

Labyrinth of Digressions



TRISTRAM SHANDY AS
PERCEIVED AND INFLUENCED
BY STERNE'S EARLY IMITATORS

RENÉ BOSCH

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Tristram Shandy as
Perceived and Influenced by
Sterne's Early Imitators

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René Bosch

Authorized translation by Piet Verhoeff



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For Susanne, who can laugh and cry at the same time,
and for our sons Tobias and Amos.

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Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this book appeared in Dutch in the Autumn of 1998. Although at that time some chapters had already been written in English, personal circumstances forced me to finish the book in a hurry, which made me decide to take the easy option of expressing myself in my mother tongue. I intended to create an English edition soon afterwards, but when financial support was unexpectedly withdrawn, that plan soon became less realistic. New uncertainties and challenges came in the way.

In the years that followed I might have lost faith in the project altogether, if it had not been for Piet Verhoeff. Not only did Piet volunteer to translate the book and assist me with the English of the parts that had to be rewritten, but he expressed his confidence in the relevance of this study for English literary history and the history of Ideas, pressed me to take the criticism of editors seriously and never forsook his side of what I have come to think of as a warm friendship. In a way, this is Piet's book as much as it is mine.

The comments of an anonymous referee contacted by the University of Delaware Press also helped to make a difference. Whoever this knowledgeable reader may have been, I hope that the person concerned will read this new version, find that it has profited by the fair criticism then given, and accept my thanks.

During the research phase in the middle of the 1990s, several colleagues contributed by sending me material or giving me information on the whereabouts of sources. To the names already mentioned in the Dutch edition (Anne Bandry, Jelle Bosma, David Brewer, Geoff Day, Rudolf Dekker, Madeleine Descargues, Paul Franssen, Tom Keymer, Annemieke Meijer, Melvyn New, Tim Parnell, the late Roy Porter, Titia Ram and Peter de Voogd) that of Mary Newbould can now be added. As my latest Sterne contact in Cambridge, she gave her generous assistance by sending me new and better reproductions of materials from the Oates collection.

Thinking of Cambridge, happy memories arise of Paul and Fiona Cornish and their children. Probably, working in the rare books room of Cambridge University Library would not have been half as pleasant without their hospitality and friendliness during the intervals.

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Overveen, July 2007

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A Note on References

References to Sterne-imitations

Because so many primary sources referred to were published anonymously, an alphabetic list of all books and pamphlets would include a long section in which books would be listed under the “Anon” tag. That part of the reference list would naturally become a checklist of Sterne imitations and commentaries, but it would also be incomplete, because a number of Shandean books and pamphlets have been published under the names of their authors. Therefore I have chosen to select imitations, parodies and commentaries by year of appearance, thus creating a chronological survey of Sterne-related materials, alphabetizing authors’ names and titles by year only. This list appears as the second section of the Bibliography.

The use of a chronological list makes it necessary to repeat the years of appearance of books and pamphlets more often than the promotion of historical awareness would require. In a few cases where the year of appearance could not be determined, a reasoned guess is made.

References to Sterne’s works

Tristram Shandy is referred to in the style of *The Shandean*, here somewhat adjusted by citing the short title instead of a simple *TS* and by using roman numbers for the volumes. The second number indicates the chapter, while the final number refers to the page in the *Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*. One obvious reason for not restricting myself to page numbers only, is that the Florida Edition, although flawless and authoritative, will not be readily available to many of my readers. With the chapter indicated, readers will be able to find a citation in whatever edition they happen to own.

It may also be useful to mention that the volumes with Notes within the Florida Edition were published (and can be obtained) as books in their own right. They are referred to as such. The editions of Laurence Sterne’s works used here are mentioned in first section of the Bibliography.

Introduction

While relatively many documents have been left that may help us to reconstruct the most important events, ideas, desires and decisions in the life of Laurence Sterne, the man remains a greater mystery than other eighteenth-century vicars. The main reason for this is that he wrote *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. This highly confusing novel-like book is like a Rorschach testplate, on which every individual and every age projects its own motives. With the ever-changing interpretations of *Tristram Shandy* the image of Sterne changes as well. Besides this general complicating factor, there is the more specific fact that *Tristram Shandy* is full of grotesque and sexually tainted humour. It remains difficult to reconcile the cultural taste which speaks from this with the idea of Sterne that we find in many biographical surveys, of a serious and emotionally involved vicar – from whatever side one wishes to look at it. Contemporaries wrestled with this seeming paradox, as much as some modern literary historians and biographers do.

While my intention in the present work is not to offer a new and competing interpretation of the works and life of Sterne, it does build on the assumption that some of the artistic decisions of the author may be explained from biographical and historical facts. By having a new and broader look at the earliest reception, I hope to shed new light on some passages and a few general traits of *Tristram Shandy*, without committing myself to any one overall historically founded interpretation. *Tristram Shandy* was an open project, that grew and changed with Sterne's life. From 1759 on, the reception of the instalments of this major book and of his published sermons made up an important part of that life and it appears to have been even more important to these works themselves than some later articles have assumed.

For the very reason that ideas about Sterne and interpretations of *Tristram Shandy* appear to betray the concerns of readers rather than of the author, a history of the reception almost naturally acquires traits of a general cultural history. Therefore, an overview of the subtle changes in the attention for certain specific passages in the works of Sterne, will be of interest to social historians and historians of ideas. Besides, in order to consciously weigh and understand the reactions of Sterne's earliest audience (of those readers who may have influenced his work) it may be important also to understand the reactions of the following generations.

The contrast may sharpen our view and make us once more aware of the many possibilities that *Tristram Shandy* offers – and offered Sterne’s contemporaries and near-contemporaries.

Howes’ study

Studies of the earliest reception of *Tristram Shandy* are conspicuously scarce when compared with the number of philosophical discussions and textual analyses of Sterne’s work. The biographies, of which that in two parts by Arthur Cash (1975 and 1986) is the most comprehensive, are indispensable for an understanding of Sterne’s intellectual background, and all deal briefly with the reactions to his work by the public, but refer mainly to private documents, leaving many questions unanswered. For an understanding of the earliest reception of *Tristram Shandy*, the *Sermons* and *A Sentimental Journey* we still have to depend on the first part of Alan B. Howes’ *Yorick and the Critics: Sterne’s Reputation in England, 1760-1868*, a study from 1958, or possibly on Howes’ selection from the texts used for that book in *The Critical Heritage* series from 1974. The present study can be read first of all as a complement to Howes’ pioneering work. Although Howes carried out thorough and essential research, his study has by now unavoidably become dated, for several reasons.

In his implicit critical interpretation of *Tristram Shandy* especially, Howes shows himself to be a child of his time. With many other Sternologists of the 1950s and 1960s, he considered Sterne to be an essentially serious philosophical writer, whose main theme was individual man being thrown back on his own resources. Reflecting on Locke’s thoughts about the linguistic origin of human knowledge and the simultaneous shortcomings of language as a means of communication and organization, Sterne had acquired a modern, “solipsistic view of the universe”.¹ Partly inspired by Shaftesbury, Hume and Hutcheson, partly relying on his own strength, he had then immediately also indicated the ways out of the existential impasse: at an anecdotal level – through the affective solidarity of the principal male characters – *Tristram Shandy* showed the possibilities of non-linguistic, sympathetic communication; at a stylistic level – through the unpredictable turns of his wild imagination, his baroque word-craft – it demonstrated the psychological meaning of truly subjective literary expression.

¹ Joan Joffe Hall, “The Hobbyhorsical World of *Tristram Shandy*”, *MLQ*, 24 (1963), 139.

Though Howes tried to look at the comments by Sterne's early readers impartially, his description is coloured by this existentialist interest in Sterne. To give only one example, Howes shows himself clearly puzzled by the fact that *Tristram Shandy*, from the publication of the first two volumes in London in 1760, was an unequalled financial success, whereas there is no indication that during Sterne's lifetime the philosophical depths of the book were fathomed. The very special construction of Sterne's work of fiction was commented on by his contemporaries, it is true, and sometimes admired (by the poet Charles Churchill, for instance²), but according to Howes it was not well enough understood, since nobody saw the connection with Locke's insight in the subjective experience of time. Eighteenth-century readers "did not understand this part of the plan of *Tristram Shandy*".³

Even if, in the end, it should appear that I have not been able to avoid interpretation-laden anachronisms, the fact that since the appearance of Howes' study so many more new interpretative possibilities have emerged has at least induced me to select other passages from eighteenth-century commentaries on *Tristram Shandy* than Howes did. There is, however, another important difference: for the greater part I have used sources that were either not known to Howes or he did not think worth reading.

The sources

The rise of Sterne was a phenomenon within the eighteenth-century booksellers' world. Sterne managed to secure the high price of 450 pounds for the copyright of the first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, which were subsequently reprinted six times during his lifetime.⁴ With

² The "wild excursions" passage in the third book of *The Ghost* (ll. 967-78) is about Sterne. See, among others, David Thomson, *Wild Excursions; The Life and Fiction of Laurence Sterne*, New York, 1972, v.; and *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Alan B. Howes, London, 1974, 152.

³ Alan B. Howes, *Yorick and the Critics: Sterne's Reputation in England, 1760-1868*, New Haven, 1958, 36.

⁴ Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, London, 1986, 9; Howes, *Yorick and the Critics*, n.3. Terry Belanger ("Publishers and Writers in Eighteenth-Century England", in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers, New York, 1982, 17) remarks that "Copyrights worth in excess of £ 400 were substantial properties, far above the average for the period". There was a rumour that Sterne had received as much as 600 pounds: "Ye ladies so fair, / And beaus debonair, / Do all in your power that can be, / The author to shame, / And publisher blame, / That gave him six hundred for *Shandy*" was a rhyme made by a (pseudo-)critic in *The Gentleman's*

the London edition of *Tristram Shandy* I and II and the following publication of the first two volumes of *The Sermons of Mr Yorick*, he became, in the early spring of 1760, an instant celebrity.

All over Europe since the Renaissance, and even before that, booksellers and professional writers reacted to this kind of commercial hype by putting imitations of, or spurious supplements to, the work of successful authors on the market. It happened to, among others, Rabelais, who revised anonymous supplements to *Gargantua and Pantagruel* himself and included them in his *oeuvre*, and to Cervantes, who in part two of *Don Quixote* warns against spurious continuations of the first part.⁵ In eighteenth-century England, with its exploding commercial press, the practice was quite common. There are several contemporary imitations of Fielding's novels, some with his name on the title page. In addition, there was a lively pamphlet culture. Small booksellers, the "hedge publishers", responding to what was fashionable, had quill-drivers give their opinion on society gossip, political events and new successful publications. What was said seems often to have been less important than the fact that something was said.⁶

That the hacks should jump on *Tristram Shandy* as well was to be expected. What nobody could have foreseen, however, was the scale on which it happened. On 23 April 1760, the first item for Sterne fans appeared, *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, wherein the Morals and Politics of this Piece are Clearly laid Open*, the work of someone posing as "Jeremiah Kunastrokius". More commentaries – most of them apparently critical – followed soon after. In addition, several books were published in which the title pages suggest that they were written by Sterne, besides numerous imitations whose titles express a connection with *Tristram Shandy*. Moreover, there were authors who, because Sterne published his work in instalments, saw a golden opportunity to score off the writer with spurious continuations. Of these, *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, from 1760, was presented as the work of an imitator ("by the author of Yorick's Meditations"), but *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*,

Magazine, 30 ("Tristram Shandy"; May 1760).

⁵ Joseph A. Dane, *Parody: Critical Concepts versus Literary Practices, Aristophanes to Sterne*, Norman: OK and London, 1988, 88.

⁶ Cf. Pat Rogers, *The Context of English Literature: The Eighteenth Century*, New York, 1978, 20-21.

Gentleman, Vol. III was a fraud.⁷ In 1766, a year after the publication of the fourth instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, with volumes VII and VIII, a spurious *Vol. IX* was put on the market and after Sterne's death the falsification continued with, among others, new instalments of the unfinished *Sentimental Journey*.

It may be noted that a few of these works have been ascribed to Sterne at some point. In 1770, a clever collection of mixed fragments, in fact the work of the hack writer Richard Griffith, under the title of *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*, was accepted as genuine, and has since been included in a number of editions of the collected works of Laurence Sterne, along with a spurious continuation of *A Sentimental Journey*. Some foreign publishers of *Tristram Shandy* have accidentally used the spurious *Vol. IX* for their editions.

Some well-known imitations, commentaries and spurious works are listed below; for a full chronological survey of Sterneana, I refer to sections 2 and 5 of the bibliography.

Usually, nothing is known about the writers of these and similar Shandean publications. They are anonymous texts, whose authors often pose as hack writers, thereby cynically affirming neoclassical assumptions about this trade.⁸ Sterne himself and the reviewers who signalled the imitations of his work, spoke of the products of "scribblers" or "hacks". It is possible that here or there, a gentleman amused himself by writing a Sterne imitation, but in general, at any rate in the 1760s, we appear to be dealing with predominantly commercial motives. Obviously, classicist and early modern prejudices about commercial writing are not ours anymore and to some readers may even feel unjust. Nevertheless, in order to keep the cultural background in scope, I have

⁷ The spurious *Vol. III* was attributed by Nichols to John Carr, a schoolteacher who was to achieve fame with his translation of Lucian (John Nichols, *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1812, III, 168n), but Bandry does not think the attribution is reliable (Anne Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations en Angleterre au XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, 1991, 428; and "The Publication of the Spurious Volumes of 'Tristram Shandy'", *The Shandean*, 3 [1991], 132.)

⁸ For eighteenth-century hackwriting as a subcultural phenomenon and the augustan imagery surrounding it, see especially Pat Rogers, *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture*, London, 1972; *The Context of English Literature*, 20-24; *Hacks and Dunces: Pope, Swift and Grub Street*, London and New York, 1980; *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England*, Brighton and Totowa: NJ, 1985.

chosen to use the term “hack” throughout and without inverted commas.⁹ I hope it will be clear that I want to refer to a certain social and cultural position, not to dispute literary qualities beforehand.

The publishers/booksellers concerned often had a brief existence. Their lists, as far as we are able to ascertain, suggest a specialization in popular culture. E. Cabe, the publisher of three *Sterneana*, put a number of books about criminals and accounts of executions on the market, and in addition published slanderous pamphlets.¹⁰ R. Stevens, “at Pope’s Head in Pater-Noster Row”, was in business for only two years, and in that time he printed, apart from *Miss Sukey Shandy* and *Yorick’s Meditations* (both from 1760), sermons and a few pamphlets on the Byng controversy.¹¹ J. Hinxman, also from Pater-Noster Road, was one Jane Hinxman, who in 1764 abandoned the profession, presenting in that year remainders and copyrights of picaresque novels and travelogues for auction.¹² The rights of *Christopher Wagstaff* (1762) Hinxman seems to have sold off earlier, for a second edition of that book was published in 1763 by the little-known firm of “Hawes, Clark and Collins”.¹³ The name of bookseller J. Burd is linked up with *The Clockmakers Outcry* (1760) and a series of political satires from the years 1758-1769, all of them from the circle of Wilkes and Churchill. L. Tomlinson was in business for a year, in order to publish *Veni, Vidi, Vici, Ivi* (1768) and a work with the promising title *The Comical Tricks of Jack the Piper*. Sta-

⁹ A native speaker, and knowledgeable reader of the manuscript of the present book, has objected against this choice, expressing his feelings about the matter as follows: “I would have referred to it a couple of times early on and thereafter disowned it as an inappropriate snobbish and socially discriminating term. In general I am not in favour of extended political correctness, but in this case I’m inclined to think that calling certain writers in the eighteenth century ‘hacks’ was rather like talking about ‘niggers’ in the twentieth.”

¹⁰ *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers who were at work in England, Scotland and Ireland from 1726 to 1775*, eds H.R. Plomer, G.H. Bushnell and E.R. McC Dix, Oxford, 1932, 41; The ESTC mentions such publications by Cabe as the criminal records *The Reward of Murder* (1751), *The Prisoner, by a Lady in confinement* (1758), *Memoirs of the Pillory* (1759) and *The Affecting Case of the Unfortunate Thomas Daniels* (1761). He also published a spurious continuation of Charles Churchill’s *The Prophecy of Famine* (*The Prophecy of Famine; a Scots pastoral, Part the Second*, 1763).

¹¹ Plomer et al., *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers*, 237.

¹² *A Catalogue of Books in Quires and Copies, the Property of Mrs. Hinxman, leaving off trade, which will be sold by auction, to the booksellers of London and Westminster, on Thursday, April 26, 1764.*

¹³ Plomer et al., *A Dictionary of the Printers and Booksellers*, 57.

Some well-known imitations and other reactions

Critical and quasi-critical commentaries

- *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, wherein the Morals and Politics of this Piece are Clearly laid Open* (1760)
 - *The Clockmakers Outcry against the Author of The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760)
 - *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher in the Country, to Laurence Sterne, M.A. Prebendary of ork* (1760)
 - *A Funeral Discourse, Occasioned by the Much lamented Death of Mr. Yorick* (1761)
 - *An Admonitory Letter to the Rev. Mr. S----* (1761)
 - *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick* (1768)
 - *Veni, Vidi, Vici, Ivi* (1768)
-

Works “by Sterne”

- *Tristram Shandy’s Bon Mots, Repartees, Odd Adventures, and Humorous Stories* (1760)
 - *Yorick’s Meditations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects* (1760)
 - *The Cream of the Jest* (1760)
 - *Tristram Shandy’s Description of General Elections, and Septennial Parliaments* (1762)
 - *Yorick’s compleat Jests* (1761)
 - *Yorick turned Trimmer* (1762)
 - *Miss C———y’s Cabinet of Curiosities* (1765)
 - *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased* (1770)
 - *Letters supposed to have been written by Yorick and Eliza* (1779)
 - *Original Letters of the Late Reverend Mr. Laurence Sterne* (1788)
-

“Life and Opinions ...”

- *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius* (1760)
 - *The Life and Opinions of Miss Sukey Shandy* (1760)
 - *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet* (1761)
 - *The Life and Opinions of an Actor* (1762)
 - *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius* (1762)
 - *The Life, Travels, and Adventures of Christopher Wagstaff, Gentleman, Grandfather to Tristram Shandy* (1762)
-

Spurious continuations

- *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760)
 - *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, Vol. III* (1760)
 - *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, Vol. IX* (1766)
 - *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued* (1769)
 - *New Sentimental Journey* (1787)
-

ples Steare, publisher of *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick* in 1768, published a series of pamphlets for and against Wilkes in the same year. The lists of the other sellers of Sterne imitations are more or less identical, in the sense that none of them had an author of any reputation in their service.

While every year dozens of articles and books about Sterne appear, so far hardly any attention has been paid to the eighteenth-century imitations and spurious continuations of his work. Howes and the biographers mention the existence of numerous pamphlets and books in the wake of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, but save themselves a great deal of work by adding that these are not worth reading.¹⁴ J.C.T. Oates, a collector of Sterne-related historical material, once published an article on his collection, but he likewise informs us that the books and pamphlets are at best interesting as proof of the existence of a Sterne cult in the second half of the eighteenth century: "I do not pretend that these books are of any importance in themselves; many of them are, indeed, the rubbish of literature."¹⁵

Even Anne Bandry, the only scholar to have made a thorough study of a number of early imitations and reactions to *Tristram Shandy*, sometimes comments denigratingly on her source material.¹⁶ This is the more remarkable because she also finds that some imitations are not inferior to the original stylistically. Her stylo-statistical computer analysis of the anonymous ninth volume, for instance, shows that this spurious continuation approaches the average use of standard terms in *Tristram Shandy* closely, and at the same time has a greater lexical richness than any individual volume written by Sterne.¹⁷

It is significant that, when the lexical and constructive qualities of an imitation are particularly high, this should lead Bandry to suggest that Sterne himself must have been the author. In her dissertation and in the postscript to the critical edition of *The Clockmakers Outcry* she includes this pamphlet in the Sterne canon. I realize that Sterne was rake enough to have an anonymous pamphlet against himself printed,¹⁸ but at the

¹⁴ Wilbur R. Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, New Haven, 1925, I, 207-13; Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 33-37; Howes, *Yorick and the Critics*, Chapter 1, *passim*.

¹⁵ J.C.T. Oates, *Shandyism and Sentiment, 1760-1800*, Cambridge, 1968, 4.

¹⁶ Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 244.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 473-500.

¹⁸ In April 1762 Sterne informed Garrick that he and Crébillon intended to write a

same time I do not suppose that he was the only one who could produce Shandean sounds. I believe *The Clockmakers Outcry* was the work of more than one person. The authors, referred to hereafter as “the Clockmakers”, came from the circle of Wilkes and Churchill, and among them was an acquaintance of Sterne.

I am not saying all this to belittle Bandry’s painstaking and interesting research. Highly relevant for the present study is Bandry’s conclusion that Sterne not only knew that there were publications for him, against him and in his name, but that he must actually have read some of the imitations himself. Bandry points at three phrases and ideas that appeared earlier in the imitations than in the original work.¹⁹ In the present work, a few instances will be added to those adduced by Bandry. All the same, the central problem of Bandry’s investigation, namely what influence did the imitations selected by her have on the original, yielded disappointingly few results. The imitators used many more terms and phrases of Sterne’s than the other way round.²⁰

For all that, Bandry is certainly right in still maintaining that *Tristram Shandy* and the imitations were linked up. Sterne’s relationship with his direct followers was, as I hope to make even clearer, an ambiguous one. When *Explanatory Remarks* came out, he wrote from London to his friend Stephen Croft, “— There is a shilling pamphlet wrote against Tristram.— I wish they would write a hundred such.”²¹ According as this casual wish threatened to be fulfilled, Sterne’s enthusiasm turned into irritation. The appearance of the spurious *Vol. III* forced Sterne and his publishers to insert advertisements in the papers, in which the deceit was denounced. From 1761, Sterne, as a precaution, signed all separate copies of his books.²²

A notion to which I will revert in the course of this book is that the

pamphlet against each other’s works: “Crebellion against Sterne—— Sterne against Crebellion —— the copy to be sold, and the money equally devided—— This is good Swiss-policy” (*Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis, Oxford, 1935, 162).

¹⁹ Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 71, 80, 135.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, *passim*, esp. 240-45.

²¹ *Letters*, 107. It is not certain, incidentally, that the reference in this letter from early May is to *Explanatory Remarks* (as Curtis assumes, *Letters*, 108n). Sterne mentions a pamphlet written against him – perhaps he is referring to the imminent publication of *The Clockmakers Outcry*.

²² Kenneth Monkman, “The Bibliography of the Early Editions of Tristram Shandy”, *The Library*, 5th series, 25 (1970), 26. Volumes V and VI, the former with signature, appeared in December 1761. The booksellers advertised in *The London Chronicle*, 21 December 1761, with the announcement that “Every book is signed by the Author”.

influence of the imitations should be understood to be negative in the sense that certain possibilities for the continuation of *Tristram Shandy* were cut off by the imitators. *Tristram Shandy* was to be a witty, original work – the work of Sterne and nobody else. Sterne’s ideal was also, to write a paradoxical book, a book with “more handles than one”, as he put it in a famous letter.²³ The hack writers formulated or expressed indirectly ideas about the ideology or dominant trend that made *Tristram Shandy* an interesting book that sold well. What I hope to show is that Sterne gradually tried to frustrate those ideas. It has often been said that towards the end, *Tristram Shandy* becomes richer in pathetic passages and narratives, and that the clear satire of the first few instalments is lacking in the later volumes; and it has been suggested that Sterne, by doing this, followed the advice given by the most authoritative reviewers, those of the *Monthly Review*.²⁴ But that seems to be an inadequate explanation. The *Monthly* reviewers loved pathetic stories, and thought that Sterne excelled in them, but they never objected against satire in general. My claim is that the imitations and spurious continuations gave Sterne the impression that the public looked over-critically at the satirical aspects of his work, and that therefore he could safely give the sentimental aspects more emphasis, or even that, by way of compensation, he had to do so. The genesis of *Tristram Shandy* can then, in Bourdieu’s terms, be understood as a process within a socio-cultural area of tension. Sterne was influenced from two sides, by the hacks and by the reviewers, and he tried to preserve his autonomy towards both.²⁵

Finally, I hope that some of my interpretive comments on *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* will not be understood as definitive statements, overruling other options. From an epistemological point of view, taking the imitations as a guideline easily leads to tautological reasonings. The imitations naturally influence the interpretation of *Tristram Shandy*. All imitations point to aspects that are present in the

²³ Letter to John Eustace, *Letters*, 411.

²⁴ William Park, “Change in the Criticism of the Novel after 1760”, *Philological Quarterly*, 46 (1967), 37-38; and “*Tristram Shandy* and the New Novel of Sensibility”, *Studies in the Novel*, 6 (1974), 268-79; Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life*, Oxford, 2002, 318-19.

²⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, *Zur Soziologie der symbolischen Formen*, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, 75-102. Bourdieu’s term, in Fietkau’s translation, is “intellektuelles Kräftefeld”. What is meant is the complex of professional readers in respect to whom the author tries to preserve his autonomy, but who consequently influence his work.

original, and sometimes both early and late imitations bring up new aspects from below the surface of the *texte antérieur*. But then, my reading of these newly discovered or revisited source materials will have been influenced by *a priori* assumptions about the age, meaning and importance of *Tristram Shandy* and even by personal motives unknown or only vaguely known to me.

Once it has been admitted that writing history works that way, there should be no reason to abandon the attempt at an historically founded interpretation of Sterne's works. Used as signs of historical change and as implicit carriers of textual analysis, the direct imitations can enrich our understanding of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, in a literary or in a scientific way. To put it negatively, I do not believe the possibilities of interpretation to be so numerous that a reading of historical contexts makes no sense at all.²⁶

²⁶ The opinion of Wolfgang Iser ("Der Lesevorgang, eine phänomenologische Perspektive", in *Rezeptionsästhetik: Theorie und Praxis*, ed. Rainer Warning, Munich, 1971, 254; and Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy"; *Inszenierte Subjektivität*, Munich, 1987, 60).

PART ONE

POSITIVE EXPECTATIONS

Chapter One

Tristram in Grub Street

From as early as 1969, American literary historian Melvyn New has propagated the view that *Tristram Shandy* can best be understood as a satire in the tradition of the Scriblerians.¹ In support, New refers to internal evidence and statements by Sterne himself, but strangely enough, hardly to appraisals by Sterne's contemporaries. This is remarkable because, even superficially, it is evident how much attention was paid by early readers to the satirical and educative aspects of Sterne's work. Alan Howes, for instance, *en passant* quotes a large number of comments that could corroborate New's position from the point of view of historical reception: eighteenth-century readers found in *Tristram Shandy* "much good satire on the follies of life", "poignant ridicule, and marks of taste and erudition", "latent lessons of virtue and morality", and "satire [which] is spirited, poignant, and often extremely just".² The reviewers recognized in *Tristram Shandy* a good universal satire – perhaps too chaotically mixed up with unnecessary obscenities and unexpectedly moving passages, but in any case a work that denounces error and vice. "Mr Sterne doubtless possesses in the highest degree the art of ridiculing the ruling passions, or hobby horses, as well as the vices and follies of mankind. No man is equal to him in the *ridentem dicere verum*", as an anonymous writer in the *Imperial Magazine* put it.³ *Tristram Shandy* is placed beside satires from antiquity and the Augustans, and Sterne was hailed as a direct successor of Swift. This happened most frequently when only a few volumes of *Tristram Shandy* had been published, but until well into the nineteenth century, the relation

¹ Melvyn New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of Tristram Shandy*, Gainesville: Fl., 1969; "Sterne and Swift, Sermons and Satire", *Modern Language Quarterly*, 30 (1969), 198-211; "Sterne as Editor: The 'Abuses of Conscience' Sermon", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 8 (1979), 243-51; "Swift and Sterne: Two Tales, Several Sermons, and a Relationship Revisited", in *Critical Essays on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Frank Palmeri, New York, 1993.

² Howes, *Yorick and the Critics*, citations from *Critical Review*, XIII (Jan. 1762), 66, and XI (April 1761), 315; *London Magazine*, XXIX (Sep. 1760), 496; Edmund Burke in *The Annual Register*, III (1760), 247.

³ Howes, *Yorick and the Critics*, 23.

was taken for granted.

The question as to why New preferred not to make use of this historical evidence is hard to answer, and is perhaps of secondary importance. Maybe he did not wish to stray too far from Sterne's own ideas about his readers and reviewers, to the effect that *Tristram Shandy* was read and valued for the wrong reasons. New seems to be referring to this in particular when he concludes that Sterne, in writing his most important work, was wrestling with "the difficulty of writing ironic satire in an unsatirical age".⁴ Another possibility is that New did not wish to deviate further from his colleagues in the field, for whom the opinions of earlier readers are uninteresting for other reasons: does not the notion that the great merits of *Tristram Shandy* are related to modern psychological and philosophical views make it impossible to believe that the book could really have been understood in its own time? Whenever in that context the relation between Sterne and Swift was brought up, it was invariably done in terms of contrast: Swift's work was said to bespeak cynicism, conservatism, mysanthropy and even schizophrenia, Sterne's irony, progressiveness, humaneness and mental sanity.⁵

This view, predominant in the field of English literature until the 1980s was, naturally, in conformity with the general ideas about the cultural-historical developments in the eighteenth century, within which Swift and Sterne would each acquire iconic status. Although there was a strong resemblance between them, the one belonged to the era of satire, the other to that of Sensibility, and this made a most essential difference.

From the late 1980s, the stereotyped, obfuscating concentration on great stories in English cultural and literary history, has come in for criticism, renewed attention being created for more text-immanent approaches. At first, this seems to have resulted especially in a renewed appreciation of Swift, in whose satires a greater light-heartedness and more philosophic-subversive elements were recognized. Swift's great merit is now found to lie in the parody and clever mixture of the new literary and scientific genres that grew up in the second half of the

⁴ New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist*, 151.

⁵ The annotated tape recordings of a seminar on "Sterne and Swift" at the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference are especially illuminating (*The Winged Skull: Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference at the University of York*, eds Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond, Kent: OH, 1971, 76-93). See also Malcolm Bradbury, "The Comic Novel in Sterne and Fielding", in the same volume, 131; Max Byrd, *Tristram Shandy*, London, 1988, 44-45. For criticism, see Melvyn New, "Swift as Ogre, Richardson as Dolt: Recusing Sterne from the Eighteenth Century", *The Shandean*, 3 (1991), 49-60.

seventeenth century. In itself, if we discount all thought of Swift's conservative cultural policy, this urge to write parodies betrays a great fascination with modern developments. In that light, the impression we are left with of *A Tale of a Tub* seems more like that of *Tristram Shandy*, in the sense that both works stem from an ironizing espousal of modernity.

With this new understanding, the eighteenth-century relationship between Swift and Sterne might acquire a renewed interest, but in reception studies, this change in orientation has received hardly any attention. A more recent discussion, in which J.T. Parnell participated, centred on the problem of whether contemporaries were not simply thinking of Swift because they also thought of Sterne as a conservative writer, a view that most Sternologists still dismiss with a shrug, and which even New cannot wholeheartedly accept.⁶

The main impression we are left with from all this is that we still do not have sufficient insight into what, around 1760, was considered so Swiftesque about Sterne. Possibly, eighteenth-century readers had a different understanding of the relationship between Swift and Sterne from that assumed on the basis of twentieth-century research.

Yorick's Meditations

If there is one text that can help us further on this point, it is the satire *Yorick's Meditations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects*, a booklet of a good 110 pages from the summer of 1760, the work of the anonymous writer who was to publish, a few months later, *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* as well. Neither work is incongruous with the other imitative reactions from this, the first Tristram year, but both are more outspoken about the connection with the inheritance of the Scriblerians. Part of *Yorick's Meditations* could even have been written as an imitation of Swift, without any prompting from Sterne, although the title and the numerous references in the introduction and elsewhere underscore the topicality of the pamphlet, and the Swiftian aspects are decidedly not isolated.

The "Yorick" talking here – we should identify him with Sterne,

⁶J.T. Parnell, "Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994), 221-42; "Sterne and Kundera: The Novel of Variations and the 'Noisy Foolishness of Human Certainty'", in *Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism*, eds David Pierce and Peter de Voogd, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1996, 147-56.

although we sometimes hear the voice of the pulp writer behind the book – via trivial associations chattily links a large number of disparate subjects together. And, just like the Tristram persona and the hack of *A Tale of a Tub*, “Yorick” appears slightly worried about the looseness of the structure his work may acquire. Further along the line of these instances, he finally concludes that it is only in the domains of morality and justice that deviations from the straight and narrow path are dangerous. From an aesthetic point of view they are essential – and “Yorick” mentions which Swift text interested him (actually Sterne) in particular: “witness that admirable treatise of Dr Swift, entitled, A Tritical Essay, to which I have been indebted in all my writings.”⁷

A Tritical Essay upon the Faculties of the Mind is a short demonstration of meaningless, digressive subjectivity of the kind also displayed by Swift in *A Tale of a Tub*, to which this text is sometimes subjoined. Swift carries his readers along in a vehement tirade against philosophers who are never mentioned by name, without explaining what it is they have to say, and without giving any counter-arguments. He seems to want to say that philosophers should not aspire at unravelling nature – but his argument founders in a chaos of trivially linked quotations and statements. Within the space of five pages, the reader learns twice that the author resumes his argument after a digression without having been able to perceive that he had landed in one. In the end the author wonders quasi-modestly if he has done his subject justice, but the reader has not even the faintest notion of what that subject is.

An almost equally great chaos is found in *Yorick’s Meditations*, and we may assume that the author saw this as the most essential aspect of *Tristram Shandy*. Moreover, it is not simply a matter of form. With the associative, intriguing, but in the end especially confusing framework, the mentality of a specific type of author is at issue. The form is directly at odds with the content, and with this contrariety, “Yorick” is shown up as a conceited, untalented and especially muddle-headed poet-philosopher. He argues by association and without logic. It is the more surprising, then, that he should declare his solidarity with those who wish to preserve the aesthetic values of classical antiquity as their guide-line. He is lavish with his Greek and Latin quotations, suggesting that he knows that the classical authors achieved a higher perfection than any of those who have tried to emulate them since the Middle Ages. At the same time he proves to be a plebeian who has not

⁷ Anon., *Yorick’s Meditations on Various Interesting and Important Subjects*, London 1760, 64–65.

developed sufficient qualities of intellect and character to understand why this should be acclaimed by well-educated people with a good social background. The very motto on the title-page of *Yorick's Meditations* presents this double message very accurately. With the dictum "*Nec cum porticus aut me lectica excipit, desum mihi*", Horace is honoured, while at the same time it is suggested that it is not moral but pecuniary qualities that determine a man's value.

A Yorick who is bent on acquiring superficial glory and revenues is not a novel character in the series of pamphlets of the 1760s, but in *Yorick's Meditations* this personage is not introduced only to put the commercially-minded prebendary Laurence Sterne in an unfavourable light. That the author behind "Yorick" should cause us to hear the voice of a Grub-street pauper as well as the sounds of Sterne is of course most relevant here. The reader must get the impression that he is following the thoughts of the man who wrote the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, but is being introduced, at the same time, to the person who for financial reasons is posing as such. What we know about him is that he does not in the least resemble Laurence Sterne, that he is an alcoholic and moves in circles of artists living in rooms with broken windowpanes. It is not always clear where the change of persona takes place, but when, for instance, the "I" of the book interrupts his story to recommend his own booklet ("for the small price of two shilling!"), most readers will be inclined to think of this hack pamphleteer rather than of Sterne.⁸

Whether this voice of the destitute pen-pusher sounds like that of the real author, or is itself an enactment, is of little importance for the interpretation of *Yorick's Meditations*. Here, poverty, half-baked education, lack of self-knowledge, immoderate ambition, literary failure and madness are co-ordinated. The author may have done this out of an exalted disgust for the commercial press or out of some sort of self-depreciation. His pose is in this respect just as confusing as Swift's in his best moments, and the mood is almost necessarily conservative.

"Almost", for with its chaotic framework and confusing plurality of voices, *Yorick's Meditations* can quite easily be grouped with the category of texts that Michail Bakhtin called *Menippean satires* or "anti-literary parodies". A characteristic of such texts is that the satiric aims of the real author do not appear from the text itself, the content depending completely on the reader's advance knowledge or ideas about that author. Thus, the fixation of author's intentions in *A Tale of a Tub* is determined by texts

⁸ *Yorick's Meditations*, 60, 79, 35.

which Swift wrote, as Robert Phiddian puts it, “with his right hand”: non-ironic texts in defence of church and state such as *A Project for the Advancement of Religion* (1790), and *Letters to a Young Gentleman, lately entered into Holy Orders* (1720), and texts attacking the commercial press with a stable irony such as the *Bickerstaff-letters* (1711) and *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* (with Pope, 1727). Without these texts, *A Tale of a Tub* leaves room for many interpretations: the text is cynical or playful, Tory or Whig, depending on the degree to which the rise of the Moderns can amuse the reader.⁹

What is worth remembering, as Phiddian also remarks, is that practically all later readers of Swift know these texts and their accompanying reputation, and are therefore probably inclined to favour a conservative interpretation. It is precisely this context that the author of *Yorick's Meditations* seems to presuppose for the Swiftian echoes in *Tristram Shandy* – we note in passing that he does not seem to rely blindly on his readers' acumen. The plurality of voices and the references to both *A Tale of a Tub* and *Tristram Shandy* are here and there as confusing as the books themselves, but in *Yorick's Meditations*, there are more resting-points in the form of camouflaged quotations that can put the intelligent reader on the track of moral intentions behind this whole series of books.

A nice illustration of this is provided by the digressive discussion of the phenomenon of digressions. Swift's original in *A Tale of a Tub* is, first of all, wittily paradoxical – a joke in the spirit of classical logic and aesthetics. Sterne uses it anew and in practically the same way as Swift: Tristram cheerfully observes that there is such a thing as digressive skill, filling another chapter with it. “Yorick”, finally, apparently without much innovation, joins in with his models – at any rate, we hear the same cheerful notes. Optimistic as ever, the book's “I” applauds the steady familiarization of the reading public with the new digressive way of writing: “The example being set, I hope to see the day when every new book shall be a labyrinth of digressions; from whence the reader shall vainly try to extricate himself, and wherein the authors shall heap digression on digression to the end of the chapter.”¹⁰ This time, however, the joke is less non-committal, for the initiated reader here recognizes an echo from *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*.

⁹ Robert Phiddian, *Swift's Parody*, Cambridge, 1995, 15-16. Cf. Dane, *Parody*, 8-13; M. Keith Booker, *Flann O'Brien, Bakhtin and Menippean Satire*, Syracuse: NY, 1995, 12-31; Anton Simons, *Het Groteske van de Taal: Over het Werk van Michail Bachtin*, Amsterdam, 1990, 114-15.

¹⁰ *Yorick's Meditations*, 59.

In that parodistic guide for the beginning hack, Pope and Swift mock the commercial press. With seemingly pure irony, they proclaim that prosperous readers have for some time not been sensitive to beautiful diction and clear phrasings – they want to be surprised by unexpected turns and to be puzzled by vagueness and enigmatic remarks. The work of the modern successful author should be, then, “like a Labyrinth, out of which no body can get you clear but himself”.¹¹

The implicit reference by “Yorick” to this conservative text by Swift and Pope supplies a context that is not immediately visible in *Tristram Shandy*. *The Art of Sinking in Poetry* can be read, together with *The Dunciad*, as a companion piece to Pope’s *Moral Essays* and *An Essay on Man* and *An Essay on Criticism*. The labyrinth metaphor here stands for the mental confusion that man without a classical education based on Aristotle will end up in. Those who were insufficiently educated in their younger years will be lacking in self-awareness. At one end, this may lead to a lack of character, a condition in which one has insufficient contact with one’s “ruling passion”, living in anxious backbonelessness; at the other extreme, it may lead a person to having a proud, dogmatic and antisocial character – the situation in which the “ruling passion” has degenerated into “the mind’s disease”.¹² In Pope this socio-psychological programme is immediately transformed into a literary theory. The poet who creates from a character pruned by reason, naturally cherishes the aesthetic norms of tradition and environment. Others go astray in two different directions. Possibly, the characterless artist dutifully imitates the forms he distills from his environment, with a result usually referred to by Pope as “dullness”.¹³ Or – the other possibility – the writer uninhibitedly commits his emotions to paper, under the mistaken assumption that they are of interest to other people as well. The attitude and the work of such writers, who “make themselves the measures of mankind”, can be reduced to the denominator “egotism”.¹⁴

It is not immediately clear whether the digressive technique of the narrator in *Tristram Shandy* can be associated with these ailments of modern writing. But Tristram’s subject matter and vocabulary in the first few

¹¹ Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift: *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, critical edition by Edna Leake Steeves, New York, 1968, 19.

