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If Somebody Knows About that Nose, It's Not the Forgetful Maid: False Memory and the Environment of Recall in *Tristram Shandy*

Introduction

Published between 1913 and 1927, Marcel Proust's seven-volume novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, not only explores the depths and limitations of involuntary memory, but it also exists as a fundamental text for critics invested in literary representations of memory theory. Heavily influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Proust argues that remembrance of the past is inherently altered and unreliable and that memory, and human consciousness more generally, are best understood through methods of introspection and intuition, rather than by scientific explanation. Referred to by some as Proustian Memory, this theory explicates both the revision that takes place in the act of remembering as well as the inherent fictionality of these recollections. However, nearly two-hundred years earlier, Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1764) hints at some of the same claims regarding the degree to which the past can be reconstructed. Deeply concerned with how and to what extent the past can be regenerated, Sterne's novel not only illuminates how memories are altered, but it proposes that under certain environmental conditions, short-term memory is more susceptible to modification.

1. A Brief Historical Overview of Memory Theory

To understand both Proust's approach to memory as well as Sterne's utilization of it in *Tristram Shandy*, it is first important to explore a brief history of the theory of memory and some of its developments over time. According definition 6a. in the *Oxford English Dictionary*,

“memory” is defined as “The faculty by which things are remembered; the capacity for retaining, perpetuating, or reviving the thought of things past.” Although this definition of memory dates back to Chaucer in 1380, it is one that continues to be used today. Because memory deals explicitly with “retaining, perpetuating, or reviving” the past, this mental faculty has been a main concern for a broad host of scholars ranging from philosophers to scientific researchers. One way these intellectuals have tried to explain the interworkings of memory is to call upon several useful metaphors ranging from a wax tablet, to a mirror, to a storehouse of ideas. One of the earliest of these memory metaphors is that of the wax tablet, invoked by Plato in *Theaetetus*: “

Let us say that this tablet is a gift of Memory ... and that when we wish to remember anything which we have seen, or heard, or thought in our own minds, we hold the wax to the perceptions and thoughts, and in that material receive the impression of them as from the seal of a ring; and that we remember and know what is imprinted as long as the image lasts; but when the image is effaced, or cannot be taken, then we forget and do not know.” (n.p)

For Plato, memory functions like hot wax where images of the past are “imprinted” and held for “as long as the image lasts.” In addition to Plato’s metaphor, in his 1774 version of “An Essay on Genius,” Alexander Gerard explains that memory is like a mirror that “reflects images of the objects formerly perceived by us,” and that “It is in its nature a mere copier” (28,9). Here, similar to Plato’s image of the impression stamped on hot wax, Gerard imagines memory as a fixed reflection of the past that functions as a “mere copier” in order to reproduce the original image. Lastly, in 1798 Maria Edgeworth adds, “the memory resembles a storehouse, in which we should early lay up facts,” so that they “will afterwards be ready for service at our summons” (345,6). Each of these metaphors—the wax seal, the mirror, and the storehouse—imply that memory is a reliable imprint or copy of the past and can easily be accessed through the act of remembrance.

Amidst these various metaphors aimed at shedding light on the process and capabilities of memory, a theory of memory as unreliable and susceptible to error emerged in the late 1600s with the scholarship of John Locke. Although philosophers such as Plato and Descartes were also invested in the revision of memories, Locke's work launched this perspective into the foreground. In 1690, Locke wrote, "The Memory is very weak, such *Ideas* quickly fade, and vanish quite out of the Understanding, and leave it as clear without any Foot-steps, or remaining Characters, as Shadows do flying over Fields of Corn; and the Mind is as void of them, as if they never had been there" (65). Unlike the previous metaphors that imagined the memory as capable of reproducing an exact replica of the past, Locke points to the weakness of memory, suggesting that in the instances where memory is able to reconstruct the past, its reproductions are "weak," and mere "Shadows" of the previous original. In this way, Locke argues for the unreliability of memory as well as its inability to recreate a stable, unaltered version of the original past. Since Locke's exposition of memory as inherently unreliable, other theorists have supported Locke's views as well as discredited many of the earlier metaphors for memory. For example, aiming criticism at the idea that memory works like a wax seal or a mirror that produces an exact image of the past, Martin A. Conway explains that "Memories are records of people's experiences of events and are not a record of events themselves, In this respect, they are unlike recording media such as videos or audio recordings, to which they should not be compared" (368). Here, Conway not only suggests that memory is subject to biases resulting from personal experience, but he urges readers to refrain from using forms of media recording as a means for understanding the way that memory functions. Furthermore, Lynn Nadel and Walter P. Sinnott-Armstrong argue, "stable memories can be altered when they are reactivated. That is, memory is fundamentally malleable...The most important implication is that when memories are replayed...this process of

