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Locke and Sterne: The History  
of a Critical Hobby-Horse<sup>†</sup>

*Earlier Reception*

In the middle of the twentieth century, the influence on Laurence Sterne of the seventeenth-century English empiricist philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) was generally accepted as a literary-historical fact. It was inscribed in the introduction and annotations to the standard edition of Sterne's major fictional work; it was the subject, in one way or another, of numerous critical essays on aspects of his narrative technique; it was the premise of a major monograph on the nature and significance of his 'philosophical rhetoric'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, such was the ostensible self-evidence of the principle of Locke's influence on Sterne that twentieth-century commentators occasionally expressed surprise at the almost total silence on that subject of Sterne's early readers and reviewers. In particular, Alan

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1. The edition was Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. James Aiken Work (1940; repr. Indianapolis: Odyssey, 1982); relevant essays and articles included John Laird, 'Shandean Philosophy', in *Philosophical Incursions into English Literature* (CUP, 1946), pp. 74–91, Arthur H. Cash, 'The Lockean Psychology of *Tristram Shandy*', *ELH*, 22 (1955), 125–135, and Ernest Tuveson, 'Locke and Sterne', in J. A. Mazzeo (ed.), *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600–1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 255–277; the monograph was John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1954).

Howes's exhaustive surveys of Sterne's reception in contemporary periodicals discovered only one brief mention of Locke, with Howes attributing the reticence of early critics to their 'general ignorance' of the philosophical and compositional issues involved.<sup>2</sup>

In more recent times, scholars of Sterne's contemporary reception have increasingly paid attention to alternative sources of literary information about the ways in which the author's work was understood. Most significantly, René Bosch has followed Frank Donoghue and Anne Bandry in choosing to take seriously the interpretative implications of the imitations, commentaries, and related items of *Sterneana* that began to appear on the London print market within weeks of Sterne's arrival on the scene.<sup>3</sup> Bosch's analysis of such anonymous sources as *Yorick's Meditations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects* (1760), with its explicitly Lockean 'Meditation upon the Association of Ideas', and the spurious *Tristram Shandy, Vol. IX* (1766), with its theologically heterodox experimentalist, Dr Querpo, has led him to conclude that at least some of Sterne's early readers 'did perceive that Sterne was interested in [Locke's] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1690] and were not shy of interpreting and following his hints'.<sup>4</sup> Even so, parodists who revealed a knowing awareness of Sterne's comedic engagement with Lockean themes remained in the minority throughout the 1760s, and their influence on the more essential attitudes of the contemporary critical reviewers was evidently minimal.

For both parodists and reviewers, the only available evidence on which a Lockean reading of Sterne was or could have been based were the direct references and indirect allusions to the philosopher that appeared in the published volumes of Sterne's works. By far the most significant of these were those that occurred between 1759 and 1761 in the first and second instalments of *Tristram Shandy*. Obviously, it was Tristram's attribution of the unfortunate circumstances of his conception to an 'unhappy association of ideas', as theorized by 'the sagacious Locke' (*TS*, 1.4.7) [8], that inspired the pseudo-Yorick's humorously insightful 'Meditation' on that theme.<sup>5</sup> Almost certainly, it was Tristram's instruction on how to feign knowledge of 'Locke's Essay upon the Human Understanding' (*TS*, 2.2.98) [57], that led the same imitator elsewhere to ascribe a fallacious view of Locke's position on nativism to his pseudo-Walter.<sup>6</sup> More intriguingly, it was Tristram's 'Author's Preface', with its attack on Locke's purported

2. See Alan B. Howes, *Yorick and the Critics: Sterne's Reputation in England, 1760–1868* (1958; repr. Hamden, CT: Archon, 1971), 36, Howes (ed.), *Sterne: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 184 n., and Lodwick Hartley, *Laurence Sterne in the Twentieth Century: An Essay and a Bibliography of Sternean Studies 1900–1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 23.

3. See Frank Donoghue, *The Fame Machine: Book Reviewing and Eighteenth-Century Literary Careers* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), ch. 2, and Anne Bandry, 'Imitations of *Tristram Shandy*', in Melvyn New (ed.), *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne* (New York: G. K. Hall, 1998), 39–52.

4. René Bosch, *Labyrinth of Digressions: Tristram Shandy as Perceived and Influenced by Sterne's Early Imitators*, tr. Piet Verhoeff (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), 222.

5. See John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 394–401, and Anon., *Yorick's Meditations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects* (1760), 76–80. The theme of association is also briefly acknowledged in 'Jeremiah Kunastrokius', *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy; wherein the Morals and Politics of this Piece Are Clearly Laid Open* (1760), 11–12.