¹² *An Essay on Man*, II, 136-44, in Alexander Pope, *Collected Poems*, ed. Bonamy Dobré, London, 1987. Cf. “drop into thyself, and be a fool!” (*An Essay on Man*, II, 30). The classical provenance of Pope’s psychology is evident; elements of it can be found in numerous other authors amongst the eighteenth-century elite.

¹³ Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, II, 289-99 and *The Dunciad*, *passim*.

¹⁴ Pope, *An Essay on Criticism*, II, 453.

volumes correspond with those of the *Moral Essays* (“When a man gives himself up to the government of a ruling passion ... farewell cool reason and fair discretion”¹⁵), and for the author of *Yorick’s Meditations* it was apparently only natural to regard Sterne’s confusing writings as Augustan satire on your arrogant plebeian. This becomes especially clear in the sequel with which the same author tried to score a few months later, *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, where the pseudo-Tristram imagines being snarled at by a jealous “Mr. Critick”: “Sir, ... let me tell you, you are a great *egotist*.”¹⁶

Another subject linked up with the labyrinthine form by *Yorick’s Meditations*, apparently through the connection with Swift’s satire, is that of religious aberration. It has often been observed that both Swift and Sterne in their sermons sketch a tripartite division within Christianity, with Catholics and Dissenters representing the extreme examples of slavish docility and arrogant conceitedness respectively, while Anglican Protestantism is said to occupy the least distorted middle position. It is not difficult to see here, once more, the Augustan outlook on character-building and classical virtue in the background: Catholic sensitivity to authority is a kind of religious “dullness”, dissent can be seen as a form of “egotism”, while Anglicans are in search of Aristotelian virtue. This scheme also underlies the anecdotic chapters of *A Tale of a Tub*, and Melvyn New has suggested that in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne wanted to introduce more or less the same religious positions, the difference being that the position of the dissenters in Swift’s days had by 1760 been taken up by Methodism.

Now, it is true that in *Tristram Shandy*, Catholicism is severely ridiculed, but Methodism is not – that movement is let off with the odd allusion, which, moreover, we do not come across before Volume IV, that is in the second instalment, which came out in 1761. *Yorick’s Meditations* confirms New’s idea, however, for in the middle of his defence of the modern digressive style of writing, “Yorick” – with all too transparent irony – praises the Methodist preachers: “Oh, happy methodists (though your sect derives its name from method), your discourses consist entirely of digressions, and those so unconnected, that at the end of the sermon ’tis impossible to tell what it turned upon.”¹⁷ Also the more obvious observation, that *Tristram Shandy* was at least partly a satire against

¹⁵ Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, eds Melvyn New and Joan New, Gainesville: FL, 1978, II.5.106

¹⁶ Anon., *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, London, 1760, 61.

¹⁷ *Yorick’s Meditations*, 66.

Catholicism, has been further worked out in *Yorick's Meditations*, a striking aspect being that the Roman Catholic mentality can indeed be seen as a kind of counterpart to that of Methodism. With the petty Protestants delving into their own minds and getting lost there, the Catholics refrain from any form of introspection in order to have befuddled priests tell them where they stand spiritually: "Yorick" concludes his meditation "upon Conscience" with the observation that in Roman Catholic countries, nobody feels called upon to study their own conscience, because they are expected to rely in all things on spiritual authorities, "directors", and one of these Catholic authorities appears to compare the bliss of the hereafter to a state of inebriety.¹⁸

Finally, a third aspect – besides that of the mentally immature narrator – brought out strongly in *Yorick's Meditations* but not in *Tristram Shandy*, is the relation between monstrosity and commerce. The hack's opportunism here leads more or less automatically to disorderliness, in the sense that he tries to provide something for everybody: meditations for readers with a philosophical interest ("Upon Nothing", "Upon the Monades of Leibnitz"), for students ("Upon Drunkenness"), for ladies ("Upon Midwives"), and so on. The original Tristram also caters for a miscellaneous audience ("Madam", "Mr Critic", "Mr Connoisseur"), but we do not immediately see that he is trying to increase his earnings that way. The commercial side of Sterne's undertaking, and the composition of his reading public are, as we shall see, subjects which many commentators and imitators of the 1760s felt at home with. *Yorick's Meditations* most emphatically harks back to the past, linking these subjects with Scriblerian satire against Grub-street.

The Clockmakers Outcry

In my Introduction, I referred to another book that highlights the relatedness of *Tristram Shandy* to Swift's satires, namely *The Clockmakers Outcry against the Author of the Life and Opinions of Trisram Shandy*, a pamphlet from the spring of 1760, that went through three reprints in a very short time. This work was very probably conceived within the circle of Sterne's friends, but in 1760, few readers will have known this; as far as we know, none of Sterne's contemporaries make mention of it.

The Swift-like character of this book is also to be found in the tangle of personae and loyalties and a large admixture of self-mockery, as a result of which it is hard to pin down exactly the tenor of the satire. The principal voice in the booklet seems, at first sight, to be a group of clockmakers who

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-101.

claim that Sterne has harmed them in the execution of their professional duties – at first without explaining in what way. Not until the end of the story does it become clear (what the reader, naturally, could already have surmised) that it is Tristram’s association of clocks with human procreation that is said to be harmful to their trade. Then it also turns out that this supposition is defended by a “zealous member” of the guild, and that it was this clockmaker who up to then had been the spokesman in the pamphlet.

These revelations are preceded by a detailed discussion of passages from the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy*. Here, the Clockmakers prove to be humourless, and therefore not very well-disposed, readers of Sterne’s book. This humourlessness, as well as the suggestion of a club remind us of some of Swift’s later satires – the *Bickerstaff* letters (1710) and *A Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation* (1738). With Swift’s Simon Wagstaff, for instance, the Clockmakers have in common their overly emphatic use of Latin clichés, with Mr Bickerstaff the tendency to extrapolate and to take literally. To give an example of the latter: Tristram’s open discussion of his begetting leads the Clockmakers to the conclusion that he must be a philosophical materialist. They then quote the passage about Yorick’s sentimental death, which is said to be at odds with this:

He shamefully keeps up a belief of what as a Christian clergyman, and what he plumes himself more for, a bold philosopher, he ought to discountenance; “Ten times a day has Yorick’s ghost the consolation to hear his monumental inscription read over.” It is tolerably inconsistent that the same writer, who at the very commencement of his work impliedly declares against the immortality of the soul, should now start up an advocate for the existence of ghosts.¹⁹

And the Clockmakers find much more than incidental contradictions in Sterne’s book. What is worse, they cannot even detect any plan or method in it. They refer to Tristram/Sterne’s attitude regarding the impossibility for a historian to predict “what dance he may be led, by one excursion or another”,²⁰ and, naturally, cannot easily subscribe to it: “Men of true genius take care to ruminate on and digest their work so well before they set about writing it, that they are not liable to such Will-of-the-wisp vagaries.”²¹ We are once more reminded of Swift, where all these literary-critical issues

¹⁹ Anon., *The Clockmakers Outcry Against the Author of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, eds Anne Bandry and Geoffrey Day, Winchester, 1991, 30.

²⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, I.14.41

²¹ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 31.

converge in one hyperbolic prediction of total cultural annihilation. With all its confusing aspects, *Tristram Shandy* appears to be no less than an attempt to “under an affected mask of folly or insanity of mind, and as it were in a frolicksome mood ... sap, undermine, and blow up all that is sacred in our moral religious, and political system”.²²

So far, *The Clockmakers Outcry* sounds like a relatively simple satire on the aspirations of ill-educated citizens. Mechanical, rigid thinking artisans look anxiously at new developments, think that they, too, should make use of the printing press, thus making chaos worse and making themselves ridiculous. This impression is given extra weight when, towards the end, the outcry in the first person changes into a narration in the third person. This change in perspective emphatically highlights the “zealous member” of the guild in the company of other fools.

Yet, the message is not always so unequivocal, the more so because the Clockmakers are not consistently square and naïve. As appears from the previous quotation, they know at any rate, that Tristram’s seeming foolishness is an act. Furthermore, they prove to be able to place Sterne’s work in the right context. The charge of humourlessness, therefore, is rejected by them in advance:

... we are resignedly prepared to be called heavy blockheads, vile tasteless wretches, stupid dolts. They should never read books of wit and humour. ——— Cruel sentence! However, we can relish the works of Fielding, Swift, Le Sage, Cervantes, Lucian, &c. that is some comfort to us.²³

Swift has by then already been mentioned, in the Preface, which is almost entirely devoted to a comparison between *Tristram Shandy* and *A Tale of a Tub*. The main point of difference is said to be that Swift always has “*some great point in view*” in his satire, while Sterne “*tends only to bewilder*”. Since the Clockmakers have not yet disqualified themselves there, and their objections are not disproportionate, it looks as if we are dealing with serious criticism here. The persona who makes his appearance towards the end, telling us about the Clockmakers, may count as principal narrator in these passages. Therefore we have another satire pointing in at least two directions. On the whole, the Clockmakers pose as over-serious, poorly

²² *Ibid.*, 17.

²³ *Ibid.*, 29.

educated citizens, but one also gets the impression that, without their knowing it, Swift devotees are secretly passing on serious advice to Sterne.

Swiftian sounds – what the reviews thought about them

In how far Sterne allowed himself to be influenced by this advice of the Clockmakers is a justifiable question, which in its turn is linked with the question in how far Sterne was influenced in general by reactions to his work. Critics have assumed that, working on *Tristram Shandy*, he gradually came to take into account the views of prestigious reviews such as the *Monthly* and the *Critical*, but that position is open to criticism. Even if a case could be made for any direct influence, we would have to accept that these two reviews represented a single overall position in the cultural field (“overall”, since the two reviews had different political backgrounds, contracting out jobs individually to reviewers of varying quality). Their voices were lost in the choir of conflicting voices, each with its own view of *Tristram Shandy* and related subjects. The reviewers’ reactions to Sterne imitations and other pamphlets by third parties took up at least as much space within this confusing debate as their views on the works of Sterne himself, and it may be assumed that these comments came to Sterne’s attention.

Before we try to get the various positions into focus more clearly, it may be useful to remark that the Swift imitations within the Sterne hype dealt with earlier certainly received extensive and on the whole favourable notices in the *Monthly* and *Critical Reviews*. Sterne could learn from them that the combination of ambiguity and moral interest was seen as an essential characteristic of his work. Those who copied these elements successfully received appreciative comments from the reviewers, although it would seem that the political affiliations of the two periodicals played a role in the attention paid to the various pamphlets.

The Clockmakers Outcry was ignored by the *Critical Review*, perhaps because of certain passages, to be discussed presently, that link the work to the political faction round Wilkes. But the more progressive *Monthly Review* was enthusiastic, devoting to this “whimsical pamphlet” an unusually long notice. The reviewer praises the equilibrium with which the anonymous author of *The Clockmakers Outcry* (he assumes there is one author only) balances between criticism and raillery, feeling pleasantly teased by the feeling of uncertainty that the booklet manages to evoke: “the whole pamphlet is such an odd mixture of ridicule and abuse, that we are

at a loss to conclude whether our Author is in jest or earnest.”²⁴

The *Monthly Review* took less kindly to *Yorick's Meditations*, perhaps because of the at times too pessimistic undertone of the book – at any rate, little attention was paid to it.²⁵ But the *Critical Review* was wildly enthusiastic about it. This periodical devoted as many as three pages to a review and a long quotation. In *Yorick's Meditations*, one could, it was said, find “the very overflowings and exuberances of genius”. In one sentence we then find a precise indication of where and how the specific genius of the anonymous writer behind the book coincides with Sterne’s: “The spirit of Swift breathes through the whole performance; and this alone, of all the numerous publications, palmed on the world for Mr Sterne’s, has caught the comic powers of the ingenious writer of the *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.”²⁶

As appears also from other works, ambiguity and paradoxical turns were expected and appreciated in satires, both by reviewers of the *Monthly Review* and by writers for the *Critical Review*. In that area, Swift was still a favourite example and point of reference. Sometimes, warnings against too coarse and broad expressions in his work could be heard, but fairly generally, it was assumed that their social effects were not harmful. Swift’s humour about man’s nether regions was not sensual, and no merry or otherwise positive feelings were associated with thoughts of the sex act.

This is a much more essential point than one might think. To what extent this aspect overshadowed other qualities of a book in the eyes of the reviewers, may be illustrated, for instance, with the help of the critical comments on a work that was published in 1762, *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius*.

This booklet, *Hafen Slawkenbergius*, in many respects continues the style of imitation begun with *Yorick's Meditations*: references to Sterne (the whole work is, of course, related to “Slawkenbergius’s Tale”) are combined with Scriblerian-like digs at follies of the modern times and the emptiness of contemporary hackwork. The connection could hardly become closer when the author of *Hafen Slawkenbergius*, too, like the writer of *Yorick's Meditations*, uses the labyrinth topos from *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*. As in *Yorick's Meditations*, the writing down-and-outers of the commercial press are jubilantly confronted with the general lack of good taste among readers as a favourable condition:

²⁴ *Monthly Review*, XXII (1760), 436-37.

²⁵ *Monthly Review*, XXIII (1760), 84.

²⁶ *Critical Review*, X (1760), 70.

He (that is, the wit and fine figurist) is to consider himself as a grotesque painter, whose works would be spoil'd by an imitation of nature, or uniformity of design.—— He is to mingle bits of the most various and discordant kinds, landskape, history portraits, animals, fish, flesh, and fowl, and connect them with a great deal of flourishing —— by the head or tail, or middle —— (there may be connection that way, madam) —— as it shall best please his imagination. ... His design ought to be like a labyrinth, out of which no body can get you clear but himself.²⁷

Here, the text is nearly the same as that of *The Art of Sinking in Poetry*. The comparison with the art of painting and the elevation of the grotesque as a genre par excellence for the modern wit (like the burlesque and the farce in literature) can be read as purely ironical. The parenthesis addressed to madam, however, sounds a different note – although it is an unmistakably Sternean clause, the text is strikingly artificial in its construction towards an obscene move. “Flourishing, by Heads or Tails” is what Swift and Pope had written – “or middle” is new. There is no question of a real ambiguity or, as is much more often the case in *Tristram Shandy*, a suggestiveness that disturbs the reader. The connection in question can be one only.

Neither the *Monthly Review* nor the *Critical Review* was pleased with *Hafen Slawkenbergius*, although the qualifications are still different. The *Monthly Review* talked about “mere chatter, about nothing”.²⁸ The characterization being meant in a disapproving sense does not tally with other comments in the same periodical. “Talking about nothing” could be fun and was then part of “the vein of the true and original Tristram Shandy himself”. *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* was discussed favourably in that context.²⁹ Probably it was simply the nature of the humour in *Hafen Slawkenbergius* that pleased the critic less: in terms of lexical wealth, that work is definitely superior to *A Supplement*, but it is also more suggestive of sexual liberties. For the *Critical Review* that was precisely the main objection, both to *Hafen Slawkenbergius* and to the episode in *Tristram Shandy* on which the book is grafted. *Hafen Slawkenbergius* was stylistically strong: “if it not be executed by the same author [that is, Sterne], it is the production of one who has happily hit off his manner.” But the comparison was here

²⁷ Anon., *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius, Author of the Institute of Noses* ... , London, 1762, 34.

²⁸ *Monthly Review*, XXV (1761) 503.

²⁹ *Monthly Review*, XXIII (1760), 522.

disadvantageous – “Slawkenbergius’s Tale” is referred to as “a *lusus naturae*, upon which all the world looks with disgust, except the infatuated parent”.³⁰

It seems that a pattern is becoming apparent. The *Monthly Review* was somewhat less enthusiastic about satire with a conservative slant than the *Critical Review* was, but generally the qualities that brought to mind the ideas and exuberance of Scriblerian satire were appreciated. Where the satire was obscene, however close the rest of it was to *A Tale of a Tub* or *Gulliver*, the chances of a profitable review were none.

It seems that, from the point of view of the reviewers, the Shandy imitations have to be grouped into two categories. The first category was that of the Swiftian satire. If we follow the indications of the *Critical Review*, the pamphlets in this category show the greatest correspondence with their model. In the eyes of such imitators and their critical readers, Sterne had not only adopted the form or a few terms from the Augustan satirists, with Swift and Pope he also shared a positive point of reference from which a menippian satire can be understood. What Tristram was to call his “mystick labyrinth”,³¹ was a hyperbolic demonstration of a lack of character and of would-be profoundness. The satire against hobby-horses should move people to introspection. Behind all this, there lurks an aristocratic notion of character-building and the accompanying need to bring sense and feeling into balance.

The other category could be classified as Grub-street satire. This was, as we shall see presently, a much broader category, and this is perhaps significant for the public’s taste for matters Sternean. The reviewers, in many of these cases, did not need many words. The booklets were often written along established picaresque lines, mostly expressing the cynical morality of scoundrels and whores – phenomena that had long been the target of campaigns by the editors of the reviews (long before the publication of *Tristram Shandy*). A case in point from the imitations is the comically pornographic *The Life and Opinions of Miss Sukey Shandy*. This little book was called “Obscene, dull, and despicable” by the *Monthly Review*,³² and makes the *Critical Review*, in almost identical terms, complain that “obscenity and dullness should court the public favour under

³⁰ *Critical Review*, XIII (1762), 76.

³¹ *Tristram Shandy*, VI.37.565.

³² *Monthly Review*, XXIII (1760), 83.

the admired name of Shandy”.³³ Interestingly, the *Critical Review* is here convinced that Sterne’s work belongs in a completely different category.

This notion that Sterne’s original work by far surpasses that of all his imitators became accepted almost right from the start, thanks to this kind of texts and their characterizations. In this context, it has often been remarked that Sterne’s reputation and honour, and even the correct understanding of *Tristram Shandy* were damaged by the imitations.

As we shall see in Part II of this book, we can certainly speak of a certain measure of social contamination, which Sterne had to take into account. However, saying that Sterne did not deserve this kind of treatment from the hacks (as Cross did, for instance³⁴) is another matter altogether. To begin with, as is shown by the reactions to *Hafen Slawkenbergius*, the difference between Swifitean satire and Grub-street satire was extremely subtle. And then, from the commentaries in the critical press, it appears that *Tristram Shandy* was not always positioned on the “right” side of this diffuse demarcation line. The reasons for this were to be found both in a number of extra-literary activities of Sterne’s and in parts of *Tristram Shandy* that were irreconcilable with the image of a latter-day Swift.

Before going more deeply in Chapters 4 and 5 into the unkind embrace of Sterne by the hacks, it may be useful to introduce these qualifications, and to find out what nuances were applied by Sterne in a way different from Swift’s – in what respects he was more modern, and consequently more vulnerable than his earlier eighteenth-century model.

³³ *Critical Review*, IX (1760), 72.

³⁴ Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, I, 209-13.

Chapter Two

Sterne in Covent-Garden

Initially some readers hoped and believed that Sterne was continuing the tradition of neoclassical satire, including its element of playfulness, the mockery of modern projects and self-accusation. At the same time, many of them felt that the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy* did not really comply with the Augustinian aspects of Swiftian satire. This was mostly detrimental to Sterne, even according to commercial hacks who, as their pamphlets show, were themselves unwilling or unable to keep up with Swift's moral staunchness and style. In two pamphlets, the story is told of how Swift, from the hereafter, looks at the success of his direct heir to the throne, finding that Sterne has knelt before the repulsive masses: "Old Swift was ready to beat his brains out; ——— What! three editions, exclaims the doctor, in so short a time, where was my Tale of a Tub and my Gulliver, were the people bewitched ... ?"¹ In "A Dialogue between Doctor Swift and Henry Fielding, Esq. in the Shades", Swift answers the question as to whether Sterne's "hotch potch" contains humour with the counterquestion: "Would you think there was humour ——— if a blackguard in the street should pull down his breeches and shew you his dirty ——— if you would, then there is humour in Tristram Shandy."²

Criticism of this kind has often been dismissed as exaggerated and unreasonable. However, bearing in mind the moral and intellectual level of the pamphlets in which these accusations occur, it should probably not be taken too seriously. Rather, the message seems to be that Sterne and the pamphleteers play their parts before an audience interested in scandal and misdemeanor. The real reason for Sterne's success is his talent for buffoonery and opportunism – and he receives inverted praise for it. Instead of a moral talking-to, we witness a rough embrace by cynics claiming to recognize their equal. The atmosphere is that of Mandevillian, not Swiftian satire.

Interestingly, the very first serious review of *Tristram Shandy* gives a foretaste of this atmosphere. It appeared in the appendix for the year 1759 of the *Monthly Review*, and has been attributed on good grounds to

¹ Anon., *Tristram Shandy in a Reverie*, London, 1760. Quoted in an unidentified auction catalogue: loose leaf in Oates collection, Cambridge UL.

² Anon., *Tristram Shandy's Bon Mots*, London, 1760, 69.

William Kenrick.³ Howes and Bandry call it a favourable review,⁴ pointing at the contrast with the reviews which the *Monthly* devoted to later volumes of Sterne's work, but what they might also have noticed is that the text ironically confirms well-known values:

Of Lives and *Adventures* the public have had enough, and, perhaps, more than enough, long ago. A consideration that probably induced the Droll Mr. Tristram Shandy to entitle the performance before us, his *Life and Opinions*. Perhaps also, he had, in this, a view to the design he professes, of giving the world two such volumes every year, during the remainder of his life. Now, adventures worth relating, are not every day to be met with, so that, in time, his budget might be exhausted; but his opinions will, in all probability, afford him matter enough to write about, tho' he should live to the age of Methusalem.⁵

It is true that when these first evaluative lines about *Tristram Shandy* were written the name of the author behind Tristram was not yet known, but that seems to be an inadequate reason for Kenrick's reluctance to distinguish between author X and "the droll Mr. Tristram Shandy".⁶ He talks about a "performance", and the reviewer happens to be not interested in the identity of the performing actor. Mr Shandy stretching out his work by peddling his opinions is nice, but Kenrick could expect his readers to be familiar with the pejorative connotations of the word "opinion" (particular, irrelevant, opposite of truth⁷), and also, of course, with the classical ideas about commerce, so that in fact it is especially the impertinence of Sterne's artifice that is highlighted. By paying tribute to Tristram for this, the (likewise anonymous) reviewer takes on something of the Shandy role himself. He introduces himself as someone who can decide whether a book may rank "among the numerous diminutive tomes of a modern library". The association of modern with the genre of *Life and Adventures* (that is what "numerous diminutive tomes" refers to) does not suggest that he himself sees this as a high-principled specialism.

Howes and Bandry ascribe the difference between this and the more

³ Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 609.

⁴ Howes, *Yorick and the Critics*, 4; Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 34-36.

⁵ *Monthly Review*, XXI (Appendix, December 1759), 561.

⁶ Bandry's explanation.

⁷ For the Humanist meaning of "opinio" ("the mother of all ills"), see especially Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, Cambridge, 1982, 19-20.

analytical and caustic later reviews to the appearance of Sterne himself in London. The discovery that *Tristram Shandy* was the work of a prebendary of York Cathedral reduced the margins of what was acceptable. It would seem plausible to me, however, to assume that what happened as a result of Sterne's presence there, was not so much that the critics became more critical, but that a different kind of critics came to turn their attention to Sterne's work. Kenrick had the reputation and, possibly, the self-image of a typical hack. He tried to attract people's attention, among others, by publishing anonymous slanderous pamphlets against himself, and it was said that "he seldom wrote without a bottle of brandy at his elbow".⁸ He did chores for the *Monthly* by signalling novels. After Sterne's entry on the scene, reviews of his works were not to be entrusted to people like Kenrick any more. From then on, Owen Ruffhead and the big man himself, Ralph Griffiths, kept their eye on Sterne. These men claimed to take their classics seriously. Even more so than the regular editors of the other great review, the *Critical*, the men behind the *Monthly* presented themselves as members of scholarly academies under the banners of the *utile et dulce*. An essentially aristocratic idea of civic virtue, sketched by Shaftesbury and by later Whig theoreticians adapted to the needs of a well-to-do middle class, was the basis of their undertakings.⁹

Before we shall see what this meant for Sterne's public image, another question should have our attention: how did Kenrick come to recognize Sterne as a Mandevillean actor and opportunist, long before he could have any acquaintance with the man? An answer may begin with a short exposé on another humourist from the past who got Sterne's attention, one who is considered to be the antipole of Swift.

Colley Cibber

In 1740, Colley Cibber, actor and playwright, the "king Cibber" of *The Dunciad*,¹⁰ monarch of Grub-street and "the antichrist of wit", published his autobiography *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*. What strikes one straightaway in this book is the pleasure with which Cibber compares and contrasts his style of living and letters with that of Pope,

⁸ *DNB*; see also Wallace Cable Brown, "A Belated Augustan: Bonnell Thornton, Esq.", *Philological Quarterly*, 34 (1955), 339-40.

⁹ Shelley Burt, *Virtue Transformed: Political Argument in England, 1688-1740*, Cambridge and New York, 1992.

¹⁰ Pope, *The Dunciad*, I.320ff.

“our great imitator of Horace”. Already in the Preface, he sets his opportunistic and relativistic ethics as an example to the reader. The most important lesson of his life story is that “Follies, without the Reproach of Guilt upon them, are not inconsistent with Happiness”.¹¹ This carefree assessment of his own errors finds a direct reflection in his style: “I live as I write; while my Way amuses me, it’s as well as I with it.”¹² The reader has been warned:

This work, ... which I hope, they will not expect a Man of my hasty Head shou’d confine to any regular Method: (For I shall make no scruple of leaving my History, when I think a Digression may make it lighter, for my Reader’s Digestion) This work, I say, shall not only contain the various Impressions of my Mind, (as in *Louis the Fourteenth* his Cabinet you have seen the growing Medals of his Person from Infancy to Old Age,) but shall likewise include with them the *Theatrical History of my Own Time*, from my first Appearance on the Stage to my last *EXIT*.¹³

Cibber wears different masks. Sometimes he throws his egotism and accompanying digressive technique in the face of the men of taste, sometimes he resorts to relatively dry exposition and self-defence. The actor and opportunist is not consistent even in his role as a clown.

Melvyn New thinks that Sterne associated the stylistic features of Cibber’s *Apology* with the mentality of the self-conscious dunce.¹⁴ Tristram’s digressive technique and inner confusion seem directly derived from the same elements in Cibber. In fact, New finds similarities between whole passages and phrases in the biographies of these two. Sterne, says New, wanted to amplify Cibber’s revolutionary voice in a way that shows the dangers of flawed self-examination in extremis. This appears most strikingly in the problems that Tristram encounters gradually, as a result of his aimlessness, in the telling of his full life story. The most relevant passage is well known:

¹¹ *An Apology for the Life of Mr. Colley Cibber, Comedian, and Late Patentee of the Theatre Royal*, 2nd edn, London, 1740, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 18.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁴ Melvyn New, “The Dunce Revisited: Colley Cibber and Tristram Shandy”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 72 (1973), 547-59.

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—— and no farther than to my first day's life ——'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it——on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back——was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this—— And why not?—— and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description—— And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write——¹⁵

Writers who have seen in this a reflection on the heroic struggle between art and transitoriness¹⁶ should have to comment on Cibber's treatment of the same dilemma. Between two digressions, Cibber discovers that his intention to tell his story the way his "Vanity" and "Gayeté du Coeur" tell him to do, has resulted in the enormous quantity of paper that he has by then filled with his scribbles containing "but seven Years of the forty three I pass'd upon the Stage".¹⁷ However, he remains optimistic: "even my Dulness will find somebody to do it right." Towards the end of the book, the remaining thirty-six years become more and more condensed, and finally only sketchily summarized. The dashes and the rhetorical interjections in Tristram's reflections ("—— And why not?") also form part of the typical Cibber idiom: ("——But why make my follies publick? Why not?"¹⁸). It is clear that Sterne has projected a few characteristic features of the dunce onto Tristram. To New, the blow-up suggests that Sterne wanted to be on the side of the conservative Augustans, especially Pope and Swift, who had mocked Cibber before.

This conclusion deserves an extensive appendix. Colley Cibber was a well-known figure well into the late 1750s.¹⁹ What needs to be asked is whether Cibber continued to pass for the ultimate dunce until nearly twenty years after the death of Pope and for four years after his own death. Fielding had, with a characteristic sense of understatement,

¹⁵ *Tristram Shandy*, IV.13.341-42.

¹⁶ William V. Holtz, *Image and Immortality: A Study of Tristram Shandy*, Providence, 1971, 128-29; Introduction, in Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, ed. Ian Campbell Ross, Oxford, 1983, xxii-xxiii.

¹⁷ *An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber*, 243.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ The fourth edition of the *Apology* was published in 1756 by Dodsley. In 1762, Sterne ordered "The Dramatick Works of Cibber – & Cibbers Life" for Diderot (*Letters*, 166).

typified Cibber as an author who had demonstrated “the emptiness and vanity of that fantom, reputation”.²⁰ That did not make Cibber the promoter of chaos and the blurring of moral principles that Pope’s mythology provided. Under Walpole, Cibber had been nominated Poet Laureate and, in spite of himself and the perplexed Pope, he was part of the establishment. In addition, because of the efforts of David Garrick, the theatre world was beginning to lose its bad reputation, and that made the association of Cibber with the Grub-street culture less self-evident in retrospect.

Kenrick, when he first came to read *Tristram Shandy*, may have associated it with the ideals of Pope and Swift, but if so, he must have missed the urgency of Scriblerian satire. He may even have recognized a conscious provoking of these ideals and then made the connection with Cibber. At least, he connected *Tristram Shandy* with comedy and theatre, not with any kind of essentialism. And this is more than a projection. A natural tendency among critics to credit Sterne with deep thoughts has pushed out of sight his congeniality with Cibber and low life comedy, but contemporaries recognized the link, even more easily perhaps than the one with Swift. Biographical facts, had they been known to them, would have suggested that they were right.

Sterne had not only, like Cibber, supported the cause of the Whigs, he was also a fervent theatre-goer. More importantly, he owed his own fame largely to the theatre culture. In some biographies, it is pointed out that in London, Sterne had hardly tried to get in touch with settled fellow-writers.²¹ The main reason for that seems to be that he could do without those contacts – not because he was an enormous talent, but because he had opted for the shortest way to fame. Great writers built up their fame and influence gradually – the place where sudden reputations like Sterne’s sprang up was the theatre world. David Garrick had suddenly appeared *ex nihilo* in 1741. Charles Churchill, with whom Sterne was sometimes compared, was to owe his temporary fame and riches to *The Rosciad* (1761), a long poem about the styles and performances of the actors that appeared in the two London theatres. The famous hoax of the letter of praise about *Tristram Shandy* with which Sterne, through the actress Catherine Fourmantel, tried to bring himself to the notice of Garrick (Sterne asked Fourmantel to copy the letter in her own

²⁰ Henry Fielding, *Joseph Andrews*, ed. R.F. Brissenden, London, 1985, 40.

²¹ Willard Connely, *Laurence Sterne as Yorick*, Westport: Conn, 1979, 50; Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 24.

handwriting, so that Garrick might think he was looking at an impartial recommendation²²), shows how much store Sterne set by contacts in the London theatre world.

Content and style of Sterne's first letters to Garrick are also remarkable. In the early days of his correspondence, Sterne stresses the theatrical quality of his performance – as an aspect that Garrick would probably be able to appreciate – and he even announces a stage adaptation of the first, and two more future volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. He also applies for an order for a new stage play. Apparent formality and sycophancy alternate with casually interjected confessions of opportunism and assertiveness.²³ Ignoring the moral aspect of his satire, he is the loony Shandy in these letters; he even suggests that he could not be otherwise. He lies that *Tristram Shandy* was sent “into the world, hot as it came from my Brain, without one Correction”, calling the work “a picture of myself”.

The clown's act of Colley Cibber, then, seems to have served him as a model for an amicably jesting pose, at the writing table as well as in public life. In the end much of what has been written about Sterne centres around the consequences of that pose. Nevertheless, more biographical attention could have been paid to the fact that Sterne at the time of his first successes became famous also through his “performance”. A short digression illustrating this side of the Sterne reception may give us a better understanding of his position as a modern satirist.

The Town

The reception of Sterne by “the Town”, as the coherent milieu of fervent theatre-goers and drama critics, actors and actresses from the coffee houses round Covent Garden and Drury Lane was significantly called, has received little attention in Sterne literature. The printed evidence witnessing to Sterne's reputation in these circles, however, is plentiful. From April 1760, Sterne's name appears regularly in cheap booklets with songs and fragments from popular plays of the moment and in jestbooks

²² *Letters*, 85-86. It has to be admitted (Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 4, does not) that it is uncertain whether the letter indeed found its way to Garrick. It seems quite possible that Fourmantel did not endorse Sterne's plan. In any case, it remains significant that Sterne sought an entry to cultural circles through an actress.

²³ *Letters*, 86-87 and 92-94: cf. “I know not what it was (tho 'I lye abominably,' because I know very well) which inclined me ... to wish for your Approbation.”

with jokes about actors and comedians.²⁴ A number of them refer to Sterne in their titles. Of these, the following have been preserved: *The Cream of the Jest; or, the Wits Out-Witted ... now first published at the request of Tristram Shandy and Dr. Slop* (1760), with jokes about, among others, Foote and Garrick; *Yorick's Compleat Jests, And Universal Songster* (1761); *Sterne's Witticisms, or Yorick's Convivial Jester ... with some Theatric Squibbs* (no date, c. 1762: see fig. 1); and *Yorick's Jests: Or, Wit's Common-Place Book* (1783), with, in addition to Sterne's "best jokes", those of James Quin, Bonnell Thornton, David Garrick, George Colman and George Alexander Stevens (see also fig. 15, p. 137). The first engravings related to *Tristram Shandy* after those designed by Hogarth for the second edition of the work are to be found in one of those booklets: *Yorick turned Trimmer* (1760: see fig. 2) contains, in addition to "SONGS, CATCHES, and GLEES, sung at the public



1. *Sterne's Witticisms ... with some Theatric Squibbs* (1762?), frontispiece.

²⁴ Sterne is practically always the man of the smart repartee, the "wit" (see, for instance, *The Covent-Garden Jester; or Man of Fashion's Companion*, London, no date, 8).



Yorick turned Trimmer ;
OR,
The GENTLEMAN'S JESTER ;
And several Collections of Songs.

Illustrated with three Campaignate Cuts, the most interesting Scenes at Yorick's Works, &c. &c. Yorick riding through the Village, at Dr. Rip and Obolado's; a Block-Tree and Cooper's Tree; containing besides a Variety of Jests and other Subjects, the following interesting Articles:

SOMERS, CATCHES, and GLEES, sung at the public Places that Success, viz. Roundly Theatre, the Haymarket, the Bath-Street Club, and the Anacreontic Entertainment; Pieces of Wit of the choicest Sorts of the last and present Age, amongst which are:

A Fair Warning, Sent in the Agreeable Style, with the famous Song—the Jolly Ball.

Mr. Edmond's New Equipage and Terrestrial Vehicle.

Five Favourite Trains of Authors, as sung by Mr. Palmer at Royal's Theatre.

Hippoclyte's Broken Music, as spoken by Mr. Lee Lower at the Royal Theatre.

Jestery Jumps, a Song in the Façon.

The three Princes, printed in a beautiful picturesque Manner, in Black, Red, and Green, are worth the Purchase Money of the whole.

The English Days of good Cheer, as performed by Mr. Galton, Author of the Evening Post.

The Flax and Linen of the Nation, &c.

The Politeness of the English Nation, from the 'Yorick's Englishman,' from Swift's Miscellany.

An Evening's Adventure at Vauxhall.

Commodious, Rhabdick, Sentimental Tracts, Epigrams, &c. &c.

L O N D O N :
Printed for the Proprietors; and sold by W. Streats, No. 41, St. Paul's Church-yard; at the Calculating Library, No. 2, Shoe-lane; and may be had at all the Book-sellers and News-vendors in Great-Britain.
[Price ONE SHILLING.]

2. *Yorick turned Trimmer* (1760), frontispiece and title page.



3. "Trim reading", from *Yorick turned Trimmer* (1760), opp. page 49.



4. "Trim Reading" by Hogarth and Ravenet, frontispiece to *Tristram Shandy*, Vol. II (1760).

Places this Summer”, and fragments from several plays, “the most interesting Scenes in Yorick’s Works, viz. — 1. Yorick riding through the Village; 2. Dr. Slop and Obadiah; 3. Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim; —”. Each of the reprinted fragments²⁵ is accompanied by an illustration. A remarkable aspect of these engravings, especially when we compare that of Trim reading (fig.3) with Hogarth’s picture of the same scene (fig.4) is that all the figures face the front. In combination with the décor-like wall and the scanty furniture, this gives an impression of the kind of theatre-conversation pieces that were popular in painted form.

A similar piece of evidence, although probably Irish in origin, is the short novel (if one may call it that) *Miss C——y’s Cabinet of Curiosities, or the Green-Room broke open* (1765). On the title-page, this work passes itself off as a book by “Tristram Shandy”, but an attempt at fraud is out of the question (in the early pages, Sterne is introduced with denigrating comment on the text and a general complaint about “——Oh, these Plaguy Imitators!”). The Tristram persona, a cross between Swift’s hack and a cursing, frothing, insulting Rabelais, is intimately acquainted with popular theatre-goers and actors. The title of the book refers explicitly to the actual situation – socially and physically – of the theatres in Dublin and London, and implicitly to older works related to the theatre and sex.²⁶ Interrupting himself *ad nauseam* with all kinds of bizarre fragments, Tristram unfolds the story of two “cabinets” of Miss C——y, of which the first gets stolen and disappears,²⁷ while the second gets into the hands of Tristram himself, who finds letters and notes in it. This is followed by some gossip about actors and managers of the Smock Alley and Crow-street theatres.

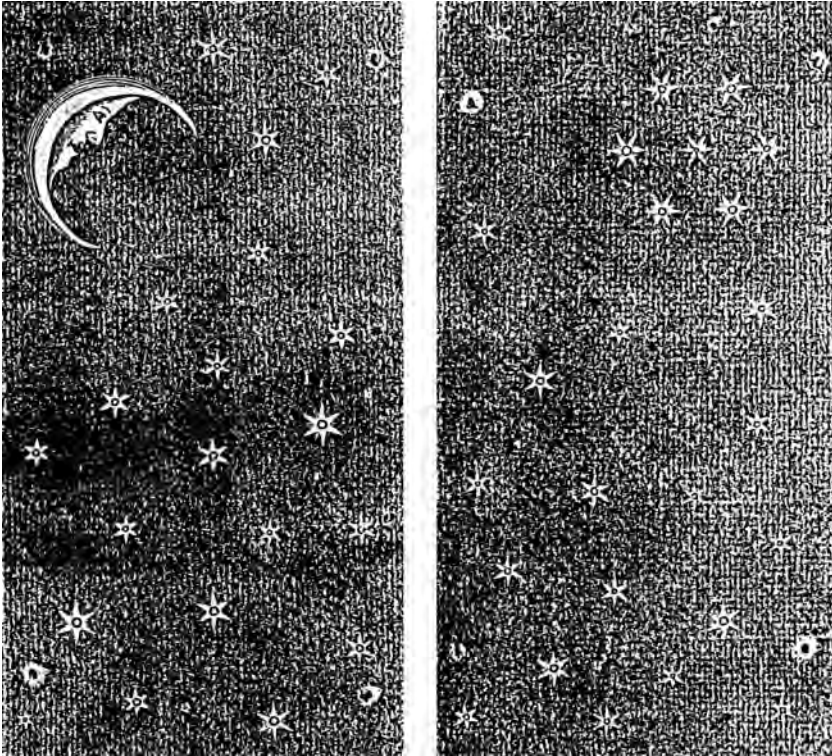
The same characters are the object of a complaint by the Irish actor

²⁵ *Tristram Shandy*, I.10; II.2; II.17.