reactivating and replaying a memory inalterably changes it going forward” (5). Much like Locke’s warning about the unreliability of memory, Nadel and Sinnott-Armstrong agree that memories are easily altered, or revised, once they are recalled. Not only do these claims focus attention on both the malleability and fallible nature of memory, but they also suggest that “Truth preservation is not the primary function of memory. In the first instance, memory is meant to preserve content rather than truth” (Bernecker 215). Hence, through a very brief and broad exploration of the ways that memory has been examined and explained throughout a brief history, it is clear that there exists a tension between understanding memory either as an authentic reproduction or a revised reconstruction of the past.

2. *Proustian Memory*

With a broad historical context concerning the unreliable and altered nature of memory now set in place, a turn to Proust and his literary contributions to the field of neuroscience is an important stepping stone before venturing into Sterne’s own contributions in *Tristram Shandy*. Building off of scholars like Nadel, Sinnott-Armstrong, Bernecker, and Conway, Jonah Lehrer argues that through the act of writing, Proust developed a theory of memory that imagined the inherent act of remembering as a revisionary process. Rather than reconstructing a moment from the past exactly as it occurred, Proust believed that the resulting memory was an altered version of the original event. Similar to Locke, for Proust, memories were always shades of reality rather than recreations of the past. Lending to this view of memory as something newly created rather than simply reproduced, Cretien Van Campen in his book, *The Proust Effect: The Senses as Doorways to Lost Memories* suggest that “A memory is more of a construction than a reconstruction: memories never reconstruct the past precisely, but add elements from different moments in a person’s life” (56) and thus, memory is closely related to the “creative process that

is experienced by an artist” (57). Moreover, Lehrer suggests that Proust not only divorced memories from reality, but that he also viewed them as unreliable: “Simply put, he believed that our recollections were phony. Although they felt real, they were actually elaborate fabrications” (82). Like the artist’s ability to conjure images that appear to reflect reality, Proust believed that memories were recreations that seemed authentic to the past, but were actually revised reproductions of it.

Proust illustrates these concerns with memory in the first volume of his novel, *In Search of Lost Time*, where in tasting a madeleine cookie dipped in tea, the narrator is immediately overcome by childhood nostalgia. As a result, Proust’s narrator plunges into an exploration of the capacity of memory and the human mind:

I put down the cup and examine my own mind. It alone can discover the truth. But how: What an abyss of uncertainty, whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself; when it, the seeker, is at the same time the dark region through which it must go seeking and where all its equipment will avail it nothing. Seek? More than that: create. (1)

Bringing the past into focus through an examination of his own mind, Proust’s narrator points to the mind and memory as “an abyss of uncertainty” and “the dark region,” emphasizing its inability to draw forth clear, reliable accounts of the past. Additionally, referring to memory as an “abyss” or a “dark region” further suggests the gap between reality and reconstructed memories, as well as points to memory’s susceptibility to error. Proust’s repetition of the words “seeker,” “seeking,” and “Seek” also reinforce this idea in an attempt to show the difficulties of rendering a truly accurate account of the past. But just as he suggests that conjuring the past through memory is unreliable, he does acknowledge the moment of recall as one of creation. Proust illustrates the creative powers of memory in its ability to reconstruct a scene from his childhood, “the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking shape and solidity, sprang into

being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea” (3). Furthermore, despite the constant seeking for that past reality and an apparent connection to his past, the narrator admits that “all its equipment will avail it nothing.” Lastly, by reconstructing a moment from the past, Proust declares that the mind and memory not only seeks but that it must do “More than that: create,” emphasizing that the act of remembering both searches for and crafts the past in a way that is less authentic than the original moment. Hence, just as Lehrer suggests, Proust recognizes that “Our memories are not *like* fiction. They *are* fiction” (88).