6. See Anon., *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. Serving to Elucidate that Work. By the Author of Yorick's Meditations* (1760), 51.

attitude towards wit and its relationship with judgment (TS, 3.20.227–38) [123], that provided the context for a scathing review by Owen Ruffhead in which he appealed for moral and intellectual authority to a different 'celebrated Philosopher', Locke's seventeenth-century predecessor, Thomas Hobbes.<sup>7</sup>

The exclusively textual basis for the brief and ambivalent allusions to Locke that occasionally appeared in Sternean pamphlets and other ephemera of the 1760s is important to underline[.] \* \* \* Although it deals with a conversation that took place in 1762, the crucial piece of biographical evidence on which the twentieth-century Locke and Sterne industry would be based, and whose status and implications are discussed below, was belatedly discovered in a nineteenth-century source that was obviously unavailable to Sterne's contemporaries. \* \* \*

Other factors also contributed to the critical and conceptual distance that opened up between Locke and Sterne from the turn of the nineteenth century on, not least of which was the damage to the reputations of both authors that resulted from their more or less loose associations with French materialist, sensationalist, and libertine thought.<sup>8</sup> \* \* \*

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### *Wilbur Cross and the Suard Story*

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the editor and biographer Wilbur Cross succeeded in establishing an entirely new direction in the scholarship and criticism of Sterne. The process began in 1904, when Cross introduced the third volume of *The Complete Works and Life of Laurence Sterne* with an account of 'Yorick's Plagiarisms' that both summarized and advanced the work of Ferriar.<sup>9</sup> As well as reporting that later scholarship had identified in John Dunton's *A Voyage Round the World* (1691) 'the prototype of Sterne's whimsical style', Cross contended that 'one other book—and it is the book of all books—should be mentioned in considering Sterne'. The book in question was Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, which Sterne had first encountered as an undergraduate at Cambridge University, and which apparently 'became a companion throughout life'. According to Cross, the relationship between Locke's *Essay* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* was both direct and palpably productive. First and foremost, 'Locke's doctrine of associated ideas certainly impressed Sterne greatly; and upon it he organized his whole work, lending to madness a kind of method'. Moreover, although Sterne was 'no philosopher', he drew from Locke both 'that love for playing with abstruse thinking exemplified in Walter Shandy' and an 'attitude towards scholastic and theological pedantry' whose 'seriousness' he tempered with humour. Finally, Cross also posited 'some logical connection between the philosophy of Locke and Sterne's sentimentalism', adding by way of explanation

7. See [Owen Ruffhead], review of *Tristram Shandy*, vols. 3 and 4, *Monthly Review*, 24 (February, 1761), 101–116 (102–3). For a pseudo-Shandean gloss on Locke's view of wit and judgment, see [Richard Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1770), 2: 228.

8. See D. Whyte, *The Fallacy of French Freedom, and Dangerous Tendency of Sterne's Writings* (1799), 2–5, and Hans Aarsieff, 'Locke's Influence', in Vere Chappell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Locke* (CUP, 1994), 252–89 (279).

9. John Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne* (1798) [Editor].

that Locke's sensationalism was the animating influence on a later eighteenth-century literary culture that was 'not so much of ideas as of emotions, not so much of the intellect as of the heart'.<sup>1</sup>

\*\*\* Five years after the publication of his *Works and Life of Sterne*, Cross revealed the sources of his argument in a new account of the eighteenth-century author's *Life and Times*. In Paris in 1762, Sterne had not only arranged for his publisher, Thomas Becket, to send from London a box of books including 'Locke complete' as a gift to be presented to Denis Diderot; more significantly, he had also reportedly provided Jean-Baptiste Suard, a young journalist in the Baron d'Holbach's circle, with a remarkably clear and concise explanation of the defining features of his personality. Beyond his creativity and natural sensibility, Sterne directed Suard's attention to

certain acquired traits, affecting mind and style, which had come from 'the daily reading of the Old and New Testaments, books which were to his liking as well as necessary to his profession'; and from a prolonged study of Locke, 'which he had begun in youth and continued through life.' Anyone, he told Suard, who was acquainted with Locke might discover the philosopher's directing hand 'in all his pages, in all his lines, in all his expressions.' In conclusion, he said of Locke's philosophy, which had thus tempered everywhere his thought and manner of procedure, in his *Sermons* as well as in *Tristram Shandy*: 'It is a philosophy which never attempts to explain the miracle of sensation; but reverently leaving that miracle in the hands of God, it unfolds all the secrets of the mind; and shunning the errors to which other theories of knowledge are exposed, it arrives at all truths accessible to the understanding.' Finally, it is 'a sacred philosophy, without which the world will never have a true universal religion, a true science of morals, nor will man without it ever attain to real command over nature.'<sup>2</sup>

In the Suard story, Cross appeared to have discovered the single most important piece of biographical evidence for Sterne's religious and intellectual seriousness to have emerged since the time of the author's death. Equally significantly, it finds Sterne prepared to admit that a single philosopher had comprehensively and definitively influenced both the content of his thought and the style of his writing in all of their various forms. Even so, the insight that Cross had gained into the structure of his subject's vision was not quite as clear as it initially seemed. The story was taken from Dominique-Joseph Garat's *Mémoires Historiques sur la vie de M. Suard*, which was probably based on a lost document by the journalist, and which was first published in 1820, over half a century after the event in question.<sup>3</sup> Even if reliability of transmission can be assumed, Sterne

1. *The Complete Works and Life of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Wilbur L. Cross, 12 vols. (New York: Taylor, 1904), 3: xx and xxv-xxvi.