²⁶ In the eighteenth century, the term “greenroom” made the association possible with the expensive green boxes, a select streetwalkers’ corner (Cecil Price, *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*, Oxford, 1973, 87). Related titles are *The D--ry Lane P--h--se Broke Open* (1748; see Price, 95ff.) and *The Cabinet of Venus Unlocked* (a revision from 1658 of Sinibaldi’s work on copulation). Miss C——y is possibly the same as the Miss C—tl—y who was later on, according to *The Covent-Garden Magazine*, 2 (1773), 28-29, to distinguish herself “at Drury Lane, in the boxes”, because of her beauty and witty digs at intrusive gentlemen, and as the Miss C——t—y who appears in a list of kept mistresses in the same magazine (20-21).

²⁷ An ambiguity, I presume: one Lord Pomposo had long been hankering after this cabinet and got into difficulties with his wife over it.

and dramatist George Staley. In 1762 this disappointed poet published his autobiography, called for – so he claims – by his many London “friends and subscribers”,²⁸ under the title *The Life and Opinions of an*



5. *The Life and Opinions of an Actor* (1762), 208-209
(The narrator has fallen asleep on the preceding page while reading
Tristram Shandy).

²⁸ *The Life and Opinions of an Actor, A Real History, In Two Real Volumes ...* By Mr. George Staley, Late of Smock-Alley, Comedian, ... Dublin, 1762, I, i. Of the London subscribers only “the managers and performers of the Theatre Royal” are mentioned – the others wanted to remain nameless. In Dublin, Staley had only one fan, a Mr Brown (I, 1, n.a).



6. *The Celebrated Lecture on Heads* (1763), frontispiece illustrating Stevens' "aparatus". Object 50 is a bust of Sterne.

Actor. The colouring of self-praise with self-mockery, the seemingly unstudied use of language, the many digressions in the form of “merry anecdotes” and uncalled-for observations, resulting in the unavoidable reduction of the actual memoirs and theatre recollections in the second volume, make this publication a descendant of the autobiography of Colley Cibber. The title of the book covers what appears from the contents, namely that Stayley, more than anything else, was jealous of Sterne. A parody of the marbled pages looks reasonably sporting (see fig. 5), but in a following comment²⁹ Stayley mingles with the chorus of Sterne’s puritanical critics. The writer thinks especially that the favourite of the season should have stuck to his pastoral last.

Actors with fewer hangups treated Sterne more as one of them. The stand-up comedian George Alexander Stevens had Sterne appear in his box-office success of many years’ standing, *The Lecture on Heads* (first appearance 1763).³⁰ Referring to the last but one of the busts and portraits that Stevens used in this sketch (see fig. 6), he discusses the fate of “a real wit”. He makes it appear as if the person known as “Yorick, and Tristram Shandy” has died of hunger and has been buried in the paupers’ churchyard at his friends’ expense. Shortly before his demise, Sterne had come to the door of “a large mansion-house” asking for bread, but a “French Mammeselle” would have none of his tricks: “she wondered vat English vit vas good for?”³¹ The influence of French taste on the trade of honest English comedians is also criticized by Stevens in his novels *The History of Tom Fool* (1760) and *The Dramatic History of Master Edward* (1763), both of them influenced by *Tristram Shandy*.

Sterne was, in short, regarded as a typically British joker, an artist whose effect depended as much on his text as on his delivery and expression. Many engravers of the prints derived from the Reynolds portrait seem to have wanted to emphasize the latter aspect, so keeping

²⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 212-15.

³⁰ *The Celebrated Lecture upon Heads, Which Has Been Exhibited Upwards of One Hundred Successive Nights, To Crowded Audiences, And Met With the Most Universal Applause ...* by G. Alexander Stevens, Dublin, 1765. Stevens originally wrote the sketch for Edward Shuter, who had little success with it, though. After rewriting it, adding stage properties and “aparatus”, Stevens went on tour with it, he played at the New Haymarket, toured England, Ireland and North America, and became rich. In 1772, he sold the rights of the *Lecture on Heads* to Lee Lewes (*DNB* and “An account of the life of the author”, in *The Dramatic History of Master Edward*, a new edition, 1785, ii-xi).

³¹ *Ibid.*, 54-56.

the memory of it alive. In any case, the name Sterne could stand for dramatic narrative art as late as 1787. The American fugitive Jonathan Corncob, because of his head, was invited by a travelling companion to tell his story: "I am sure you tell a story admirably, for I have not, since the death of my friend Sterne, seen a quainter phiz."³²

By feeding and upholding this reputation, Sterne certainly took some risk, but it should not be doubted that he did this consciously and with a great awareness of what was going on. Even if he wanted to walk in the footsteps of Swift, he must have found that the world was changing and a new position for philosophical and religious satire would have to be defined. Anyway, he liked acting.

The morality of acting

The theatre as a whole had long been suspect because of the commercial slant of the business. Before the reading revolution, writers could make a fortune by taking advantage of the audiences' "perpetual demand for something new".³³ And the quick monetary awards, in spite of the fluctuations in the prejudices that Raven discovered,³⁴ has seldom been welcomed with enthusiasm by the purveyors of culture. Swift thought it a disgrace that his friend Gay was not supported by the government and had to demean himself by writing *The Beggar's Opera*. Fielding was ashamed of his farces. In the first three quarters of the eighteenth century, there was also the problem that even the two licensed London theatres could not survive without staging afterpieces at reduced prices, which gave the lower classes a grip on the choice of repertory.³⁵ According to Langford,³⁶ the dramatists of Grub-street held out longest against the demands of the reviewers.

In the early modern period actors were not seen as paragons of common decency. Actors were low in the social hierarchy. They were craftsmen, practising a trade for which they were first of all supposed to undress. Actresses and female singers were almost automatically

³² *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee* (1787), ed. David R. Godine, Boston, 1976, 2.

³³ Alexandre Beljame, *Men of Letters and the English Public in the Eighteenth Century*, eds Karl Mannheim and Bonamy Dobrée, London, 1948, 53.

³⁴ James Raven, *Judging New Wealth: Popular Publishing and Responses of Commerce in England, 1750-1800*, Oxford, 1992, 94-111.

³⁵ Price, *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*, 170-73.

³⁶ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, Oxford, 1989, 465.

suspected of easy morals.³⁷ As David Marshall has shown, there were, after all, old ideological reasons for not making friends with actors. They were professionally unreliable. When an actor was praised because of his talent for simulating emotions, the thought was never far away that he did so off the stage as well. Mandeville maintained that in “the drama of life” every one plays the part that is profitable for them, but not every one thought well of Mandeville.

Traditionally David Garrick has been placed at the heart of the improvements in status and organization of the theatres after the licensing act for the stage (1737) took effect. Although there is no doubt that Garrick, in addition to being a legendary actor, was a good commercial manager and social networker,³⁸ his promotion to the higher circles seems also to illustrate a change in the cultural climate. Garrick, it seems, found a culture that attached greater value to politeness than to character.³⁹ Of him too, it was said that it made no difference whether he was acting or having a conversation. Samuel Johnson remarked, in this connection, that Garrick “had friends, but no friend”. But what one heard predominantly about his reputation were fair words about decency and sociability. “And after all, Madam, I thought him less to be envied on the stage than at the head of a table” is what Johnson said also.⁴⁰

Sterne was devoted to Garrick, more so, it seems, than the other way round.⁴¹ From *Tristram Shandy* it may be inferred that Sterne admired Garrick’s natural acting style, and with this fact as a central datum, critics such as Hafter and de Voogd have pondered their relationship.⁴²

³⁷ E.J. Burford, *Wits, Wenchers and Wantons: London’s Low Life – Covent Garden in the Eighteenth Century*, London, 1986, 85ff.

³⁸ Price, *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*, 84-86.

³⁹ The redemption of character as a basis for virtue by what Marshall calls “the theatricality of moral sentiments” is especially associated with Adam Smith (David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith and George Eliot*, New York 1986, 168). Perhaps social practice in the middle classes preceded theory. A talent for acting was a praiseworthy quality of the new social climber, who perhaps, as Bertelsen sketches him, was “removed only by the thinnest veneer – a generation perhaps, a modicum of schooling, a bit of luck in business – from the rough, independent, irreverent manner of the artisans and labourers” (Lance Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club: Literature and Popular Culture, 1749-1764*, Oxford, 1986, 255).

⁴⁰ James Boswell, *The Life of Johnson*, ed. R.W. Chapman, Oxford, 1980, 1020 and 1252.

⁴¹ Garrick apparently wrote back very little, or perhaps letters have got lost.

⁴² Ronald Hafter, “Garrick and *Tristram Shandy*”, *SEL*, 7 (1967), 475-89; Peter de Voogd, “*Tristram Shandy* as Aesthetic Object”, *Word and Image*, 4 (1988), 1, 383-93.

Sterne's enthusiasm about Garrick's stage performance is, however, less interesting than it seems – everybody was enthusiastic about that. The rigid drama critics that comment sceptically on Garrick in *Tristram Shandy*⁴³ do not seem to represent even a minority.

What Sterne and Garrick had in common especially was their skill in hiding their low social origins behind a socially profitable façade. Garrick moved as easily among actors and comedians as in aristocratic circles. His acting talent made him an elusive go-between and gave him an opportunity to bring popular and polite culture together. In Garrick, Sterne thought he could find an appreciation of his own multiple role-playing.

Peter Briggs is probably right when he claims that Sterne recognized a similar case in Cibber.⁴⁴ With his relativistic ethics and unashamedly egotistic disorderliness, Cibber had ventured onto a slippery slope, but the clowning tone of the *Apology* suggests self-assuredness, so that it is by no means certain if the poet/actor is doubting the value of humanistic aesthetics. It is not Cibber's real character (or lack of it), but his public character that is the first subject of his autobiography. In apparent agreement with Mandeville, Cibber suggests that a talent for playing social roles is profitable for society as a whole. A relativistic attitude provides a possibility to renounce honour, and with that, Cibber ultimately defends a central value of what (somewhat misleadingly) has come to be known as Whig culture. The controversy with Pope he had drifted into is described by Cibber as a rhetorical slanging match, and he is ready at a pinch to admit that Pope won it. So, whereas Pope relates the pruning of selfish passions to good taste and artistic consistency, what counts for Cibber is in the first place the exemplary function of his social actions. He realizes that Pope is the better poet, leaving the idea that great art has a social function, intact. At the same time he points out the use of playful humour, "wit" that harms nobody. Swift and Cibber, poles apart in their time, were to Sterne writers in related traditions.

While *Tristram* is presented as a muddle-head, Sterne did not, certainly in the early days, let it bother him that some people might identify him with his persona. The presentation and sales of his work and the tour of the salons going with it was a play with two roles for one actor: *Tristram*

⁴³ *Tristram Shandy*, III.12.213.

⁴⁴ Peter M. Briggs, "Laurence Sterne and Literary Celebrity in 1760", *The Age of Johnson*, 4 (1991), 251-80.

and Yorick.

To what degree writing and acting coincided for Sterne in this period is illustrated, among others, by an advertisement that he had inserted, in March 1760, in the *York Courant*: “To be printed in Two Volumes, Price 5s. And to be delivered to the subscribers in May next, The DRAMATIC SERMONS of Mr. Yorick, Published by TRISTRAM SHANDY, Gentleman.”⁴⁵ Sterne still had to negotiate with bookseller Dodsley about the publication, and perhaps that gentleman rejected the plan to send the sermons into the world as dramatic texts. That Sterne went too far here was also suggested by the Clockmakers, who saw it as “some sign of grace and becomming diffidence” that in following announcements of the Sermons the word “dramatic” was left out.⁴⁶

The plan was eventually executed with some hesitation. *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* was published with two title pages, and in his Foreword, Sterne explains why that formula was chosen:

The sermon which gave rise to the publication of these, having been offer'd to the world as a sermon of *Yorick's*, I hope the most serious reader will find nothing to offend him, in my continuing these two volumes under the same title: lest it should be otherwise, I have added a second title page with the real name of the author:—— the first will serve the bookseller's purpose, as *Yorick's* name is possibly of the two the more known;—— and the second will ease the minds of those who see a jest, and the danger which lurks under it, where no jest was meant.⁴⁷

It was to no avail. *Monthly Reviewer* Owen Ruffhead called the mode of publication “the greatest outrage against against Sense and Decency, that has been offered since the first establishment of Christianity —— an outrage which would scarce have been tolerated even in the days of paganism”. It was precisely the use of a persona that evoked repugnance: “If the order of society requires that there should be a distinction of characters, *Yorick* and *Sterne*, instead of being one and the same person, should have been, in public at least, as utter strangers as *Moses* and *Mahomet*.”⁴⁸ Sermons, even when they have been put together from texts

⁴⁵ Quoted by Bandry and Day in their edition of *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 47-48.

⁴⁶ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 30.

⁴⁷ *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New, Gainesville, 1996, 1.

⁴⁸ *Monthly Review*, XXII (1760), 424.

by others,⁴⁹ should be associated with one consistent character.

That apart from the reference to the theatre, the name Tristram Shandy was also left out of the London advertisements for the *Sermons*, may again suggest the influence of Dodsley, but perhaps Sterne himself had come to attach more importance to keeping his two pen-bearers separated. In April 1760, something of a Grub-street fascination for Tristram became noticeable, and it is plausible to think that in order to get rid of his imitators Sterne wanted to bring his serious mask more emphatically to the notice of his readers. The two instalments of his sermons (1760 and 1766) provided extra revenues, naturally, but they were also part of his publicity campaign. The *Sermons* guided the reading experience of the public and in that sense they are inextricably bound up with *Tristram Shandy*.

By the end of 1760 the imitations and other reactions had made clear that *Tristram Shandy* was understood as a work with several satiric layers, but that there was a tendency to incorporate it in a more superficial culture of cynicism and commerce. As we shall see in the second and third parts of this study, Sterne tried to distance his work from the most aggressive and meanest forms of contamination, but maintained his taste for comical acting. He had a more behaviouristic moral view than, for instance, Pope, or the serious reviewers of his own day, in the sense that he was a man focused on actions rather than intentions.

One may be tempted to connect this trait in Sterne to the development towards a Whiggish idea of virtue. It is said that the second half of the eighteenth century witnessed a new esteem for the ability to act well and decently, which could both secure and render harmless the social upwardness of the middle classes. Sterne's appearance as an author may indeed be understandable against this ideological background. However, I believe that, in his special case, the anti-essentialism was immediately connected with a deep moral scepticism – a mistrust of “good intentions” and the possibility of self-knowledge. This points back to the satirical and theological position of Swift rather than forward to modern democracy and civil liberties.

If this seems rather speculative, it can hardly be denied that the themes of acting and “doing well” gradually became more important to Sterne. He gave them expression in the sentimental anecdotes within

⁴⁹ Sterne says as much in the Preface to his *Sermons*.

Tristram Shandy. Here, more than anywhere else, Sterne found his very special satirical voice, which, in the end, could prove deeply serious and melancholy. Together with the *Sermons*, they could (and were probably intended to) function as a counterweight against the grubby and lighthearted qualities of the Yorick-Tristram persona. As I will argue later, these, and not the passages in direct imitation of Swift tip the scale towards orthodoxy.

This will be made clearer by a discussion of a sentimental work from Sterne's entourage: *The Triumvirate*, an independent book by Sterne's most successful imitator, Richard Griffith. However, in order to fully appreciate this discussion, some historical notions about the cultural and literary phenomenon of Sentimentalism in general should be evaluated and, where necessary, put in place – which is why the next chapter will begin with yet another digression.

Chapter Three

Sentiment, or Something Like It

The most easily produced long imitation of *Tristram Shandy* is likely to have been *The Life, Travels and Adventures of Christopher Wagstaff, Gentleman, Grandfather to Tristram Shandy*, from 1762. In fact, it is not an imitation at all, but a revised edition of John Dunton's *A Voyage Round the World*.¹ This digressive combination of fictional memoirs, anecdotes and religious reflection first appeared in 1691 and had been unexpectedly successful during the next ten years. J. Paul Hunter has referred to Dunton's work as an example of the novel-like publications of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that began to lessen the Protestant repulsion of curiosity and fashion. In Hunter's study, Dunton holds an important position among the journalists and booksellers who consciously tried to widen the audience for books with modern, and especially urban subjects.²

If this interest in fashionable printed matter alone had not been enough, Dunton's picaresque life, religious wavering and self-conceit would certainly have made him the kind of author on whom the Scriblerians would vent their contempt. In *A Tale of a Tub*, Dunton parades as the "worthy citizen and bookseller [who] in twelve volumes in folio" will preserve the last words of hanged criminals ("the choicest treasury of our British eloquence") for posterity.³ In *The Dunciad* he is mentioned as "a broken bookseller and abusive scribler".⁴ The fact that the narrator in *A Voyage Round the World* appears under the name of Wagstaff suggests that the new editor of the book was familiar with these satirical stabs, or at least saw the relationship between Grub-street, *Tristram Shandy*, and Swift.

¹ Anon., *The Life, Travels, and Adventures of Christopher Wagstaff, Gentleman, Grandfather to Tristram Shandy, Originally Published in the Latter End of the Last Century ...*, London, 1762; Anon. [John Dunton], *A Voyage Round the World: or, A Pocket-Library, Divided into Several Volumes, the First of Which Contains the Rare Adventures of Don Kainophilus ...* London, 1693.

² J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels: The Cultural Contexts of Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, New York and London, 1990, 15-16, 104-105.

³ Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Satires*, ed. Lewis Melville, London, 1968, 45.

⁴ Pope, *The Dunciad*, II.45.

We are not certain whether Sterne actually read *A Voyage Round the World*, or knew about the Scriblerian animosity towards its author. A number of phrases and expressions from Dunton's work reappear in *Tristram Shandy*, but these may also be derived from Ozell's translation of Rabelais, which was a source for both authors. Moreover, since many of these appear in later parts of *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne may also have lifted them from the re-edited Shandean edition.⁵

Whatever the relationship may really have been, the "editor" suggests that *A Voyage Round the World*, which he presents as an anonymous and obscure work from the days of Dryden, is in fact the sole source from which Sterne derived the "hints and grounds of his work". His first incentive to give *A Voyage Round the World* a new life as a work by Tristram's grandfather lies in the similarity in what he calls "humour of expression". But this, the editor explains, is in itself not enough to claim that *A Voyage Round the World* presents an early example of "Shandeism". A more essential similarity is that Sterne and the author of *A Voyage* combine a burlesque and unpredictable humour with fragments about "moral and serious matter". In the case of *A Voyage*, we meet with thoughts of untimely deceased people and the deceased parents of the narrator, which result in grave reflections on death, guilt and resurrection. For instance, we are introduced to "the house of weeping", a place well known to Protestants and certainly to Sterne's congregation, and learn that no monument will ever be a guarantee for eternity. For that, one needs grace, hopefully attained in faith, nurtured by a continuous realization of one's own mortality. These memories and reflections, it is suggested, are perfect equivalents of the pathetic narratives for which Sterne/Tristram was also famous. The chapters in which they have been included in *Christopher Wagstaff* have the titles "An Excellent Sentimental Chapter" and "More Sentiments, or Something like it".

⁵ Huntington Brown, *Rabelais in English Literature*, London, 1933, 191-206; Anthony Coleman, "Sterne's Use of the Motteux-Ozell 'Rabelais'", *Notes and Queries*, 223 (1978), 55-58; Melvyn New, "Sterne's Rabelaisian Fragment: A Text From the Holograph Manuscript", *PMLA*, 87 (1972), 1083-92. The possibility that similarities between *Tristram Shandy* and *A Voyage Round the World* were mediated by *Christopher Wagstaff* is not considered in the Florida Notes.

Digression on pathos

At first, there seem to be considerable differences between the self-conscious lachrymosity and explicit orthodox moral of these sentimental chapters by Dunton, and the passages in *Tristram Shandy* that were read for the sentiment.

Christopher Wagstaff was published about six months after the third instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, with, in volume VI, the famous beauty by which the recognition of Sterne's pathetic talents was to get its definitive form, the history of the adventures of Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim round the death-bed of lieutenant Le Fever. Much has been said already about the literary qualities of this fragment, in which unreasoning human solidarity is the central issue. The theme works on the readers' feelings – a poor widower, alone with his little son, dying in an inn – just like the tension curve in the story, with first, Trim's account, the flash-back to the death of Mrs Le Fever, then Uncle Toby's blasphemy at the thought of being too late to save the critically ill lieutenant and the reactions to that in heaven (“The ACCUSING SPIRIT, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in; — and the RECORDING ANGEL, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever”), up to the final meeting between Toby and Le Fever, with the last agony, and finally the postscript of the funeral. Sterne uses a form of realism that makes it difficult not to take the sobs, tears and sighs of Toby and Trim seriously. The episode confirmed the reviewers in their opinion that Sterne's “excellence lay not so much in the humorous as in the pathetic”.⁶ The story was even “beautifully pathetic” and would have the whole-hearted approval of “every reader of sensibility”.⁷ In this sense, that of “intended for the sensitive reader”, the passages in *Christopher Wagstaff* so designated are not “sentimental”.

The titles given to the chapters need not, however, have been simply a matter of fashionable modernism on the part of the editor. The recent interest in philosophical and aesthetic sentimentalism might almost make one forget that the word “sentimental” first appeared in a didactic, religious context. The shift in meaning of the basic word, “sentiment”, from thought to combination of thought and feeling, with an emphasis on the latter, went slowly, as Erämetsä has shown. At the end of the century,

⁶ *Monthly Review*, XXVI (1762), 41.

⁷ *Critical Review*, XIII (1762), 68.

too, “sentiment” was a current term for something like confident opinion, conviction. The more unusual “sentimental” was derived from it and had the connotation of morally instructive.⁸ Dunton’s emotional rhetoric gave food for thought in a desired, orthodox, direction, and was for the editor in that more usual sense sentimental.

To more readers than is assumed by the historians of Sentimentalism, Sterne’s pathetic stories were sentimental, however, in exactly this sense. Over the history of Le Fever people could cry and reflect. The pathos was found beautiful because the story as a whole had the effect of a sermon, not that of a “romance”.⁹ Before elaborating on this point by having a look at a typical early “sentimental” Sterne-imitation, more will be said on the links between Sterne’s fiction and his sermons, and, in a wider sense, between the current theology of the Anglican church and eighteenth-century sensitivity to pathetic literature.

The serious side of Sterne’s public character has often been underestimated. It ought to be said once again that all his life, Sterne remained a faithful son of the Anglican Church. After his literary breakthrough, too, he composed sermons and, his health permitting, preached them. Literary critics have usually regarded this as an external factor, but Sterne himself had different ideas about that. He feared that Tristram Shandy’s “vein of humour would be too free & gay for the solemn colour of My coat”, professing to hope that “if he is so happy as to have some striking beauties, merciful & good Judges will spare it as God did Sodom for the ten righteous that are therein”.¹⁰ Probably, the early publication of the *Sermons of Mr Yorick* was at least partly suggested by his idea of having to counterbalance the one-sided association of Sterne with Tristram.¹¹ Sterne knew from experience that, whatever people thought about him, his sermons impressed them and

⁸ Erik Erämetsä, *A Study of the Word “Sentimental” and of Other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth-Century Sentimentalism in England*, Helsinki, 1951, 21-32.

⁹ As a first indication of the context in which the story of Le Fever was received, reference may be made to Edmund Ferrer’s marginalia in a copy of *Tristram Shandy* now in the British Library. Ferrer recognized the sentence “The blood and spirits of Le Fever ... were retreating to their last citadel, the heart” (*Tristram Shandy*, VI.10.512) from Jeremy Taylor, *The Rule and Exercise of Holy Dying* (1727); see Anthony Coleman, “Further Illustrations of Sterne”, *Notes and Queries*, 225 (1980), 44.

¹⁰ *Letters*, 76, 80.

¹¹ Cf. *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne, The Notes*, 1.

were above doctrinal and moral doubt. Reviewers had grave objections against the way of publication (under the name of Yorick), but the sermons, as expected, were received with admiration.

Now what should be stressed here is that the reputation as a spiritual guide which Sterne, in spite of Tristram, managed to maintain, was bound up with his skill in sketching moving scenes. Richard Griffith might serve as a typical reader here, since he explained in detail what the rhetorical effectiveness of Sterne's sermons consisted in:

—— His sermons* are written professedly, upon the divine principle of philanthropy; and there are two apostrophes in them, which are both striking and affecting. In the midst of a most moving discription of a complicated family distress, he suddenly interrupts himself with this humane exclamation: *Look down, O God, upon their afflictions!* and then proceeds with his narrative*. Again he is telling the story of the good Samaritan, and after these words, *by chance there came by a certain priest*, he cries out, *Merciful God! that a teacher of thy religion should ever want humanity!*† For my part, were I a bishop, I would not indeed prefer him as a *Cure* (though I am glad that he does not want one) because of his *Tristram*, but I would certainly make him my *Vicar-General*, on account of his *Yoric* [sic].¹²

The use of pathetic interjections in sermons was perhaps less unusual than is suggested in this argument,¹³ but elsewhere, too, at least the apparent lack of polish of the *Sermons* (possibly related to Sterne's renunciation of the usual editing conventions) was noticed and praised.¹⁴ Sterne's sermons were sentimental in the most familiar sense of the word: they encouraged moral contemplation through an appeal to the passions.

Richard Griffith's feeling that Sterne's exclamations were artless and

¹² Anon. [Richard Griffith], *The Triumvirate, or The Authentic Memoirs of A.B. and C.*, London, 1764, I, xvi-xvii. Griffith's footnotes to this passage: * "Yoric's Sermons" [sic], * "Sermon 2d, page 41" (i.e. *Sermons*, 2.18, not quoted correctly), † "Sermon 3d, page 53" (i.e. *Sermons*, 3.24). With his pun, Griffith is referring to the aggrieved protests among Grub-street authors about Sterne's acquisition of the Coxwold curacy in 1760.

¹³ Cf. R.S. Crane, "Suggestions Towards a Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling'", *ELH*, 1/3 (1934), 205-30; New, *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne, The Notes*, xiv-xv; J.T. Parnell, "A Story Painted to the Heart? 'Tristram Shandy' and Sentimentalism Reconsidered", *The Shandean*, 9 (1997), 122-35.

¹⁴ For example, *Critical Review*, IX (1760), 405-407.

sincere was shared by many of his contemporaries. The same sincerity was to be encountered in *A Sentimental Journey*, the *Letters to Eliza* and *The Beauties of Sterne*, and some readers of these works were to see Sterne as a “modern sentimentalist”, a champion of “Sensibility, or, Feeling, as Opposed to Principle”.¹⁵ That was not how readers regarded his work in the early years of *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne’s Tristram pose and doubles entendres caused confusion, so that Richard Griffith, too, did not commit himself, but if his moral intentions could be trusted, they were at any rate traditional: Sterne’s “principal end, I hope and believe, was to inculcate ... humanity and benevolence. ‘A tale may catch him who a sermon flies.’”¹⁶

“Inculcate” is here the operative word. In the association psychology of the period, complex ideas are better retained by the memory when, at the moment of composition, they are accompanied by strong emotions.¹⁷ In the end, it is ideas that Richard Griffith has in mind. If the stories in *Tristram Shandy* have the same effect as the *Sermons*, that does not mean that they just appeal to people’s feelings, but that they also exhort people to reflection. Like most Anglican priests, Sterne emphasized feelings of philanthropy and generosity, but only a superficial reading of the *Sermons* can substantiate that he saw that as the highest good. God’s grace cannot be bought; faith and hope are most important. Courtesy may be a sign of inner virtue, but signs are deceptive. “The Abuses of Conscience considered”, first published in 1750, read by Trim in *Tristram Shandy* and reprinted again in volume IV of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, shows clearly enough that feelings – of sympathy, of disapproval – are no criterion: “the heart is everyday thus treacherous to itself above all things.” “Conscience ... is not to be trusted alone; and therefore ... Look ——— What is written in the law of God? ——— How readeest thou? ——— Consult calm reason, and the unchangeable obligations of justice and truth, ——— What say they?”¹⁸ For *Tristram*

¹⁵ “On Sensibility, or, Feeling, as Opposed to Principle”, *American Museum*, 10 (1791), 92 (quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 308).

¹⁶ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, xiv.

¹⁷ Cf. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 33, Sections 8-19; Alexander Gerard, “Of the Influence of the Passions on Association”, section II, 3 of *An Essay on Genius* (1774), in *Literary Criticism in England, 1660-1800*, ed. Gerald Wester Chapman, New York, 1966, 322-26.

¹⁸ *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 260-61.

Shandy, Sterne sought wise readers. In his famous letter to John Eustace about the “handles” of that book, he makes clear that by “true feeling” he does not understand the same thing as “sensibility”.¹⁹ The message that is made explicit in the *Sermons* returns in the pathetic parts of *Tristram Shandy* in the form of subtle exhortations to keep a rhetorical distance. That is almost tantamount to saying that an element of satire can be recognized here.

The sentimental paradox

Even the story of Le Fever contains a few seemingly superfluous asides that frustrate a thoughtless enjoyment of sympathy. Melvyn New points out Toby’s selfish worries about his old wound, which make him decide not to go to the inn in bad weather himself. The help for Le Fever therefore is slow in getting organized, for Trim has a limited mandate.²⁰ New also points at Toby’s thoughts straying to his scale models while waiting for news from Trim. New suspects that in this way the “death of one soldier may reflect ironically on Toby’s campaigns”. Then there are the self-satisfied comments by Tristram about his own narrative qualities, suggesting that this is a question of aiming at effects rather than of being involved with the subject. In this connection, the way in which Billy le Fever is forgotten seems to me to be especially relevant. As the only one to take care of his father, the boy is “broken-hearted already”,²¹ but how he fared immediately after the death of Le Fever, is not Tristram’s concern: “I am so impatient to return to my own story, that what remains of young Le Fever’s ... shall be told in a very few words in the next chapter.”²² Of course, New knows the eulogies that were to earn Sterne, if only because of the story of Le Fever, the name of an exceptional sentimentalist. His unlavish conclusion is that Sterne was poorly understood by most of his contemporaries.

However, John Mullan has found, in the reactions called forth by the story of Le Fever, evidential support for his perception of the ambiguous sentimental response by eighteenth-century readers of novels. Mullan does not seem aware of the impure, purely human sides of Toby’s character (*Laurence Sterne as Satirist* is not on his list), but he does

¹⁹ *Letters*, 411.

²⁰ New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist*, 150-51.

²¹ *Tristram Shandy*, VI.7.504.

²² *Ibid.*, VI.11.513. Notice the choice of words (“my own story”).

consider in some detail what is theatrical and obvious in Tristram's presentation. He assumes that readers of Sterne recognized this aspect, too. In his view, Tristram's manifest theatricalism intensifies the realization that narrator and reader have become strangers to the natural (but socially impossible) innocence of Trim and Toby. This awareness of exclusivity is crucial for the sentimental response that Sterne evoked: "The gestures by which feeling is communicated are, in his fiction, the prerogative of those who cannot be imitated because innocence is inimitable."²³ Mullan's argument is not new, but well-founded historically.²⁴

What Mullan does not say is that the realization by Sterne's readers of being on the side of literacy and unhappy knowledge coincides with the Augustinian emphasis on the concept of the tree of knowledge and the depravity of human nature. The melancholy that Mullan discerns behind the applause for Sterne the sentimentalist belongs to the world of the Augustans. Pope, Swift, Burke and Johnson would be the first to admit that, in the terms in which Fussell describes this continent of *The Rhetorical world of Augustan Humanism*, "no 'kind' of literature can be expected to be 'natural' and 'sincere', especially not those kinds that most ostentatiously proclaim their proximity to the author's genuine feelings".²⁵ Any attempt at sincerity is doomed to fail from the start, and that because man, since his expulsion from Paradise, has only been able to express himself with sophistication, that is, by means of lies.

Because Sterne could be funny and naughty and, moreover, only seldom pointed a didactic finger, it has been assumed that his devoutness did not amount to much.²⁶ And whenever his fiction is discussed against the backdrop of the *Sermons*, it is usually done because of the latitudinarian

²³ John Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability: The Language of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford, 1988, 200.

²⁴ Brissenden regards the "failure of [Yorick's] virtues to succeed in the world" as a cause for sadness (R.F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade*, London, 1974, 90-91).

²⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism: Ethics and Imagery from Swift to Burke*, London and New York, 1965, 81.

²⁶ For instance, Ernest Nevin Dilworth, *The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne*, Morningside Heights: NY, 1948, 46; D.W. Jefferson, *Laurence Sterne*, London, 1954, 11-12. Walter Göbel, "The Suppositional Structure: *Tristram Shandy* as a Playful Inquiry into Human Nature", *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 13 (1988), 179.

tolerance and the emphasis on social responsibility that both Sterne the clergyman and Sterne the writer found important.²⁷

The idea that the broad Anglican church in the eighteenth century propagated a pragmatic and almost secular type of religion has a long history, and has struck deep roots in literary histories and discussions of Sentimentalism. Historians such as Humphries, Bredvold and Brissenden have not taken R.S. Crane's well-known "Suggestions Towards a Genealogy of the *Man of Feeling*" for what they claim to be – suggestions – and have propagated the notion that an anti-stoic emphasis on sensibility in sermon literature paved the way for a taste for the pathetic novel.²⁸ Mullan did feel that there is something wrong here, but strangely enough, his only objection is to the automatic linking of "latitudinarian" sermons to novels. The former sketch a "model of a universal capacity, a general bond",²⁹ while the latter play along with the realization that a pure solidarity is impossible – and it is this realization that caused the novels to be read with such eagerness and emotion. That a lot of religious literature, too, was read, and probably for the same reason, does not occur to him (which makes one suppose Crane still has some authority even with Mullan).

Mullan wrestles with Sterne's sermons, which he believes are optimistic and straightforward "for didactic purposes", and have therefore little connection with Sterne's ambiguous, aesthetically well-considered sentimentalism.³⁰ At the end of his chapter on Sterne, however, he retracts all that by remarking that the posthumously published sermons contain more sceptical elements, thereby revealing Sterne's true character, or at least relinquishing the realism in contrast with which Sterne's works of fiction were found moving. The notion that the first few *Sermons of Mr. Yorick* have an optimistic, in Mullan's words "latitudinarian" tone, whereas the sermons that were originally

²⁷ Herbert Read, *Collected Essays in Literary Criticism*, London, 1938, 255-56; Kenneth MacLean, "Imagination and Sympathy: Sterne and Adam Smith", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 10 (1949), 399-410, and *John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century*, New Haven, 1936, 49.

²⁸ A.R. Humphreys, "'The Friend of Mankind' (1700-60): An Aspect of Eighteenth Century Sensibility", *Review of English Studies*, 24 (1948), 203-18; L.I. Bredvold, *The Natural History of Sensibility*, Detroit, 1962; Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress*, 7ff.

²⁹ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 144.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

suppressed by Sterne are pessimistic (“orthodox”), stems from Van der Heyden Hammond and has been repeated regularly.³¹ In reality, Sterne is in all Volumes of the Sermons equally clear about the fallen state of mankind: “Scripture tells us, and gives us many historical proofs of it ... ——— that the heart of man is treacherous to itself and *deceitful above all things*”; “The passions of men are pretty severe executioners”; man is a “short-lived and a wretched creature”; we live in an “uncertain and perplexed state” and “the true faith and fear of Thee ... only can carry us to this haven of rest where we would be ——— that sure haven, where true joys are to be found”.³² These are all quotations from the first two parts of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, which Sterne is said to have composed for “those who would expect the affability of address of the author of *Tristram Shandy*”.³³

For a good understanding of the first reactions to Sterne’s works, it will be useful not to take the oppositions traditionally suggested by cultural history – Orthodoxy versus Latitudinarianism an “age of Satire” versus an “age of Sensibility” – too literally. The Anglican faith – as Crane rightly assumed – had been of great influence on Sterne and the public that read his work “for the sentiment”. Only, the dedication of the church and the sort of influence emanating from it after the seventeenth century do not seem to have changed so drastically as has been suggested. The growing power of Methodism, Whitefield’s “doctrine of faith against good works”, as Parson Adams³⁴ described that persuasion, may have made it necessary to increase the emphasis on morality, but everyday Anglicanism did not allow the concept of the wicked individual soul to be taken away from it. In a sense, this acknowledgement only makes Mullan’s claim about the psychology of Sentimentalism stronger. The purposeful moral ambiguity of the three then popular sentimental novels on which Mullan rests his claim need not be explained by the influence of the secular scepticism of the early Hume and Adam Smith on Sterne and Goldsmith. The combination of empathy and the cynical undermining of it corresponds with the maddening contradictions in

³¹ Lansing Van der Heyden Hammond, *Laurence Sterne’s Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, New Haven, 1948, 50-64; cf. New, *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne, The Notes*, 7-11.

³² *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, resp. 31, 112, 102, 5.

³³ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 198.

³⁴ In Fielding’s *Joseph Andrews*, Vol. I, Chapter 17.

English protestant sermons.³⁵

With regard to the question of philanthropy and generosity, the Anglican church demanded a position between Pelagianism (good works are rewarded by God) and justification by faith (the inner attitude, not the outward signs are weighed by God); between Cambridge-Platonistic (the New Testament shows the way), or Shaftesburian optimism (man can refind remnants of his real Nature) and Calvinistic-Augustinian pessimism (man has been morally decayed since the Fall and become dependent on God's grace by believing in the Redeemer). The never-settled dispute between Scholtz and Greene about true Anglicanism "in the age of Johnson" seems to reflect the degree to which theologians from the period were themselves torn between these extremes.³⁶

Sterne's charity sermons present good deeds as pleasant for the performer and as agreeable to God, but not to such a degree that they might remedy a bad conscience or offset lapses in the balance of the All-seeing Judge. The emphasis on social virtues is, as in many English sermon collections from the period, overwhelming, but the typically Anglican double bind – the suspicion and self-depreciation of the Augustan humanist – is very rarely missing.³⁷ Seen in that light, Sterne's sermons and his works of fiction are related, not only because of the emphasis on philanthropy, but also because of the inherent doubt about human ability to achieve self-knowledge and sincerity. The sentimentally satirical duckrabbits of *Tristram Shandy* offer all kinds of possibilities to those who wish to cope with the difficult assignment of "The Abuses of Conscience Considered": suffer conscientiously with the sufferers, but

³⁵ I mean "maddening" in a fairly literal sense: connections between double binds in education and schizophrenia have been fairly conclusively proved to exist.

³⁶ Donald Greene, "Augustinianism and Empiricism: A Note on Eighteenth-Century English Intellectual History", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 1 (1968), 33-68; "Latiudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the 'Man of Feeling' Reconsidered", *Modern Philology*, 75 (1977), 159-83; "How 'Degraded' Was Eighteenth-Century Anglicanism?", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, XXIV/1 (1990), 93-108. Gregory F. Scholtz, "Anglicanism in the Age of Johnson: The Doctrine of Conditional Salvation", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 22 (1989), 182-207; "Reply to Donald Greene", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 24 (1990), 109-11.

³⁷ Both the contradictions and the pessimistic tenor of Sterne's sermons have also been noted by Bosma (Jelle Bosma, "De preek als medium voor de verspreiding van verlicht ideeëngoed: Een korte schets van het werk van de Engelsen, Tillotson, Doddridge, Sterne en Blair", in *Kerk en Verlichting*, ed. P. Bange, Zwolle, 1990, 49-50).

do not trust your own conscience.

A relevant question is, of course, can we then say that Sterne's play with "the intricacies of sentiment" (John Eustace's phrase) was appreciated by his early readers? Sterne himself seems to have become ever more doubtful about that. In the Advertisement for "The Abuses of Conscience Considered" in Part 4 of *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, he points out that "the following Sermon ... has already appeared in the body of a moral work, more read than understood".³⁸ (A new edition without "the breaks and interruptions given to the sense as it stands there offered to the world" – that is, in *Tristram Shandy* – might, it is hoped, lead to a better understanding). He complained to John Eustace about "the herd of the world" lacking the brains to understand his book.³⁹ Although many reviewers found Sterne's satire around ruling passions excellent, being reminded of Pope, one or two reviews in the *Monthly Review* suggest that at any rate the editor Ralph Griffiths thought it unnecessary for evidently sensible passages to be interlarded with rude satire.⁴⁰ And yet, we must not in this see signs of a growing preference for aesthetically enjoyable pathos. The moving passages in *A Sentimental Journey* are by no means less problematic than those in *Tristram Shandy*, and once more a realization of Yorick's Anglican theology may help us

³⁸ *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 255.