3. *Slawkenbergius’ Tale: A True or False Nose?*

Although nearly two hundred years earlier than Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* investigates many of the same issues concerning the alteration of the past through the act of remembering. The scene in Sterne’s novel depicting Slawkenbergius’ tale is a crucial moment in the text that illustrates both the revisionary aspects of recall as well as the unique ways in which this occurs within the context of collective memory. In the tale, the narrator relays the story of a stranger whose unusually large nose attracts the attention of the townspeople of Strasbug. Only witnessed by a handful of people in the town before his departure, the stranger’s nose becomes the obsession of the entire city as the townspeople diligently attempt to reconstruct a unified, retrospective description of the nose. The trouble begins for the town, however, once the stranger leaves Strasburg and the handful of eye-witnesses are forced to reconstruct a description of the nose based off of their personal recollections:

“’tis a nose, said the centinel, like my own.

——I heard it crackle, said the drummer.

By dunder, said the centinel, I saw it bleed.

What a pity, cried the bandy-legg'd drummer, we did not both touch it!" (179)

In this passage, the drummer and the centinel attempt to align their accounts of the stranger's nose. The centinel believes the nose was "like my own" and that he "saw it bleed," whereas the drummer remembers that he "heard it crackle." In this first description of the stranger's nose, although the centinel and drummer's memories of the nose do not match up, they also do not necessarily contradict each other. In fact, the stranger's nose could be similar to the centinel's and could indeed have both crackled and bled. Later accounts from the trumpeter and his wife, however, add to the contradicting memories of the witnesses as the couple describes the sounds of the stranger's sneeze as both "soft as a flute" and as "a brazen nose" sounding like "brass" (179). It is also interesting to note that up to this point, each of the accounts of the nose reflect the various personal biases of the witnesses. For instance, the centinel's comment that he saw the stranger's nose bleed, or the drummer and musical couple's comments about the various sounds the nose makes harken back to the personal biases that feed into reconstructions of memories. Not only do the witnesses use language both specific and accessible to their various personal backgrounds and occupations, but their accounts highlight how personal biases affect the types of details that are remembered.

In addition to the previous accounts of the stranger's nose which emphasize not only that memories are unreliable and inherently changed, the final two witnesses, the inn-keeper and his wife, not only add to the conflicting remembrances of the appendage but they help to outline the revisionary process:

'Tis an imposture, my dear, said the master of the inn——'tis a false nose.——

'Tis a true nose, said his wife.——

'Tis made of fir-tree, said he,——I smell the turpentine.——

There's a pimple on it, said she.

'Tis a dead nose, replied the inn-keeper.

'Tis a live nose, and if I am alive myself, said the inn-keeper's wife, I will touch it." (181)

Like the previous witnesses, the inn-keeper and his wife are also unable to reconcile their memory of the stranger's nose. For the inn-keeper the nose is an "imposture" or a trick, possibly a prosthetic apparatus "made of fir-tree," which he then links to his sense of smell when he mentions, "I smell the turpentine." Therefore, for the master of the inn, the stranger's nose is a "false nose" and a "dead nose." For his wife, however, the stranger's nose is remembered as both a "true nose" and "a live nose," further evidenced by her remark, "There's a pimple on it." Furthermore, traditionally understood as a phallic symbol, the inn-keeper's wife's statement, "I will touch it" hints at the stranger's appendage not only as a penis, but one quite literally full of life. Not only do the inn-keeper and his wife's remembrances of the nose drastically differ, but they build off of one another and are revised in accordance with their corresponding responses. For instance, in both statements made by the inn-keeper that the nose is "a false nose" and a "dead nose," his wife replies with the opposing statements, "'Tis a true nose" and a "live nose." Additionally, for each time that the inn-keeper tries to suggest that the stranger's nose is fake or whittled out of wood, his wife counters his remarks both with her account that she notices a pimple on the nose as well as her insistence on touching it. Like in the case of the inn-keeper and his wife, not only do the townspeople's accounts differ, but in many cases they contradict each other and build off of previous responses in order to craft their own depictions. In this way, readers notice not only the revision taking place in the memory of each of the witnesses, but also their inability to recreate a unified description of the stranger's nose.