2. Wilbur L. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 279-82.

3. See D. J. Garat, *Mémoires Historiques sur le XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle, sur la vie et les écrits de M. Suard*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 2 vols. (Paris: Philippe, 1829), 2: 149, where Sterne is reported to have attributed the development of aspects of his character and style

à l'étude de Locke, qu'il avait faite au sortir de l'enfance, et qu'il refit toute sa vie; à cette philosophie que ceux qui savent la reconnaître où elle est, et où elle dirige tout secrètement, retrouvent et sentent dans toutes les pages, dans toutes les lignes, dans le choix de toutes les expressions; à cette philosophie trop religieuse pour vouloir expliquer le miracle

was demonstrably pragmatic enough to adapt himself to the demands or opportunities of virtually any specific occasion. \* \* \*

Once the authenticity of the Suard story had been accepted, its impact on the developing field of Sterne studies was both immediate and profound. To Cross's remarks about the bases in Locke of Sterne's associative and sentimentalist aesthetics, Read added suggestions about the author's rhetorical 'indebtedness to Locke', confirming as he did so that it might not have been suspected but for the solemn declaration of his devotion to this philosopher which he made to Suard.<sup>4</sup> A year previously, the German critic Rudolf Kassner had made the apparently independent observation that the 'Grundmotiv' of *Tristram Shandy* was derived from Locke's distinction between experiential and measurable time, as rehearsed by Walter Shandy in a typically tortuous conversation with his brother Toby (*TS*, 3.18.222) [121–22].<sup>5</sup> Whereas Read openly questioned Kassner's interpretation, Theodore Baird advanced and supported it in an article that he published in 1936. Although Baird took significant liberties with Cross's evidence when he claimed that 'Sterne himself repeatedly said, that *Tristram Shandy* is Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in a novelized form', his and Kassner's general thesis, that the passage of time in the consciousness of Sterne's characters 'depends upon the rapidity of the succession of ideas', soon found numerous subscribers.<sup>6</sup>

Among the most significant of those subscribers was Kenneth MacLean, whose book *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, which appeared in the same year as Baird's article, represented the first sustained attempt to historicize Locke's influence on the literary and intellectual culture of Sterne's era.<sup>7</sup> \* \* \*

Along with Cross, MacLean was one of the major contributors to a steadily growing critical consensus about how best to interpret the structure and content of Sterne's work. In 1940, that new consensus became a basic principle of James Work's annotated *Tristram Shandy*, which would be the standard edition of the text for the next four decades. Observing in particular that its 'most important structural device is the principle of the association of ideas upon which the whole progression of the book is based', Work summed up the interpretative advances that critics since Cross had made by succinctly and unequivocally declaring Locke to have 'profoundly influenced all Sterne's thinking and writing'.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the precise nature and true extent of Locke's influence on Sterne continued to be presented throughout the 1940s as topics for scholarly debate, until in 1946 John Laird published the most comprehensive delineation to

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des sensations, mais qui, avec ce miracle dont elle n'a pas la témérité de demander raison et compte à Dieu, développe tous les secrets de l'entendement, évite les erreurs, arrive aux vérités accessibles; philosophie sainte, sans laquelle il n'y aura jamais sur la terre ni vraie religion universelle, ni vraie morale, ni vraie puissance de l'homme sur la nature.

4. Herbert Read, 'Sterne', in *The Sense of Glory: Essays in Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1929), 123–51 (147–48).

5. Rudolf Kassner, 'Lawrence Sterne', in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Zinn and Klaus E. Bohnenkamp, 10 vols. (Pfullingen: Neske, 1969–91), vol. 4 (1978), 257. Kassner's term can be translated as 'primary motive'.

6. Theodore Baird, 'The Time-Scheme of *Tristram Shandy* and a Source', *PMLA*, 1 (1936), 803–20 (803–4).

7. Kenneth MacLean, *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1936).

8. Sterne, *Tristram Shandy*, ed. Work, xlix and 9 n3.

date of 'Shandean philosophy' as 'an elaborate application of Locke's methods.'<sup>9</sup> \* \* \*

\* \* \* With Locke's reputation having yet to recover from the attacks to which his nineteenth-century critics had subjected it, Sterne's critics found themselves in the difficult position of having to use *Tristram Shandy* as a source from which to reconstruct the principles and applications of the philosopher's thought.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Sterne was presented as having lacked awareness of latent forms of ambivalence and ambiguity in Locke that he might otherwise have been seen to have exploited, with Laird in particular coming to the conclusion that 'for the most part if Locke's views contained difficulties, the same difficulties are to be found in the unsuspecting Sterne'.<sup>2</sup> If what was truly needed in order fully to come to terms with Sterne's inventions was a more critical and discriminating attitude towards the Suard story on the one hand and Locke's *Essay* on the other, then such an attitude duly found its voice in the first decade of the second half of the twentieth century. As the following account will demonstrate, however, that new approach was not without significant problems of its own.