³⁹ *Letters*, 411.

⁴⁰ Ralph Griffiths' review of the story of Maria of Moulins is the best-known example. The reviewer had the whole episode printed, "except the abrupt transition in the two last lines, which, in our opinion, serve but to spoil all, by an ill-timed stroke of levity; like a ludicrous epilogue, or ridiculous farce, unnaturally tagged to the end of a deep tragedy, only as it were, to efface every elevated, generous, or tender sentiment that might before have been excited by the nobler part of the evening's entertainment" (*Monthly Review*, XXXVI [1767], 99). With the sudden change of perspective at the end of Tristram's account of his meeting with Maria – "What an excellent inn at Moulins!" – Tristram threatens to break his solemn promise of only two sentences before, "never-never attempt again to commit mirth with man, woman, or child, the longest day I had to live". His "humblest conviction of what a Beast man is", expressed before Maria, appeared, just for a moment, to be an exaggeration after that promise, but of course also because of the conviction with which the story of Maria is told. Griffiths blamed Sterne for sacrificing that effect. What remains, however, is that Tristram's recollection of his own lust obviously could not spoil a sentimental enjoyment of the story. The infamous passage in which Tristram is put on a level with Maria's goat ("Well, Maria, said I softly ——— What resemblance do you find?"; *Tristram Shandy*, IX.24.783) was fully acceptable for Griffiths.

in our analysis of the problems. It is not for nothing that Sterne's last work has in the twentieth century been regarded as a satire on the pathetic novel in general.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the first reviews of *A Sentimental Journey* were (with one predictable exception⁴²) favourable. *The Political Register* saw Sterne moving his attention in the direction of "the moral and the pathetic", and found itself "agreeably instructed".⁴³ The *Monthly* discovered "many dozens of shrewd observations and choice sentiments". Ralph Griffiths saw a confirmation of what he had always thought: that Sterne's "excellence ... lies not in his humourous [*sic*] but in his pathetic vein" – the work was, however, also "diverting, edifying, and *satirical*".⁴⁴ It was not the satirical layer in *Tristram Shandy* that was not understood; what the reviewers rejected, and part of his readers did not know what to do with, was the tone of the satire. It was the Rabelais in Sterne that caused difficulties. The depravity of human nature was something to deplore and to discuss. The obscene, aggressive and grotesque elements in *Tristram Shandy* left the possibility open for people to laugh feelings of fear and guilt off loud – as Bakhtin puts it, from the abdomen. As promised before, in following chapters, I will show how the residents of Grub-street made off with those elements and forced Sterne, as it were, to soften his humour.

The sentimental paradox in question, then, seems to be, after all, the exclusive stylistic means of a few elite writers, Sterne and Goldsmith, and not really to belong in the opportunistic culture of the Grub-street authors. Although this is not an incorrect picture in general, in the course of this book a number of sources will be mentioned to at least qualify it somewhat. A book of unmistakable grubby origin, *Ephraim Tristram Bates* (1756; see later Chapter 6 in the present book), influenced Sterne in his sentimental treatment of the theme of war. The contradictions in the character of Uncle Toby can be found in this precursor of *Tristram Shandy*. Unfortunately, too little is known about the backgrounds of the work to enable us to say very much about the intentions of the anonymous author. For the present, I will only deal with *The*

⁴¹ Arthur Cash, *Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments: The Ethical Dimension of the Journey*, Pittsburgh, 1966.

⁴² *The Critical Review* took its revenge for the attack on Smollett (Smelfungus in *A Sentimental Journey*).

⁴³ *The Political Register*, II (1768), 383.

⁴⁴ *Monthly Review*, XXXVI (1768), 174-85, 309-19 (my italics).

Triumvirate, the work from which I have already quoted Richard Griffith's comments on Sterne's modernity and sermons. Griffith was not exactly a hack, although, before finding a job as a civil servant, he lived for a long time on the lower side of society, supporting his family with difficulty by doing editorial work. In contrast with most writers, he had had little schooling. He openly deplored his fragmentary erudition, but at the same time prided himself on having acquired it himself.⁴⁵ Although *The Triumvirate* (1764) betrays the influence of Sterne, it can easily be read as an independent work. Griffith is explicit about his intention to bring pathos and satire in an indeterminate balance; the fact that he compares his satiric persona to Tristram throws light on the intentions he suspected in Sterne. No other book from the period can illustrate so well that indeterminacy and layered prose need not indicate an original philosophical attitude, but can be related to a interlinked series of normal moral and aesthetic ideas. Although Griffith's explicit intentions cannot perhaps be compared with the possible intentions of Sterne, his work may be useful for us in positioning Sterne's Augustan Sentimentalism.

Triglyph and Tristram

A number of eighteenth-century readers seem to have wept over passages in the works of Sterne. To my knowledge, only once is there a mention of a literary text that caused Sterne himself to shed tears. In September 1767, Sterne broke off his work on *A Sentimental Journey* for a short holiday in the house of Dr Jemmett Browne, Bishop of Cork and Ross, in Scarborough. There, in a company of other Anglo-Irishmen, he met, for the first and last time, his admirer and fellow-author Richard Griffith. For a brief period, the two shared each other's work-in-progress. Griffith read the first few chapters of *A Sentimental Journey*, and Sterne perused the notes for Griffith's *The Gordian Knot*. If we may trust Griffith, Sterne was deeply moved by one of his manuscripts: "He read the Memoir of my Life, and actually dropped Tears as he went on. He begged of me, by all Means, to introduce that Piece into some Part of the present Work."⁴⁶

In the literature on Sterne, Griffith has so far been referred to as a

⁴⁵ Anon. [Richard and Elizabeth Griffith], *A Series of Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, London, 1767, "Henry's Preface to the Second Edition" (xxxix-xliv) and letter 164 (I, 255ff).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, VI, 87.

parasitic hack writer. If he is mentioned at all, it is because of his *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*, the falsification of 1770, which was included in two English editions of Sterne's collected works, and which, regarded as authentic by, among others, Goethe, Kant and Nietzsche, influenced nineteenth-century Sterne reception. As far as I know, the idea has not yet penetrated that Griffith might be an interesting author in his own right. Perhaps (although it is conceivable) Sterne did not actually weep when reading the *Memoir*, but it is likely that he appreciated Griffith's prose, in particular, as Griffith proudly mentions, that of *The Triumvirate, or the Authentic Memoirs of A.B. and C.*:

He mentioned my Strictures on his Writings* to me, and said that they had hurt him a little at first, notwithstanding the fine Qualifications I had thrown in, in Compliment to his moral Character. But upon going through the Work, he confessed that he became soon reconciled to me, was sensible of strong sympathy of *feeling* coming upon him every Chapter, and said to himself, "This Man, surely, hath no *Inimicability* in his Nature."⁴⁷

The work that called forth in Sterne "strong sympathy of *feeling*" is a stereotypical pathetic narrative, or at any rate one that can be read as such.

The B. and C. in the subtitle of *The Triumvirate* are Messrs. Beville and Carewe, who make each other's acquaintance in the bachelor's lodge of their common friend Andrew. This A. is the type of life-battered sensitive man that we also come across in Fielding's *Tom Jones*, Mackenzie's *The Man of the World*, Amory's *John Buncl*e and a dozen other novels from the period. Andrews leads a retired life on his small, self-supporting farm. He is a good man, but benevolent rather than philanthropical. His good deeds extend to "the whole animal creation, from the Leviathan of the deep, to the emmet of the field".⁴⁸ His neighbours regard him as insane "as he spent all his time in [the] reading

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, VI, 83; "*" in the Preface to the *Triumvirate*". *The Triumvirate* appears as item 1760 in *A Catalogue of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, Among Which Are Included The Entire Library of the Late Reverend and Learned Laurence Sterne*, York, 1768, 67.

⁴⁸ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, 13.

of *books*".⁴⁹ Carewe at first is a rake (a libertine, profane, a gambler); Beville is of a more businesslike and practical nature. At the first level, practically the whole story is enacted at Andrews' house and in a period of not more than two days. The memoirs proper consist of fragmentary flash-backs, in which the gentlemen tell their own and each other's histories, and about how their friendships began. Every now and then, the stories are supplemented by the first narrative agent, Griffith's persona biographer Triglyph.

Each of the three men turns out to have had a far from easy life. Practically all well-known pathetic elements are there. Beville is desperately in love with a naturally sensitive and exceptionally beautiful but unhappy (because, of course, she is married to a brute) acquaintance of Andrews. A long, secret love affair between Andrews and Beville's sister has, against much parental opposition, ended in marriage, but the wife (who is, of course, no less delicate and therefore physically vulnerable) has died during a sea voyage, leaving two children behind. Carewe, too, is unhappy in love, but his greatest problems are related to his life on the seamy side: he is on the run from his creditors, and also from justice because of a false accusation of murder (a situation in which poor Andrews had also got involved). Moreover, Andrews has gone bankrupt because of a family debt which has been shifted on to him by the person really responsible (his father, unreconcilable because of the earlier marriage), and to top it all, Beville and Andrews have together been cheated by a swindler. Gradually, the reader learns that at the moment of meeting at Andrew's house, all non-amorous ordeals have in the meantime (mostly through lucky coincidences) come to an end. Right at the end, all amorous problems are solved too: Beville's loved one becomes a widow, Carewe is tamed by a virtuous Eloisa, and, to add to the improbabilities, Mrs Andrews appears not to have died, but to have been confined in the dungeons of the Portuguese inquisition. Two marriages and a reunion result, after all, in "the union and harmony of this happy family of friends".⁵⁰

The superabundance of clichés gives *The Triumvirate* the semblance of a parody in everything. And a parody it is, and even much more clearly than appears from this précis. First, however, we must add that

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 3.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 337.

Griffith has not treated the misery of the protagonists in an indifferent or stereotyped way. In spite of the obvious thought-up names and positions, the personages are sometimes unpredictable and consequently relatively realistic. Andrews, for instance, is clearly fascinated by Carewe's excesses, and sometimes seems to have learned from his libertine wives. Thus, he passes himself off as a physician to be able to subject Miss Beville to a far-reaching physical examination. The scene in which Andrews "made a physical pretence, of feeling her pulse, for the natural one of feeling her hand"⁵¹ may have provided Sterne with an idea for *A Sentimental Journey*. Carewe has much of the John Bull type: fond of cockfighting but not malicious. The confession of faith of this rough diamond comes unexpectedly, but is not unacceptable. The circumstances in which our heroes end up are sometimes described convincingly. Triglyph's knowledge of the letter of the bankruptcy act is extensive, and his decription of a debtor's gaol is detailed.⁵² Therefore Griffith has provided a sufficiently strong foundation to be able to empathize with his characters. Richard's wife Elizabeth Griffith, herself a writer of, among others, plays, dramatic poetry and essays, emphasized in the edited letters between them this pathetic aspect of *The Triumvirate*: "I wept and wondered, both at the Virtue, and the Vice of the Recital", she repeated after the Miss Beville of the book when she had read the manuscript of Part I.⁵³ In Part II she found "many Passages ... , which seize upon the Heart, unawares, and leave the Eyes to mourn its Captivity, even without a Wish to set it free".⁵⁴ It was especially the chapters about the debtors⁵⁵ and "Carewe's Confession of Faith" that had moved her. Of course, Elizabeth must have loved advertising a publication by her husband and co-author. My point, then, is only that the Griffiths relied on *The Triumvirate* being able to fulfil the promise of sensibility.

Just like Sterne, however, Griffith keeps distancing himself from his own pathetic talents. The sting of *The Triumvirate* and the correspondence with *Tristram Shandy* is in the comments of the

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I, 113.

⁵² *Ibid.*, II, 205ff. As the owner of a farm in County Kilkenny, Griffith himself had gone bankrupt.

⁵³ [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, III, 28.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, III, 116.

⁵⁵ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, II (Chapter 162).

biographer Tryglyph. The reader is regularly made to face the facts of the compository considerations behind the story; these considerations are often an insult to the reading public. The following passage is typical:

... Just as Mr. Carewe had finished the reading of these letters, Mr. Beville walked into the room. The remainder of the day was passed in family incidents not of sufficient consequence to relate, or in conversations which the generality of readers, preferring narrative to sentiment, would excuse the recital of, that I may be the more at liberty *to file the thread of my story*, without any further interruption. Therefore, I shall just dine them, sup them, and put them to bed, and to-morrow morning, after I have sent off Mr. Beville to Scarborough, Messieurs Andrews and Carewe shall retire to the library, of which I have myself a master key, and will suffer the reader to slip in after them, *incog.* and overhear their whole conversation; ...⁵⁶

Reading the book for the story is represented as something inferior – and is made difficult. Many a narrative thread ends in an anticlimax. In anticipation of the disappointment about this among his readers, biographer Triglyph emphasizes that he is re-telling authentic memoirs: “Had I been at liberty to have suffered events to wait upon the leisure of invention”... etc.⁵⁷ The options that real novelists would have seized upon are presented a few times so circumstantially that we might speak of alternative stories within the novel proper.

It is not just the obligatory adventurousness of the average novel that is being targeted – all the ingredients that might carry the readers away and divert them have to suffer, including the sort of pathos that Griffith seems to have copied from Richardson. That for Griffith – as for Richardson, for that matter – pathos and sentiment were two different things, appears clearly from the following passage. Readers who get bored by the sentiment of *The Triumvirate* are promised a new, forthcoming work by Triglyph:

But, have a little patience, good people, for I hope soon to rid my hands of the confined work I am now upon; and then I promise you to give myself loose to all the *extravaganza* of invention; and to present the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 33.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 99.

public with a *novel*, though nothing *new*, which shall at once *distress* and *delight* all hearts — ... a novel, which, if it does not blind their eyes with tears, first, shall break their heart with grief, at last. The story, in short, shall be this:

I will join Clarissa Harlowe, and Sidney Bidulph, both in the same piece; and after I have ravished Clary, and married Biddy, I will pack them off on a voyage together, no matter why, or where, but in order to have them taken by pirates, and sold in slavery; where, after they have been re-ravished, and re-married, *to the end of the chapter*, they shall attempt making their escape from *Algiers*, and be taken in the fact; tried, condemned, but not executed at all once — not so fast, good Sirs — This would be putting the reader *out of pain*, too suddenly, either for *his pleasure*, or my profit, by cutting me short of just forty *entertaining chapters*, exactly.

For in the first, I will only lop off a finger, and in the next, a toe; and so proceed, alternately, *as often as they have fingers and toes*. Oh! oh! oh! Till *finis* shall bring us an account of their *tedious* deaths and burials. ... N.B. This works shall consist of nine volumes, in octavo.⁵⁸

The stab is not intended for Samuel Richardson and Frances Sheridan only. Griffith undermines the pathos of his own story more often. An example is provided by the following imaginary dialogue between Triglyph and the ideal reader. A meeting, at the first level of the story, between the three friends and the children of widower Andrews, promises to become a pathetic climax, but immediately after that meeting has been announced, Triglyph moves his heroes for the occasion “from the scene”, ostensibly out of sight for biographer and reader, and of course to the displeasure of the latter:

Read. Pray now, Sir, shan't we follow them too, and have the pleasure of seeing the dear little *prate-a-paces* also, which I must confess I long to do extremely, from the affection and esteem you have taught me to conceive for their father and mother.

Tri. I do not chuse it, at present, Sir, and I'll tell you why. I have been all my life afflicted with a certain precordial weakness, which the Cabletonians, before mentioned, stile nervous*. I saw Mr. Andrews and his children meet once — that was enough for my disorder. Believe me, Mr. Reader, that, for all the money I expect to make of you and your

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 102; I, 105-106.

whole fraternity, I would not review such another scene – To see the *storgé*, to perceive the workings of the father, when he placed little Harry on his knee! But the looks, the emotions, the tears, when he snatched up *la petite Fançhon* in his arms! “So like her mother! Eternity, I have bought you with her loss!”

And then we should be plagued, at the same time also, with the nonsense of the nurse. This is daddy’s eye, and that is mammy’s lip. This is daddy’s this thing, and that is mammy’s t’other thing.⁵⁹

Because the language of sobs and tears apparently makes less impact these days, for us these and similar passages are probably the only memorable ones in the book. We appreciate the satire on Richardson and what Triglyph calls the “unnatural passion for crying” of his readers. From the Preface, Griffith makes it clear that it is by no means his intention to ridicule readers enjoying moving stories. Triglyph attaches great value to an intimate contact with his ideal readers. His obscene and sarcastic comments just remind them that that contact can never be completely screened off from the evil world outside, by which we can understand here both unfeeling third persons and unexpected evil passions in writer and reader.

The unfeeling third persons are recognizable most clearly. Just like Tristram, Triglyph is involved with readers who “are not readers at all”, but without whose company the relationship with the rest of the public cannot exist. Triglyph is talking here about well-defined social groups: the publication of his work depends on the same riff-raff that support the theatre by occupying the pit and the upper galleries. Consequently, when Carewe, out of commiseration with his audience, “the refined Messieurs Andrews and Beville”, leaves out the obscene passages from a retold conversation, Triglyph may not be blamed for filling in the gaps:

to say the truth, I should be as nice myself, were I to perform before such audiences only; but pit, box and gallery must be regarded, now-a-days, by every writer who honestly means to pay his bookseller*. Besides, you

⁵⁹ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, 155-56. The note (*) refers to an earlier passage (I,107), in which the “Cabletonians” who call Triglyph a neurotic were defined as “Persons whose nerves are as tough as cable ropes; and who have no *feelings*, but what are simply natural to animal nature; who are sensible of *pain*, but not *grief*, of *pleasure*, but not *joy*”. For Griffith’s objections to Stoicism, see also Anon. [Richard Griffith], *Something New*, London, 1772, I, 206-209 and II, 12ff.

may see by the list of my subscribers, what a farrago of readers I am bound down to; and I am now going to fulfil my engagement, to the last class of them.⁶⁰

This last remark refers to a fantastic story about the way in which Griffith has collected subscriptions for *The Triumvirate*. Unfamiliar with “the arts of *puffing off* a work”⁶¹ as he was at first, he had left the complete manuscript of *The Triumvirate* for perusal on the counter of his bookseller. The result was that potential buyers, when leafing through the work, could encounter both passages they liked and fragments that they found boring or to which they could not attach their names. Having learned from this experience, Griffith after that offered only selected fragments, which the bookseller could then, according to his own views, bring to the notice of the various characters among his clients. A list with the specific parts of *The Triumvirate* and the numbers and kinds of subscribers (fig. 8) shows both the value of this ruse (65,465 subscribers), and the irreconcilable contrasts between the various groups of readers. The last group of readers, for whom the rancid *bon mots* from Carewe’s story are as yet inserted, are “the admirers of *Tristram Shandy*”.

This looks like an ordinary sample of Grub-street cynicism, but in the context of *The Triumvirate*, the irony has a serious undertone. In the *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, Griffith suggests that he has only acted out of commercial necessity. *Frances*, who as we saw earlier had to weep over *The Triumvirate*, was not exactly pleased with Richard’s satirical side: “I am extremely displeased at most of those chapters, where you make *Triglyph* interlope, as you phrase it ... these Passages offend me ... as a Woman, and a Mother.”⁶² Henry apologizes by reminding her of the genesis of his book; she ought to remember how he had received the manuscript of Part I back from a London bookseller with the message that “a Work of this kind should ... be seasoned with *Comicality*, and *Archness*, before they would purchase it, in hopes of its

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, II.262. The note [*] refers to “Preface, parag.12”. There, Griffith remarks, “In a work like this, designed for the Public at large, there must be something, in allusion to dramatic writings, to entertain the three different classes of auditors; pit, box, and gallery”. Fielding makes the same comparison in *Tom Jones* (Book VII, Chapter 1).

⁶¹ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, xxi.

⁶² [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, III, 117-18.

bringing a Sale".⁶³ The fact that a union of sensitive minds should be forged by means of a book made that union vulnerable.

In *The Triumvirate*, however, the perfectly sensitive reader, too, appears to be a fiction. Griffith assumed that, among other things, grief at the death of Mrs Andrews as described in his book would communicate itself to his readers, but the comment by Triglyph's ideal reader on the following passage with its reference to "daddy's this thing, and ... mammy's t'other thing" is not necessarily one of disappointment:

As for Example.				Names.	Characters.	Parts subscri- bed to.	Numbers
This column must remain a blank, till the fifteenth edition, for reasons that will perfectly satisfy the <i>bona</i> Public.	Names.	Characters.	Parts subscri- bed to.	Numbers			
		All who have faith in the veracity of Burnet's History of his Own Times.	To } The Preface	15	The admirers of Mrs. Sliplop. - - -	The description of Mrs. Benfon, the Cornish squire, &c.	5,000
		The dependents on the little Great. - -	} The Appen- dix - - -	20,000	All the women in the world, who would banish an amiable lover from their presence, and remain with a disagreeable husband in a bleak castle, on the Cornish coast. - - -	The story of Anadyomene.	00000
		All the <i>primitive</i> bishops, priests, deacons, and presbyters, in England, Ireland, and Scotland. - - -	} Mr. Carewe's confession of faith. - - -	10	All the old maids in England, &c. - - -	The chapter on the <i>Forlorn Hope</i> . - - -	20,000
		Every man of true love and honour in these kingdoms. - -	} The story of Mr. Andrews	20	All the old virgins in ditto -	Ditto. - - -	0
		All the witty rakes in ditto. -	} The character of the condisciple. - - -	15	Some of the noble families of Europe. - - -	The chapter on <i>private relations</i> . - - -	400
	Every moral rake in ditto. -	} The story of Mr. Carewe.	5	The admirers of Tristram Shandy. - - -	Some of the chapters where Triglyph speaks in his own character. - -	20,000	
			Names.			Total Subscribers	65,465

7. Subscribers for *The Triumvirate*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, III, 122.

Read. You are a whimsical man, Mr. Triglyph, and shift so suddenly sometimes, from serious to comical, that I declare one does not know how to accomodate themselves [*sic*] to your humour; for you possess a certain art, of setting the upper part of the face a crying, and the lower a laughing, so hysterically, at the same time, that I am sure I must, at this instant, make as drole an appearance as a whipped school boy eating a tart, while tears with syrup mixed, run down his chaps, together.⁶⁴

As Elizabeth Griffith remarked, there is something malicious about Triglyph's comments. The reader who laughs through his tears, betrays himself. He may enjoy his own ability to feel compassion, with Triglyph he can no longer deny that he too is capable of unchaste thoughts and malicious pleasure. We, as engrained implicit readers, already know that, of course. When Beville by accident peeps at his Ethelinda in the nude, we expect spicy details, and we are also worldly wise enough to be able to follow the thoughts of someone who misunderstands "coquetting" as "cock-getting". When, finally, we think of characters like Clarissa Harlowe and Sidney Biddulph, who are innocent of all these pernicious things, we revel in the idea of torturing them.

In his other writings, Griffith manifests a robust-masculine ideal of virtue, and in that context, his satirical discussion of pathetic reading should in the first instance be examined, too. Compassion is only sincere if, as the word indicates, passion is part of it: "For in passion are sown the seeds of all our virtues, which bear fruit, according to their culture."⁶⁵ Without evident understanding of and control over the lower passions, "Knowledge, Learning, and Politeness" make someone "a *factitious*, or *made up Man*".⁶⁶ Those who pose as people unmoved by passions will probably not be sincere in their benefactions: "Such persons may be said, in the University phrase, to be *well read in humanity*"; they possess (in a phrase reminiscent of the common theological condemnations of Methodism) "*The outward and visible sign, but not the inward and Spiritual Grace*, of virtue". Such attacks on bogus decorum remind one of Fielding, and it will come as no surprise that Griffith compared himself to that writer: "In my opinion, Tom Jones,

⁶⁴ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, 56.

⁶⁵ [Griffith], *Something New*, I, 204.

⁶⁶ [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, III, 182.

and Charles Carewe, are worth a dozen Sir Charles Grandisons.”⁶⁷

In *The Triumvirate* there is, besides comic materialism, another tradition operative: in his letters and contemplative prose, Griffith regularly reverts to the problem of the unreliability of all human knowledge, both of the natural world and of human nature. His awareness of it has been nurtured by Montaigne and Erasmus, authors whom, in letters from the years 1740-50, he mentions several times as his favourites.⁶⁸ Griffith was especially impressed by Montaigne, whose “whole design”, says Henry, “is, by shewing the insufficiency of human understanding, to recommend to us our dependence upon faith; and tho’ there are few people who are more inclined to a free and canvassed disquisition of all matters, even the most sacred, than I have always been, yet the arguments of Montaigne, deduced from the writings of the wisest of the ancient and modern philosophers, have indeed put me out of conceit with the vain imagination, and presumptuous reasonings of human understanding”.⁶⁹ He adds that Montaigne’s “Essay about the Rationality of Brutes ... would be properly called, by being bound up with the *Moriae Encomium* of Erasmus; only with this difference, that Montaigne is in earnest and Erasmus in jest”.

Griffith’s linking “inner grace” to what he calls “a proper scope to passion” should not lead us to assume that in his mind self-analysis and self-control lead automatically to virtue. The dogmatism of the Puritans is rejected, but not replaced by another, reverse dogma. The truth is that no certainty can ever be reached about the conscience. Nobody knows himself sufficiently well. In *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, Griffith has comprised that thought in Sterne’s name into a beautiful aphorism: “A mirror even reverses our features, and presents our left hand for our right, — This is an emblem of all personal reflections.”⁷⁰

The feeling expressed by the ideal reader in *The Triumvirate*, of no longer knowing what attitude to take, reminds one strongly of “ein

⁶⁷ [Griffith], *Something New*, I, 206-207.

⁶⁸ [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, I, 222-5; I, 228-30; I, 225; II, 105.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, I, 223-24.

⁷⁰ [Richard Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*, ... Dublin, 1770, II, 152. Goethe plagiarized this aphorism (see W.R.R. Pinger, *Laurence Sterne and Goethe*, Los Angeles, 1918, 39).

Gefühl, welches dem des Schwebens am verwandtesten ist”, the feeling that Nietzsche was left with after reading Sterne. That sensation is in every respect related to moral ambiguity: “Er war, wenn die Sprache von einer solchen Zusammenstellung nicht erschrecken wollte, von einer hartherzigen Gutmütigkeit.”⁷¹ The example of Griffith once more shows that in the eighteenth century the creation of moral paradoxes does not indicate philosophical resistance against essentialist categories of good and evil, but an understanding of the rhetorical strategies of sceptical Christians such as Erasmus, Montaigne and Burton.⁷² Triglyph himself claims to be related to the elusive personae from this specific school: “I happened to have learned my philosophy in the porch of Democritus.”⁷³ With this statement, Griffith puts the rhetorical freedom of *The Triumvirate* on a par with that of the *Moriae Encomium* and *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, and, consequently, that of *Tristram Shandy*.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches Allzumenschliches: Ein Buch für freie Geister*, ed. Alfred Baeumler, Stuttgart, 1964, II, 57: For commentary, see also Stuart Sim, “All That Exists Are Islands of Determinism: Shandean Sentiment and the Dilemma Of Postmodern Physics”, in *Laurence Sterne in Modernism and Postmodernism*, eds Pierce and de Voogd, 17. An interesting aside: Nietzsche explicitly mentions Sterne’s “Sentenzen”, which makes it likely that he is referring to the paradoxes and “Montaigniana” in the *Posthumous Works: Yoricks nachgelassene Werke*, of which Nietzsche possessed a copy (see Duncan Large, “The Freest Writer: Nietzsche on Sterne”, *The Shandean*, 7 [1995], 13), the only work “by Sterne” containing aphorisms. Nietzsche, as I said before, was ignorant of Griffith’s authorship. For German editions of *The Posthumous Works* (the first dates from 1771), see Peter Michelsen, *Laurence Sterne und der Deutsche Roman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Göttingen, 1962, 78.

⁷² For Sterne’s place in the tradition of “sceptical balancing”, see especially Jefferson, “Tristram Shandy and the Tradition of Learned Wit”, reprinted in *Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Traugott, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1968; Donald R. Wehrs, “Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Scepticism and The Rhetoric of Desire”, reprinted in *Tristram Shandy: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Melvyn New, London and New York, 1992; Parnell, “Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition”, *passim*.

⁷³ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, 155.

⁷⁴ On the title pages of the third instalment of *Tristram Shandy* (volumes V and VI, 1761), Sterne refers to the function of the unreliable narrator in the person of Democritus. The second motto in these two volumes, a maxim ascribed by Burton to Erasmus, is “– Si quis calumniatur levius esse quam decet theologum, aut mordacius quam deceat Christianum – non Ego, sed Democritus dixit” (Should malicious people find my jokes too flippant for a clergyman, or too cutting for a Christian – not I, but Democritus said it). Sterne’s first motto, from Horace, proclaims the thesis of the second a little louder: “Dixero si quid fortè jocosius, hoc mihi juris Cum venia dabis” (If in my words I am too

Griffith further on stresses especially the relation with Sterne. In the *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, Sterne is referred to as “the modern Democritus, Tristram Shandy”⁷⁵, and as “editor” of *The Posthumous Works*, Griffith explains more precisely that Sterne “was a second Democritus, who sported his opinions freely, just as his philosophy, or his fancy led the way”.⁷⁶ This last characterization suggests something of a noncommittal playfulness, but that is not what the name Democritus is usually associated with. Especially in Burton, but also in other writers in the Humanist tradition, Democritus represents an enigmatic philosophical attitude towards human suffering. The classical Democritus is not a stoic or an ignoramus, he regales his audience with a smile that can signify either unattainable wisdom or weak-mindedness.⁷⁷ In Paterson’s *Joineriana*, the two reactions that

free or too light, this bit of liberty you will grant me). This, too, Sterne took from Burton. Griffith used this first motto as apology for his own work, inviting Sterne to share it with him (*The Triumvirate*, I, xviii). There is also an interesting possibility that Griffith, who, by virtue of his profession, spent most of his time in Ireland, may have known the Dublin edition of *Tristram Shandy*. In the Dublin edition of volume V (1762; see Kenneth Monkman, “Tristram in Dublin”, *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 7 [1981], 349) Sterne added a third motto to the two that he took from Burton. The message of this third motto (which in 1767 was included in the authorized second London edition of volume V) is diametrically opposed to that of the first: “Si quis Clericus, aut Monachus, verba jocularia, risum moventia serat anathema esto” (Any priest or monk raising laughter with jokes shall be cursed). Thus, on the title page of the most “sentimental” volume of *Tristram Shandy*, the circularity of Tristram’s arguments seems already to be indicated. See also Melvyn New, *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits*, New York, 1994, 120-22.

⁷⁵ [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, V, 83.

⁷⁶ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, I, v.

⁷⁷ Juvenal’s Democritus (in the Tenth Satire) is the philosopher who looks at human activities with a laugh. Erasmus compares More with him (Desiderius Erasmus, *Moriae Encomium*, ed. J.M.Vermeer-Pardoen, Utrecht, 1992, 17). In Johnson’s *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (ll. 49-72), the philosopher also appears in this capacity, while Democritus’ awareness of the human condition is again emphasized (Samuel Johnson, *Selected Writings*, ed. Patrick Cruttwell, London, 1986, 140-41. For commentary on Johnson’s position, see Walter Jackson Bate, *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson*, New York, 1955, 115-19; Fussell, *The Rhetorical World of Augustan Humanism*, 158ff.). Triglyph, after this example, says he is truly moved by human suffering: “My cast is intirely grave, nor do I mean to jest, even in those parts of my writings where I sometimes speak in humorous images; ... this is not mirth; nor is my moral the less severe, upon this account; for human frailties do not *divert*, but *tickle* me; and extort a smile through pain” (*The Triumvirate*, I, 157). Elizabeth Griffith relates the reference to

Burton's Democritus evokes are opposed: "Learned BURTON has given us numberless cases - to laugh at (DEMOCRITUS-like—) Believe me, that's not a book for madmen — ... Yet some have wept!— to see our Godlike nature so abused, depraved, sophisticated!"⁷⁸

The rhetorical paradox had since the Renaissance been "the means of illuminating ... the mystery of being".⁷⁹ Henry Van Leeuwen has suggested how important this kamikaze weapon was in the polemical struggle of the English theologians and philosophers of the seventeenth century, against *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (the title of Glanvill's most important work), and in the design of modern Anglicanism. Fundamental uncertainty, thanks to Tillotson and Butler, became a central article of faith in eighteenth-century sermon literature.⁸⁰ *The Triumvirate* creates doubts about the ability to empathize. The re-formulation of that doubt in the context of the pathetic novel was perhaps new, but the portrayal of man behind it was not. Griffith's seemingly innocent rhetoric confronts the reader with the riddle with which Pope saw man in general wrestling in all eternity: "He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest; / In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast."⁸¹ In the Preface to *The Triumvirate*, Griffith says that Triglyph's comments, "if rightly apprehended, in the context of the whole, ... may be compared with the *anamorphosis* in painting; which is an ... art of drawing a picture so equivocally, that, according to the light it is viewed in, may present you either with a satyr, or a saint".⁸²

Democritus to the rhetorical paradox of *The Triumvirate*: "This is a new species of writing, ... suppose we ... called it the pathetic and comical. This sounds ridiculous, I own; but I don't mean it; for I don't know how, it has its Effect, not only to surprize, but please. You did, indeed, as you say, in the *Trio*, learn your Philosophy in the School of Democritus" (*Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, III, 245-46). For associations with madness (via Burton), see Roy Porter, *Mind-Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency*, Harmondsworth, 1987, 63-70.

⁷⁸ Anon. [Samuel Paterson], *Joineriana, or: The Book of Scraps*, London, 1772, 178.

⁷⁹ A.E. Malloch, "The Techniques and Function of the Renaissance Paradox", *Studies in Philology*, 53 (1956), 203. The theological and philosophical meanings of the paradox in writers of the Renaissance are extensively and brilliantly discussed in Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica, The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox*, Princeton, 1966.

⁸⁰ Henry Van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630-1690*, The Hague, 1963.

⁸¹ Pope, *Essay on Man*, II.7-8.

⁸² [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, xvii-xviii. Colie (*Paradoxia Epidemica*, 288-90) writes concisely and lucidly about the relation between Renaissance paradoxes and anamorphic

Sentimental revolution?

There is a general belief that with the appearance of *Tristram Shandy* and, simultaneously, the publication of the translation of Rousseau's *Julie* (1761), the sentimental revolution broke out in England. According to Paul Langford, the bourgeoisie recognized in Sterne and Rousseau the voices of revolution against orthodox ethical principles: "For many entering on adolescence or adulthood at this time the primacy of the individual's feelings offered a startlingly new vision of the world."⁸³ Langford is well informed by the many histories of literature that tell their readers that satire in the tradition of the Augustans was succeeded as early as the middle decades of the eighteenth century by the sentimental novel, and that Sterne was the driving force behind it.⁸⁴ Langford has that scheme fall in with the well-known interpretation of the English culture of the eighteenth century as one which increasingly shows optimism about human power of sociability and a lack of interest in ideas that were connected with original sin.

There is much that is wrong about this assessment of the earliest reception of Sterne and its background. Sterne's work has relatively rarely, and only late in the eighteenth century, and chiefly offensively, been associated with Rousseau's. O'Brien MacMahon found both Sterne and Rousseau too optimistic.⁸⁵ Sir John Hawkins, Samuel Johnson's biographer, considered Fielding, Rousseau and Sterne to be the headmasters of the "new school of morality", which taught that self-professed superiority in "tender affections" surpasses sense of duty. That was in 1787. John Ferriar (1793) and Thomas Mathias, finally, suggest that Sterne somehow resembles Rousseau, but they forget to tell us in

paintings. The paintings are usually vanitates: the commonplace scene appears as nature morte when looked at in a different way. Sometimes they refer to the miracle of the Creation: chaos at first sight yields up a scene from the Bible after careful and prolonged inspection. Behrendt discusses the relation between the paradoxes in *Tristram Shandy* and multi-stable images from the Greeks until the present (Stephen C. Behrendt, "Multistability and Method in *Tristram Shandy*", reprinted in *Tristram Shandy: Contemporary Critical Essays*, ed. Melvyn New, London and New York, 147ff.).

⁸³ Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 464.

⁸⁴ For instance, David Skilton, *Defoe to the Victorians: Two Centuries of the English Novel*, Harmondsworth, 1977, 45-58.

⁸⁵ Thomas O'Brien Mac Mahon, *An Essay on the Corruption and Depravity of Human Nature*, London, 1774, 179-80.

what respects.⁸⁶

Parallels are, of course, conceivable. Rousseau's many fans were especially devoted to their hero because of his apparently scrupulous self-criticism. As Darnton remarks: "By confessing his moral failures, [Rousseau] underlined his honesty and at the same time created an ideal Jean-Jacques who could speak directly from the heart to the ideal reader envisioned in the text."⁸⁷ Sterne's identification with Tristram makes for a similar effect. The implicit reader is different from the hypercritic who objects to the gratifications of low passions, but whose straightforwardness implies a lack of empathy.

Unlike what we find in Rousseau, however, the condemnation of the insensitive reader is also suspect. Tristram himself is the only one who says that he expresses himself more naturally than his learned critics, just as only he himself claims to be a great philanthropist.⁸⁸ A bitter irony is dimly discernible through all this bluster. Sterne does not ignore the fact that his friendship with the reader is brought about through the words on the page, and is therefore coloured by financial motives. We are also reminded of empathy with characters in a novel being egotistic, if only because at the moment that that empathy manifests itself, we are reading a book, instead of taking action. Human failure is a central issue in *Tristram Shandy*, influencing also the relation with the reader, who can never be sure whether or not he is supposed to take Tristram seriously. Briefly, Sterne creates a moral vagueness that has no obvious connection with Rousseau's idealism.

Richard Griffith, an admirer of sentimental Sterne, could not only live with that vagueness, but regarded it as a sign of true feeling. Being both sympathizing writer and mocker made Sterne elusive, but also human within the definition of an orthodox Anglican. As I have already indicated, Griffith saw no reason at all to regard Sterne as representing a new moral philosophy. In a chapter of *The Posthumous Works of a Late*

⁸⁶ John Hawkins, *The Life of Samuel Johnson* (quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 272; see also *ibid.*, 289 [Ferriar] and 321 [Mathias]).

⁸⁷ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History*, Harmondsworth, 1984, 228.

⁸⁸ For the irony behind Tristram's ideas about natural expression, see especially William J. Farrell, "Nature Versus Art As Comic Pattern in *Tristram Shandy*", *ELH*, 30 (1963), 16-35; J. Paul Hunter, "Response As Reformation: *Tristram Shandy* and the Art of Interruption", in *Laurence Sterne: Wege der Forschung*, ed. Gerd Rohmann, Darmstadt, 1980, 145ff.

Celebrated Genius entitled “My Religion”, Griffith as a pseudo-Sterne gives a review of traditional religious persuasions. A few aphorisms attributed to Sterne are reflections on the *Thirty-nine Articles*. This, for instance, is what Sterne might have written about “natural virtue”, according to Griffith:

That virtue is its own reward, may be understood not only in a *moral*, but an *orthodox* sense of the words also. — For, according to our divines, that virtue which proceeds from a mere natural good disposition, or a regard to ethic beauty only, is so far from having any merit with God, that it is made a doubt, by the *thirteenth article* of our faith, whether it does not *partake of the nature of sin*.⁸⁹

This kind of doubt is more usually associated with satire in the tradition of the Augustans, from whom Sterne, with his apparent faith in the value of sympathetic contact, is said to distance himself. John Eustace and Richard Griffith, to begin with, were two readers who did not confuse appearances in *Tristram Shandy* with certainty, and consequently regarded Sterne’s sentimentalism as a continuation of the sceptical tradition.