Further evidencing how Slawkenbergius' tale supports the theory of memory as revisionary, the narrator expresses that the obsession with reconstructing the description of the nose extends far beyond the initial six eye-witnesses. The story continues, "queen *Mab*, like an elf as she was, had taken the stranger's nose, and without reduction of its bulk, had that night been at the pains of slitting and dividing it into as many noses of different cuts and fashions, as there were heads in *Strasburg* to hold them" (183). This moment in the tale reinforces the unreliability of memory as it adds a plethora of possible descriptions and imaginings of the nose to the existing contradictory eye-witness accounts. The narrator suggests that now, in addition to the initial six accounts, the city-wide dream has succeeded in producing "as many noses of different cuts and fashions, as there were heads in *Strasburg* to hold them." The invocation of Queen Mab as well as the setting of a dream symbolizes the dream-like fallibility of memory-based reconstructions, as well as hints at the possibility that like a dream, memory is oftentimes only remembered in lingering fragments that can never be wholly reconstructed. Additionally, the narrator's use of the phrase, "slitting and dividing" further illustrates Proust's theory of memory by demonstrating the revisionary aspects of memory and its ability to separate or pull apart reality from fiction and create multiple versions of the past.

4. *Environmental Influences on Memory: John Locke in Tristram Shandy*

Transitioning away from Slawkenbergius' tale as an illustration of the fallible and revisionary nature of memory, I propose that in *Tristram Shandy*, revisionary memory not only occurs naturally, but that it is spurred and even heightened according to the environment in which recall is evoked. In order to understand the crucial role that an overloaded environment plays in memory reconstruction, it is important to first look at two key concepts that both enhance and limit short-term memory: working memory and chunking. In his book, *Essentials*

of *Human Memory*, Alan D. Baddeley defines working memory as “a system that allowed several pieces of information to be held in mind at the same time” (45, 6). Although distinct from short-term memory, working memory oftentimes operates in conjunction with short-term memory in order to process and update information input. One aspect of working memory that must be taken into consideration, however, is its limitations. Psychologist George Miller explains these shortcomings, when he writes, “The span of immediate memory impose severe limitations on the amount of information that we are able to receive, process, and remember. By organizing the stimulus input simultaneously into several dimensions and successively into a sequence or chunks, we manage to break (or at least stretch) this informational bottleneck” (n.p.). Miller further suggests that seven, plus or minus two, is the magic range in terms of remembering. Lehrer simplifies Miller’s idea further when he writes, “Miller’s idea was simple: the mind has limits. Our short-term memory, Miller said, can only contain about seven random bits before forgetfulness begins to intrude. This is why all the random labels in our life, from phone numbers to license plates to Social Security numbers, are limited to seven digits” (159). Once working memory reaches retention levels and is asked to exceed them, memory becomes overloaded and, thus, is susceptible to forgetting and revision. Considering these limitations on memory, Baddeley also argues that one way the brain attempts to retain information and manage overload is through the process of chunking. According to Fonollosa et. al., “A chunk is often defined as a collection of elements having strong associations with each other, but weaker associations with elements within other chunks” (n.p.). To illustrate this concept, Baddeley provides the following example:

The capacity of immediate memory is determined by the number of chunks rather than by the number of digits...Try reading off and repeating back the following sequence of letters: I A R F T S K B G N I. Were you able to repeat it correctly?

If you were, you have a remarkably good immediate memory. Now try the next sequence, which in fact comprises exactly the same letters: F R I K B A S T I N G. No prizes for getting that one correct (24).

Baddeley's example clearly delineates how organizing smaller strands of information into coherent chunks helps the brain store and recall information not only longer, but more accurately. Where most people are unable to recite and remember the first sequence due to its incoherent or random arrangement, the second sequence is much easier to remember because it has been organized into manageable chunks: "FRIK" and "BASTING." Additionally, the second ordering is easier to remember not only because it is broken into two distinct chunks, but because the second chunk, "BASTING," is a familiar word with attributed meaning. Therefore, chunking functions alongside working memory to help facilitate both retention and recall¹.