### *John Traugott and Synthetic Proofs*

The publication in 1954 of John Traugott's *Tristram Shandy's World* marked a second major turning point in the critical understanding of the philosophical and literary influence of Locke on Sterne. \* \* \*

Traugott's thesis was based on what he called Locke's 'two worlds' hypothesis. On the one hand, when Sterne's characters 'are set down on Locke's ontological vast abrupt, the abyss between ideas and reality, they perfectly display the worldly problem of Locke's *Essay*'. On the other, where 'Locke's view of mind, which prohibits public concourse of various mental activities, seems inadequate to explain the facts of the Shandy world', Sterne's 'solution is the comedy of the Shandy[s]' real sympathetic correspondence in the midst of their misunderstandings'.<sup>3</sup> According to Traugott, this correspondence is exclusively registered by non-verbal gestures and 'a context of situations'. As a result, in considering 'Locke's system' as 'the other side of his shield', Traugott's Sterne managed to produce a literary achievement of genuine moral value in that he 'followed Locke and yet made life whole'.<sup>4</sup> As powerful and attractive as this argument may appear, the suggestions that Locke posited an 'abyss between ideas and reality', that he excluded the possibility of non-verbal communication, and that *Tristram Shandy* is, in Traugott's sense, 'whole' or complete, are ultimately either erroneous or at best misleading. \* \* \*

9. See W. B. C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance: The Tragic Genius of Swift, Johnson, & Sterne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939), 99–157; B. H. Lehman, 'Of Time, Personality, and the Author', in B. H. Bronson et al., *Studies in the Comic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), 233–50, and Vivian H. S. Mercier, 'Tristram Shandy and Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*', *Dublin Magazine*, 18 (October–December, 1943), 32–7; Laird, 'Shandean Philosophy', 84.

1. On early twentieth-century criticisms of Locke, see Michael Ayers, 'The Reputation of Locke's General Philosophy in Britain in the Twentieth Century', in G. A. J. Rogers, Tom Sorell, and Jill Kraye (eds.), *Insiders and Outsiders in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Routledge, 2010), 269–80.

2. Laird, 'Shandean Philosophy', 88; see also 86 and cf. *TS*, 3.40.280–81 [152].

3. Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World*, 6, 13, and 20.

4. *Ibid.*, 27 and 31.

As far as the theme of association is concerned, Traugott advanced two influential arguments about the historical provenance and relevance to Sterne of Locke's philosophical account. In the first place, he cited the examples of François Rabelais, Michel de Montaigne, Robert Burton, and David Hume in order to demonstrate that the theory in question was both older and more recent than the analysis that appears in Locke's *Essay*. \* \* \* In the second place, Traugott took issue with the prevailing assumption that Locke's theory of the association of ideas could explain not only the behaviour of Sterne's characters but also the narrative organization of Tristram's text. Although he agreed with earlier critics that 'Toby is exactly Locke's madman', Traugott contended that the Shandy brothers' roles as 'symbolic personifications' represents 'the only true meaning that association of ideas has, with respect to Sterne's structure'.<sup>5</sup>

In the decade or so that followed the publication of his book, Traugott's arguments about the association of ideas in Locke and Sterne were extensively debated and elaborated. In 1955, Arthur Cash maintained that 'Locke's association principle' cannot be 'the structural principle of *Tristram Shandy*' for the simple reason that 'it treats only of revival association, a type of memory'. Although this type could account for the hobby-horses that determine the thoughts of Walter and Toby Shandy, Tristram's discoveries of 'new ideas or new relationships among ideas' stood in need of a different explanation. For Cash, that explanation was derived from 'the psychology of the train of ideas' that Locke described in other sections of his *Essay*, and which was inextricably linked both to Tristram's 'digressive method' and to Locke's and Walter's disquisitions on the concepts of duration and time.<sup>6</sup> \* \* \*

As for the theme of language in *Tristram Shandy*, Traugott's argument that Sterne set out to correct Locke's stance on words is unquestionably one of the least convincing that he produced. In book III of his *Essay*, Locke had maintained that the 'general Terms' on which scholastic definitions were based were deceptively exclusive of the 'circumstances' that attended the 'particular Existence' of things.<sup>7</sup> Investigating potential alternatives, Locke rejected, among other things, contemporary conjectures about the possible invention of a new artificial and universal language, and instead tied linguistic research to natural and experimental history.<sup>8</sup> In spite of this, Traugott somehow managed to argue that 'Locke sees no reason that language should not be something like mathematics', whereas 'for Sterne definition is only possible by leaving out most of the life of the individual'.<sup>9</sup>

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In 1973, Duke Maskell produced to date the most vehement corrective to the once standard and now increasingly complicated principle that Locke exerted a significant philosophical influence on Sterne. His first objection to the traditional orthodoxy was that *Tristram Shandy* was

5. *Ibid.*, 46-9.