Although Griffith, then, could remain a faithful defender of Sterne’s fiction, one source of ambiguity was, in *Tristram Shandy*, struck too deeply even for him: sex. Perhaps under the influence of Elizabeth, or by many reviews of *Tristram Shandy*, Griffith appears to be afraid to support Sterne on this point. In the *Posthumous Works*, the usual excuses are indeed adduced. As disarming confessions by the author and winks at the implicit reader, some doubles entendres can be tolerated, a form of wit.⁹⁰ Lust (a consequence of original sin) should be discussed rather than denied.⁹¹ However, after *The Triumvirate*, Griffith comments no more on the suggestivity of *Tristram Shandy*, what he calls the lack of “attic salt” in Sterne’s language. This was not just a matter of satire against a lecherous human nature, but of hedonism and titillating low humour. As has become clear, Griffith could only understand this aspect as a sort of missionaries’ trick, a temporary going along with the sinfulness of readers who still had insufficient control over their passions

⁸⁹ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, II, 176.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, I.8.22-23.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, I.35.97-99.

and who would not understand a wholly sentimental work. This pragmatic argument, of course, smacked of Cripplegate and would be unacceptable for the reviewers. In the *Posthumous Works* it was not repeated. Sterne's annoyance at the strictures in *The Triumvirate* may be an indication that Griffith had come to realize that Sterne did not wish to be defended on these grounds.

In his letters from Scarborough, Griffith nonetheless reports that in the meanwhile Sterne has decided to mend his literary ways:

He has communicated a manuscript to us, that he means soon to publish. It is stiled a Sentimental Journey through Europe, by Yoric. [*sic*] It has all the Humour and Adress of the best Parts of Tristram, and is quite free from the Grossness of the worst. There is but about Half a Volume wrote of it yet. He promises to spin the idea through several Volumes, in the same chaste Way, and calls it his *Work of Redemption*; for he has but little Superstition to appropriated Expressions.⁹²

On one of the following days he suggests that he himself had shared in the conversion:

Tristram and *Triglyph* have entered into a League, offensive and defensive, together, against all Oponents [*sic*] in Literature. We have, at the same time, agreed never to write any more *Tristrams* or *Triglyphs*. I am to stick to *Andrews*, and he to *Yoric*.⁹³

While *A Sentimental Journey*, perhaps even more expressly so than *Tristram Shandy*, is about sex, the theme, except perhaps for the very last line, is dealt with more delicately. The problem with *Tristram*, as Griffith once more points out in the *Posthumous Works*, was the possibility of titillation. In the chapter "Triglyph and Tristram compared", Griffith (posing as Sterne) refers again to the difference of opinion between them about the propriety of *Tristram Shandy*. Indirectly, he confesses that he himself has gone too far in *The Triumvirate*. "Sterne" complains about "too *methodistical* a severity" in some of his critics, but he blames *biographer Triglyph* above all for his hypocrisy:

⁹² [Griffith and Griffith], *Genuine Letters Between Henry and Frances*, IV, 83.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, IV, 86.

But prithee, ladies, is not Triglyph full as arch and free as Tristram? I shall not take the pains to collate the several passages together nor, like friend Kidgel, *reveal*, while I *expose*.— But is not his LXXXVIIIth chapter un *chef d’oeuvre* in this way?

He therein mentions the accidental view of a fine woman, stark naked — Indeed he neither describes her person, her limbs, her complexion, nor makes use of any one loose idea, or indecent expression ——— Better he had ——— for then the offence would have ended there — But how is the reader’s imagination inflamed, and his passion emoved, by sympathy, with those effects which the spectator tells you this object had upon his own senses and sensations?

Of course, Griffith did provide a fitting emphasis on his alliance with Sterne, whom he imagines to have added some qualifications:

But I do not deny the man his merits, as he has also had the candor not to refuse me mine — for, though we are both great rivals, it is in a sentiment that ought to make us the greater friends.— We seem equally to wish, and most fervently pray, for “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men.” Amen!⁹⁴

The story about Sterne’s conversion in 1767 may have been embroidered by Griffith, but it was not made up. In the same period Sterne wrote, among other things, that “in fact I have long been a sentimental being — ... The world has imagined, because I wrote Tristram Shandy, that I was myself more Shandean than I really ever was —.” If *A Sentimental Journey* should cause misunderstandings, that really could not be his fault: “If it is not thought a chaste book, mercy on them that read it, for they must have warm imaginations indeed!”⁹⁵

Some historians have regarded Sterne’s last opus as an admission of weakness. They think that Sterne capitulated to the reviewers.⁹⁶ Griffith’s account of his meeting with Sterne, however, suggests an unremitting fighting spirit against “Oponents in Literature”. That the official literary critics would not let him do as he liked was something

⁹⁴ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, I, 30-31.

⁹⁵ *Letters*, 402-403.

⁹⁶ Ulrike Montigel, *Der Körper im humoristischen Roman: Zur Verlustgeschichte des Sinnlichen – François Rabelais – Laurence Sterne – Jean Paul – Friedrich Theodor Vischer*, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, 84; Thomson, *Wild Excursions*, 257.

Sterne had anticipated before *Tristram Shandy* was published, and the unfavourable remarks in the reviews caused him to go on nagging them to the very end. As is well-known, Sterne intended to continue *Tristram Shandy* after he had finished *A Sentimental Journey*, and it is hard to imagine that the continuation would have been moderate in character.

A much more serious impetus for change than that of the reviewers came, I think, from the opposite side of the cultural area of tension. What Sterne had not anticipated was the unprecedented energy with which the literary rabble would seize upon his work. In order to be able to go on occupying, in 1767, the vague centre ground that Sterne preferred to occupy, a little move in the direction of more civilized circles was, after about fifty obscene pamphlets, books and engravings (with which Sterne's name was somehow connected) highly desirable. There was room for something of which it could not be said that it opened up evident possibilities for predictably obscene, aggressive and grotesque imitations.

As I promised, the next chapters will deal with the principal forms of contamination of *Tristram Shandy* by Grub-street writers and other producers of printed matter.

PART TWO
CONTAMINATION

Chapter Four

Impulses

One of the most widely read pamphlets during the Sterne-hype of 1760 was *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher in the Country, to Laurence Sterne, M.A., Prebendary of York*, later published as *A Letter from the Rev. George Whitefield*. The Methodist preacher would, naturally, have nothing to do with popular novels, and it was not very probable that Whitefield himself should have written a complaint against Sterne. The tone of the pamphlet removed all doubts:

Oh Sterne! Thou art scabby, and such is the leprosy of thy mind that it is not to be cured like the leprosy of the body, by dipping nine times in the river Jordan. Thy prophane history of *Tristram Shandy* is as it were an anti-gospel, and seems to have been penned by the hand of Antichrist himself; it tends to excite laughter, but you should remember that the wisest man that ever was, that the great king Solomon himself said of laughter “it is mad,” and of mirth “what doth it?” ... Had John Bunyan been now alive to behold thy abominable work, he would have cried out, “Antichrist is come, Antichrist has published his antichristian gospel; and lo there shall arise other Antichrists, his disciples, who shall write books filled with obscenity, and these obscene books shall be read in a degenerate age, when the sacred oracles are neglected. The ministers of the gospel shall cease to point the way that leads to the New Jerusalem, and, deserting the paths of grace, shall give themselves up to the evil spirit Mammon, and lead their flocks to Babylon. But the time shall come, when the cup of wrath shall be poured down their throats, and when that time is come, it will be more tolerable for the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah than for them.”¹

And so on – twenty-two pages in which “Whitefield”, in turn aggressive and saccharine, tries to win Sterne over to a blameless conduct in life and to Methodism. Alan Howes calls it an attack on Sterne and Methodism. That looks like a contradiction. In so far as it is an attack on Methodism, it can only be a declaration of support for Sterne. What Howes probably

¹ Anon., *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher In the Country to Laurence Sterne, M.A, Prebendary of York ...*, London, 1760, 2-4.

means is that it was a declaration of support from an undesired quarter.

As a true Anglican, Sterne was dead set against Methodism. A typical Methodist was trapped in a vicious circle of pride, physical torment and self-deception. Renouncing earthly pleasures led to an obsession with these pleasures, and a bad condition of body and mind, which in turn gave rise to delusions about divine messages of grace. In that respect, the satire of the open letter resembled the picture of the average Methodist that Sterne himself sketched in the *Sermons*:

—— See his countenance overspread with a melancholy gloom and despondence; —— as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of sullenness and discontent. —— Hear him pouring forth his pharisaical ejaculations on his journey, or in the streets. —— Hear him boasting of extraordinary communications with the God of all knowledge, and at the same time offending against the common rules of his own native language, and the plainer dictates of common sense. —— Hear him arrogantly thanking his God, that he is not as other men are; and, with more than papal uncharitableness, very liberally allotting the portion of the damned, to every christian whom he, partial judge, deems less perfect than himself
——²

The *Genuine Letter* extends the attack, however, to principles that Methodism and latitudinarian Anglicanism shared. The mysterious grace-through-faith on which Methodism laid much emphasis, is the cornerstone of the Anglican doctrine in general. In so far as grace is unknowable, the Methodists' claim was in fact quite as much justified as that of Orthodoxy. Sterne and other latitudinarian clergymen usually covered this similarity up carefully, but the author of the *Genuine Letter* removes the veils:

You have undoubtedly often heard and often yourself pronounced these words of the liturgy of the church of England: "The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and the blessing of God Almighty the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be amongst you and remain with you always."

"The peace of God," —— That smells rankly of Methodism ...³

² *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 365.

³ *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher*, 13.

For various reasons, some of a socio-hygienic nature, the latitudinarians were prepared to allow amusement and, in marriage, sexual pleasure.⁴ That did not alter the fact that self-constraint and a realistically sombre awareness of the Four Last Things should always prevail, and that lust remained the work of the devil. Whatever rays of joy were still to be enjoyed on earth, they did not outweigh the perfect happiness that only the true believers would inherit. By reasoning from the extreme position of Methodism, the author of the *Genuine Letter* does away with these nuances. Whitefield's ideas about picking up prostitutes are just as ridiculous as those about visiting the theatre: "forsake the paths that lead unto Ranelagh, take no more walks in St. James's Park."⁵ The *Monthly Review* at first needed only two adjectives to describe the pamphlet: "Nonsensical and Prophane".⁶ When it was re-issued a few months later, the reviewer saw a reason for great concern in it: "The impudence of our low, dirty, hedge Publishers, is now risen to a most shameful height. To take such scandalous liberties with names, as is here done with that of Mr. Whitefield, is surely insufferable, in any well-regulated community!"⁷

Like most of the Grub-street products of those early years, the *Genuine Letter* also had much to say about Sterne's financial motives. Of course, the suggestion is made that the success of *Tristram Shandy* is only due to the loose morals that the book is said to propagate. In that respect, Sterne was not a jot better than his "disciples", hacks like the author of the *Genuine Letter* himself. All of them take "recourse to vile expedients, to procure bread".⁸ The *Genuine Letter* thus combines the three principal sins that Sterne, according to the hacks, made light of in order to be admitted to their circles: a passion for financial gain, immorality, and aggression against individuals.

⁴ Porter regards this as a late eighteenth-century development, associated with Erasmus Darwin and having originated under the influence of French Enlightenment (Roy Porter, "Mixed Feelings: The Enlightenment and Sexuality In Eighteenth-Century Britain", in *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. P-G. Boucé, Manchester, 1982, 4). Some seventeenth-century writers, however, held similar views; see Richard Acworth, *The Philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton 1657-1712*, Hildesheim, 1979, 156-62; Elizabeth Kraft, *Laurence Sterne Revisited*, New York and London, 1996, 44-46.

⁵ *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher*, 11.

⁶ *Monthly Review*, XXIII (1760), 85.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 327-28.

⁸ *A Genuine Letter from a Methodist Preacher*, 9.

Magnus Cash

Money was the great obsession of Grub-street, and the knowledge that it could be raked in in shovelfuls by an author who did not seem averse to the sort of amusement of which Grub-street had the sole rights, resulted in a mixture of fascination and jealousy. A few engravings illustrate this double attitude.

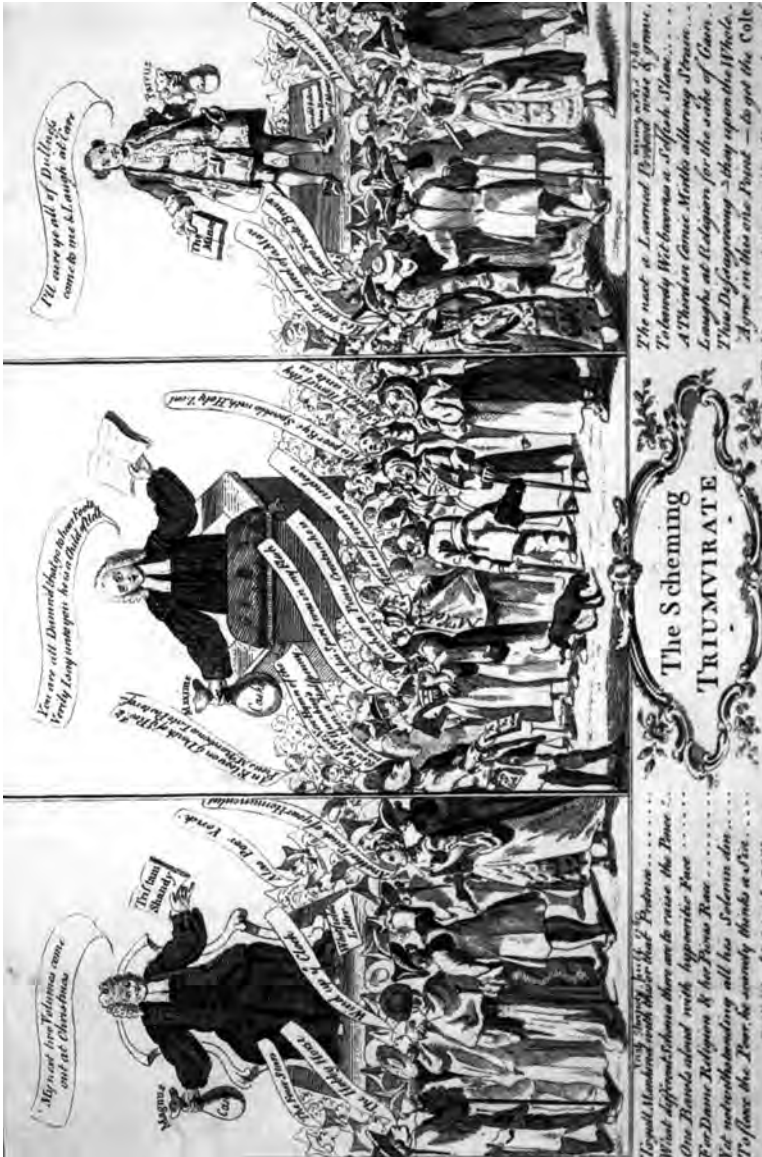
In a print from 1760 (fig.8), perhaps originally a frontispiece of the lost *Tristram Shandy at Ranelagh* (“An obscene and contemptible catch-penny”⁹), we see Sterne arm in arm with a gaudily dressed young woman walking in the famous recreation park. The lady in question is more probably an actress or an expensive prostitute than, as Thomson suggests, Sterne’s lady friend, bluestocking Mrs Vesey.¹⁰ In the foreground, “Subscriptions for yoricks Sermons” are sold – not, I think, as modern descriptions of the print tell us, by an unidentified assistant of Sterne’s, but by Sterne himself – the way I see it, the print shows, in the best cartoon tradition, two moments in one, highlighting at the same time the split of Sterne’s public character into two personages: Tristram and Yorick. The message is that both belong to a world hungry after sensation and money.



8. Anon., *Sterne in Ranelagh Gardens* (1760).

⁹ *Monthly Review*, XXII (1760), 548.

¹⁰ Thomson, *Wild Excursions*, 50v.



9. Anon., *The Scheming Triumvirate*.

An engraving, hitherto unnoticed, from the same year (fig.9) makes clear how overriding people's interest in Sterne's pecuniary slyness was. The first of three comparable pictures in a row shows Sterne with in his left hand *Tristram Shandy* and in his right a bag with "Magnus Cash". He sits enthroned on a dais, calling out to a mass of admirers that "My next two Volumes come out at Christmas". Men among the public shout "The four stars" and "The Hobby Horse", while young women ask for "Another Touch of your Homunculus" and to "Wind up the Clock". The two adjoining pictures show Whitefield and the actor/dramatist Samuel Foote in similar positions, also with bags of money. Whitefield, in a pulpit, forbids poor and crippled people to visit a performance by Foote ("You are all damn'd that go to hear Foote / Verily I say unto you he is a Child of Hell"); Foote's public look like Sterne's.¹¹ Though Whitefield's followers evince a religious conviction ("Heal us for we are unclean"; "His poor eye sparkles with Holy Zeal"¹²), the words shouted by a few women among them suggest certain subconscious motives: "Lift up the Horn of thy Salvation unto us" (the woman at the far right); and "I wish his Spirit was in my Flesh" (left; mark this woman's hand). It is clear that the interest in Whitefield is converted into money: chapmen exhort people to buy "The Last New Hymn of the Rev^d M^r Humbug's / no more then a Halfpenny" and "An Elegy on the Death of the Rev^d & Pious M^r Barebones Late Pastor of –". At the feet of Sterne and Foote lie cryptic pamphlets against their works (in Sterne's case "Whitfield's Letter", in Foote's the "Candid & Christian Remarks on the Minor"). The message is probably that they make just as much money, shamelessly, from these as from their works themselves. For "The Scheming Triumvirate" all moral values have been overcome by those of money. The caption explains: "To gull Mankind with this or that Pretence / What different Schemes there are to raise the Pence!" Whitefield plunders the poor and Foote "Laughs at Religion for the sake of Gain. / Thus disagreeing – they upon the Whole / Agree in this one Point – to get the Cole".

The characterization of Sterne in the poem is interesting: "a Learned Prebend wise & grave / To bawdy Wit becomes a Selfish Slave." Selfish slave in this context seems to refer to the money that controlled Sterne,

¹¹ A relationship between the two was also suggested by Boswell, who used the *Tristram* style for a defence of Foote ("A Genius" [James Boswell], *Observations, Good or Bad, Stupid or Clever, Serious or Jocular, on Squire Foote's Dramatic Entertainment Entitled The Minor*, Edinburgh, 1760).

¹² Whitefield was cross-eyed.

but in another engraving from the period (never before reproduced either), these lines have been given a slightly different interpretation.

“Tristram Shandy’s Implements” (fig. 10) is a remarkable adaptation of Reynolds’ famous portrait of Sterne. As I have shown elsewhere, Reynolds’ portrait lent itself extremely well to classical physiognomical interpretations. In one of the two official engravings that Sterne and Reynolds ordered to be made from the portrait, Ravenet’s frontispiece for *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, “Sterne” is already beginning to show features that could be interpreted with the help of physiognomical tracts. A further “animalization” of Sterne’s face makes some of the later descendants of Reynolds’ portrait into classical caricatures of godlessness and cunning.¹³ “Tristram Shandy’s Implements” belongs in that series, but as we can see, the engraving contains more information. With his cross-legged position, Sterne has a view of the groin of a classical statue of Aphrodite, a view he is evidently enjoying. Only his right hand, indicating a desk with “Yorick’s Sermons” [*sic*] on it, is keeping up a pretence of piety. In the background are two other statues – a second Aphrodite, seen from the back, and a Hercules Farnese.

A spectacular feature is that the phallos of the Hercules statue is held in erection with the help of a string on a pulley. This last detail especially seems to give an extra meaning to the jingle we have already heard: “Behold the Learned P——d wise & grave, / To bawdy Wit become a selfish slave.” “Selfish” here is related to “egotistical” in the early modern sense of the word. The slave of “bawdy Wit” is “selfish” because a cardinal passion has burst out. The “self” of *Tristram Shandy* is, then, also “unnatural” in the sense of “uncontrolled”. The reference to Greek antiquity defines the ideological dimension of the print: the “unnatural” self is played off against the control and “generally Natural” beauty of the classical statues. Tristram Shandy is not only unable to recognize that beauty, he will also wittingly derive “lust” from it. The pulley over the Hercules Farnese may be a reference to Tristram’s impotence, but also, as a sort of mechanical aphrodisium, symbolize the “unnaturalness” of Sterne’s “implements”. The caption at the bottom gives a list of these sexual artifices in *Tristram Shandy*: “The fore Stars, The bomb of his Hobby Horse, The Clock, The touch of your Homunculus.” The phrases need little explanation, except perhaps the one about Tristram’s hobby

¹³ René Bosch, “‘Character’ in Reynolds’ Portrait of Sterne”, *The Shandean*, 6 (1994), 8-23.



10. Anon., *Tristram Shandy's Implements* (1760).

horse. It should be borne in mind that hobby horse called forth a gamut of indecent associations. Amongst other things, the word stood for a prostitute or mistress, but was of course also a stick between the legs.¹⁴ The “bomb” may be the knob at the lower end or at the top of the hobby horse. The other phrases refer to Toby’s remark about Elizabeth’s reasons for not letting Dr Slop come near her and Tristram’s conception.¹⁵

Bawdy wit

What is more obvious than modern readers perhaps think is that in the print just now discussed, the four stars (asterisks) are mentioned as the first “implement”. Of all the indecent jokes in *Tristram Shandy*, the one about Elizabeth’s **** was without doubt the most popular among writers of a questionable character. Possibly, Sterne made a miscalculation here. When he decided to leave the relevant passages as they were in his manuscript, he probably did not foresee that a covert four-letter word was to become his trademark.

Sterneans need not read the passages anew to realize what effect Sterne may have hoped to achieve. In the best Shandean tradition, the passage with the Shandy brothers’ discussion on the man-midwife, the snapping of Walter’s pipe, and other “etcetera’s”, contains a beautiful circularity.¹⁶ Tristram seems to be carefully reasoning away the possibility of vulgar words, and without knowing it is led astray after all. An aim of Sterne’s may be to make the reader who thinks he or she is shocked, aware, by (almost) breaking through a taboo, of how sensitive they are to double entendres. An added result of Tristram’s adding four, instead of nine or any other number of asterisks to Toby’s possibly unfinished sentence, is that from now on, whenever we encounter words or passages that have been blocked out in this way, we start to

¹⁴ See Oakleaf for an exhaustive discussion of popular and learned associations with the word “hobby horse”. Swift and Glanville thought of Horace’s *equitare in harundine longa* – the foolishness of academic pretence – while illiterates associated it with the hobby horse of the Morris dance, with hints of aggressive carnivalesque amusement and superstition (David Oakleaf, “Long Sticks, Morris Dancers, and Gentlemen: Associations of the Hobby-Horse in *Tristram Shandy*”, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 11 n.s. [1987], 62-76).

¹⁵ Respectively *Tristram Shandy*, II.6 and I.1.

¹⁶ Cf. Melvyn New, ““At the Backside of the Door of Purgatory”, A Note on Annotating *Tristram Shandy*”, in *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, ed. Valerie Grosvenor Meyer, London, 1984, 15-23.

unscramble them like mad, even when (as happens regularly) this is most unprofitable.

The editor of *Christopher Wagstaff* recognized that purpose. In a chapter with “definitions and rules ... which all editors and authors ought to learn by heart”, he states that “A short train, or half a dozen lines of asterisks, as ***, or **** ***** signifies that an author’s meaning is not to be understood”, and that therefore any obscene interpretation “must be entirely owing to the unhappy association of a man’s own ideas”.¹⁷ The pseudo-Sterne of *Yorick’s Meditations* defends himself with the same line of argument: “’tis you yourselves, whose impure imaginations make the obscenity you reprehend.”¹⁸ A few imitators have confined themselves, along those lines, to vague ambiguities. In the spurious *Vol. III*, Tristram assures the reader:

—— Whenever then there has been, or may hereafter be found anything in *Tristram Shandy*, that gives the feeblest squint towards obscenity; be assured, once for all, that I was drawn into it by a certain oily conformity of temper, which has too often prompted me to swim on the top of the stream of that universal fashion, which flows between the embroidered banks of luscious allusions.

So loth I am at present to commit the crime I am condemning, that you see, in mentioning it, I have gone beyond the simple transparency of common stile, and embellished my book with the swelling fulness of a flowery period.¹⁹

Sterne’s invention of a similar paradox, six years later (“For in talking of my digression —— I declare before heaven I have made it!”²⁰) might indicate that he had amused himself with this spurious Tristram. The majority of the additions, comments and imitations, however, did not go beyond metaphors that completely preclude a harmless reading. As I said, the references to the four asterisks are numerous enough to become boring.

John Hall-Stevenson, in one of the two *Lyric Epistles* that Dodsley published in the wake of *Tristram Shandy*, addresses “the Grown Gentlewomen, The Misses of ****”. A suggestion for sexy ladies’

¹⁷ *Christopher Wagstaff*, I.1.3.

¹⁸ *Yorick’s Meditations*, 4.

¹⁹ Anon., *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [Spurious] Vol. III*, London, 1760, 74-75.

²⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, XI.15.767.

underwear in that poem is also quoted in an invitation to Sterne that one of the Clockmakers came across. “*Harry Love-Glee*, the wag of the club”, reads out:

“Mrs. *P* —— presents her compliments to the Rd. Dr. *Tristram*, and prays the honour of his company to-morrow evening at tea, as she intends to decorate her new-fancied *Pudding Strings** with his Name; TRISTRAM on the right, SHANDY on the left: then a fig for all hostilities lurking in the *covered Way*. ... As Mrs. *P* ——’s **** yearneth violently for the Doctor’s ****, she fervently hopes he will not fail, but come and exhibit to her the *salient Angle*.”²¹

Jeremiah Kunastrokius, to prove that it is at the instigation of “the fair sex” that he narrates his life story, quotes from a similar letter. A certain “DIANA MORELOVE” is said to have written to him: “—— You have so pleased and tickled *me ****, that I am resolved to have a further Acquaintance with you.” The asterisk preceding “me” refers to the addition that “This was in the original wrote ‘my’. I ask the Lady’s Pardon for the Alteration, which is absolutely necessary to preserve the Sense.”²² In his earlier publication *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), written in aid of “seven hundred and fifty *incomprehensible* [*sic*] readers”²³ of Sterne’s work, the same Kunastrokius had already explained that “covered way” could not be the word with which Toby in *Tristram Shandy* concludes his sentence about “my sister”. Tristram’s stupid readers should count the number of asterisks and find out what word does fit. For those who even then do not grasp the idea, he adds that “—— the *third*, the *twentieth*, the *thirteenth*, and the *nineteenth* letters of the English alphabet certainly compose the word, though it is not to be found in any Lexicon extant”.²⁴

Apart from a lack of subtlety, there is nearly always present an element of evident sexism. The narrative hero of “The Life and Opinions of Timotheus Randy, Staymaker” (1773) breaks off his story because “the charming Kitty Tent” enters his room: “What a neck! —— What a

²¹ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 39. The footnote explains: “See Two Lyric Epistles, p.17, and 19.”

²² Anon., *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius, Doctor of Physic, &c. &c.*, London, 1760, xi.

²³ Anon., *Explanatory Remarks Upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy ...*, London, 1760, 7

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28.

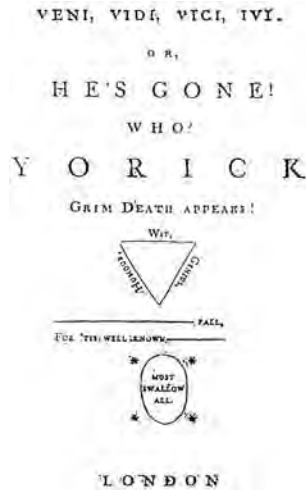
bossom! —— What a ****! —— I can hold out no longer ——.”²⁵
Often the asterisks are used to suggest silliness on all fronts but one in the female reader:

You tell me, madam, you have read all the volumes of *Tristram Shandy*. True, sir, I have. —— You understand them perfectly well I suppose, —— all the ****, innuendoes, hobby-horses, noses, &c.&c.?
Do you dispute my understanding, Sir?²⁶

Because of all this specific attention, **** became a sort of logo for Sterne. On the title-page of the spurious *Vol. IX* of *Tristram Shandy* (fig. 11) there is a vignette with the words “si je les perd je suis perdu” round a skipper pointing at four stars in a row. In the graphics on the title-page of *Veni, vidi, vici, ivi: or He’s Gone! Who? Yorick!*, too, four asterisks have been included (fig.12). The frontispiece of a pirated edition of *A Sentimental Journey* from 1769 (fig.13) is perhaps the most illustrative. Below the (again predictably caricatural) portrait of the author we see, not his name (which has been moved to the margin), but four asterisks.



11. Spurious *Vol. IX* (1766).



12. *Veni, Vidi, Vici, Ivi* (1768).

²⁵ [Anon.], “The Life and Opinions of Timotheus Randy, Staymaker”, *The Covent-Garden Magazine, or Amourous Repository*, 2 (April-May, 1773), 178.

²⁶ *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius*, I.1.



13. Frontispiece, *A Sentimental Journey*,
“4th edition” (Dublin, 1769).

It is imaginable that the name Sterne in itself should have facilitated the association with stars,²⁷ but in the context of the many imitations, the logo highlighted the reputation that Sterne had enjoyed from the beginning among the least melancholy of his admirers:

there is no reading him without laughing; nay the very sight of him is reviving —— for his long sharp nose, and his droll look altogether, affect our risible faculties so strongly; that there is no looking at him without laughing.

But the best of all is —— may be you do not know it —— *Tristy's* a

²⁷ Not only among those who know German. In the Yorkshire dialect Sterne means “starling”.

clergyman of the church of *England* —— smoke the parson! —— Did you ever know such a jolly dog of a divine? —— He has the finest knack at talking bawdy! ——²⁸

This final remark is repeated in all possible keys. A full discussion of the indecent appropriations of *Tristram Shandy* would require several dozen pages. The conclusion is that the additions have a misogynous character. By inviting their public to read *Tristram Shandy* under only one set of stars, the hacks declared their model to be gentlemen's reading.

Elizabeth Kraft's claim that Sterne is playing with the inclination towards unchaste thoughts that we all have, and that he does not really deserve this kind of abuse,²⁹ seems to me to be hardly tenable. In the first four volumes of *Tristram Shandy* especially, Sterne harks back to a tradition of jokes that suggest that women serve only one purpose. His many years of friendship with John Hall-Stevenson and his visits to the latter's club, The Demoniacs, are enough to make it improbable for him not to have been aware of the tradition. In the chapter following that with the four asterisks is the famous joke about the crevice in the chimney-piece: "—— Right end, quoth my uncle Toby, muttering the two words low to himself, and fixing his two eyes insensibly as he muttered them, upon a small crevice, formed by a bad joint in the chimney-piece. —— Right end of a woman! ——."³⁰ It is true that in the following instalment Tristram shows some (naturally dubious) regret especially about this passage, but Sterne must have had a notion of the thoughts that he stirred up. The "end of a woman" was a randy classic long before *Tristram Shandy*. For instance, in the last sentence of the story about the deceased but in her lifetime self-sacrificing prostitute Jeaney Muir, we read that "if her life was useful, her *end below* was fulfilled".³¹ In Chapter Seven I shall discuss the various degrees of aggression against women in *Tristram Shandy* and a number of imitations. At this stage, it is worth remarking that early modern etiquette permitted any dirty joke, provided it was original.³² Those with the asterisks and about the end of a woman were not.³³

²⁸ Anon., "Animadversions on Tristram Shandy", *Grand Magazine*, 3 (1760), 194.

²⁹ Kraft, *Tristram Shandy Revisited*, 58.

³⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, II.7.118.

³¹ "Miss Betty Montgomery" [Pseud.], *A Funeral Oration in Honour of Miss Jeany Muir, A Celebrated Lady of Pleasure*, Amsterdam, n.d., 16.

³² Rudolf Dekker, *Lachen in de Gouden Eeuw: Een Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse*

In the eyes of the reviewers, the hacks and small-scale booksellers were not the only persons guilty of the stream of erroneous imitations. In the first place, there was a public that obviously expected this kind of work. One reviewer of *Tristram Shandy at Ranelagh* remarked that “every Scribbler can write asterisms, and make blanks for bawdy words; but if such vile stuff is encouraged, the public are still more to blame than these miserable Pamphleteers, who are compelled by hunger to prostitute their talents, such as they are, to please the depraved taste of their Readers”.³⁴ The editors of the respectable magazines were divided on the question whether Sterne himself could also be held responsible. In the review of *Miss Sukey Shandy* (“obscene, dull, and despicable”), the *Monthly* quoted an observation about this matter in *The London Magazine*³⁵ with approval:

—— A writer in one of the Magazines observes, that “if Tristram Shandy has done any mischief, it is in raising such a swarm of filthy Pamphleteers.” This is certainly one of the bad consequences following the licentious manner in which that Writer has indulged himself; and Mr. S —— is so far reprehensible for it, as every man, and more especially a Teacher of men, ought to be rendered accountable for the bad example he sets to others.³⁶

In view of the deluge of obscene imitations, it should be observed here that the reviewers as a rule wrote subtly balanced articles. On a much more general scale, their reproaches were aimed at the buyers and sellers of the imitations. The criticism of the saucy aspects of *Tristram Shandy* increased in fierceness after the publicity stunt with the *Sermons*, but the reviewers seldom judged Sterne and his imitators in the same way. Although Sterne blithely continued his play with ambiguities after the spring of 1760, at least he no longer used hard four-letter words. The reviewers were therefore pleased to see signs of improvement in the later volumes: “The fifth and sixth volumes of this work, indeed, are not so much interlarded with obscenity as the former; yet they are not without

Humor, Amsterdam, 1997, 21.

³³ For the comical use of **** in the early eighteenth century, see, among others, *Venus Unmasked*, eds Leonard De Vries and Peter Fryer, London, 1967, 122-23.

³⁴ *Monthly Review*, XXII (1760), 548.

³⁵ 20 June, with reference to *Tristram Shandy at Ranelagh*. Also quoted in Oates, *Shandyism and Sentiment*, 9.

³⁶ *Monthly Review*, XXIII (1760), 83.

their stars and dashes, their hints and whiskers: but in point of true humour, they are much superior”³⁷ I doubt whether *Tristram Shandy* would have become the book we know if Sterne had not found indications of a new sympathy among the acknowledged cultural leaders. Just as Richard Griffith was to experience, Sterne refused to accept the claim that his work did more than give short shrift to hypocrisy, and it was probably important for him that in this respect he need not be without influential supporters.

With reference to the ninth volume of *Tristram Shandy*, one reviewer in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* concluded that the controversy of the past few years, in so far as it related to the work of Sterne and not to that of the “dabblers in bawdry and nastiness”, had been a storm in a teacup:

It has been charged with gross indecency, and the charge is certainly true; but indecency does no mischief, at least such indecency as is found in *Tristram Shandy*; it will disgust a delicate mind, but it will not sully a chaste one: It tends as little to inflame the passions as *Culpepper’s Family Physician*; on the contrary, as nastiness is the strongest antidote to desire, many parts of the work in question, that have been most severely treated by moralists and divines, are less likely to do ill than good, as far as Chastity is immediately concerned. How far he is a friend to society, who lessens the power of the most important of all passions, by connecting disgusting images with its gratifications, is another question: Perhaps he will be found to deserve the thanks of virtue no better than he, who, to prevent gluttony, should prohibit the sale of any food till it had acquired a taste and smell that would substitute nausea for appetite.³⁸

Sterne’s treatment of “the most important of all passions” revived memories of Swift, who had not seen any profit in abstinence either, but certainly could not be called a pornographer. The quality of Sterne’s wit could also, however, be measured by the reactions of those who called themselves his greatest admirers, and there the comparison with Swift did not work. William Warburton, who at first was well disposed towards Sterne, concluded after Sterne’s death that *Tristram Shandy*, in spite of his own timely advice to the author, had remained too accessible for uncivilized readers:

³⁷ *Ibid.*, XXVI (1762), 32.

³⁸ *Gentleman’s Magazine*, XXXVII (1767), 75-76.

Poor Sterne, whom the papers tell us is just dead, was the idol of the higher mob, who left the care of the public to Wilkes and the lower He found a strong disposition in the many to laugh away life; and as now every one *makes himself*, he chose the office of common jester to the many. He chose Swift for his model: but Swift was either luckier or wiser, who so managed his wit, that he will never pass with posterity for a buffoon; while Sterne gave such a loose to his buffoonery, that he will never pass for a wit.³⁹

Warburton was an influential man of culture and a politician. A closer look at his conflict with Sterne may elucidate somewhat Sterne's notions of "bawdy" and "wit", and can at the same time produce an insight into the social networks connected with the market for Sterne imitations. A consideration of the part played by Warburton will serve as an introduction to a discussion of a third element of *Tristram Shandy* that was blown up in Grub-street imitations: the attacks on individual persons.

A digression on loyalty

The first thing Sterne did when he wrote to Warburton was to emphasize that he wanted no truck with the hacks: "the scribblers use me ill, but they have used my betters much worse, for which may God forgive them".⁴⁰ In a later letter, he claims that money was not his object.⁴¹ Warburton showed understanding for Sterne's situation ("Whoever is, in any way, well received by the public, is sure to be annoy'd by that pest of the public, *profligate scribblers*"⁴²), but he warned him against the wrong kind of friends, in particular the writer of the *Two Lyric Epistles*, whom he, rightly, suspected to be John Hall-Stevenson. Warburton (as bishop of Gloucester) was Sterne's superior in the church and, of course, the author of the much-discussed *Divine Legation of Moses*. Moreover, Pope had appointed him as the person responsible for his artistic legacy, and this gave him authority in the higher art-loving circles, within which he had contacts with, among others, Richard Berenger and Joshua

³⁹ Letter from Warburton to Charles Yorke, cited in *Letters*, 96.

⁴⁰ *Letters*, 112.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 116: "Otherwise I wish from my heart, I had never set pen to paper, but continued in the quiet obscurity in which I had so long lived: I was quiet, for I was below Envy—and yet above Want—; & indeed so very far above it, that the idea of it never once entered in my head, in writing"

⁴² *Ibid.*, 113.

Reynolds.

In 1760, Sterne yearned so much for the blessing of this cultural pope that he wriggled every which way to keep his friendship with Hall-Stevenson a secret: “With regard to the ‘Lyrick Odes’, all I know of them is this: that the first ode, which places me and the author in a ridiculous light, was sent to me in a cover without a name I found afterwards it was sent me from Mr. Hall; for from a nineteen years’ total interruption of all correspondence with him, I had forgot his hand, which at last when I recollected, I sent it back.”⁴³ Much of this, if not all, was a lie. Sterne’s relations with Warburton had further come under pressure because of a story that John Hill had spread with his biographical sketch of Sterne. Sterne, said Hill, had intended to present Warburton as the tutor of Tristram, but the bishop is said to have literally bought off this intended blot on his reputation. It is as good as an established fact that Sterne did harbour the idea of making Warburton the target of his satire against school-divinity,⁴⁴ and also that he was indiscreet about that plan. Nevertheless, he denied this, too, in letters to Garrick, Stephen Croft and Warburton himself.⁴⁵

In a penetrating essay, Melvyn New has shown how much Sterne was occupied during his work on *Tristram Shandy*, by thoughts that were directly and indirectly concerned with Warburton – as a person and as a symbol.⁴⁶ Warburton was a superior judge of the tradition of learned wit, and could, moreover, pass as one of the last authors with the wide reading, the memory and the agility of mind that would be needed for the creation of a work in that tradition. His initial enthusiasm for *Tristram Shandy* as an original work in the tradition of Cervantes⁴⁷ was, therefore, a great help. At the same time, Warburton was a model of implacability in theological and political debates. His erudition and acerbic pen were feared everywhere. The editors of the *Monthly Review* condemned Warburton’s polemical style.⁴⁸ This big gun, in the early summer of

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁴ Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years*, 279.

⁴⁵ *Letters*, 92-93, 110, 115-16.

⁴⁶ Melvyn New, “Sterne, Warburton and the Burden of Exuberant Wit”, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 15 (1982), 250.

⁴⁷ New quotes Horace Walpole: “Bishop Warburton gave him [Sterne] a purse of gold and this compliment ... *that it was quite an original composition, an in the true Cervantic vein*. ... Warburton ... recommended the book to the bench of bishops and told them Mr Sterne ... was the English Rabelais.”

⁴⁸ Robert Donald Spector, *English Literary Periodicals and the Climate of Opinion*

1760, took the debutant Sterne under his wing like a tyrannical father. He assured Sterne that *Tristram Shandy* was potentially an amusing satire, but demanded better manners in future.