Sterne not only depicts the revisionist nature of memory, but he also suggests an environment where memory is prime for alteration. Early in the novel, readers encounter a conversation between the narrating Tristram and an unnamed "Critick" concerning the philosophy of John Locke. Utilizing the previously mentioned metaphor of the mind as hot wax on which memories are imprinted, Tristram and the Critick debate over the malleability and instability of memory as well as the environment surrounding the creation and reconstruction of those memories. On this subject Tristram outlines three scenarios where memory is at the highest risk of being modified: "dull organs, dear Sir, in the first place. Secondly, slight and transient impressions made by objects when the said organs are not dull. And, thirdly, a memory unto a sieve, not able to retain what it has received" (61). It is important to note that two of the scenarios deal explicitly with the individual, whereas one condition directly concerns the

¹ Retention and recall a part of the three distinct stages of memory: encoding, storage, and retrieval. Retention relates specifically to encoding and storage, whereas recall deals explicitly with retrieval (Phelps 11).

environment. However, as I will demonstrate later, the two scenarios involving the individual can easily be influenced by environmental conditions. In addition to outlining these various situations, Tristram goes a step further by modeling a scenario where memory would be forced into revision. Bearing the wax metaphor² in mind, Tristram explains:

When this is melted and dropp'd upon the letter,——if *Dolly* fumbles too long for her thimble, till the wax is over harden'd, it will not receive the mark of her thimble from the usual impulse which was wont to imprint it. Very well: If *Dolly's* wax, for want of better, is bees-wax or of a temper too soft,——tho' it may receive,——it will not hold the impression, how hard soever *Dolly* thrusts against it; and last of all, supposing the wax good, and eke the thimble, but applied thereto in careless haste, as her Mistress rings the bell;——in any one of these three cases, the print, left by the thimble, will be as unlike the prototype as a brass-jack. (61-2)

In his model, Tristram hypothesizes the outcomes of each of the three scenarios concerning memory. In the first situation, Dolly “fumbles too long for her thimble,” causing the wax to become “over harden'd.” In the second scenario, Dolly uses bees-wax that is “of a temper too soft,” and finds that “it will not hold the impression.” The final situation explains that Dolly’s “Mistress rings the bell” and, therefore, the impression is “applied thereto in careless haste.” Although the first two situations do not explicitly deal with the environment surrounding retention or recall, the final example highlights the effects of distraction and memory overload in Dolly’s inability to create a strong impression. In each scenario, the outcome of the wax imprint is the same—each is as “unlike the prototype as a brass-jack.” This resulting imprint further exemplifies not only that the imprint is revised in some way, but it points to the inherent fallibility of memory and its inability to reproduce the original. Tristram’s example also

² Borrowing the wax metaphor from earlier scholars such as Plato and John Locke, I return once again to Alexander Gerard’s *An Essay on Genius* to give a clearer example of the metaphor, “the memory is of such a happy temperature as may be compared to wax, which receives the seal easily and strongly when it is melted, and immediately hardens and suffers it not to be effaced” (269-72).

illustrates that under certain moments of distraction or environmental pressures —such as Dolly’s mistress ringing the bell— working memory can become overloaded and cause significant alterations in the various stages of memory. In each case, the imprint left in the wax resembles the original, but is nonetheless changed in some way. Thus, Tristram’s model creates hypothetical environments where working memory is severely inhibited and pushed towards revision in order to recreate some semblance of the original.

5. *The Forgetful Maid: The Environment of Recall*

Narrating the hectic moment of this birth and subsequent naming, Tristram models the prime environment for revision by illustrating the role that overloaded memory plays in the chambermaid’s retention and recall abilities. Fearing that the child is dead upon birth, Mrs. Shandy’s chambermaid, Susannah, is sent to ask Mr. Shandy what the child is to be named so that the baby can be christened before death. Tristram recounts the events:

Then reach me my breeches off the chair, said my father to *Susannah*—There is not a moment’s time to dress you, Sir, cried *Susannah*—the child is as black in the face as my—As your, what?...—Bless me, Sir, said *Susannah*, the child’s in a fit—And where’s Mr. *Yorick*—Never where he should be, said *Susannah*, but his curate’s in the dressing-room, with the child upon his arm, waiting for the name—and my mistress bid me run as fast as I could to know—.... I’ll get up—There is no time, cried *Susannah*, the child’s as black as my shoe. *Trismegistus*, said my father—But stay—thou art a leaky vessel, *Susannah*, added my father; canst thou carry *Trismegistus* in thy head, the length of the gallery without scattering—Can I? cried *Susannah*, shutting the door in a huff.... *Susannah* got the start, and kept it—’Tis *Tris*—something, cried *Susannah*—There is no Christian name in the world, said the curate beginning with *Tris*—but *Tristram*. Then ’tis *Tristramgistus*, quoth *Susannah*. (207, 8)

In this passage, Tristram draws attention to the environment in which Susannah is tasked with remembering and recalling a variety of details. Utilizing this scene, I will investigate three important aspects of environmentally-induced memory overload in order to show how these environments not only inhibit, but also revise memory.

5.1 Emotional Overload: Stress and Anxiety

In this scene depicting Susannah, Sterne's novel calls attention to the breakdown of memory under conditions of emotional overload. Enveloped in an extreme state of anxiety caused by the impending death of the baby, Susannah enters into the stages of memory heavily influenced by environmental stress. Marked by the phrases, "There is not a moment's time," "my mistress bid me run as fast as I could," and "There is no time," Sterne's narrator emphasizes the sense of urgency in which Susannah operates. Repeating the words, "cried *Susannah*," four times throughout the passage, the narrator further cues the reader into Susannah's emotional state by showing that the maid is not only a player in the stressful situation, but that she is heavily influenced by it. The sense of rapid movement implied by the phrases, "run as fast as I could," and "shutting the door in a huff," also lend to the urgency of the moment. Furthermore, by showing that Susannah is moving within rooms and down the "length of the gallery," Sterne highlights a sense of spatial movement that in turn gives readers an idea of the complexity of Susannah's task. Elizabeth A. Phelps lends some helpful information regarding emotional states and memory in her description of traditionally held views of emotionally-saturated memories, "One of the most frequently cited qualities of memories of highly emotional events is their perceived vividness and detail. Which is often assumed to reflect memory accuracy" (8). As Phelps suggests, it has been commonly accepted that memories occurring under heightened emotional states are both better committed to memory and more accurately remembered. Moving away from this traditional view, however, Phelps argues that emotional environments play a crucial role in the revision of memories:

One of the primary ways emotion alters memory encoding is through influencing attention and perception, thus, changing what information comes into memory. Emotion has two distinct but related effects on attention and perception. Emotion

enhances attention and perception for some central aspects of the emotional event, and it impairs attention to other, nonemotional components of the event.” (12)

Thus, Phelps posits that although emotionally overloaded environments may cause certain aspects of the past to become more vivid, this also results in other portions of the memory being heavily revised or removed altogether. By bringing certain details into focus, emotionally imprinted memories also blur and abstract other details, therefore, causing an alteration of the past. For Susannah, the environmental stress causes her to recall certain details such as the child being as “black as my shoe” or the location of the curate, but it also contributes ultimately to her inability to recall the child’s name.

5.2 Informational Overload: Dual-task Performance and Chunking

In addition to the emotionally overloaded environment Susannah faces, she also experiences an informational overload that directly influences her memory capacities. Considering Miller’s seven plus or minus two rule as a limitation on working memory, the Susannah scene in Sterne’s novel showcases a moment where this accepted range is reached and far-surpassed. In addition to the overall sense of urgency characterized by this scene, Susannah’s working memory is challenged as she is forced to perform the dual task of remembering and recalling simultaneously. This is illustrated in the passage when Susannah is asked to recall information to answer questions such as “where’s Mr. Yorick,” or to remember the color of the dying baby so that she can fulfill Mr. Shandy’s request for a comparison, which she eventually fulfills. Not only is Susannah charged with recalling memories in order to meet Mr. Shandy’s demands, but she is also responsible for committing the name “*Trismegistus*” to memory long enough to report it back to the curate. Tasked with remembering a twelve-letter long name, Susannah faces the limitations of Miller’s rule and is forced to resort to chunking in hopes of remembering the name. Returning to Baddeley, he argues that “One factor that assists chunking