6. Cash, 'The Lockean Psychology of *Tristram Shandy*', 126-33. For the view that Sterne's 'theory' of time and consciousness is in fact a 'contradiction' of Locke's, see Jean-Claude Sallé, 'A Source of Sterne's Conception of Time', *Review of English Studies*, 6 (1955), 180-82.

7. Locke, *Essay*, 410-11.

8. See *ibid.*, 509 and 521-2.

9. Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World*, 55. See also Robert J. Griffin, 'Tristram Shandy and Language', *College English*, 23 (1961), 108-112.

demonstrably not a text from which the central arguments of Locke's *Essay* could be reconstructed; his second concerned the possible correspondence between the 'logical connections' that bind Locke's sentences and the 'dramatic connections' among Sterne's 'figures and scenes': as Maskell observed, 'even to put such questions sounds silly'. His final objection was both the simplest and most persuasive of the three: when 'Locke's words' reappear in the 'new context' of *Tristram Shandy*, 'they call for a quite different kind of attention'; the kind, that is, that functions according to literary or aesthetic values rather than to Locke's original objective of attaining or discovering rational truth.<sup>1</sup> While Maskell's broader thesis that philosophy and literature are mutually exclusive enterprises might usefully, if endlessly, be debated, his concluding reflections on the particular case of the relevance of Locke to Sterne remain compelling. \* \* \* Ultimately, for Maskell, 'Locke's influence on Sterne is not philosophical, but rhetorical'.<sup>2</sup>

As fundamentally challenging as it was, Maskell's sceptical argument about Locke's philosophical influence on Sterne took time to find a truly receptive audience. In 1974, for example, Martin Battestin based his analysis of Sterne's innovative 'Poetics of Sensibility' on the traditional premises that the author 'was profoundly influenced by Locke's epistemology' and that *Tristram Shandy* 'is the objectification in art of the new subjectivism implicit in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*'.<sup>3</sup> The following year, Helene Moglen similarly opened a chapter entitled 'John Locke, the Hero of *Tristram Shandy*', by asserting the apparent 'paradox' that a study of Sterne's text must begin with 'a careful analysis of the epistemology of John Locke': for Moglen, Locke was as profoundly aware as Sterne of the philosophical ambiguities of his *Essay*.<sup>4</sup> \* \* \*

If one of the difficulties in evaluating Locke's influence was the theoretical divide between literature and philosophy to which Maskell had called attention, then it was a problem that at least two of Sterne's critics were prepared quite explicitly to confront. In his 1977 book *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy*, James Swearingen described Sterne's text as 'a phenomenological analysis of the structures and meaning of Tristram's being', and identified five preliminary stages to the work of Edmund Husserl of which Locke's attempt 'to establish a secure epistemological basis for objective knowledge' was the third.<sup>5</sup> According to Swearingen, Sterne 'carries out the analysis that Locke only suggests', and does so in a distinctively 'comic' way. \* \* \*

\* \* \* [A] second major difficulty in interpreting Locke's influence on Sterne is more historiographically and bibliographically oriented, and therefore, at least in principle, more amenable to objectively factual resolution. In 1982, Mark Loveridge posed this crucial problem in terms that suggested a new and potentially profitable way forward for scholars who maintained an interest in Locke and Sterne. Pointing out that Locke in

1. Duke Maskell, 'Locke and Sterne, or Can Philosophy Influence Literature?', *Essays in Criticism*, 23 (1973), 22-40 (27-31).

2. *Ibid.*, 39.

3. Martin C. Battestin, *The Providence of Wit: Aspects of Form in Augustan Literature and the Arts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), 314 n32 and 245.

4. Helene Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1975), 9. See also Eric Rothstein, *Systems of Order and Inquiry in Later Eighteenth-century Fiction* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975), 70 n12, for the intriguing speculation that Tristram may have learned about Locke from his mother.