The bishop represented the Renaissance tradition of learning and creativity as well as the kind of prudery that Sterne was convinced he had to fight against in order to continue that tradition. For Sterne, creativity seems to have been very much related to what we would call libido. He felt, in early modern terms, that wit began with passion, or, to put it the other way round and differently, that suppressing sexual impulses might harm his associative skill. Before *Tristram Shandy* was going to appear, he had already tried to explain this to an advisor, who has never been identified. In the account of his conversation with Sterne about the forthcoming book,⁴⁹ the “adviser” writes: “He observed, that an Attention to his Character would damp his Fire and check the Flow of his Humour, and that if he went on, and hoped to be read, he must not look at his Band or his Cassock. I told him ... that it was no difficult Matter to avoid the Dirtiness of Swift on the one Hand, and the Looseness of Rabelais on the other” That was precisely what Sterne found difficult, and he was later to submit his ideas on this point to Warburton. In his discussion of the resulting chill between the two clergymen, New focuses on their moral-aesthetic difference of opinion. He observes that the subject matter broached by Tristram in volume V, with reference to the sixteenth-century archbishop Giovanni della Casa, touches upon the essence of the conflict with Warburton, and suggests that that conflict is related to an inner conflict in Sterne himself.⁵⁰

Sterne, in spite of this, never let himself be tempted into an attack on Warburton that would make the latter’s attitude altogether understandable. *Tristram Shandy* contains only two hints, in volumes IV and V. Tristram is quoting an imaginary critic who tells him that “your

During the Seven Years’ War, The Hague, 1966, 198.

⁴⁹ The anonymous letter (15 April 1760) was first printed in *The European Magazine*, March, 1792, 169 (see *Letters*, 77n.).

⁵⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, V.16.446-49. Della Casa, a model for “those few ... who write not so much to be fed — as to be famous”, worked for forty years at his Galateo, according to Tristram, “and when the thing came out, it was not af above half the size of a Rider’s Almanac”. The man had, moreover, not been a “slender clerk”, but “a genius of fine parts and fertile fancy”. With a subsequent pattern of references, Sterne contrasts Della Casa with Rabelais, as representing gravity and wit, respectively – Sterne’s preference seems obvious.

horse throws dirt; see you've splashed a bishop".⁵¹ The other hint seems to have been recognizable only to Sterne and Warburton himself. Trim is telling the story of Tristram's unintended circumcision in such a way that "priests and virgins might have listened to it";⁵² Sterne is here parodying the advice given him by Warburton to laugh from now on "in good company, where priests and virgins may be present".⁵³ Warburton, always quick to take offence, was not as a rule inaccurate in his reproaches. The fact that Warburton emphasized the company Sterne seems to move in, and that, as we saw earlier, he associated Tristram Shandy indirectly with Wilkes, suggests the importance of Sterne's alliances. The role played by John Hall-Stevenson in Sterne's life as a writer is a biographical cliché, but I am inclined to stress that Warburton's aversion to Sterne because of the association with Hall-Stevenson had a political dimension. I shall make a short detour through the works of Hall-Stevenson and a few anonymous attacks on Warburton to put Sterne's allusions to the bishop in a richer light.

Hall-Stevenson's works

The poet Warburton hoped had nothing to do with Sterne kept pace with his friend also after the *Two Lyric Epistles*. Shortly after the publication of the second volume of *Tristram Shandy* (February 1761), Dodsley published, again anonymously, Hall-Stevenson's *Fables for Grown Gentlemen; or, a Fable for Every Day in the Week*, an imitation of Mandeville with sufficient vagueness and unusual stylistic features to pass for a work by Sterne.⁵⁴ In June 1761, Sterne's new publishers

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, IV.20.357.

⁵² *Ibid.*, V.20.453.

⁵³ *Letters*, 119. The allusion was noticed by Michael O. Houlahan, in "William Warburton and 'Tristram Shandy', An Ironic Source", *Notes and Queries*, 217 (1972), 378-79. Sterne's ambiguous attitude *vis-a-vis* Warburton has also been illustrated by Jonathan Lamb: in his sermons, Sterne clearly takes the side of the "Anti-Warburtonians": Job is a moving story about an historical figure. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne always also contrasts commentaries on Job in this vein, with an indication in favour of Warburton's theory that the book of Job is an allegory (Jonathan Lamb, "The Job Controversy, Sterne and the Question of Allegory", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 24 [1990], 1, esp. 17).

⁵⁴ A critic in the *Critical Review* (IX, 1760, 322) remarked that verse and metre "hobbled strangely". That, and the mixture of all kinds of jargon made him think of *Tristram Shandy*. That the reviewer considered ascribing them to Sterne is particularly remarkable in view of the contents of the fables. The fables criticize the conservative warnings against the consumption of articles of luxury, Scottish nationalism, the participation of

Becket and DeHondt⁵⁵ published *Crazy Tales*, a series of rancid narratives, collected by “Antony Shandy” among the members of the Demoniacs, the male conversation group that had regularly met at Hall-Stevenson’s house Skelton (“Crazy Castle”) and of which Sterne had been a member. I shall have more to say about the nature of this book, Sterne’s contribution to it and his appreciation of it. Let me just note now that, after the appearance of *Crazy Tales*, Warburton could be pretty sure that Sterne had deceived him about his association with Hall-Stevenson.

The continuation of Hall-Stevenson’s career as a writer is also relevant here. While Sterne was in France, “Cousin Antony” had a regular correspondence with Wilkes and Churchill, with whose personal situations and political relations he seems to have been extensively familiar.⁵⁶ In the years following he was to support them with a series of political satires. *A Pastoral Cordial* (1763), *A Pastoral Puke* (1763), *The First Chapter of Prophecies of the Prophet Homer* (1766), and *Makarony Fables, with the New Fable of the Bees* (1768) are greatly different in form, design and quality, but they all come from the recalcitrant wing of the Whigs. Bute and everybody Scots or defending Bute are depicted as cowardly and villainous (Smollett and Johnson suffer twice). The powerful Whigs Pitt and Newcastle are too naive to put up a fight against Bute and would have done better not to set the backbenchers against Wilkes, the only one who is cynical enough to see through Bute’s machinations. The second, third and fourth pamphlets of the series are relevant in respect to Sterne’s position. *A Pastoral Puke* (1763) is a satirical sermon with for its persona an “independent” who has got lost in pseudo-divinity. The only consistent message is that the politicians who left Wilkes in the lurch have nevertheless been unable to exert any influence on the Government. Because of this pamphlet the name of Hall-Stevenson was once more linked to Sterne’s: the *Monthly Review* wrote that “when Tristram Shandy went to France he certainly left his mantle with his natural brother in jocularly”.⁵⁷ *The First Chapter of Prophecies of the Prophet Homer, with a letter to the B—— of G———* (1766) is a direct insult to Warburton, who had meanwhile

Spain in the Seven Years’ War, and Bute’s efforts for a peace with France. Pitt, too, is told off – for his weak coalition with Newcastle.

⁵⁵ As from the fifth volume of *Tristram Shandy* (December 1761, title page 1762), Sterne’s works were no longer published by Dodsley.

⁵⁶ Lodwick Hartley, “Sterne’s Eugenius as Indiscreet Author: The Literary Career of John Hall-Stevenson”, *PMLA*, 86 (1971), 434-35.

⁵⁷ *Monthly Review*, XXX (1764), 415.

revealed himself as one of the most formidable political opponents of Wilkes.

The pamphlet consists of a Homeric poem about the birth of Apollo, preceded by an explanation, ostensibly in the argumentative style of the *Divine Legation of Moses*, of the Christian and Judaic parallels in the poem. In passing, Warburton is compared to Joseph, because the bishop, too, accepts his wife being pregnant by someone else. Hall-Stevenson is here alluding to a piece of gossip that was probably circulated by Wilkes and Churchill, about *crimcon* in the Warburton household. The authorship of Hall-Stevenson is established through a letter from him to Sterne with a reference to the pamphlet (to be considered later).⁵⁸ One of the *Makarony Fables*, finally, brings Sterne definitively into the camp of the Wilkites. A blackbird called Tristram drowns, with “Wanton Fancies” and “seculariz’d airs”, the vespers of a caged owl. Sterne is diametrically opposed to the hypocritical “My good Lord Bishop”, and placed among “those good Children of St. Francis”, that is, the Medmenham Brothers of Sir Francis Dashwood’s Hell-Fire Club.⁵⁹

The main points, then, are that, firstly, the works of Sterne and Hall-Stevenson have always been linked together, by the reviewers and by Hall-Stevenson himself, and, secondly, already before 5 July 1762 (the date of the earliest surviving letter to Wilkes), Hall-Stevenson was on friendly terms with Wilkes and Churchill. Further to this latter point, it can be observed that the underlying ideas of Hall-Stevenson’s satires against Warburton were shared by the other two rebels. There is a direct line from the Grub-street satires against Pope to those of Churchill and Hall-Stevenson against Pope’s editor. The main rhetorical tactics consisted in the creation of a not very respectable persona, who from his

⁵⁸ Hartley (“Sterne’s Eugenius As Indiscreet Author”, 443) rejects the ascription by Curtis (*Letters*, 280n), because the work was not included in Hall-Stevenson’s *Works* (1795), and because it is stylistically refined. Cash (*Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 251n) rightly says that no other pamphlet can be considered as the subject of the exchange of letters between Sterne and Hall-Stevenson in July 1766. I may add that Hall-Stevenson’s work is inconstant. The possibility may also be considered that Hall cooperated with someone. That could then explain why the editor of the collected works, Hall’s grandson John Wharton, could not find the manuscript or left it lying around. It is a known fact that Hall-Stevenson and Churchill occasionally supplemented each other’s work (see Wallace Cable Brown, *Charles Churchill: Poet, Rake and Rebel*, Lawrence, 1953, 158-60).

⁵⁹ *The Works of John Hall-Stevenson* ... London, 1795, I, 200-202.

low position sees through the sham of the exalted person, emerging eventually as the more virtuous.

The masterpiece in this genre is Churchill's *Dedication to the Sermons* (1765), a complex satire in which the poet, in the role of a pauperized clergyman (which Churchill had once been), overpraises Warburton intelligently, only to charge him with pride in the last few lines.⁶⁰

Let GLOSTER well remember, how he rose,
Nor turn his back on men who made him great;
Let him not, gorg'd with pow'r, and drunk with state,
Forget what once he was, tho' now so high;
How low, how mean, and full as poor as I

Just like the Grub-street writers who, a few decades earlier, had hit back at Pope, Warburton's attackers liked to emphasize that the object of their ridicule had to be just as low and mean as they were in sexual matters. The pornographical *Essay on Woman*, which, as is well-known, at last gave Gloucester and his friends the stick they needed to beat Wilkes into prison, parodies the footnotes of Pope's *Essay on Man* in such a way that Warburton's chastity comes to be in doubt.⁶¹

Sterne's efforts to stay outside the atmosphere of politics were, seen from Warburton's position, always half-hearted. Even before Sterne sought contact with him (9 June 1760), *Tristram Shandy* had been deployed for the sort of attacks that Warburton invited. With the complaint in the letter to Warburton about the scribblers from whom his "betters" suffered more than he himself, Sterne was probably alluding especially to *The Clockmakers Outcry* (the first edition is from 9 May 1760).⁶² In view of the nature of the insults in that pamphlet, the question is whether Warburton had not in fact expected (although he had not insisted on it) a more specific and public counterattack.

The Clockmakers dedicate their critical exploitation of Tristram's obscenity to the author of "MOSES's Divine Legation". Since Warburton,

⁶⁰ "Dedication to the Sermons", ll. 176-80, *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, ed. W. Tooke, London, 1804, II, 305.

⁶¹ The *Essay on Woman* was probably written by Thomas Potter, but Wilkes took care of the footnotes, and he was held responsible for the whole text.

⁶² Curtis (*Letters*, 199n) suspects that Warburton, in his reply, is alluding to *The Clockmakers Outcry*. New (1982) refers only in a footnote to this "vulgar piece of hackwork" (254).

as Hill had made public, had bought off his tutorship of Tristram, grovelling before “the book-wright of SHANDY’s *Obscene Legation*”, the Clockmakers regard him as “the Most Humble of all Christian Prelates”. Meanwhile parodying Warburton’s own pompous style, the authors nevertheless assume that the person addressed with his support for Sterne, served his private interests. By calling himself Sterne’s admirer, he tries to remove possible doubts about his manliness:

The former great personage, ... of flashy and pert reputation, strides like a Colossus over the human race, mere pygmies in understanding, when put in competition with him; whose *Goliah* learning is indeed acknowledged to be huge, monstrous, and unwieldy.

But should the sons and daughters of common mortality, as they succesively pass under the high-vaulted arch, and between the supporting columns of this towering *Colossus* (as the *Lilliputians* did in regard to *Gulliver*) not be able to discover, thro’ any gaping chasm of the sable and reverend teguments of his dignified *Nates*, canonical protuberances of requisite and laudable dimensions, it would make the males sneer, and the females flout.⁶³

As early as 1760 a connection was made, as Hall and Churchill were to point out, between Warburton’s lust of power and his lack of sexual potency. The swollenness of Warburton’s prose can be assumed to correspond to a lack of protuberance elsewhere.

Incidentally, it is interesting to know who may have grabbed Warburton by the balls here. The assumption by Bandry and Day that Sterne himself wrote *The Clockmakers Outcry* cannot be made to stand, but it is a fact that the pamphleteer or pamphleteers knew about Sterne’s publications in York, and also that he or they kept track of his publicity stunts in London.⁶⁴ This, together with the fact that the Clockmakers refer to John Hall-Stevenson’s *Two Lyric Epistles* Warburton detested so much, makes one suspect that Hall was involved to some extent in the

⁶³ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, xi-xii.

⁶⁴ The author or authors knew of Sterne’s advertisement for *The Sermons of Mr Yorick* in the *York Courant* of 4 March 1760, and used the first edition of *Tristram Shandy*, published in York in 1759. For more arguments by Bandry and Day in support of Sterne’s authorship, see the section “Some Observations” in their critical edition of *The Clockmakers Outcry*, and also Ann Bandry and W.G. Day, “The Third Edition of the Clockmakers Outcry”, *The Shandean*, 4 (1992), *passim*, and Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 139-243. For arguments against, see my review of the latter in *The Shandean*, 4 (1992), 252-55.

situation.⁶⁵ But it is not really important who it was. Warburton was to become the victim of other Shandy parodies. In *Tsonnonthouan* the priests specialized in sexual problems are called Chickamichabou, Sterne and Warburton.⁶⁶ In the spurious *Vol. IX of Tristram Shandy* (1766), after all, a certain “W—” is to become Tristram’s tutor (as we shall later see in Chapter 8).

Sterne’s conscience

The attacks on Warburton by Hall-Stevenson, the members of the Nonsense Club and the anonymous hacks, form a contrast with the covert, light ironic teasing in *Tristram Shandy*, and the difference has been adduced to paint Sterne as being more magnanimous than the party politicians and the scribblers.⁶⁷ That characterization goes much too far. Like all career-conscious men of his generation, Sterne stood with at least one leg in the shame-culture.⁶⁸ His dislike of Warburton, after his attempt at building a bridge had failed, was probably just as great as that of Wilkes’ friends. Like them, the Whig Sterne rejected the kind of pomposity with which Warburton commanded respect. By describing Sterne as an early Jean Paul, a detached literary lonely person,⁶⁹ an ironical romantic, one does not do justice to the mental exertion it appears to have cost him to keep his antagonism out of his work. The decision not to let the wit of *Tristram Shandy* be fed by venom, following *A Political Romance*, came after a resolution at a cognitive

⁶⁵ I am still unable to adduce evidence for this supposition. There are consistent links between this pamphlet, the works of Sterne and the kind of political aspirations of Hall-Stevenson. After the *Outcry* of May 1760, the *Public Advertiser* of 20 June announced two related pamphlets: *The Clockmaker’s Kne’l for the Dialogue of the Dead* and *The Clockmaker’s Meditation upon Yorick’s Sermons*. The announcements are spurious, or perhaps these pamphlets were lost (see section 5 of the Bibliography to this book). What did get published was *The Clockmaker’s Political hum-bug*. There was an advertisement for it in the *York Courant* of 8 July 1760, and in the *Critical Review* it was characterized as a specimen of whiggish nonsense.

⁶⁶ Anon., *Memoirs of the Life of Tsonnonthouan, A King of the Indian Nation Called Roundheads ...*, London, 1763, I, 102.

⁶⁷ Connely, *Laurence Sterne as Yorick*, 60-62; Johann Czerny, *Sterne, Hippel und Jean Paul: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte de humoristischen Romans in Deutschland*, Berlin, 1904, 46.

⁶⁸ For the theoretical difference between shame and guilt culture and the mixture of these in the eighteenth century, see Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art*, Princeton, 1960, 66-68, and 184-222.

⁶⁹ Sitter’s concept (John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Engand*, Ithaca: NY, 1982, 214-20).

level.⁷⁰ Gravity was always lurking in the background, however. The correspondence between Hall-Stevenson and Sterne about *The First Chapter of Prophecies* suggests that both were equally disposed to drown Warburton in defamation in the classical manner (by sexual accusations against his private life). In this snapshot episode, it even looks as if Hall-Stevenson had contemplated the good manners of the reviewers, who naturally forbade such a thing, more seriously than Sterne. The reviewers thought the allusion to Mrs Warburton's adultery extremely distasteful,⁷¹ but remarkably, Hall-Stevenson thought so, too. In a short note to Sterne he mentions the inner unrest about his temporary lack of self-constraint:

Crazy Castle July 13. 1766

From J.Hall Esq^{re}

You see, my dear Cosin, the Reviewers have had a stroke at me, and in good truth not without cause. ——— and so I am very contrite for my bestiality with the Bishop of G but there is no help for it; so lend me some assistance to set me well again with myself. It was against my own feelings ——— but for the sake of a Joke many a wiser man has done as beastly a thing.

Adio.ANTONIO.

Even when we consider the ironical tone, it seems that “bestiality” is what Hall would rather not admit within the domain of his “own feelings”. In his reply for Hall's peace of mind, Sterne shifts the blame for the real malice to the messengers of the bad news, suggesting also that the story about Warburton's marital problems is sufficiently well known for Hall not to be held responsible for it. I believe that the bantering tone of Sterne's words of consolation should not make us underestimate the seriousness of the problem:

Thou hast so tender a conscience my dear Cosin Antonio, and takest on so sadly for thy sins, that thou wast certainly meant and intended to have gone to heaven ——— if ever Wit went there ——— but of that, I have some slight mistrusts, inasmuch as we have all of us (accounting myself,

⁷⁰ For the history of *A Political Romance*, see Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years*, 262-77. Kay discusses the signals, in *A Political Romance* and *Tristram Shandy*, of recognition and deliberate curtailment of the satirical impulse in Sterne (Carol Kay, *Political Constructions: Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke*, Ithaca, 1988, esp. 215-17).

⁷¹ *Critical Review*, XXI (1766), 319; *Monthly Review*, XXXIV, 398-99. The *Monthly* called the author “an object of detestation and abhorrence”.

thou siest, as one) had, if not our good things, at least our good sayings in this life; & the Devil thou knowest, who is made up of spight, will not let them pass for nothing: and now I am persuaded in my mind, that it was by the suggestions of Satan, which, I trust my dear Antonio, we shall live finally to beat down under our feet, That thou gavest heed unto these Reviewers, & didst not rather chuse to cut them, as Jehudi did the role, with a penknife, than vex and pucker thy conscience at the rate thou doest. Heaven forgive me! for I said as much both of Dr Kunastrokius and Solomon too —— but every footman and Chamber maid in town knew both their Stories before hand —— & so there was an end of the matter. / These poor Devils, as well as thou and I, will have their Say —— or else they cannot have their supper⁷²

Although Hall-Stevenson was served handsomely, finding a loyal confessor in Sterne, the letter also shows that Sterne had not forgotten his own bestiality, least of all that against the heirs of Dr Richard Mead, the Kunastrokius of *Tristram Shandy*.

Mead as Kunastrokius

It amounts to no more than a hint. In the introduction to his defence of hobby-horses, Tristram says that every one is welcome to his idiosyncracies: “Did not Dr. Kunastrokius, that great man, at his leisure hours, take the greatest delight imaginable in combing of asses’ tails, and plucking the dead hairs out with his teeth, though he had tweezers always in his pocket?”⁷³ Mead had been dead for quite some time, but the portrait was recognized, reminding people that the exceedingly rich society physician had gone bankrupt partly because of his addiction to expensive sexual perversions. The stories around Mead had been *gefundenes Fressen* for the writers living on Grub-street, who had filled in the necessary details.⁷⁴

Sterne does not seem to have been pleased with the matter. In January 1760, he received a letter from an unidentifiable physician who wondered why Mead’s relatives should again be confronted with the whole unpleasant history.⁷⁵ Sterne replied at length, in a style that makes

⁷² *Letters*, 280-81.

⁷³ *Tristram Shandy*, I.7.12.

⁷⁴ In Anon, *The Cornutor of Seventy-Five, Being a Genuine Narrative of the Life, Adventures and Amours of Don Ricardo Honeywater ...* London, 1748, and Anon, *Don Ricardo Honeywater Vindicated ...*, London, 1748.

⁷⁵ In Hill’s biographical sketch we read that the same anonymous physician warned Mead’s sons-in-law (John Hill, “A Letter to the Ladies Magazine”, *Royal Female*

Curtis suspect that the document might on occasions also have had to serve as a public defence.⁷⁶ Opening with a long, witty analysis of the saying “de mortuis nil nisi bonum” (“Why so? —Who says so?— neither reason or scripture.”), the letter discusses the seriousness of the offence and the pastimes of Mead himself.

— I do him first all honour — speak of Kunastrokius as a great man — (be he who he will) and then most distantly hint at a drole foible in his character — and that not first reported (to the few who can even understand the hint) by me — but known before by every chambermaid and footman within the bills of mortality — [...] — as to the failing of Kun[a]strokius, which you say can only be imputed to his friends as a misfortune — I see nothing like a misfortune in it to any friend or relation to Kunastrokius — that Kunastrokius upon occasions should sit with *** **** and *****—I have put these stars not to hurt your worship’s delicacy —⁷⁷

Because of the repetitions of the nickname and the asterisks, what we might call “relativizations” were of course salt in the wounds of the person addressed. It must also have been painful for him that Sterne should have alluded to the sort of social degradation that Mead had undergone before the lowest classes. That Sterne, after six years, should still believe that he had to defend himself, thinking, moreover, of the chambermaids and footmen to whom Mead had symbolically been delivered, suggests a feeling of guilt.

An appeal to the lower classes’ love of gloating as in the reference to Mead is unique in *Tristram Shandy*. One can imagine that a certain remorse about this should have contributed to Sterne’s refusal in later volumes of *Tristram Shandy* to put any more recognizable individuals in the pillory. If this is true, here too we may suspect a certain influence by the Grub-street authors. Through the mention of Kunastrokius in *Tristram Shandy*, the gutter-press got a new opportunity to play their games with the Mead family. The Jeremiah Kunastrokius M.D. of the *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), thanks, with a reference to the relevant page, his “good friend, and arch companion, Mr. Tristram Shandy, gentlemen [*sic*]” for the honourable mention of his father, “the celebrated doctor Kunastrokius, of

Magazine, 1 April 1760; quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 73-74).

⁷⁶ *Letters*, 91n.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

physical memory”.⁷⁸ Readers could expect *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius, Doctor of Physic, &c.&c.&c.* (1760), which appeared shortly afterwards, to discuss the domestic circumstances of the elder Kunastrokius.

Although I have tried in this chapter to put new ideas before Sterne specialists, my conclusions will not come as a great surprise to them. The commercial press concentrated on the elements of *Tristram Shandy* that linked up with what Bertelsen describes as the “nihilistic irreverence” of part of the urban middle classes. The blow-ups of Tristram’s obscene and misogynous suggestions, of Sterne’s supposed financial motives and of the vulgar liberties he took with Mead, and, it was hoped, Warburton, suggested the notion that the phenomenon of *Tristram Shandy* formed part of the courageous new world of Mandeville.

Sterne’s initial enthusiasm over these interferences in his literary existence seem to have changed very quickly into irritation, particularly when the criticism of the obscenity of his work threatened to drown the appreciation for its sentimental and overall satirical qualities. It is again typical of Sterne that he initially fell foul of his imitators only in personal letters, and then in an elusive, semi-jocular style, not openly: “God forgive me, for the Volumes of Ribaldry I’ve been the cause of’ — now I say, god forgive them — and tis the pray’r I constantly put up for those who use me most unhandsomely —” The woman addressed, Mary Macartney, had to be won over for Sterne’s middle course: “I’m sure with regard to Discretion ... — only I insist upon it, she [Discretion] must not spoil good company.”⁷⁹

Most of the “Volumes of Ribaldry” differ from *Tristram Shandy* in their deviations from the middle course. With *Yorick’s Meditations*, *The Clockmakers Outcry*, *Christopher Wagstaff*, the spurious *Vol. IX* of *Tristram Shandy* and Griffith’s *Posthumous Works* as the most important exceptions, there is little in the imitations to remind us of the art of satirical balance, the melancholy and the sentiment that made Sterne an important author in the eyes of the reviewers and other serious readers.

However, it can hardly be denied that Sterne, certainly with the first instalments of *Tristram Shandy*, instigated the vulgarity in the imitations. His repeated admission in early letters that he took great pains – and found it necessary to take even greater pains – to control himself,

⁷⁸ “Kunastrokius”, *Explanatory Remarks*, 5-6.

⁷⁹ *Letters*, 118.

suggests that he did not estimate his own creative impulses as naturally higher than those of the hacks. Because the sermon in *Tristram Shandy* is enough to demonstrate that he had greater ambitions than to keep Covent-Garden bucks amused, he seems at first to have thought that he could permit himself a few coarse jokes. Nevertheless, the criticism of Tristram's stale sexual jokes and the stabbing of individual persons (details that were not necessarily connected with the sceptical satire against moral and intellectual pride, puritanism and atheism) seem to have gone home. In these, limited, respects, the last seven volumes of *Tristram Shandy* are, as I have already intimated, more civilized than the first two.

Sterne never forgot Swift and Rabelais, however. As Montigel and others have noted, much of the humour in *Tristram Shandy* is still "physically grotesque", that is, linked up with an aversion to physical existence.⁸⁰ As I hope to make clear in the following chapters, readers of later generations have removed especially the grotesque from their vision. What has to be shown is that for the early Grub-street authors this was still a vital satirical element.

⁸⁰ Montigel, *Der Körper im humoristischen Roman*, ch. 2.

Chapter Five

Nonsense and the Grotesque

According to one historian of civilization in the Dutch Republic, up to and including the seventeenth century, telling dirty jokes was a favourite pastime among men of social importance, while in the eighteenth century it was only accepted among the lower classes.¹ In England, the civilization offensive seems to have been launched at a later date and more explicitly from among the middling classes.² The foul-mouthed nobleman with his disgusting friends – Squire Weston in *Tom Jones*, the husband of Ethelinda in *The Triumvirate*³ – continued to make his appearance in novels until after the middle of the eighteenth century, and probably not without reason. John Burton from Oxford said he really knew few financially independent gentlemen with a consistently civilized character.⁴ Dramatists assumed that some of the gentlemen in the boxes would laugh at the same jokes as their servants in the upper galleries and the lads in the pit.⁵

Sterne's friend John Hall-Stevenson in many respects resembles the eighteenth-century Esquire-rake. The fact that Sterne's publishers also attached their name to Hall's works may say something about the readership they envisaged in both cases. The similarities are at any rate obvious, as is the humorous tradition on which both Sterne and Hall-Stevenson drew. The Demoniacs amused themselves with Rabelais and the works of his direct successors, Béroalde, Scarron and Bruscombille. Ferriar even seems to have seen the copy of Bouchet's scatological *Serées* that Hall-Stevenson once lent to Sterne.⁶ Lodwick Hartley

¹ Dekker, *Lachen in de Gouden Eeuw*, 42-43.

² Derek Brewer, "Prose Jest-Books Mainly in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries in England", in *A Cultural History of Humour from Antiquity to the Present Day*, eds Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg, Cambridge, 1997, 97-99.

³ [Griffith], *The Triumvirate*, I, 71-73, 186-92.

⁴ John Burton, *University-Politicks. Or the Study of a Christian, Gentleman, Scholar, set forth in three Sermons on the King's Inauguration before the University of Oxford, at St. Mary's Church* (cited in the *Monthly Review*, XXIV [1761], 119-26).

⁵ Price, *Theatre in the Age of Garrick*, 92.

⁶ John Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne, With Other Essays and Verses*, London, 1798, 41-42.

nevertheless had difficulty digesting the irrefutable fact that Sterne appreciated the humour (“too frequently vulgar, obscure, juvenile”) in Hall’s *Crazy Tales*. He hopes that this is a case of a “willing blindness to the faults of a warm friend”, although he seems to harbour a notion that Sterne (“genius though he was”) may not always have risen above the taste of his time.⁷

A lack of familiarity with the low humorous genres prevalent before *Tristram Shandy* has caught out other Sterne critics, and in the case of Hartley has led to a definite error. Giving a brief epitome of the second of Hall’s *Crazy Tales*, “My cousin’s Tale of a Cock and a Bull”, Hartley wonders “how this astonishingly prurient story could have been the one that Sterne referred to as ‘one of the best of its kind, I ever heard’ and the memory of which he perpetuated even to the last line of *Tristram Shandy*”.⁸ The suggestion that Yorick’s last words in *Tristram Shandy* (the answer to Elizabeth’s question as to what the story about Obadiah’s infertile cow relates to), refer to the specific title of “My Cousin’s Tale”, is mistaken. Wayne Booth already concluded that the last line, “A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick—— And one of the best of its kind, I ever heard”, relates to the old *coq-à-lâne*, and probably also refers to *Tristram Shandy* as a whole.

A cock and a bull

In his analysis, Booth mentions that, by analogy with French practice, a “Cock-and-Bull” story was a term for an obscene story, and then concentrates on the resonances of this one phrase in the context of *Tristram Shandy*. With cock, Yorick alludes to the ailments of Tristram and Toby, and through Walter’s impotent bull to the problematic engendering of Tristram, as well as to the deception of the readers by Sterne’s title (by way of “to bull”, that is, to bully). The story thus bites its own tail: the anecdote of the bull brings us back thematically to the conception of our hero in the early pages which, chronologically, follows the adventure with the bull. Since Booth assumes that *Tristram Shandy* is a pre-designed whole, complete in itself, he regards the suggestion of bullying as a final wink at the reader, who knows now that he will never hear anything about the promised life of the narrator.⁹

⁷ Hartley, “Sterne’s Eugenius as Indiscreet Author”, 434.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 432.

⁹ Wayne C. Booth, “Did Sterne Complete *Tristram Shandy*?”, *Modern Philology*, 48

Booth's hypothesis of a completed composition is not strong, in the first place because Sterne actually considered a continuation of *Tristram Shandy*,¹⁰ but perhaps even more so because his idea of completion does not tally with what Booth himself regards as the all-important theme of Sterne's fiction – male infertility.

However, this latter observation does not make Booth's reflections on Tristram's final pages any less interesting. It remains intriguing that Sterne's great *Unvollendete* should end with an unclearly broken off story about impotence. The sexual failure of all male activity in *Tristram Shandy* and the unsatisfying nature of the book itself in terms of plot, for the last time make their appearance together.

This combination, in the book as a whole, of literal indecision (Tristram breaking off story threads and indefinitely putting off decisions) and the tragi-comedy around male assertivity in producing books and children, has made *Tristram Shandy* popular with psychoanalytically oriented literary scholars over the past few decades. Careful Lacanian readings admit of the suggestion that Sterne, like nobody else who has ever put literary pen to paper, was aware of the phallic urge behind that deed. With the deconstruction of his own text, Sterne is said to have abandoned the "author-ity" of the male discourse.¹¹ In the words of Calvin Thomas, "Through tropes of impotence, castration, and thwarted physical and symbolic paternity, the novel [*Tristram Shandy*] disrupts the fictions of male prerogative, privilege, and power, the phallogocentric transmission of 'meaning' through narrative

(1951) 172-83.

¹⁰ *Letters*, 284. The question of whether *Tristram Shandy* is to be regarded as a completed work (Booth), a work still to be completed (Peter de Voogd, "The Design of *Tristram Shandy*", *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, VI/2 [1983], 159-62), or as an endlessly expandable work (R.F.Brissenden, "'Trusting To Almighty God': Another Look at the Composition of *Tristram Shandy*", *The Winged Skull*, eds Cash and Stedmond, 258-69; Marcia Allentuck, "In Defense of an Unfinished *Tristram Shandy*: Laurence Sterne and the Non Finito", *The Winged Skull*, eds Cash and Stedmond, 45-55), is a popular item for discussion among Sterneans. Keymer seems to me to be the most sensible observer: Sterne had a vague plan, and then set to work improvising (Tom Keymer, "Dying By Numbers: *Tristram Shandy* and Serial Fiction (1)", *The Shandean*, 8 [1996], 51-53).

¹¹ Richard Macksey, "'Alas, Poor Yorick': Sterne's Thoughts", *Modern Language Notes*, 7 (1982), 1007-20, focuses on the seeming absence of a biological father. James Cruise, "Reinvesting the Novel: *Tristram Shandy* and Authority", *The Age of Johnson, A Scholarly Annual*, 1 (1987), 215-35, supports the idea that commerce kills "author-ity".

and Oedipal closure, and the disavowal of castration which is the heart of linguistic ‘mastery’ itself”.¹²

It is quite possible that Sterne approached this level of self-analysis intuitively, and this time too I do not wish to identify him with other authors in his environment. That Tristram’s refusal to climax can be nicely linked up with a post-modern philosophy of life and letters has been proved. It should be added, however, that Tristram was not the first persona to have been involved with sex and impotence, nor was he the first to do so in a vague or a plot-less story. When considering these as important ingredients, we are no longer talking about a single novel, but about a humorous genre. The name of the genre is the Cock-and-Bull story.¹³ When we look at a few of the Sterne imitations that announce themselves as such, one gets some idea of the expectations derived with Sterne’s role as a jester.

Hartley is right in remarking that Hall-Stevenson’s *Crazy Tales* are obscene, and that in this respect “My Cousin’s Tale of a Cock and a Bull” is an all-time low. There is, however, more that can be said about this narrative poem.

This little work “by Sterne”, too, is about male impotence, although it has a more misogynist undertone than *Tristram Shandy*. An old Italian marquis wants to have a child, and after a long period of trying he sends his wife to a faith-healer, known to be able to cure infertility. Having returned home, the supposed patient reports on the treatment she has undergone, after first having had to wait for a week for the busily occupied “Saint”. The marchioness has witnessed an elaborate peepshow, presented to her as a vision: “First came a Cock, and then a Bull, / And then a Heifer and a Hen; / Till they had got their bellies full, / On and off and on again.” Then there appeared a dozen naked, tonsured men, “Every one with an exalted horn”, who had sexual intercourse with a girl who had earlier appeared to be able to play sexual games with a tame mouse. The old marquis becomes so excited by this story that the

¹² Calvin Thomas, “Tristram Shandy’s Consent To Incompleteness: Discourse, Disavowal, Disruption”, *Literature and Psychology*, XXXVI/3 (1990), 47.

¹³ Golden thinks that Sterne may have been influenced by “A Story of a Cock and a Bull” in *The Literary Magazine*, May-June 1756, and/or “A Cock and a Bull, as sung by Mr. Beard at Ranelagh”, in *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, March 1757 (Morris Golden, “Periodical Context in the Imagined World of *Tristram Shandy*”, *The Age of Johnson*, 1 [1987], 237-60), but the genre was widespread.

following night he produces two ejaculations. Less than nine months later, the marchioness gives birth to twins.¹⁴

Thus summarized, “My Cousin’s Tale” is a clear-cut bawdy story with a predictable anti-Catholic undertone. However, the poem contains a number of vague elements and seemingly superfluous asides, which may cause “grown misses and gentlemen” to doubt whether these are the most relevant facts. We are told, for instance, that the “Saint” held court in the neighbourhood of a Franciscan monastery, and we are left in the dark as to what the marchioness did during the week she had to wait for an audience. Then, there is a nephew of the marquis, a potent cardinal of twenty-seven, who would like to see a successor engendered. Although the narrator fills in too many details for us to be able to speak of a classic Cock-and-Bull story, the mention made of the cock and the bull is probably a reference to these cul-de-sacs in the story that invite further speculation.

The classical Cock-and-Bull story is built up entirely from these vague elements.¹⁵ The first object of ridicule is usually the narrator, who can be suspected of re-telling a story without understanding the essence. That a Cock-and-Bull story must have or suggest a sexual content is then significant for two reasons. In the first place, the narrator can now pose as innocent in sexual matters. He does not just pretend to be ignorant, but one who knows what grown-ups think of most of the time without himself taking part in their sinfulness. So the reader or listener is made the victim of his own expectations. Legman discusses this rhetorical function of the Cock-and-Bull story in some detail, remarking that the hidden aggression of the narrator against the listener is part of a long-standing folk tradition, in which the *nincumpoop* (till late eighteenth century not just a fool, but more precisely “A foolish fellow, also one who never saw his wife’s *****)¹⁶ is opposed to the civilian who has to keep his passions under control in public: “In such tales and jokes, the dénouement or ‘punch-line’ is improporionally small or absurd (or even simply evaded) by comparison with the long and complex development or ‘build-up’ of the listener’s expectation; and the avowed butt of the

¹⁴ Hall-Stevenson, *Works*, III, 32-43.

¹⁵ By quoting the *OED*, the editors of the Florida *Tristram Shandy* stress this aspect. Cock-and-bull-story is explained as “a long rambling, idle story”. On the basis of this, the editors note a relation with “Tale of a tub” (*Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 552).

¹⁶ Anon. [Frances Grose], *A Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, London, 1785, s.v. “Nincumpoop”.

joke is simply the person who has been tricked into listening.” As an eighteenth-century example of such a role-inverting “pointless anecdote”, Legman mentions a story (Number 79) from *Joe Miller’s Jests* (1739), but he assumes that *Tristram Shandy* belongs to this same tradition.¹⁷

Some passages from *Miss C——y’s Cabinet of Curiosities* (1765) enable us to assess Legman’s claim. The “Tristram Shandy” of this story imagines how a reader, after reading an advertisement, buys his book, only to discover that it is not a work by Sterne:

MISS C——Y’s cabinet broke open, or the Green-Room curiosities! Ha! a good Title, I must confess ————— There’s Quaintness and Fun in it
 ——— TOMMY, go to the Bookseller’s for Miss C——Y’s Cabinet
 ————— Sir, the Bookseller says ’tis the genuine One —————
 The Bookseller’s a Fool, and you’re a Puppy ————— Was ever a Man so served! An impertinent Puppy, to be making so free with Miss C——Y ——her Name I mean————— what Business had he to take so often her Name in vain? ————— I’ll not hold him guiltless for it.

Knowing that this is a Grub-street product, then, alters the perception of the imaginary reader, who obviously knows that it is only the real Shandy that he is permitted to laugh at. Nevertheless, since he has the forgery in his hands, he immediately has certain expectations:

NOT a Syllable of the Green Room yet! ————— ’Tis fine Work, indeed, if the Public is to be hummed ————— and choused
 ————— and troubled —— and bubbled — and bamboozled – with a Cock and a Bull Story. —— ’Sdeath! I wish I had my Six-pence half-penny again. —— And so do I, Sir ————— And so do I, Madam
 —— And so do I, my dear JENNY —— And so do I, Mrs. WADMAN.

The narrator himself, finally, calms everybody’s feelings:

¹⁷ Gershon Legman, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke: An Analysis of Sexual Humor*, New York, 1968, 9-10, 113-32 (quotation, page 9).

