fun to think about. So this week...

\textbf{ARTICLES IN THE BOOK}

1. A Christmas Carol
2. A Tale of Two Cities
3. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
4. An Essay Concerning the Principles of Human
5. A Modest Proposal
6. The Anatomy of Melancholy
7. The Art of Criticism
8. The Art of Eloquence
9. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
10. An Essay Concerning the Principles of Human
11. A Modest Proposal
12. The Anatomy of Melancholy
13. A Tale of Two Cities
14. A Christmas Carol
15. A Modest Proposal
16. The Anatomy of Melancholy
17. A Tale of Two Cities
18. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
19. A Modest Proposal
20. The Anatomy of Melancholy
21. A Tale of Two Cities
22. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
23. A Modest Proposal
24. The Anatomy of Melancholy
25. A Tale of Two Cities
26. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
27. A Modest Proposal
28. The Anatomy of Melancholy
29. A Tale of Two Cities
30. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
31. A Modest Proposal
32. The Anatomy of Melancholy
33. A Tale of Two Cities
34. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
35. A Modest Proposal
36. The Anatomy of Melancholy
37. A Tale of Two Cities
38. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
39. A Modest Proposal
40. The Anatomy of Melancholy
41. A Tale of Two Cities
42. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
43. A Modest Proposal
44. The Anatomy of Melancholy
45. A Tale of Two Cities
46. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
47. A Modest Proposal
48. The Anatomy of Melancholy
49. A Tale of Two Cities
50. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
51. A Modest Proposal
52. The Anatomy of Melancholy
53. A Tale of Two Cities
54. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
55. A Modest Proposal
56. The Anatomy of Melancholy
57. A Tale of Two Cities
58. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
59. A Modest Proposal
60. The Anatomy of Melancholy
61. A Tale of Two Cities
62. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
63. A Modest Proposal
64. The Anatomy of Melancholy
65. A Tale of Two Cities
66. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
67. A Modest Proposal
68. The Anatomy of Melancholy
69. A Tale of Two Cities
70. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
71. A Modest Proposal
72. The Anatomy of Melancholy
73. A Tale of Two Cities
74. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
75. A Modest Proposal
76. The Anatomy of Melancholy
77. A Tale of Two Cities
78. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
79. A Modest Proposal
80. The Anatomy of Melancholy
81. A Tale of Two Cities
82. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
83. A Modest Proposal
84. The Anatomy of Melancholy
85. A Tale of Two Cities

\textbf{SYNOPSIS AND STYLE}

As its title suggests, the book is ostensibly Tristram's narration of his life story. But it is one of the central joys of the novel that he cannot explain anything simply without making explanatory diversions to add context and meaning to the text, to the extent that we do not even reach Tristram's own birth until Volume III. Consequently, as Tristram as narrator, the most familiar and important characters in the book are his father Walter, his mother Toby, Toby's servant Tristram, and a supporting cast of popular minor characters including Doctor Slop parson Yorick. Most of the action is concerned with domestic upssets or misunderstandings, which find their humorous teasing of Watt's speltastic, rational and somewhat sarcastic – and Toby, who is gentle, unaccomplished and a lover of his fellow man.

In between such events, Tristram as narrator finds himself discoursing at length on sexual practices, instilling one's name, names, as well as explorations of obstetrics, siege warfare and philosophy, as he struggles to marshall his material and finish the story of his life.

\textbf{TECHNIQUES AND INFLUENCES}

Sterne's text is filled with allusions and references to the leading thinkers and writers of the 17th and 18th centuries. Pope, Locke, and Swift were all major influences on Sterne and Tristram Shandy. Satires of Swift formed much of the humour of Tristram Shandy, but Swift's sermons and Locke's Essays Concerning Understanding contributed ideas and frameworks that Sterne explored throughout his novel. Sterne's engagement with the science and philosophy of his day was extensive, however, and the sections on obstetrics and fortifications, for instance, indicate that he had a grasp of the main issues then current in those fields.

Four influences on Tristram Shandy overshadow all others: Rabelais, Cervantes, Montaigne's Essays and Locke. Sterne had written an earlier piece called A Rabelaisian Fragment which indicates his familiarity with the work of the French monk. But the earlier work is not needed to see the influence of Rabelais on Tristram which is evident in multiple allusions, as well as in the overall tone of bawdy humor centered on the body. The shade of Cervantes is similarly present throughout Sterne's novel. The frequent references to Rocinante character of Uncle Toby (who resembles Don Quixote in many ways) and Sterne's own description of his characters "Cervantiscumhumour," along with the genre-defying structure of Tristram Shandy, which owes its second part of Cervantes' novel, all demonstrate the influence of Cervantes.

The shade of Montaigne is similarly present throughout Sterne's novel. His friend and biographer, Montaigne, was a major influence on Sterne, and his essays are a primary source of inspiration for Sterne's own writing. Sterne's use of Montaigne's essays as a model for his own writing is evident throughout the novel, particularly in the first and second volumes. Montaigne's essays are characterized by their use of reflection and self-examination, and Sterne's own work shares these qualities.

In conclusion, the novel Tristram Shandy is a complex and multi-layered work that draws upon a wide range of influences and allusions. Its influence on later writers and its enduring popularity in the 20th and 21st centuries is a testament to the power of Sterne's vision and the enduring appeal of his unique voice.
different metrics you could use to determine the “literariness” of a state—which is itself a made-up distinction, of course. Still, it’s fun to think about. So this week

A number of later works seem to owe a significant debt to *Tristram Shandy*, among them:

- Pustkin’s *Eugene Onegin*
- Diderot’s *Jacques le fataliste et son maître*
- Robert K. Morton’s *The Travels and Adventures of Serendipity: A Study in Sociological Semantics a Sociology of Science*
- Gogol’s *The Nose*
- James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*
- Machado de Assis’s *Dom Casmurro* – One of the masterpieces of Brazilian literature.
- Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*

### Trivia

- The Skull and Bones secret society is rumoured [2] to use characters from *Tristram Shandy* in its rites.
- Virginia Woolf hailed the book as “The Greatest of all Novels.”
- The novel has been cited by John Updike as the one novel he wants to read before he dies.
- Thomas Jefferson and his wife Martha are said to have enjoyed spending evenings reading *Tristram Shandy* to each other.

### Adaptations

*Tristram Shandy* has been adapted as a graphic novel by cartoonist Martin Rowson. It has also been adapt in 2006 as *A Cock and Bull Story*, directed by Michael Winterbottom, written by Frank Cottrell Boyce (as Martin Hardy, in a complicated metafictional twist), and starring Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon, Kelly Macdonald, and Gillian Anderson.

### Bibliography

- Robert Alter, “*Tristram Shandy and the Game of Love*”, American Scholar, 37 (1968) 316-333
- D. W. Jefferson, “*Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit*” in Essays in Criticism, 1(1951),

### External links

- Hypertext *Tristram Shandy* Web Project
- *Shandean*
- *Glasgow University*: the book
- *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* available freely at Project Gutenberg
- An Annotated Bibliography by Jack Lynch


### Categories

- 1759 novels | English novels | British novels | Satirical books