5. James E. Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: An Essay in Phenomenological Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 25 and 29.

the early 1760s was no longer quite the dominant cultural force that he had been in earlier eighteenth-century Britain, Loveridge observed that 'what Tristram understands by "Locke" is not really quite what the philosophers or Sterne's commentators mean by the word', and proposed instead that "'Locke" is essentially a device which Tristram uses to define the nature of other characters, and to define the audience'.<sup>6</sup> Loveridge elaborated two main examples of Sterne's manipulation of this 'device', the second and more convincing of which was the alleged subservience of wit to judgment that Tristram sets out to contest in 'The Author's Preface'. Finding that Locke nowhere expressed the views that Tristram ascribes to him in his opening dismissal of his detractors, Loveridge argued that Tristram 'merely sets up a symbolic or cliché audience, and sets out their idea of a cliché Locke', so that when he 'pretends to be sarcastic about Locke at the end of the Preface, it is not to the real Locke that he is referring, but to this cliché Locke'.<sup>7</sup>

\*\*\* All in all, Loveridge's was a novel and remarkably subtle analysis, and when allied to the contemporary resurgence of interest in Locke's philosophical achievements it suddenly seemed capable of restructuring the critical debate by simultaneously broadening and magnifying its scope; of refining perspectives on *Tristram Shandy* by making them relevant to a fuller investigation of Locke's eighteenth-century reception.<sup>8</sup> That it has so far largely failed to do so is due, partly and ironically, to an outstanding achievement of twentieth-century scholarship: *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*.

#### *Melvyn New and the Florida Edition*

Between 1978 and 1984, the first three volumes of the *Florida Edition of Sterne* replaced James Work's annotated *Tristram Shandy* as the standard scholarly edition of the text. In his introduction to the vast set of *Notes* that comprised the third of those volumes, the editor-in-chief Melvyn New identified, among other things, a series of fundamental problems that had to be confronted in any serious attempt to assess Locke's relevance to Sterne. First, 'few if any literary works in the eighteenth century do not show the influence of Locke's empiricism and sensationalism, especially in fiction'. Second, 'Sterne rather consistently dwells upon a few very famous and often-quoted passages from a very popular work'. And third, 'few if any problems have more exercised modern critics than that of the relationship between philosophy and literature'. \*\*\* [H]e called for a critical reorientation. 'That we cannot even settle the most basic problem of whether Sterne agrees or disagrees with Locke', he argued, 'is perhaps a strong indication that the question has not yet been asked in a manner that could produce a satisfying answer' (*TS: Notes*, 16–17).<sup>9</sup>

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6. Mark Loveridge, *Laurence Sterne and the Argument about Design* (Macmillan, 1982), 130.

7. *Ibid.*, 145.

8. On the late twentieth-century 'historicization of Locke', see Aarsleff, 'Locke's Influence', 282, and Ayers, 'The Reputation of Locke's General Philosophy', 276.

9. For a contemporary and less interpretatively reticent editorial viewpoint, see Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), xvi–xviii. Locke features less prominently in the introduction to Ross's revised edition of 2009.

At almost 600 pages in length, the volume of *Notes to Tristram Shandy* on which New and Day collaborated immediately demanded the attention of other scholars. Indeed, within a few years of its publication it was possible to discern in the academic literature on Sterne the beginnings of the critical reorientation that New had promised. One of the most striking shifts in perspective that the Florida *Notes* effected occurred in the second volume of Arthur Cash's biography of Sterne, which appeared, eleven years after the first, in 1986. Whereas Cash had previously been fully persuaded that Locke's *Essay* had 'informed all of [Sterne's] work, sermons and novels' (*EMY*, p. 206), the scepticism of his concluding volume matched, and even went beyond, that of the Florida editors. 'Sterne may have paraphrased the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*,' Cash wrote, 'but these passages do not demonstrate any intimate knowledge of Locke because he might have found these very quotations in Chambers's *Cyclopaedia* under such headings as "Time", "Duration" or "Idea"' (*LY*, 76). \*\*\*

The extent of the impact that the *Florida Edition* made can further be clarified in a second, less obvious, way. In 1985 and 1987 respectively, Peter Briggs and Wolfgang Iser advanced new interpretations of Locke's formative contribution to Sterne's aesthetic, but the fact that they based them on the Work and Signet editions of Sterne's texts speaks volumes about the nature of the scholarly and critical dilemma that many of their colleagues had already begun to face.<sup>1</sup> \*\*\* [T]he first part of [Iser's] monograph identified Locke's philosophy as 'one of *Tristram Shandy's* central fields of reference', and construed an admittedly conflated account of perceptual and cognitive association as 'the point at which Sterne latches on to the Lockean system'.<sup>2</sup> In both cases, the critique of the work of the Florida annotators that Jonathan Lamb presented in 1989 is strikingly and instructively relevant. According to Lamb, 'an unhappy result of [the editors'] labours has been to reposition Sterne in a grid of borrowings, quotations and allusions that considerably restricts the freedom to read beyond the annotated pale'. Whereas Briggs and Iser unconsciously retained their freedom, Lamb controversially made a point of reclaiming and exercising his. Even so, the fact that he related Sterne's associationism specifically and exclusively to that of Hume and Hartley ironically allows Lamb to share with New and Day some of the credit for the critical reorientation that was evidently in the process of being achieved.<sup>3</sup> \*\*\*