NEVER fear, Madam — never fear, Sir. Regard the End, as the Latin saying has it—— You'll soon be shewn the Actress's Secrets, I warrant you, and if you are not pleased then, the Deuce must be in it.¹⁸

The deuce is in it, for Miss C——y's end does not turn out to be what we think the author is referring to. After about three quarters of his text, Tristram states that it has never been his intention to describe “high seasoned Amours”; readers who had expected that are rejected indignantly and compared to “worn-out Debauchees” who need pornography and perverse little games to achieve anything: “Perish such Miscreants! ——The blue Fog rot'em, and the red Lightning consume them to Ashes! ——.”¹⁹

Reversing the moral hierarchy is a well-tried strategy in Grub-street satire. In *Miss C——Y's Cabinet of Curiosities*, just as in most imitations, slighting remarks are made about the reader who reads Sterne for his wit and true humour, but scoffs at garret-hatched vulgarities. The hungry, confused, dishonourable Tristram turns out to be able to control his lusts more easily than his readers, who for that very reason begin to despise him: “‘He is an Eunuch’, cries a Witling ‘He is a fool’, affirms a Rake.”²⁰

Fools and Nobody

In Chapter One, I emphasized that the typical thoughtless narrator occupies an antithetical position within neoclassicist moral aesthetics, which presupposes self-knowledge and character formation (the cultivation of ruling passions). I also stated there that in parodies of *Tristram Shandy*, the satirical persona is often a hack-writer, an author who by and from necessity lacks character and civic virtue. Though the Tristram of *Miss C——Y's Cabinet of Curiosities* comes within this category, the grub in this case also shows the characteristics of an older, folklore type of dishonourable character, the nincumpoop or, more generally, the fool. There are further instances of this.

¹⁸ Anon., *Miss C——y's Cabinet of Curiosities, Or The Green-Room Broke Open, ... by Tristram Shandy, Gent., ... Utopia (Dublin?)*, 1765, 4-5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 35. The same principle has been adopted in a story which, on the title page of *Tristram Shandy's Bon Mots* (1760) is announced as “A Story of a Cock and a Bull, in the Shandy Stile”. The narrator argues with female readers who entreat him to let them know when the story becomes smutty, so that they can put the book aside in time. The expected indecency fails to appear, however (*Tristram Shandy's Bon Mots*, 1760, 41-47).

The author of *Folly* (1763), another of those indifferent as to how or what he writes (“obscene Lampoons”, “honour’d Novels”), introduces himself on the title page as “a FOOL, and younger brother to TRISTRAM SHANDY”.²¹ This brother, as will become clear, is a rather dull and predictable member of the family, but in “Tristram’s papa”, the persona of *The Whitsun Donative* (1787), we have a late true-blue Shandy. One of his preliminaries (not really at the beginning: nearly the whole book consists of prefaces, dedications and introductions) is a dramatic dialogue (“SCENE: Moorfields”) between the writer and his friend Eugenius. The wise friend tries to keep the author from publishing his rambling collection of notes, to which the would-be Shandy replies by singing the well-known folksong Tom Fool: “Tom fool thinks nothing, / Tom fool means nothing, / What Tom fool says has no sense / Fol lol de riddle dol, &c.”²²

George Alexander Stevens thought fit to dedicate his digressive picaresque novel *The History of Tom Fool* (1760; naturally, a work in which “Much Mystery is concealed”²³) to Tristram Shandy. The dedicator discusses the conflicting “rotten Interpretations” that Sterne’s readers have given of *Tristram Shandy*, promising, in the present book, “to shew you as great an Oddity, as ever any of the Shandean Race exhibited; as much the sport of Fortune, and one who has made as much Sport too”.²⁴

As an indecisive opportunist who “thinks nothing and means nothing”, Tom Fool was related to another folkloristic anti-hero, “Nobody”, the opposite number of “Somebody”. The Nobody-Somebody pair dates back to the Middle Ages,²⁵ and in the eighteenth century was

²¹ Anon., *Folly, A Satire on the Times*, London, (1763?), 3.

²² Anon., *The Whitsun Donative, Being a Hasty Sketch of an Intended Publication Under the Title of The Life and Opinions of Tristram’s Papa ...* London, 1787, 23.

²³ Anon. [George Alexander Stevens], *The History of Tom Fool*, London, 1760, I, xi.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I, x.

²⁵ See esp. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica*, 245-51, also Ronald Paulson, *Popular and Polite Art In the Age of Hogarth and Fielding*, Notre Dame, 1979, 40; Dane, *Parody*, 84; *Humour, Wit and Satire of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. John Ashton, New York 1970, 184. Nobody and Somebody also figured at the famous Sign-Painters’ Exhibition of 1762, organized by Bonnell Thornton and William Hogarth (see especially Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth, Vol. III: Art and Politics, 1750-1764*, New Brunswick, 1993, 336-61; also Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club*, 148-50). A description of the Sign Painters’ Exhibition that, as far as I know, has not been noticed before, occurs in *Dialogues of the Living* (London, 1762, 90-94), preceding a comment on *Tristram Shandy*. The links

known especially from puppet shows. In Fielding's *The Author's Farce* (1730), a satire on London's cultural life in the form of a puppet show (with the actors playing wooden puppets), the pair also appear. Somebody is the one who carefully keeps on a respectable mask; Nobody is the picaro who "during his life does nothing at all / But eat and snore / And drink and roar, / From whore to tavern, from tavern to whore".²⁶

Working within this pattern, Charles Churchill used the Nobody-Somebody opposition to defend his robust way of life. In *Night* (1761), Churchill sketches the advantages of night life, "which heals or hides our care":

Then in oblivion's grateful cup I drown
The galling sneer, the supercilious frown,
The strange reserve, the proud, affected state
Of upstart knaves grown rich, and fools grown great.²⁷

These knaves, the somebodies, are also drunkards and whore-hoppers, but, in Lance Bertelsen's view, on the sly, they are dressed-up nobodies really.²⁸

With reference to Churchill's work, Lance Bertelsen has pointed out another connotation of the "nobody" type, which is particularly relevant in the context of *Tristram Shandy*. Churchill's "nobody" pose not only has a part to play in his attack on hypocrisy, but, as Bertelsen shows, is also related to the deliberate oppositions in Churchill's poetry. Churchill's habit of juxtaposing contrasting points of view without ever attaining a synthesis, is typical of the intended characterless quality of the poet-persona, who has no defence against the viewpoints that he is presented with from all sides. There is thus a direct relation between "Churchill's assertive independence in thought and speech" and "Nobody's confusion and consequent nihilism in the face of incessant contradiction". Bertelsen argues convincingly that this quality of Churchill's poetry was appreciated by his contemporaries as a comment on the situation of the reading public, who also had an abundance of

between Sterne's work and the absurdistic exhibition merit a special study.

²⁶ "Scriblerus Secundus" [Henry Fielding], *The Author's Farce, With a Puppet-Show, Called The Pleasures of the Town*, London, 1734, n.p. (Air number 7).

²⁷ "Night", ll. 85-88, *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, I, 51.

²⁸ Bertelsen, *The Nonsense Club*, 143-44.

information poured out over them. In support, Bertelsen cites an anonymous letter in the *Public Advertiser* of 15 June 1763, in which the writer claims that for the ordinary average modern person there were no authorities to guide him any more. Since writers of equal stature keep contradicting one another, there is only one truth left, namely that “Whatever is, is not”. The writer of the article introduces himself as “NOBODY”.²⁹

The ambiguity and verbosity of Churchill’s poetry have from the start evoked reminiscences of *Tristram Shandy*.³⁰ It looks as if there is a similar relation with the popular reading culture. Insofar as Tristram, with his digressions and internal contradictions “displays the man-of-the-world’s unpleasant ‘informed-ness’”³¹ he, too, is a “nobody” in the sense unearthed by Bertelsen. One might then see it as an honorary nickname, as Churchill was inclined to do in his own case, but also, from a conservative point of view, see in it a satirical reference to the lack of character of the calculating man in the street or the Grub-street writer. Sterne offers both possibilities. Tristram’s refusal to be bound, when writing of his life and opinions, by “any man’s rules that ever lived”³² anticipates Churchill’s Whiggish claim that “Opinions should be free as air”,³³ and refers back to the Tory satire against anarchy.

As I have said, many of Sterne’s imitators, both apparent gentlemen-amateurs and Grub-street writers, seem to have adhered to the conservative position.

The “fool and younger brother to Tristram Shandy” mentioned before, has no opinions, not on paper at any rate. For the money, he will “a Pitt and Bute revile, / And o’er my country’s ruin smile”. Here, it is only too clear that the real author rejects the nihilism of the hack.³⁴ In the latter part of the poem, the fool persona is even explicitly converted into

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 232-33.

³⁰ Sterne: *The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 235.

³¹ T.A. Birrell, *Engelse Letterkunde*, Utrecht, 1985, 148 (“Sterne demonstreert het onaangename ‘op de hoogte zijn’ van de man-van-de-wereld”).

³² *Tristram Shandy*, I.4.5.

³³ “The Ghost”, Book IV, l. 251, *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, II, 139.

³⁴ *Folly*, ll. 103-104. The conservative politico-philosophical bias of this pamphlet is clear. The Grub-street author nourishes aggression in society: “My first, last view a meal to get, / For I, like other folks, must eat ... Henceforth obscene Lampoons indite, / And honour’d Novels daily write / Henceforth, malignant vulgar rage, / Shall fire my heart and fill my page” (ll. 30-32, 97-98, 101-102). At the end, the author rounds on Wilkes.

that of a responsible satirist. The bookseller with whom the writer is conducting a dialogue discovers that the latter is by no means “wretched poor” and wonders why then he is behaving like a “hireling scribbeler” (*sic*). Finally, the truth comes out: the pamphlet is meant as a warning against the degeneration of the press with its “imports from gay France” and the discord among the English as a result of their political freedom.³⁵

Although there is no explicitly satirical narrating agent in *Tsonnonthouan* (1763), this work too deserves to be mentioned because “character-less-ness” plays such an important part in it. The titular hero of the book, a Roundhead Indian, who it is suggested resembles Tristram Shandy, shows an inclination to embrace all systems that cross his path. In order to give the story of his spiritual adventures some credibility, it proves to be necessary to inform the readers that he was good at retaining a foreign vocabulary and so could understand English periodicals well, “but with respect to everything else, his mind seemd to be a mere tabula rasa, or sheet of white paper”.³⁶ The problem with *Tsonnonthouan*’s instability is that it does not temper his need of certainties:

With all the fury, heat and enthusiasm of a bigot, he would this moment enter into a religious, moral, philosophical, or political system whatever; and the next moment, on finding the least flaw in the system itself, on taking the least disgust at the practices of any of its professors, or thro’ a whim, or capricious humour of his own, he would at once not only desert it, but forget the principles he firmly and seriously believed before, and either revert to his primitive Indian notions, and barbarous prejudices, or else embrace the first system that came in his way, even though it were contrary and diametrically opposite to the former.³⁷

This formula enables us to make a tour of a large number of religious systems. In the course of the book, *Tsonnonthouan* becomes, among others, a Roman Catholic, a Presbyterian, a Jew, a Methodist, a Quaker and an atheist. Towards the end, our hero has suffered so much persecution that (“as every wise man ought to do”³⁸) he decides to stick to the faith of his tribesmen. The moral is clear and in accordance with the sceptical rationale of Anglicanism. The implicit interpretation of

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24-27.

³⁶ *Memoirs of the Life and Adventures of Tsonnonthouan*, I, 9.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 9-10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 13.

Sterne's intentions is conservative; a lack of character leads to disasters or failures. Most Grub-street writers seem to have shared that interpretation. A few were apparently aware of the relations between Tristram's confusion, the foolishness of the "nobody" of folk tradition, and their own you've-only-got-to-ask mentality.

Veni, vidi, vici, ivi (1768), which contains many obscure anecdotes, and, in spite of an announcement on the title page, little information about Sterne (but then again, "'tis in his manner, —— has not he wrote nine volumes of the life and opinions of a person who is never introduced"), is dedicated to every "Nobodiarian and Tristramarian".³⁹ The author who introduces himself as Jeremiah Kunastrokius thinks that his readers will take him, on the basis of his earlier work, to be "Nobody, or Tristram Shandy".⁴⁰ And when the narrator in "The Life and Opinions of Timotheus Randy, Staymaker" (1773) is once more distracted by others and has lost the thread of his argument, a "Mrs. Fretwell" bursts in with the suggestion that "You might have called it ... the adventures of Nobody".⁴¹

Another commercial imitator, the author of *Sir Bartholomew Sapskull* (1768) used the Somebody-Nobody opposition for an ironical game with figurative identities. Knowing that dedications are usually intended for somebody "whose honour and steadiness would be a credit to every station which wisdom may rise him", he dedicates his work "figuratively" to "Somebody". He does realize that sometimes appearances are deceptive: "Somebody must be very significant, as Everybody attempts the character." It is remarkable, then, that he also passes himself off as "Somebody". The meaning of this appears from the frontispiece, on which the author has had himself portrayed from behind. His explanation is that "The reverse of Somebody can be the likeness of Nobody" (see fig. 14; also note the space between the wig and the hair of his head).⁴²

³⁹ *Veni, Vidi, Vici, Ivi*, resp. 18 and xi.

⁴⁰ *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius*, xi.

⁴¹ "The Life and Opinions of Timotheus Randy, Staymaker", 178.

⁴² Anon., *The Life and Adventures of Sir Bartholomew Sapskull, Baronet ... By Somebody*, London, 1768, I, ii-iv.



14. *Sir Bartholomew Sapskull* (1768).

Out of nature

Tristram, then, was associated, not only with the typically eighteenth-century self-conscious dunce, but also with a series of related honourless characters from an older tradition, the nincumpoop, the fool, and Nobody. Scholars of European culture in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance are more familiar with these types than historians working in the field of eighteenth-century England, which seems to be the main reason why their importance for an appreciation of *Tristram Shandy* has remained unnoticed. Nevertheless, their presence is eminently understandable within the better-known contexts of neoclassicist satire and what Willey calls “cosmic Toryism”.⁴³

The humour associated with the fool or the idiot in medieval and early modern farces and festivities was, in the literal sense of the word, “subversive” – based on subversions.⁴⁴ The “uncivilized” fool was given a chance, within certain limits, to raise himself above the man of honour by jeering at him or by telling the public what baseness may lie behind a handsome exterior. Classical parody⁴⁵ and satire were not always part of the programme, though. It was the confrontation itself with unashamed

⁴³ Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth-Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period*, London, 1972, 47.

⁴⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge: Mass., 1968, 81-83 and *passim*.

⁴⁵ As opposed to non-literary parody.

misconduct and a bizarre exterior that raised a laugh. With Bakhtin, many historians agree that in this laughter at the fools and the have-nots, there is an element of fear.⁴⁶ Fools and idiots were below the lowest limit of existence, “its limit in the realm of animality”, as Foucault remarked.⁴⁷ In the seventeenth century, this borderline was diffuse and therefore threatening, and this accounts for both the hilarity of observed consistently violent behaviour and grotesque images, and for the series of associations called forth by fools and idiots, with animals (especially apes), demons and the devil. On title pages and frontispieces of seventeenth-century jest books we often see satyrs referring to the expected satires, at the same time portraying the bestial and demonic aspects of laughter. Dekker concludes that “frightening people and making people laugh were closely related actions. The deviation from the normal order of things is frightening.”⁴⁸

In how far the grotesque, thus defined, still had this impact in the eighteenth century, is not clear. If sources from around Sterne are representative, it sometimes looks as if the jargon and the pictorial language about laughter had changed little. During the process of writing, Tristram is led astray by the devils that also attacked Giovanni della Casa.⁴⁹ Hall-Stevenson’s club was not called “The Demoniacs” by chance. An engraving of Sterne, used for *The Babler* (1767; frontispiece of Volume I, fig. 16), shows two satyrs, and there is also one in the frontispiece of *Yorick’s Jests* (1783; fig. 15), where it competes with a melancholy muse. On the title page of John Croft’s *Scrapeana* (1792) a witticism of Sterne’s⁵⁰ is impersonated by a monkey (see fig. 17).

The medieval meaning of this kind of symbols seems to have been lost here, so that it is probably better to speak of anachronistic metaphors than of cultural icons. From *Hafen Slawkenbergius* (1762), it becomes clear once more that Sterne’s readers had come to live at a safe distance

⁴⁶ Ninna Jørgensen, *Bauer, Narr und Pfaffe: prototypische Figuren und ihre Funktion in der Reformationsliteratur*, Leiden, 1988, 114-16.

⁴⁷ Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, New York, 1965, 81.

⁴⁸ Dekker, *Lachen in de Gouden Eeuw*, 49 (“Angst aanjagen en aan het lachen maken lagen opmerkelijk dicht bij elkaar. ... De afwijking van de normale orde is beangstigend”).

⁴⁹ *Tristram Shandy*, VI.39.571.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, IX.13.763.



15. Frontispiece, *Yorick's Jests* (1783).

16. Frontispiece, *The Babler*, Vol. I (1767).17. Anon. [John Croft], *Scrapeana* (1792), title page.

from the world in which laughter was bound up with superstitious fears. The “editor” of the work makes use of material that had been placed at his disposal by “the learned Mr. Heydegger, the curious examiner of the Apocalyptic Hypotheses of Lewis de Acasar, in his *Mysterium Babylonis Magnae*”.⁵¹ Heydegger deduces, from evil portents, including the invention of gunpowder by Berthold Schwarz exactly one hundred years before the birth of Slawkenbergius in 1465, and a great flood in Holland in 1665, that the author of *De Nasis* had been begotten by the devil, and was born somewhere in Germany. Grotesque humour and magic science are together associated with the hinterlands of Europe.⁵²

Still, some vestiges have remained of what might be described as grotesque associations with the fool. The almost total disorderliness of Sterne’s fiction to some readers was not only funny as a provocative or affirmative attack on moral-aesthetic norms, but also because of what that disorderliness meant in terms of spiritual and physical well-being.

“Well fare the scattered brains of Tristram Shandy, Gent.”, is the opening phrase of *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet* (1761). In the following long open letter to Sterne/Tristram, the incrimination of madness is repeated a few times. Uncle Toby, who also gets a voice in the matter, is concerned and urges his nephew

to be aware of dissipating your animal spirits by idle digressions from what you ought to be about. Authors and critics will take out a commission of lunacy against you, both from your absence of mind, a strong argument of its insanity, and from your wanderings from the true method of writing, of which, no reverie, howsoever pleasant and fanciful, can exculpate your non-observance.⁵³

⁵¹ *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius*, 6. The name Heydegger most probably called forth reminiscences of John James Heidegger, the famous master of ceremonies with a monstrous appearance (see Pat Rogers, *Literature and Popular Culture in Eighteenth Century England*, Brighton, 1985, 40-66).

⁵² *The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius*, 24-31. The ignorant “editor” regards the Germans as peace-loving, witty and enlightened (12). Satire directed at German scholars was a specialty of the Scriblerians.

⁵³ Anon., *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet, Esq. ...*, London, 1761, I, 15.

Bertram himself is less cautious. He refuses to bury himself in the material composition of Tristram's confused mind:

——— I shall not puzzle my own poor brains by painful researches into the cause of so strange an accident. I call it so, because not being a phenomenon of real nature, it can at best, be but one of her sports; just as I have once seen in a Mocosstone, the head of a leering sly fox, like you in a frontispice to your cousin Yorick's sermons, peeping out of his den.⁵⁴

Being a work of the very lowest literary kind, the burlesque or farce, *Tristram Shandy* cannot be analysed by standards of either a general or a particular nature. Seen as a self-portrait, it can only be the work of a *Fremdkörper*, a being on the borderline of human nature.

The author of *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760) has made the most of this possibility. As a result of his unfortunate begetting, Tristram is very badly off in this early continuation: "in some countries it would have been made a question, whether I should have been christened a man, or thrown into the sea, as a monstrous birth, or lussus Naturae."⁵⁵ Tristram turns out to have not only been mentally impaired at his birth, but to be a spastic as well. His distorted body, with the head placed diametrically on his left shoulder, will become one of Walter's favourite objects of measuring and calculation.⁵⁶ Later, Tristram becomes an object of ridicule among youngsters: "I was called the Foot-ball of the school."⁵⁷

Max Byrd refuses to accept what, among others, New and DePorte have said about the main characters in *Tristram Shandy*, namely that in the eyes of their contemporaries, they were mad.⁵⁸ Walter and Toby, according to Byrd, are eccentric and comical in their monomania, but harmless because they are capable of affection. Tristram, in spite of his likeness to Swift's hack, is by no means mad either, for it is he, after all, who shapes the characters with insight, love and tolerance. The only real case of insanity in the book, that of Maria of Moulines, is of a

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 4.

⁵⁵ *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, 13.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁵⁸ Byrd, "Tristram Shandy", 59-66; New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist, passim*; Michael V. DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne and Augustan Ideas of Madness*, San Marino, 1974, 137-53.

melancholy nature, and although the patient herself is emotionally unattainable, contemplation of that strengthens the empathic relation between narrator and reader. *Tristram Shandy* found a reading public that was ready, says Byrd, to receive new ideas about subjectivity and public spirit.

A look at the earliest imitations strongly suggests that Byrd is mistaken. The imitators saw that Sterne wrote behind a “mask of folly or insanity”,⁵⁹ and followed in his track. In doing so, they continued a long tradition of characters that made people laugh by reminding them of the revolting aspects of their existence. It is the humour of the jest-books of the early modern period, combined with, as Brewer puts it, “a world view that characterizes agrarian societies that are hierarchical and aggressive, but also collective, with clear moral bounds that are often infringed, but with hope of repentance, as well as fear of damnation”. The mentally disturbed narrator belongs, says Brewer, “to a society shaped by belief in Divine order, human inadequacy, efficacious ritual ... , a society which recognized the inevitability of pain, with a myriad ways of adjusting to it rather than abolishing it”.⁶⁰

What Byrd did perceive clearly is that Sterne has put more pathetic and autobiographical, and fewer physico-aggressive elements in the last three books of *Tristram Shandy*. A reason for this may be that, in his efforts to keep *Tristram Shandy* enigmatic, paradoxical and surprising, he came to avoid the pattern revealed in the imitations. One of the results has been that *Tristram Shandy* (but not without effort) could please a type of reader that we begin to come across after Sterne’s death and that can be associated with Byrd’s era of refined emotions. This notion will be our main concern in the next chapters.

The crucial notions in the two preceding parts – Augustan and Grubstreet satire, banter and grotesque humour, sentiment within the framework of Anglican orthodoxy – these will all appear again when we look at the ways in which Sterne’s earliest imitators handled the themes of war, man-woman relations, medical progress and the claims of contemporary philosophers. Many Sterne imitations from the last few

⁵⁹ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 17.

⁶⁰ Brewer, “Prose Jest-Books Mainly in the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries in England”, 106. The first part of the second citation Brewer quotes from E. Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, London, 1935.

decades of the eighteenth century invest different values in these same themes.

PART THREE
SHIFTING THEMES

Chapter Six

Soldiers

The formal features of title pages in the eighteenth century constituted a language in itself, and as in all languages, social relations were reflected here too. During the first half of the century, commercial works of fiction were characterized by long title pages, usually with screaming recommendations of the subject or the author (as in the case of *A Voyage Round the World* and, in a parodic form, in that of *A Tale of a Tub*). Often, too, the title was a complete summary of the story. The long title page may still have had the function of the advertisement to be read out by the chapman, or perhaps it was a remnant of that practice.¹ Publishers of more high-principled works were, naturally, eager to avoid the association with the clamour of the marketplace and aimed at brevity in their titles. As late as 1776, a bookseller is said to have remarked, “When we publish the works of an author, whose *name is up*, ... then indeed we dress them out in the plainest garb imaginable”.² *Tristram Shandy* was sent forth into the world with an exceptionally discrete title page.

Because of this, probably, it was a relatively long time before anybody noticed the relation between *Tristram Shandy* and *The Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates, Commonly Called Corporal Bates, a Broken-Hearted Soldier: Who, From a Private Centinel in the Guards, Was, From His Merits, Advanced, Regularly, to be Corporal* (etc., for another fifteen lines), published for the first time in 1756. Mrs Thrale (later Mrs Piozzi), the biographer of Dr Johnson, in 1774 discovered a copy of this book in a bookshop in Derby, and, looking back on that event, was to remark that “the famous *Tristram Shandy* itself is not absolutely original; ... The character of Uncle Toby, the

¹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 153; Victor E. Neuburg, *Popular Literature: A History and a Guide, From the Beginning of Printing to the Year 1897*, Harmondsworth, 1977, 116.

² Said to be a statement of J. Johnson, in the Preface of [Thomas Cogan], *John Bunclce, Junior, Gentleman*, London, 1776, 8.

behaviour of Corporal Trim, even the name Tristram itself, seems to be borrowed from this stupid history of Corporal Bates, forsooth.”³

Bates and Toby

Ephraim Tristram Bates was indeed one of Sterne’s examples, and indeed especially for the mixed character of Toby, whose kindness and simultaneous obsession with “saps, mines, blinds, gabions, palisadoes, ravelins, half-moons, and such trumpery”⁴ are characteristic of the titular hero of the earlier book.

When, in his youth, Tristram Bates’ passion for war becomes apparent, the people around him regard that as a problem. A scholarly clergyman called Sponge warns Bates’ mother at an early stage that her son is possibly cut out for the army, advising her

to breed Ephraim a Parson, hinting to her that they feared he would have another turn not so good for his Soul, because at school his Amusements were always Military; such as exercising Soldiers, raising Banks, and sinking Trenches, to imitate Things he had seen in Books of War. In short, says ... *Sponge*, I fear his head is turned to be a Soldier; prevent it early; I hear him talk often of Doubts, Ride-outs, Ravelins, Javelins, Half-moons, Carps, Counter-carps, and the Lord knows what. A Soldier is a profest Whore-master; Whore-masters and Adulterers God will judge. Where will he be then? Will his ridiculous red Coat, and Spit dangling by his side, or Footman’s shoulder-knot fluttering in the Wind, save his Soul? Or do you think, Madam *Bates*, (here, he made an aukward Bow, and lifted up the lid of the Tankard with his Nose) if he goes to the Wars, that the Corn and Hay he goes a foraging for, as they call it, is not absolute Thieving in his Eye who sees all; or that the People he kills is not direct Murder. There is no Heaven for Soldiers.⁵

The warning will prove to have been in vain. In spite of all efforts to suppress Bates’ militaristic tendencies, the arrival in the village of a

³ *Autobiography, Letters, and Literary Remains of Mrs. Piozzi (Thrale)*, ed. A. Hayward, London, 1861, I, 325-26 (quoted in Helen Sard Hughes, “A Precursor of ‘Tristram Shandy’”, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 17 [1918], 227-28).

⁴ *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.130.

⁵ Anon., *The Life and Memoirs of Mr. Ephraim Tristram Bates, Commonly Called Corporal Bates, a Broken-Hearted Soldier: Who, From a Private Centinel in the Guards, Was, From His Merits, Advanced, Regularly, to be Corporal, Serjeant, and Pay-Master Serjeant; And had He Lived a Few Days Longer, Might Have Died a Commission-Officer, ...*, London, 1756, 18-19.

“recruiting Serjeant” means the beginning of an army career for the then sixteen-year old Tristram. The dramatic course of that career is the main subject of the remainder of the book. Although he turns out to be a diligent and talented military man, Bates is seriously handicapped by another deep-seated quality, his kind-heartedness, a quality ascribed by the editor of Bates’ story, his “widow”, to the influence of Bates’ nanny Betsey. She not only brought him up with loving care, but (what is later on described by Bates’ mother as something much worse⁶), she also baptized him using her own ritual, intoning the formula “be Wise, be Happy, be Brave and be as Tender to our Sex, when a Man, as now I am to You”.⁷ After that, Bates turns out to have no talent for the art of using one’s elbows and for the corruption required for a career in the army, and he dies of a broken heart at the age of thirty-five. The graveyard scene concluding the book has, with a few alterations, been adopted in *Tristram Shandy*:⁸ “The Stone Mason at the Savoy tells me, he can scarce go on in his Work, on account of the numberless Questions ask’d him; and scarce an Hour in the Day passes, but Strangers enquire for his Tomb; and striking their Breasts, Cry! *Alas! poor Bates.*”⁹

Bates’ gentleness is elaborated pathetically in a number of scenes, and there is no reason for us to assume that the chapters dealing with his death and funeral are meant to be funny. The story of Bates is that of a noble mind who, when he applies to a bookseller with his talents, is robbed, and when he expects to be able to secure an officer’s post on the basis of his zest for work and his capacities gets abused by clever but otherwise incompetent people.¹⁰ Meanwhile, he continues to show to the

⁶ In the last sentence but one of the book: “and *Bates’s* Mother still says, that *Betsey’s* wicked Scheme ruined her Son” (*ibid.*, 238).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁸ *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.35-36 (“Ten times a day ... Alas, poor Yorick!”).

⁹ *Ephraim Tristram Bates*, 238.

¹⁰ His introduction to the real world begins already just after Bates has signed up. Because he has, without being noticed, been able to practise rifle-shooting on a “Bowling Green”, and thus enters upon his profession with a certain proficiency, his colleagues suspect him of being an ex-deserter. They hope to get a premium: “Such is the World!” (37-41). In what follows, his promotion is postponed time after time, among others because Bates, out of sympathy, has voted for the wrong politician (198-203), “against the interest of the ***” (220). This theme is in itself rather common, occurring in Fielding’s *Amelia*, and worked out by Smollett in the first part of *Roderick Random*, Chapters 15-19, 51-52. The author Catherine Talbot had found the relevant parts of *Roderick Random* especially memorable and moving (see *Tobias Smollett: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Lionel Kelly, London and New York, 1987, 38-39). Hughes (“A Precursor

end his deep-felt commiseration for the oppressed, in terms and gestures that resemble those with which the Shandy men communicate. A veteran in the Chelsea Hospital, for whom Lord Cadogan once tore his shirt on the battlefield, complains to Bates about his loneliness:

[and] Bates wept! And wished he might ever have the same opportunity of being stript to the skin, too, for the sake of a brave Soldier Seeing the poor Fellow without a Cravat (and the Evening cool), Bates took off his own, put it round his Neck, buttoning his own Collar close, and so set off for London.¹¹

The character of Ephraim Tristram Bates saddles the reader with a dilemma, exactly as in the case of Sterne's Uncle Toby: everything is done to arouse the readers' sympathy for these heroes, yet no attempt is made to obscure the bloodthirstiness of their ruling passion.

The development of Toby in the course of *Tristram Shandy*, from a vulgarly comic minor character to an important, and in Max Byrd's term "inflatable" figure,¹² has given present-day critics the impression that Sterne gradually began to see his work as a novel in the modern sense of the word. The theme of the fighting and sufferings of God-fearing soldiers enabled Sterne to refurbish the memory of his father and other soldiers he had met as a child. Sterne identified himself with Toby, who therefore turned out as an entertaining character in the tradition of Parson Adams (in *Joseph Andrews*) and Commodore Trunnion (in *Peregrine Pickle*) – a figure to daydream over. This impression has diverted the readers' attention from the fact that throughout the book, Toby remains the carrier of a paradoxical but clear-cut idea. Sterne keeps referring to the same objections as those that appear in the passage quoted above, about the soldierly fanaticism of the young Bates.

Let us take an example. In *Tristram Shandy* Volume II, Chapter 12, when mother Shandy is in labour, and Toby meanwhile keeps on talking to Dr Slop about military matters, Walter Shandy has a rare moment of clear-headedness: "——By the mother who bore us!——brother *Toby*, quoth my father, not able to hold out any longer, — you would provoke a

of "Tristram Shandy"', 248) mentions as an example of a work of fiction in which abuse of power and professional corruption are exposed, Shebbeare's *The Marriage Act* (1754).

¹¹ *Ephraim Tristram Bates*, 206.

¹² Byrd, "Tristram Shandy", 93.

saint ... I wish the whole science of fortification, with all its inventors, at the Devil;——it has been the death of thousands,——and it will be mine, in the end.” Walter Shandy is not the kind of person from whom we expect Christian moralism, and moreover, because of his rationalism *manqué*, he is, to many readers, the less sympathetic of the two brothers. In Tristram’s account of the event, no attention is paid to the sensible content of Walter’s outburst. Tristram even moves the reader subtly in the direction of an emotional preference for Toby in this clash. The “injury” that Walter is said to have inflicted by calling Toby to book, is borne by the latter with patience: “he felt the insult of my father’s as feelingly as a man could do;---but he was of a peaceful, placid nature—— ... my uncle *Toby* had scarce a heart to retalliate upon a fly.”¹³ The concrete facts of the event are immediately overshadowed by what have become the best-known words of praise from Tristram for his uncle:

——Go---says he, one day at dinner, to an over-grown one which had buzz’d about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time,——and which, after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew by him;---I’ll not hurt thee, says my uncle *Toby*, rising from his chair, and going across the room, with the fly in his hand,---I’ll not hurt a hair of thy head:---Go, says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape;——go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?---This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me.

I was but ten years old when this happened;—— but whether it was, that the action itself was more in unison to my nerves at that age of pity, which instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation;——or how far the manner and expression of it might go towards it; or in what degree, or by what secret magick,——a tone of voice and harmony of movement, attuned by mercy, might find a passage to my heart, I know not;——this I know, that the lesson of universal good-will then taught and imprinted by my uncle *Toby*, has never since been worn out of my mind: And tho’ I would not depreciate what the study of the *Literae humaniores*, at the university, have done for me in that respect, or discredit the other helps of an expensive education bestowed upon me, both at home and abroad since;——yet I often think that I owe one half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression.

¹³ *Tristram Shandy*, II.12.130.

☞ This is to serve for parents and governors instead of a whole volume upon the subject.¹⁴

With the title *Mercy*, this fragment found its way into numerous anthologies of the 1780s and later as an example of the humane streak in Sterne's character.¹⁵ I quote *verbatim*, because it should be clear that even out of its context, the passage does not admit of a monolithic interpretation. Sterne has Tristram emphasize that probably the situation of his tender age has contributed to Toby's empathy with the fly having become his own. Tristram's identification with an insect is that of a ten-year-old, but that places Toby's action outside the world of the grown-ups. What should not be forgotten, either, is that Tristram praises himself for his philanthropy. The casual suggestion that a university study in the humanities makes one a better man is, of course, bitterly ironic.

The contrariness of Sterne's trains of thought becomes even clearer when one realizes that Sterne furthermore has referred, not only to the well-known saying, but has also, with the details of the account, evoked memories of a classical dramatic episode. At the end of Act III of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, when the spectators of this notoriously violent play have already seen dozens of cut-off hands and heads of those whom the "brave warrior" Titus held to be traitors, being carried away, there arises, during a dinner, a curious quarrel between Titus and his more moderate brother Marcus. Seeing the latter kill a fly, Titus first flies into a rage, then almost simultaneously shows his sensitive side:

Out on thee, murderer! Thou kill'st my heart.
 ... How, if that fly had a father, brother?
 How would he hang his slender gilded wings
 And buzz lamenting dirges in the air!
 Poor harmless fly,
 That with his pretty buzzing melody,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, II.12.130-31.

¹⁵ *The Beauties of Sterne: Including all His Pathetic Tales, and Most Distinguished Observations on Life*, London, 1782 (and many other editions; title: "Mercy"); *Elegant Extracts: Or Useful and Entertaining Passages in prose*, [ed. Vicesimus Knox], London, 1783, 483 (title: "Mercy recommended"); *Orthographical Exercises in a Series of Moral Letters*, ed. James Alderson, London, 1818, 64-65 (title: "Merse rekkommeded" [orthographically]). German Enlightenment thinkers, esp. Kant and Wieland, cited the passage as an example of good education (see Bernhard Fabian, "Tristram Shandy and Parson Yorick Among Some German Greats", in *The Winged Skull*, eds Cash and Stedmond, 201-205).

Came here to make us merry – and
thou hast killed him!¹⁶

Whether or not eighteenth-century readers might have associated the Shandy brothers with the Andronicus brothers, is not certain.¹⁷ Sterne could, however, expect his readers to be able to take up a point of view from which the double message came across. It is even possible that the reprint of *Ephraim Tristram Bates* in 1759 supplied him with the notion that rhetorical paradoxes around problems of peace did not fall on deaf ears.

When that book and the first three instalments of *Tristram Shandy* came out, the Seven Years' War was raging in North America and on the continent of Europe. In this context, *Ephraim Tristram Bates* has a political message, too. The patriotic, religious and competent protagonist seems to have been created to lend force to Pitt's appeal (1756) for the formation of a national militia. The corruption Bates falls victim to is that of "the Country Interest", and it is therefore probable that the anonymous author approved of the war against France. Why else would the learned pacifist in the book be called *Sponge*? At the same time, the story may remind modern readers that the association of the military uniform with moral nobility had still not taken shape by the middle of the eighteenth century.¹⁸ Bates wears a "ridiculous red coat" and mixes with scruffy psychopaths. Against the background of a real battlefield, your sensible soldier is a pitiable creature.

The constant reminder, in Sterne's book, of a war from the past against the same enemy and under comparable political circumstances as those of the Seven Years' War, serves an equally dubious moral. There can be no doubt as to Sterne's loyalty towards Pitt and hence to his conviction that English war efforts were defensible and even necessary. In volumes V and VI of *Tristram Shandy*, completed in the summer and

¹⁶ Shakespeare, *Titus Andronicus*, III.ii.54 and 60-65 (William Shakespeare, *The Complete Works*, eds Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, Oxford, 1986, 158).

¹⁷ *Titus Andronicus* is mentioned in the Introduction to *The Beauties of the English Stage; containing of the most Affecting and Sentimental passages in the English Plays, ancient and modern* (London, 1756) as an important source. The auction catalogue in which Sterne's library was included gives an edition from 1737 (*A Catalogue of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books*, 1768, 94 [No. 2496]).

¹⁸ Linda Colley sees the cult of "élite heroism" around uniforms as a late eighteenth-century phenomenon (*Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, New Haven and London, 1992, 182-88).

autumn of 1761 (exciting times politically), he took his chance a few times to make his views clear, in guarded terms. At the beginning of volume V, Walter's horses appear unfit to ride in search of yeast: "the coach-horse ... wants a shoe, poor creature!", "the *Scotch* horse ... cannot bear a saddle upon his back The devil's in that horse" and "PATRIOT is sold".¹⁹ Many readers will have understood that the coach horse wanting a shoe stands for Pitt, the Scotch horse for Bute, and the sold horse for Patriotism in general. And there is more. In volume VI, Chapter 32, Toby, with uncharacteristic eloquence voices his disgust with the Peace of Utrecht. The inconsistency of an eloquent Toby can be explained, as Wolfgang Zach has carefully argued, from Sterne's desire to let his readers know once more, through Toby, what he himself thought of the peace talks that were started in 1761.²⁰ Still, the "politische Sinndimension" is not unequivocal. The terms in which Toby defends the war, Sterne has taken from the Introduction to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a diatribe against warfare in general. Saying that Sterne is here satirizing Burton²¹ is not really doing justice to the complexity of the chapters around the *apologetical oration*. Walter's ironic comment (" —Never mind, brother Toby, he would say, by God's blessing we shall have another war break out again some of these days"²²) and the covert reference to Burton's opening phrases about the horrors of war are intended to remind the reader that, however urgently the army is needed "to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds"²³, the "militiating spirits"²⁴ must never gain the upper hand. In addition to the economic rationale behind the Seven Years' War, in the public debate the voices of church and king, and eventually the divine justification of Pitt's painful decision counted as important.²⁵ Toby's

¹⁹ *Tristram Shandy*, V.2.415-6.

²⁰ Wolfgang Zach, "'My Uncle Toby's Apologetical Oration' und die politische Sinndimension von *Tristram Shandy*", *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 27 (1977), 391-416.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 394.

²² *Tristram Shandy*, VI.31.552.

²³ *Ibid.*, VI.32.557.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, IV.22.360.