is the redundancy, or predictability, of the material” (25). Furthermore, Pertti Sarriluoma suggests that when considering chunking, it is important to recognize that there are three dimensions that play into one’s ability to successfully chunk information and later remember it: “These aspects are the number of chunks, their size, and finally the relevance of their content. If one of these dimensions is neglected, the outcome of the training will not be satisfactory” (131). Considering both Baddeley and Sarriluoma’s dimensions of memory chunking, readers quickly realize that in trying to remember “*Trismegistus*,” Susannah is immediately disadvantaged. Not only does the name defy the principals of redundancy and predictability, seeing as there is “no Christian name in the world...beginning with *Tris*,” but the name also requires several small and unintelligible chunks. Unlike the chunking earlier illustrated by the sequence “*FRIKBASTING*,” the name Susannah is given does not easily break into manageable or intelligible chunks. Therefore, due in part to the dual-tasks that Susannah is asked to perform, as well as her inability to effectively break the name into relevant and intelligible chunks, the maid is ultimately forced into a state of revision when recalling the baby’s name.

5.3 Influential Overload: Outside Influence and Superimposed Brain Folds

The final environmental aspect that interferes with and causes the revision of memories is that of outside influence. Karen J. Mitchell and Maria S. Zaragoza suggest, “It is now well established that even single exposures to misinformation can result in genuine false memories for suggested events” (246). In Susannah’s case, the curate’s comment that “there is no Christian name in the world...beginning with *Tris*—but *Tristram*” offers such an instance of misinformation (208). Under the influence of the curate’s comment, Susannah revises the name originally given to her. In addition to the environments of emotional and informational overload, Susannah’s memory is furthered altered by the misinformation of others. Furthermore, using the

scholarship of Descartes and *L'Homme*, John Sutton explains that one commonly held belief about the structure of the brain helps to explain how Susannah's memories might be altered by outside influence. Summarizing Descartes and *L'Homme*'s philosophy, Sutton explains that one way of viewing the interworkings of the brain and memory is through the explanation that the "animal spirits" move through the brain tissue and create special patterns within the brain folds that corresponded to specific memories. Sutton elaborates:

All this is accomplished...by means of the whooshing animal spirits, shaking through brain tissues. The spirits incessantly undergo *criblage* or *tamisage* (sifting, filtering, sieving) in the textured porous net, forming and retracing patterns across the inner surfaces of a filamentous mesh. They connect the deepest interior, the pineal gland, to the world in numerous ways. (56)

Sutton's use of the words "sifting, filtering, sieving" suggest a free movement of these animal spirits throughout the brain and hint at their ability to create new impressions in different regions. Sutton later comments that this motion of the fluids "is itself altered over time" (58) and that eventually these "Spirits fold, enlarge, bend, and arrange the relevant fibres of the brain substances into forms" (59) that oftentimes do not resemble their original shape. More simply stated, the animal spirits create distinct memory patterns in the brain folds but as those memories are recalled or influenced in some way, a new pattern is not only created, but superimposed over the old one. Hence, the new memory is influenced and altered by the resulting two overlapping patterns. With this in mind, it becomes easier to understand how the curate's comment interferes with Susannah's memory by superimposing a new memory over the original one and causing her to forget the name Mr. Shandy originally tells her. Thus, in the scene depicting Susannah's memory task, Sterne's novel shows how various environmental factors such as emotional, informational, and influential overload provide a prime setting for memories to be altered.

Conclusion

Whether through the revision of memory in Slawkenbergius' tale, or through the alteration that takes place as a result of the environment surrounding Tristram's naming, Sterne's text grapples with many of the same theories of memory that Marcel Proust later outlined in his writing. Postulating memory as fabricated and deeply erroneous, Proustian memory spills over into the Sterne's text in a way that illuminates exciting new ways of understating how the brain and memory operate. In Laurence Sterne's novel, *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne explores the revisionary nature of memory as well as the role that environment plays in recall in order to show that human memory is unreliable and many times incoherent. In his attempts to reconstruct the events surrounding his conception and early childhood, Sterne's narrator not only points to the difficulties in regenerating reality, but he uncovers some of the limitations of autobiography and self-imagining in the process.

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