Sterne's emergence from his reliance on Locke was generally well received by the scholarly community. \*\*\* [T]he opportunity for critics to concentrate on alternative avenues of research appears to have come as a relief. \*\*\* [T]he prevailing mood of scepticism about the significance of work of specialists in tangentially related fields. \*\*\* William Walker briefly considered the traditional conception of Sterne as a 'qualified

1. Peter M. Briggs, 'Locke's *Essay* and the Tentativeness of *Tristram Shandy*', *Studies in Philology, Laurence Sterne*, 82 (1985), 493-520 (495-6 and 502). New later included Briggs's article in *Critical Essays on*
2. Wolfgang Iser, *Laurence Sterne: Tristram Shandy*, tr. David Henry Wilson (CUP, 1988), 11 and 14.
3. Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* (CUP, 1989), 2 and 56-7. Lamb's ductory critique in 'Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness', *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 4 (1992), 315-29 (319).

Lockean' in the broader perspective of theoretical commonplaces about 'the centrality of Locke's *Essay*' to eighteenth-century literary criticism and aesthetics. In terms that recalled Maskell's objections of twenty years before, Walker argued that damaging myths about Locke had arisen and become established as a direct result of scholarly negligence of the most basic and yet most easily explainable kind. Referring along the way to the work of MacLean and Tuveson, Walker wrote that

the luxury of being able to postulate as a central document of literary history, without the labour of reading, a tome written over twenty years that went through five editions is secured by a particular kind of investment. In its most general form, this investment is in a conception of the difference between literature and philosophy. The procedure of including in literary studies, indeed making essential to them, an *understanding* of Locke's *Essay*, but excluding from literary studies the job of *reading* Locke is afforded by a notion of the philosophical text as one which may be understood without being critically read.<sup>4</sup>

Although literary historians such as John Richetti and Peter Walmsley had recently drawn attention to the stylistic, rhetorical, and generic aspects of Locke's *Essay*, critics of Sterne increasingly turned their attentions to physiological, gendered, political, aesthetic, and bibliographical interpretations of his work, many of which offered new and valuable insights.<sup>5</sup> As a result, it would be almost another decade before Walker's challenge was seriously taken up in a Shandean context.

#### Recent Developments

\* \* \*

Between 2003 and 2009 \* \* \* three scholars contributed distinct and yet complementary perspectives on the relationship between Locke and Sterne that together amount to arguably the most accurate and edifying account of the topic ever to have been advanced. The first to appear was Fred Parker's *Scepticism and Literature*, the second and fifth chapters of which respectively deal with sceptical themes in Locke's *Essay* and approaches to 'sceptical thinking' in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. As if in implicit response to the challenges of Maskell and Walker, Parker devoted time, space, and effort to the task of reading Locke critically, independently, and for his own sake. \* \* \* In fact, Parker's view of Locke was all the clearer for being unobscured by pre-emptive perceptions of literary causality or aesthetic manifestation. Instead, he worked towards an etymological threshing of the *Essay*'s metaphysical scepticism, in which Locke's 'supposition' of substance, as a standing-under and an under-standing, forged 'the link which holds together the destructive and constructive aspects of his epistemology', and 'forced his more thoughtful successors to rediscover this link for

4. William Walker, *Locke, Literary Criticism, and Philosophy* (CUP, 1994), 10 and 13.

5. Walker was critical of John Richetti, *Philosophical Writing: Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), but recommended two articles by Peter Walmsley that later reappeared in his book *Locke's Essay and the Rhetoric of Science* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2003). For representative examples of the newer approaches to Sterne, see Thomas Keymer (ed.), *Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy: A Casebook* (OUP, 2006).

themselves, or to develop their own equivalents for it'.<sup>6</sup> In the case of Sterne, that rediscovered or redeveloped link is the comedy of *Tristram Shandy*, which functions by questioning 'whether anything can be more real to experience than the play of consciousness', and by demonstrating 'less the mind's unwillingness than its incapacity for holding to realities'. Accordingly, for Parker, 'any attempt to evaluate Shandeism by the yardstick of the reality principle which it rejects, or (rather) simply sets aside, is always liable to miss the book altogether'.<sup>7</sup>

Whereas Parker approached Locke's metaphysical scepticism from a literary and largely secular point of view, another scholar, Tim Parnell, identified that theme as a useful means of assessing the nature and extent of Sterne's religious beliefs. Finding the evidence of Sterne's fiction, clerical career, sermons, conduct, and friendships to be generally inconclusive as far as theological doctrine is concerned, Parnell returned on three separate occasions in a single two-part essay to the story that had initiated the Locke and Sterne industry almost exactly a century before. In the first instance, Parnell found Suard's memoirist Garat to be 'a perfectly reliable source' for the journalist's interviews, and commented that 'for all its oddity of tone and idiom, Sterne's response to questions about his "attributes" is remarkable in its emphasis on orthodox belief'.<sup>8</sup> In the second, he suggested that 'Garat's report has been largely ignored less because of doubts about his access to Suard's papers, and more because the image of a Bible-reading student of Locke's *holy* philosophy fails to fit the author we typically infer from [Sterne's] bawdy and exuberant fiction'. Finally, having decided that Sterne was 'a reasonably conscientious clergyman' whose 'claims for the moral thrust of his fiction' deserve to be taken seriously, Parnell maintained that the 'uncharacteristically grave', 'somewhat idealised', and yet generally 'consistent' portrait of Sterne that emerges from Suard's account is uniquely revealing of the sceptical, ethical, and ultimately religious 'affinities between Sterne and Locke'. As he explained, 'Locke's conclusions have much in common with the underpinning assumptions of Sterne's satire' in that 'for Locke, as for Sterne, God-given reason is sufficient to our needs, but its reach in terms of absolute knowledge is circumscribed'.<sup>9</sup> When considered alongside Parker's account of the more remote and less obviously spiritual correspondences between Locke and Sterne, Parnell's positive and constructive appraisal of the surviving biographical evidence offers a way of exploring their relationship that the limited perspective of the Florida annotations has inevitably failed to provide.

\*\*\* Similarly welcome has been the first attempt by a professional historian of early modern intellectual culture to engage in a discussion that had previously been the preserve of scholars and critics with exclusively literary credentials. As a specialist in seventeenth-century natural and experimental philosophy whose primary interests are in Robert Boyle and

6. Fred Parker, *Scepticism and Literature: An Essay on Pope, Hume, Sterne, and Johnson* (OUP, 2003), 54 and 84.

7. *Ibid.*, 217–18. For a different interpretation of similar themes, see Christina Lupton, 'Tristram Shandy, David Hume and Epistemological Fiction', *Philosophy and Literature*, 27 (2003), 98–115.

8. Tim Parnell, 'Laurence Sterne and the Problem of Belief (I)', *The Shandean*, 17 (2006), 121–139 (135).

9. Tim Parnell, 'Laurence Sterne and the Problem of Belief (II)', *The Shandean*, 19 (2008), 9–26 (9 and 22–3).

Locke, Peter Anstey has brought to the topic a different set of aptitudes and expectations than those with which scholars of eighteenth-century fiction are typically, and at times restrictively, equipped. In an article that appeared in 2009, Anstey argued that '*Tristram Shandy* is an experimental history of Tristram in the tradition of Locke that extends through to the middle decades of the eighteenth century', and maintained that 'a crucial component in that experimental history tradition is the doctrine of the association of ideas'.<sup>1</sup> Observing that among Locke's most significant innovations was his application to moral philosophy of the experimental and natural historical methods of his colleagues in the Royal Society of London, Anstey suggested that 'Sterne would have regarded Locke's *Essay* as a history of the understanding in the sense of it being a sustained and comprehensive gathering of facts and observations about the functions of the understanding', before further arguing that Walter's and Toby's associations 'are as pathological as those of Locke and bear almost no resemblance to those of Hartley and Hume'. Having done so, Anstey qualified his thesis in two interpretatively important ways. In the first place, *Tristram Shandy* 'is an experimental history of Tristram the narrator and not the unnamed homunculus, nor the infant, nor the son of Walter and Elizabeth Shandy'. In the second, it is also 'much else besides'.<sup>2</sup> \* \* \*

\* \* \* Although a number of further attempts have been made since 2009 to establish and describe the intellectual affinities that undoubtedly appear to exist between Locke and Sterne, few of them match the level of authenticity that the approaches of Parker, Parnell, and Anstey have brought to the ongoing debate.<sup>3</sup> If new interpretations of the influence of Locke on Sterne remain, even now, to be advanced, these three studies comprise essential sites of research from which critics with an interest in further developing the problem might begin.

1. Peter R. Anstey, 'The Experimental History of the Understanding from Locke to Sterne', *Eighteenth-Century Thought*, 4 (2009), 143–69 (144).
2. *Ibid.*, 156 and 167.
3. See Judith Hawley, 'Tristram Shandy, learned wit, and Enlightenment knowledge', in Thomas Keymer (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Laurence Sterne* (CUP, 2009), 34–48, Darrell Jones, 'Difference and Representation in Locke and Sterne', *The Shandean*, 21 (2010), 84–102, Heather Keenleyside, 'The First-Person Form of Life: Locke, Sterne, and the Autobiographical Animal', *Critical Inquiry*, 39 (2012), 116–41, Melanie D. Holm, 'Laughter, Skepticism, and the Pleasures of Being Misunderstood in Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*', *The Eighteenth Century*, 55 (2014), 355–75, and Thomas Keymer, 'Small Particles of Fame: Subjectivity, Celebrity, Sterne', in Melvyn New, Peter de Voogd, and Judith Hawley (eds.), *Sterne, Tristram, Yorick: Tercentenary Essays on Laurence Sterne* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), 3–24.