²⁵ Jeremy Black, *Pitt the Elder*, Cambridge, 1992, 225, 240; Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People*, 337; J.C.D. Clark, *Samuel Johnson: Literature, Religion and English Cultural Politics from the Restoration to Romanticism*, Cambridge, 1994, 120-21. For the entanglement of religion and politics in general during the period, see especially J.C.D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Régime*, Cambridge, 1985, 216-35.

arguments, built up round the notions whose propagandistic dimensions Burton had indicated – “public spirit”, honour”, “glory” – belong to a worldly register. That Sterne himself should have distanced himself a little from the way in which, in the third part of *Tristram Shandy*, he contrasted Toby’s foolish militarism more strongly than before with humanity (Le Fever) and even with political consciousness (the *apologetical oration*), is suggested by his comment about his “scribbling away at my Tristram” in the autumn of 1761: “so much am I delighted with my uncle Toby’s imaginary character, That I am become an enthusiast.”²⁶ “Scribbling” is a little self-mocking; “enthusiast” a term suggestive of madness.²⁷

Just like the author of *Ephraim Tristram Bates*, Sterne thought that the Catholic frog-eaters from overseas should know their place.²⁸ However, in order to be protected by means of bloodshed, Protestantism had to be able to rely on being more reasonable and tolerant than Catholicism. Both in the defence of the alliance with Poland and in Bute’s rhetoric with regard to England’s decision to make peace, the idea that one represented a morally superior kind of Christendom played an important part.²⁹ Tories and Whigs had at first been agreed on the necessity of a war, but according to his opponents, Pitt had become clouded by his military successes. The double message of Toby’s oration seems to be inspired by the fear that Pitt’s opponents were right, that the proponents of the war no longer had the battlefield in mind, did not see through their own motives, and misbehaved in the eyes of God. Tristram begins the chapter following Toby’s oration with “I told the Christian reader — I say Christian — hoping he is one — and if he is not, I am sorry for it — and only beg he will consider the matter with himself, and not lay the blame entirely upon this book,—”.³⁰

The origin of *Ephraim Tristram Bates* is too unclear for us to be able to say much about the moral intentions in that work. Because the book is so unmistakably grubby (clergymen sniffing at bedpans, and old

²⁶ *Letters*, 143.

²⁷ In the same letter Sterne professes himself loyal (naturally) to the newly crowned George III “(whom God preserve!)”. The King supported Bute.

²⁸ Sterne had witnessed the traumatic Jacobite Rising of 1745 at first hand, and he had afterwards not been lax in spying upon Catholics, which was one of his clerical duties (see Richard Forrester, “Uncle Jaques Sterne”, *The Shandean*, 4 [1992], 216-22).

²⁹ Spector, *English Literary Periodicals*, 181-82.

³⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, VI.33.557.

comrades landing in the nettles with their bare buttocks³¹ do not appeal to the sense of humour of the *Monthly* readers), the paradox of a soldier who has sayings of Jesus on his lips, could easily be ignored by the reviewers. *Ephraim Tristram Bates* was “if not the production of a fellow of the college of St.Luke’s Moorfields, at least the work of a correspondent of that respectable body”, as the *Critical Review* stated.³² Hughes’ suggestion that the Shandean twist was the deliberate discovery of a down and out clergyman, seems not to be entirely unfounded.

Bloody Toby

As was said earlier in this chapter, Toby’s bright side has been animated by Sterne so successfully that many readers have come to overlook the drawbacks of his character. Late-eighteenth-century and especially nineteenth-century readers have made an icon of Uncle Toby, and even some present-day literary critics seem to carry around with them the image that has been portrayed in so many jugs and pots of the good-humoured roly-poly who with endearing attention inspects the eye of the Widow Wadman (Fig. 18).³³ Toby has not always, however, been regarded as the kind soul that the compilers of the *Beauties of Sterne* made him out to be. Most of the early commentators straightaway saw the *miles gloriosus* in him, but still seem to have thought that a little enlargement would not be out of place.

In the spurious *Vol. III* of *Tristram Shandy* (1760), “the source of many a fraternal squabble” between Walter and Toby, the “family disgrace” of aunt Dinah,³⁴ is looked at in more detail. Although he was aware of the fact that in Sterne’s version, Dinah is said to have died before Tristram’s birth,³⁵ the anonymous author has given her an important part in the story of Elizabeth’s delivery time. She turns out to

³¹ *Ephraim Tristram Bates*, 75.

³² *Critical Review*, III (1756), 143.

³³ For reproductions on ceramic ware, see W.G. Day, “Charles Robert Leslie’s ‘My Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman’: The Nineteenth-Century Icon of Sterne’s Work”, *The Shandean*, 9 (1997), 83-108.

³⁴ *Tristram Shandy*, I.21.77.

³⁵ Toby’s request to Walter, “do let this story of our aunt’s and her ashes sleep in peace” (*Tristram Shandy*, I.21.77) seems to have been uttered during Walter’s early disquisition on his name theory, therefore before Tristram’s birth. The anonymous author of the spurious *Vol. III* may have discovered too late that auntie had already been deleted, and then decided to keep his chapters about Dinah. In the penultimate chapter he has Tristram announce that in “Vol.7, p.42”, the matter will be discussed: “SHANDY DINAH ... Thought by many readers of the first and second volume to be dead, and why” (221-22).

be a well-read person, who, except perhaps for the author of *Philosophy for the Ladies*, despises nobody more than “Ignorant thing” Elizabeth Shandy.³⁶ Nevertheless, she thinks that people have simply forgotten to invite her to the childbirth, while the real reason, of course, is the bad reputation she has had since her little adventure with the coachman.



18. *Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman*,
(Nineteenth-century engraving after the painting by C.R. Leslie).

³⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, [Spurious] Vol. III, 76.

Much more susceptible to expulsion and gossip than the family realize, Dinah starts blaming herself for “sins she had never committed”, after which she dies. Of course, she is still no good, for soon enough, she is said to have committed suicide. Dinah is here, then, almost a sentimental heroine. In any case, Tristram derives from her story a Yorick-like moral: “People apply every incident of human life to reflexion on different sides of view, according to their own opinion of their own predominant merit.”³⁷ Quite in line with his attitude in Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Toby especially keeps feeling the deepest contempt for Dinah in this third part. Irritated by Dr Slop’s suggestion that Dinah may have died of “stagnations, privations, and condensations”,³⁸ and so cannot have committed suicide, Toby suggests to cut her up. Tristram has racked his brain “a thousand times” about the following conversation:

Brother, said my father, you surprize me. Alas! how little humanity have doctors and butchers! —— But what makes you look at me, brother? said *Toby*. Turn your eyes on Slop, if you think so.—— *Slop*, said my father, is an example only of doctors.——Why, sure, said *Toby*, you do not consider me as the other example your purpose requires. ——Yes, indeed, brother *Toby*, said my father, you are still a soldier.—— Suppose, said my uncle, I grant you all that; if I allow I am a soldier, it does not follow that I am a butcher. Does it?——It does not follow, answered my father, that you sell pork and spare-rib. All I want to prove by what I have said, is, that you have had the same means of getting rid of humanity that *Tom Bullock* has had. He has cut the throats of oxen an swine, till he could with unconcern split the chine of his mother: and you have mangled the trembling limbs of supplicating *Frenchmen*, till you can, with as much serenity, provoke the doctor to cut up your aunt.³⁹

Walter’s intervention is the more relevant because Dinah turns out not to be dead at all.

Of course, Toby is more like a humour character in the tradition of Parson Adams than a Yahoo,⁴⁰ but it is certainly possible, instead of

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

⁴⁰ McNeil has described the paradoxical character of Uncle Toby on the basis of a Bakhtin-oriented theory of the grotesque. He nevertheless associates the grotesque imagery of warfare with Swift rather than Sterne: “Swift laughs at humankind as if it were something alien; Sterne laughs at the human in us all” (David McNeil, “*Tristram Shandy*: The Grotesque View of War and the Military Character”, *Studies in Voltaire and*

smiling at Toby's artlessness, to laugh heartily at what is deformed and revolting about him. A passage such as that about the fly and even the story of Le Fever could not blind some readers to the grotesque (in Thomson's sense of the word⁴¹) of the soldier *manqué*. It looks as if the anonymous writer of the spurious third part of *Tristram Shandy* wanted to serve such readers, just like the first free illustrator of *Tristram Shandy*, William Bunbury. In his best-known Shandy illustration, Bunbury has Toby point across the battlefield on the bowling green with an insane look in his eyes (Fig.19). It is even imaginable that the dialogue cited above from the spurious *Vol. III* provided Sterne with the comforting thought that the nasty side of Toby's character was discernible already in the first instalment, and perhaps the spurious text contributed along those lines to the general increase in pathos around Tristram's uncle.

For early readers, even those of the whole book, Toby's humanity was not his dominant trait. In addition to his bizarre hobby, Toby's decency in sexual matters did not bode well. In *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick* (1768), Sterne is praised for his "Humanity in ev'ry line",⁴² but there is also a suggestion that in Toby, he has combined hatred of women with sneakiness. Possibly, Toby is the father of Tristram: "Sometimes with Horn-work / His brother he'd yerck, / And unwittingly prove matrimony a farce; / Till put in a pet, / The old man would fret, / And quite in a Sweat, / Be ready to curse all who bear the ****."⁴³ The unhappy Grub-street hack behind this pamphlet is himself "one of Uncle TOBY's Illegitimate Children". (And this was not an original thought. In "The Castrated Chapter of the Fourth Volume of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Restored" [*St. James's Chronicle*, 1766], too, Toby has an illegitimate child.⁴⁴)

The character description of Toby in the spurious *Vol. III* shows that a related suggestion in the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy* was understood likewise: Toby's "modesty" is a source of his interest in

the Eighteenth Century, 266 [1989], 411-32).

⁴¹ Thomson stresses the psychological defence associated with grotesque humour (Philip Thomson, *The Grotesque*, London, 1972, especially 58-70).

⁴² Anon., *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick*, London, 1768, 16.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 13-14. "PET. In a pet; in a passion or miff" (Grose, *Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*).

⁴⁴ "The Castrated Chapter of the Fourth Volume of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Restored", *St. James's Chronicle, Or British Evening-Post*, Tue, Nov.11 – Thu., Nov. 13, 1766.

battlefields. Eighteenth-century readers did not need Reich to discern relations between puritanism, sexual frustration, and bellicosity. Already Montaigne and Charron had suggested a link between the feelings of shame with which people cover up their reproductive urges and the pride with which they put others to the sword.⁴⁵ Swift, in “A Digression concerning the Original, the Use, and Improvement of Madness in a Commonwealth”, tells the story of Henry the Great of France, who declared war on his neighbouring countries because he had been denied intercourse: “the very same principle that influences a bully to break the windows of a whore who has jilted him naturally stirs up a great prince to raise mighty armies, and dream of nothing but sieges, battles, and victories.”⁴⁶ Toby’s obsessive indignation at Dinah’s *faux pas*, and his greater aggression in the spurious *Vol. III* of *Tristram Shandy* make him there a caricature with a clear-cut moral.



19. *Uncle Toby at the Bowling Green* (William Bunbury).

⁴⁵ See *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 549-51. Ian Donaldson has pointed out that according to old beliefs, Toby should be excessively virile; in a few classical texts, and in Montaigne, we read that gladiators, lame men and gardeners are sexually active above average – Toby, of course, is all three (Ian Donaldson: “Weavers, Gardeners, Gladiators and the Lame: *Tristram Shandy* VIII-5”, *Notes and Queries*, 228 [1983], 61-63). See also Robert Alter, “*Tristram Shandy* and the Game of Love”, *American Scholar*, 37 (1968), 323.

⁴⁶ Swift, *A Tale of a Tub*, 105.

When, in volume IX of *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne reverts to the connection between sex and war, Toby has meanwhile grown into a more enigmatic figure. Walter Shandy's comment on the failed marriage between Toby and the Widow Wadman first revolves round the thesis that "the devil was in women, and that the whole of the affair was lust",⁴⁷ then changes to a direct paraphrase of Charron's juxtaposition of the sexual urge and the clash of arms, and is interrupted by Obadiah breaking into the room with the message about Walter's suspect Bull. Yorick tries a few times to interrupt Walter, but without success. Sterne obviously wants to share with us his doubts about the "pure love" that Toby had expected from the Widow, yet Toby's impractical desire has been described movingly in the preceding pages. The frustration about this now leads him to melancholy, and not to the sort of scapegoating which Dinah became a victim of and in which Walter for a moment seems to find a way out. It is significant that we shall never know what wisdoms Yorick had in store for us. Sterne supplies the themes and a framework, but more than ever leaves readers to their own devices.

Noble soldiers

On 18 March 1768, at four o'clock in the afternoon, that is what he did literally and definitively. The nihilistic and grotesque humour of the grubs, the orthodox morale and what the *Critical Review* called "the spirit of Swift" remained, in the first few years after Sterne's death, important elements in the imitations, but even in typical Grub-street products such as Griffith's *Posthumous Works* and *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick* something is beginning to show of the vision of life that booksellers in the late eighteenth century wanted to disseminate with their publications. The changes can be deduced among others from the way in which later Sterne fans have handled the theme of the sensitive soldier.

As we have seen, the fly passage was popular. One instance of a late echo illustrates the tenor of most of them. One sentimental diarist records:

A young *mouse* has fallen down a step into my room —— so young, it cannot get up again: am resolved not to kill it. What right have I

⁴⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, IX.32.805.

wantonly to prejudice the smallest link in the great chain of animated nature?⁴⁸

The writer of this *Sentimental Diary* appeals to Yorick's sensitivity,⁴⁹ but the confrontation with the mouse, like many other encounters in the book, is described in an un-Sternean way. The narrator, in line with Rousseau and Shaftesbury, feels part of a harmonious chain. There can be no doubt as to his innate goodness. Even beautiful young women in need arouse no other emotion in him than sorrow. "—— To sympathise with human woe, must be familiar to *a man of Sorrow* —— *one who is acquainted with Grief*", he writes after he has come to the aid of another.⁵⁰ Interestingly enough, this sensible traveller also had a reason to say something about the war, for his readers could know that in Brighthelmstone, an important place in his story, the militia were on standby. In an appendix he explains why this is not mentioned in the book proper: the writer is "by habitude disgusted with the art of war".⁵¹

A late imitation-Yorick who did find time to discuss the theme of the sensitive soldier, also differs in his narrative style from the authors of *Tristram Shandy* and *Ephraim Tristram Bates*, but in his case especially by the sharpness of his realism. James Douglas fought in the Austrian army before becoming a dealer in paintings and antiquities, and a writer.⁵² In his successful *Travelling Anecdotes through various Parts of Europe* (1782⁵³), he obviously incorporated some of his war experiences.

⁴⁸ Anon., *A Sentimental Diary, Kept in an Excursion to Little Hampton, near Arundel, and to Brighthelmstone, in Sussex* ... London, 1778, 47. The narrator laments a worm that has been trampled down (Anon., *Yorick's Skull, Or: College Oscitations*, London, 1777, 71-72); "A Tale in the Manner of Sterne" (in Anon., *Favourite Tales, Translated from the French*, London, 1787) is about a dog that has been run over. Other instances will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁴⁹ Anon., *A Sentimental Diary*, 3-4. The resistance against grotesque humour also colours this book. A merry actor of the Brighthelmstone theatre cannot deceive this writer: with what he himself calls the sensitivity of Yorick, he sees through the grief behind and hence the "falseness" of the grotesque laugh.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 72; the phrase in italics is a quote from Isaiah, 53:3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁵² Ronald Jessup, *Man of Many Talents: An Informal Biography of James Douglas, 1753-1819*, London, 1975, 19-40. After 1782, Douglas became a clergyman, but became especially famous through his publications on Roman antiquity in England and the Netherlands, where he carried out excavations.

⁵³ The first edition was published anonymously at Rochester, the second (1785) in London under the initials J.D., the third and fourth (1786 and 1787) under the name of the author. There is also a pirated edition without date, from Dublin (see Jessup, *Man of*

At the end of his book, the narrator is in an abbey near Tongeren, where he hears the story of a retired Prussian major, who lost his son in the war. The son was an ensign in the same regiment in which the father served as a captain. A good lad, said the Prussian: “—— His heart was naturally generous and tender —— this virtue endeared me to him but I trembled for its effects —— it might, I thought, shake his fortitude in the trying scenes of the miserable spectacles of war, and possibly suppress the enterprising spirit of youth.”⁵⁴ And indeed, in spite of repeated visits to public executions, the son could not get used to the sort of slaughter created by his comrades among the Austrian citizens. Once, having had to clear away the bodies of a family with children, he was overcome by what his father then called “weak womanish feelings”:

his imagination was too strongly impressed with it; and such was the extreme delicacy and tenderness of his feelings, that I was destined to see this only child seized with a violent fever, and to hear him in the paroxysms of his distemper rave in the most wild, yet pathetic language, on this event, which deprived him of his senses he fixed his eyes ghastly upon me, which I readily translated into a remonstrance for being the author of his unhappy malady, and fell back in a swoon from which he never recovered.⁵⁵

In a Preface to the first edition of his book, Douglas denied that he wanted to write an imitation of *A Sentimental Journey*, and although in a number of chapters the influence of Sterne is unmistakable,⁵⁶ passages like the one quoted here show that he did sometimes (whatever one may think of that) aim at a different tone. Mind you, we do get, here and

Many Talents, for further bibliographical references and for a list of predominantly favourable reviews).

⁵⁴ James Douglas, *Travelling Anecdotes through Various Parts of Europe*, Rochester, 1782, 276.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 284.

⁵⁶ Especially in the parts where he describes brief flirtations and womanizations: “Ye, whose feelings take alarm at the situation I am found in with this maid! ... impute it not ... to the heedless transports of a vicious heart; but rather accuse the chance which brought us together: and rail at the animated atoms, which divine sympathy has accorded to the wise and mysterious purposes of our existence” (51-52). Douglas’ biographer Ronald Jessup (*Man of Many Talents*, 31) also finds the negation of Yorick’s influence odd. I do not agree with what Bandry (*Tristram Shandy: créations et imitations*, 31) says about *Travelling Anecdotes*, namely that its publication history is more interesting than the text itself.

there, satirical private discussions with Christian sentimental readers. Thus, the story of the Prussian major is overheard by an English colonel, who in the end manages to work up sympathy with the self-pitying father. The Englishman obviously represents public opinion, the frame within which people handled criticism of ally Frederick the Great in a cramped and negative way.⁵⁷ But the joke is no longer funny. Douglas writes for a protected public, and has a mission. His pacifism is bitter and didactic, and also a little hypocritical – and that not so much because he himself was an ex-officer and diplomat (something that is not apparent in *Traveling Anecdotes*), but especially because it is the Prussians to whom war crimes are attributed.

That the British army was capable of horrible deeds is not denied by Isaac Brendan, and that is here the more interesting because he has purposefully grafted his work on Sterne's.⁵⁸ In "The Gentoo Story" he has Trim and Toby discuss the consequences of the English occupation of Bengal. Trim first describes in detail the sufferings of a starving native family:

————— Pestilence and Famine came into their doors
 ————— Poor father!——— to see five of his children drop
 — and breath their last before his eyes — and *then* his wife, who
 had shared all his pleasures; ————— but, alas! Your Honour,—— not
 all his pains —————

Here Trim burst into tears ————— Indeed,
 your Honour, I cannot continue ! ——

Go on, my good fellow —— said my uncle Toby —— while the
 tears rolled down his cheeks like those of an infant.

————— He took, an' please your Honour ————— I
 cannot go on!—————⁵⁹

Three million Bengalese died in that manner; the war against the British troops increased the number:

⁵⁷ Jessup, *Man of Many Talents*, 45.

⁵⁸ Behrmann ascribes *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne* to William Combe (Friedrich Behrmann, *Laurence Sterne und sein Einfluß auf die englische Prosa des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, Zurich, 1936, 99); the ascription is refuted in Harlan W. Hamilton, *Doctor Syntax: A Silhouette of William Combe, Esq., 1742-1823*, London, 1969. Isaac Brendan is said to be the name under the Foreword in the fifth edition (typescript note on loose leaf, Oates Collection).

⁵⁹ Anon. [Isaac Brendan], *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne*, London, 1797, 74.

—— An' please your Honour —— as old Dick said —— every pagoda that they pocketed was covered with blood —— I wonder, your Honour —— if they could sleep o'nights? ——
 If they did, Trim —— quoth my uncle Toby —— I trust they were not *refreshed* by it.⁶⁰

Finally, Toby and Trim deplore the colonization: “———When they [the Gentoos] were governed by themselves —— LABOUR always smiled”.⁶¹

There are so many things that can be said to indicate the points of difference from Sterne. In fact, all that remains are the expressive use of dashes and aposiopesis, the tears and the unanimity of the two ex-military men. Brendan nowhere gives a hint of irony. Trim is a “good fellow”, and Toby is consistently referred to in a cuddly way as “my uncle Toby”. The reader is kept far removed from the thought that these heroes themselves risked the grace of their Creator on the battlefields of Flanders, or that in the end they only bemoan their own misery, or that the narrator makes his work marketable with theatrical effects. The subject is bloody serious, and the treatment is instrumentally political. A dramatic stipple print (fig. 20) heightens the effect.

In another Shandy fragment, Brendan discusses the subject of war in general and in a more philosophical manner, but that makes the contrast with Sterne's work only greater. “War, a Fragment” begins with a statement by Walter about soldiers who with the Athenian soul of Aristides go to war “for glory”. For the rest, it is Yorick who does nearly all the talking, in an expatiation that would probably have made Sterne frown. “Glory! —— said Yorick (while benevolence reddened his countenance) —— Glory blooms on the Olive! I never see a laurel but methinks there's blood upon its leaf: —— [...] Religion! Religion! What will become of thee?”⁶² The same “my uncle Toby” as the one from “The Gentoos Story” replies (“in the simplicity of his heart”), that “Time will improve it”, upon which he has to endure a series of insults from Dr Slop (which, naturally, he endures). “Yorick” then goes on to preach in visions full of personifications, with CRUELTY versus REASON and AMBITION versus TRUTH, finishing with a slightly less abstract tableau (see also fig. 21):

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 12, 14.



20, 21. Stipple engravings illustrating
“The Gentoo Story” and “War”.

——— I see —— continued Yorick, (casting his eyes on Dr. Slop)
—— I see, in this War of Religion, het best duties profaned! —— I see
the virgin ravished before the eyes of age —— eyes filled with a
father’s tears: —— I see his silver locks spotted o’er with blood ——
his hut in flames —— his field trampled on —— his heart broken.⁶³

At the end of the fragment, Slop has stamped out of the room angrily, and Walter, Toby and Yorick remain sitting by the fireside in silence. “The genius of humanity” hovers over their heads.

Brendan really seems to have thought that he had captured the

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 16.

essence of Sterne's work. In his Foreword, directed at the spirit of Sterne, he says that that essence should be found in the union of "feeling" and "nature":

shelt'ring myself behind NATURE, (whom thou lovest as tenderly as young Le Fevre loved his father) —— I pray thy spirit not to cast its gentle eye upon me, as on PRESUMPTION —— but rather as one —— who, in imitating thee, is but seeking to cultivate a closer knowledge —— with the sources of thy feelings.⁶⁴

Of course, the late imitators cited here are writers of a lesser stature than Sterne, but that goes also for the Grub-street hacks that Sterne himself came to know, and they never allowed themselves to be inspired to produce this sort of enlightened poverty.

The sarcasm, the shameless egotism, the labyrinthian nonsense and the obscene suggestions of the early pseudo-Yoricks, have not yet, as I shall demonstrate at the end of this study, disappeared from the Sterne imitations by the end of the century, but the few pamphlets in which these elements can be found, were printed in a small number of copies and with little success. *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne* was, compared with them, a financial success of the first order, large enough to be exported as well.⁶⁵ The existence of the book suggests that drastic cultural changes had taken place. Before trying to summarize these changes, I would like to discuss the changing perspective of Sterne's work in more detail and by concentrating on other themes.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁶⁵ Five editions. German translation: *Fragmente in Sternes Manier*, Leipzig, 1800 (Michelsen, *Laurence Sterne und der Deutsche Roman des achtzehnten Jahrhunderts*, 84). The editor of *The Shandean* (6 [1994], 123) moreover, mentions "OORLOG, Een Fragment in den Smaak van Sterne", by one P.B., included in the *Almanak van Vernuft en Smaak* for 1806.

Chapter Seven

Women

There is something strange about Tristram's date of birth. Our hero entered "our scurvy and disastrous world" on "the fifth day of November, 1718", which, he adds, "was as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected".¹ Sterne makes us page back to the preceding chapter, to discover that the period between the night of Tristram's conception (from the first Sunday to the first Monday of the month of March) and the moment of his birth is nearer to eight than to nine months. In those days prematurely born children very seldom survived,² so that some doubt is created about the correctness of Tristram's information with regard to the moment of his begetting, and with it about the biological paternity of Walter Shandy, who in December, January and February could not fulfil his conjugal duties because of sciatica, and whose performance does not tally with what we know about his creative talents.³ However, Sterne has proceeded more subtly than it would appear, for, as the gynaecologist C.H.G. Macafee once explained, *Tristram Shandy* contains a number of details suggesting that Tristram was indeed a premature and hence not necessarily an illegitimate child. When, just before Tristram's birth, Susannah emerges from the delivery room in a panic, she says, among other things, that Elizabeth Shandy's "pains are gone".⁴ Macafee points out that long pauses between dilatation pains and contractions are common with premature births. Other problems during Tristram's birth also fit in with the picture of a foetus not carried to term, and there is the fact that on the morning after his birth Tristram turns blue in his face, looking as if he is about to die (the reason for the overhasty baptism and mistaken name-giving). Macafee here thinks of "cyanotic attacks frequently seen in the twelve to twenty-four hours following delivery of a premature baby".⁵

¹ *Tristram Shandy*, I.5.8.

² See *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 52. Chambers explains this under "Birth" (Ephraim Chambers, *Cyclopaedia: Or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences ...*, 6th Edition, London, 1750). Confinement before or after the ninth month was "illegitimate".

³ *Tristram Shandy*, I.4.7.

⁴ *Ibid.*, III.13.216.

⁵ C.H.G. Macafee, "The Obstretical Aspects of *Tristram Shandy*", *Ulster Medical Journal*, 19 (1950), 21. A possible reason why Sterne might intend to stick to an eight

Sterne, then, has surrounded the story of Tristram's conception and birth with mysteries in concrete matters, too. Correct pregnancies do not exist, and those who wish to hang Elizabeth's marital fidelity on an arithmetical calculation are following either their own rigid opinions or sensationalism. For all Tristram himself knows, he had a narrow escape as a baby. Walter is his father and Toby is his uncle⁶ – it all remains a mystery, really.

It will be clear by now that this sort of subtleties was wasted on most of Sterne's early imitators. Not a lot of speculation was devoted to the significance of the missing month. As was mentioned earlier, the author of *Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick* (1768) suspected Toby of having had an affair with his sister-in-law. Others, without mentioning names, assume at any rate that Elizabeth has committed adultery. In the spurious *Vol. III* (1760), the midwife at Tristram's birth cannot bring herself to see a likeness to Walter: "he is no more like the squire, than my boy Tom is like my booby of an husband."⁷ Toby sees horns on Walter's brow.⁸ Freer imitations, too, repeat the theme of the cuckolded husband. Like Tristram, Jeremiah Kunastrokius is born eight months after the supposed conception, with a physical handicap corresponding to that of "a certain officer of Rank in the Army", with whom his mother, shortly before her marriage, had committed a "Faux-pas", and to whom she owed part of her dowry.⁹ The end of the story centres mainly round an intended duel between father Kunastrokius and the officer.

months' pregnancy may be related to the fact that according to Maubray in *The Female Physician* (1724), because of the influence of Saturn on the eighth month, the premature child "will remain sickly and puny, often half-witted" (see P-G.Bouc , "Some Sexual Beliefs and Myths in Eighteenth Century Britain", *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. P-G. Bouc , Manchester, 1982, 38-39).

⁶ In the nineteenth century, the possibility of adultery seems to have been overlooked, for the missing month was presented in 1895 as a discovery (see *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 51.)

⁷ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III*, 18.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 38. It is funny that Toby should nevertheless attribute great virility to Walter. By accident, "kissing" is the first word uttered by Tristram. Toby therefore thinks that Walter is "so immersed in [generation] that your babes think of it the first thought they have" (*ibid.*, 36).

⁹ *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius*, 63 and 88-89.

In all such cases, the blame lies, of course, in the first place with the wife. That Sterne himself may have had the same thoughts is suggested in *Yorick's Meditations*, where the notion "woman" immediately suggests "cuckold".¹⁰

Early stereotypes

If we take the early imitations as a criterion for what is called the gender-ideological dimension of *Tristram Shandy*, there is little to be said against the objections that sober-minded feminist writers have against Sterne's work. Perry and Harries conclude that *Tristram Shandy* is a vehicle of woman-hatred.¹¹ Sterne's female characters, Elizabeth Shandy, Susannah and the widow Wadman, to mention only the most important ones, play minor parts in the story, are stupid or immoral and mainly interested in sex. With all the jokes directed at "madam", these portraits contribute to a misogynous pattern. The Grub-street imitations confirm the pattern, but (whether or not one should praise Sterne for that is another matter) they are usually more aggressive and more predictable.

The portraits of Elizabeth Shandy can illustrate the difference. If Tristram's mother can indeed be accused of adultery, then Sterne has already supplied a few extenuating circumstances. To begin with, she is plainly neglected. Her famous question about the clock is especially a sign of her boredom with Walter's monthly performance of his conjugal duties. Ehlers, moreover, points out that in the end it is Elizabeth Shandy who, however much she answers to the stereotype of the stupid mother hen, drags her son through his disastrous youth with a pragmatic, life-protecting disposition.¹²

The imitations, on the other hand, confirm the myth of the sexually

¹⁰ *Yorick's Meditations*, 82.

¹¹ Ruth Perry, "Women in *Tristram Shandy*", *Studies in Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, 193 (1980), 1976-86; Elizabeth W. Harries, "The Sorrows and Confessions of a Cross-Eyed 'Female-Reader' of Sterne", in *Approaches to Teaching Sterne's Tristram Shandy*, ed. Melvyn New, New York, 1989.

¹² Leigh A. Ehlers, "Mrs. Shandy's 'Lint and Basilicon': The Importance of Women in *Tristram Shandy*", *South Atlantic Review*, 10 (1981), 61-75. Faurot, who noticed the same thing earlier, calls Elizabeth "an early practitioner of oneupmanship" (Ruth Marie Faurot, "Mrs. Shandy Observed", *SEL*, 10 [1970], 579). She adds that Sterne perhaps wanted to suggest a similarity between Elizabeth and Tristram: both laugh and cry at the same time (*ibid.*, 580-89).

insatiable nobody,¹³ suggesting furthermore that men suffer under the female lack of self-control. In *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), Elizabeth's passions damage young Tristram in a very direct way. Tristram's "whole system was discomposed" because, just when our hero was exchanging "the womb of nature" for "this strange unaccountable world", one of the servants thought fit to wind up the clock. The sound of the clock made Elizabeth in her labours cry out, "once more, my dear", which in its turn damaged the mental constitution of the baby.¹⁴ Tristram is again the victim of his mother's automatism, and this time without Walter being much to blame. In the spurious *Vol. III*, Elizabeth is "a special breeder" and "not endowed with great sanity of intellects", for Toby, the living proof that "sense and argument are not necessary in the begetting of children".¹⁵ As we have already seen, suspicions of adultery are confirmed in this spurious continuation.

A similar story can be told about the widow Wadman. As G.S. Rousseau and Melvyn New, among others, have emphasized, Sterne has not made it easy for his readers to pass a purely negative judgment on the widow. Thus, it would seem significant that Sterne should have inserted, within the longer story of Toby's love affair, the story of the Jewish widow in Lisbon. Although the widow Wadman conducts her campaign with an eager eye for Toby's groin, she also shows signs of sensitivity, which is emphasized by the contrast with the shrewd and sexually insatiable Portuguese woman.¹⁶ The widow Wadman is firmly resolved not to lay her finger on "the place"¹⁷ that widows in Restoration comedies so like to touch. After all, only Walter sees the devil at work in

¹³ For the extent of the spread of that myth in England in the eighteenth century, see Boucé, "Some Sexual Beliefs", 41-44.

¹⁴ That Elizabeth would also jump from clock to sex, is anticipated in *Tristram Shandy*, I.4.7.

¹⁵ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III*, 11.

¹⁶ G.S. Rousseau, "Threshold and Explanation: Social Anthropology and the Critic of Literature in the Age of Post-Disciplines", *The Eighteenth Century, Theory and Interpretation*, 22 (1981), 127-52; New, *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits*, 128-29. With regard to the Jewish widow, it may be said that Sterne perhaps applied the cliché's intentionally with a trowel. That Tom's employer should be Jewish (money), and that the scene should be laid in Lisbon (since the earthquake the new Gomorrah) sounds a little too emblematical. For an extensive discussion of the ambiguous references to Judaism in *Tristram Shandy*, see Norman Simms, "The Missing Jews and Jewishness in *Tristram Shandy*", *The Shandean*, 4 (1994), 134-52.

¹⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, IX.20.773.

her,¹⁸ and as New concludes, his ideas about women only too often affect the powerless man himself.¹⁹ Furthermore New points out the importance of the conflicting views of love that Tristram brings up in connection with his uncle's affair.²⁰ Walter alludes to the age-old difference between lust and Platonic love, but Tristram also refers to the complex philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton on the subject. Remarkably, Tristram in every volume of his work refers at least once to his uncle's love affair or to Walter's comments,²¹ announcing that from his narration "one of the most complete systems, both of the elementary and practical part of love and love-making, that ever was addressed"²² can be distilled. Obviously, the subject was important to Sterne. The sources adduced by Tristram all centre round the question that occupied Norris of Bemerton, and which that theologian did not dare to answer either, namely, how far after the coming of Christ a remnant of Divine love may be suspected in the love between man and woman.²³

The Tristram of the spurious *Vol. IX* (1766) has included far fewer riddles for the connoisseurs, directing his readers instead to a more or less firm conclusion, though the person behind this production does seem to have expected that Sterne was going to rehabilitate the widow Wadman in some measure. In general, the anonymous author of the continuation thought exactly like Perry and Harries, who find in Sterne's characterization of the widow a confirmation of current prejudices about *lustige Witwen* as being scheming and randy. In the spurious continuation the widow is compared, among others, to an Indian warrior lying in ambush on his belly: "she will ... lie in wait till her purpose is gain'd and then, very good naturedly, will turn herself."²⁴ She

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, IX.32.805.

¹⁹ New, *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits*, 89-95.

²⁰ Melvyn New, "The Odd Couple: Laurence Sterne and John Norris of Bemerton", *Philological Quarterly*, 75 (1996), 369-71.

²¹ *Tristram Shandy*, II.8.118; III.24.246; VI.36-39.562-70.

²² *Ibid.*, VI.36.562.

²³ Summarized here in its simplest form. Norris discusses the problem of self-interest in the case of charity (reward here or in the hereafter), adducing amorousness as evidence of the possibility of truly unintended, passionate spirit of sacrifice. Lust is the interfering factor. (See also Acworth, *The Philosophy of John Norris of Bemerton*, Chapter 6; Melvyn New, "Proust's Influence on Sterne: Remembrance of Things to Come", in Melvyn New, *Telling New Lies: Seven Essays in Fiction, Past and Present*, Gainesville: FL, 1992).

²⁴ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. IX*, 30-31.

manipulates Trim, Walter and Elizabeth, as well as new relations of Toby's, to get her way: "In a word, every one of my uncle's friends were drawn insensibly to plot against him."²⁵ Her motives are not very exalted; Trim knows exactly with what exhortation to Toby he can please the widow: "sword in hand ... , push into the cover'd way."²⁶ A slightly different version begins with an explanation of the theory of Love, already heralded by Sterne. This proves to be a "dish of German philosophy" about three mental qualities, Anima, Animus, and Animum, that struggle and connive within the body (see later, Chapter 9 in this book).²⁷ The difference between Anima and Animus was customary – the terms stood for the soul and what we would call the autonomous nervous system. Animum is an invention of a Dr Van Gropen, admired by Tristram, and represents "love; an inflammable spirit, but mortal".²⁸ It is important that ("Let theologians say what they will"²⁹), according to Tristram and Van Gropen, not only Animum is active in love, but sometimes the immortal soul (Animus) as well. The Widow Wadman was at first controlled only by Animum, but in her contacts with Toby she turns out not to be completely God-forsaken:

The widow, by her attention to my uncle, had, in a few days, struck a strong snap hook into his upper jaw, so that he was utterly at her mercy. His native innocence, and gentleness of manners, operated so powerfully with her, that she could not for her soul treat him with that kind of tyranny, which she at first intended. ——— This instance of benevolence to the vanquished, reflects more honour upon the widow, than any thing she had said or done, for these twelve years past. ——— I took her at first for a coquette. I beg pardon for the ungenerous sentiment. ——— No woman can be perfect in that character without some flaw, either in her head or heart. It is generally in the former, tho' sometimes in both.³⁰

The character sketch is all in all more unambiguous, but, in spite of this Tristram's marking time, no doubt also more unflattering than the one we

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 71-81.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

get in Sterne's volume IX.

The nature and degree of sexism in Grub-street imitations should not, however, be exaggerated. Sometimes, authors alluded only to the well-known clichés without highlighting the inferiority of women very clearly. Augustan satire can squeeze humour from the unworthiness of all people. Women then are not necessarily more culpable than men, but only in a different way. I will deal with one imitation at greater length to make this clear.

Women and men

Although, naturally, no eighteenth-century author can be expected to have obliterated the differences between men and women, it can be said that in *Tristram Shandy* sometimes the naturalness and often the moral implications of these differences are vague. Unmistakably, the mockery of intellectual aspirations robs the Shandy men of a traditional advantage. In addition, Toby's "chastity" and Walter's anti-sexuality are closely enough linked up with their hobby-horse disorders to warrant the question of whether the female characters, with their common-sense logic and sexual appetites, do not in fact represent a healthier alternative.

That the women in the Shandy household, notwithstanding Tristram's lack of interest in their thoughts, represent normality in the background, is suggested in *Bertram Montfichet* (1761), a book that also (perhaps unnecessarily) makes clear where Sterne got this theme. The story of titular hero Bertram Montfichet centres around the scientific efforts by a Walter Shandy-like father to procure a son for himself. The magnanimity of this wish is played off against womanly wisdom. While father Montfichet clings to his masculine dreams of omnipotence, the women of the household stick to Faith and Tradition. At the cradle of, again, two daughters (twins), father Montfichet formulates his problem as follows:

"... —But is there not, (added he) turning to the midwife, some art, some method, some what-d'ye-call-it, of getting a boy rather than a girl."—"I know of none, (answered the midwife) I believe it is all as God pleases"—"Pish! woman, (said my father) God pleases nothing about it: —God has established certain general laws in nature, whereby he has destined us to act ...".³¹

³¹ *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, I, 35-36.

After a characteristically brief disquisition (“I am throwing away good philosophy on a parcel of ignorant women”), the irritated father is gently put out of the delivery room.³² The author underlines his meaning by having the gossips – midwife, mother, grandmother and aunt Dinah (the same) – decide conspiratorially that protests would be useless and exhausting.

The immediate model for this episode is found in the *Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. Cornelius Scriblerus (Martinus’ father) is also trying to find a remedy to beget a son and not a daughter, and, just like father Montfichet, he falls out with the women in his household.³³ In both cases the gossips may be said to represent the normalizing influence of united women.³⁴ Bertram Montfichet can also be linked to another more progressive dimension of *Tristram Shandy*. Feminist critics who have looked less at the story, and more at the philosophical implications of *Tristram Shandy*, find that Sterne, thematically and through his use of language, muddles the boundaries of gender.³⁵

Seen in this light, there is a discussion in the first part of *Bertram Montfichet* that is interesting. Just as in *Tristram Shandy*, the digressions

³² *Ibid.*, I, 39.

³³ “He withheld the nuptial embrace when the wind was in any point of the South; this Author [Aristotle] asserting that the grossness and moisture of the southerly winds occasion the procreation of females” (*Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus*, Written in Collaboration by the Members of the Scriblerus Club, John Arbuthnot, Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, Thomas Parnell, and Robert Harley Earl of Oxford, ed. Charles Kerby-Miller, Oxford, 1950, 96). It may be worthwhile noting that in *The Ladies Dispensatory, or, every Woman her own Physician* (1740), the question “Whether there is an Art in getting Boys or Girls”, is answered in the affirmative (dieting, continence, etc.: see Boucé, “Some Sexual Beliefs”, 41).

³⁴ I am not, of course, saying that the authors show a great interest in maternity subjects, let alone the “emotional life” of women, although there is a little more of that in *Bertram Montfichet* than in *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*. Bertram’s mother is “very rational”; her train of thought in the contact with the philosophical father is described (*The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, I, 39). The only merit of the women around Martinus consists in the care of the baby after Cornelius has dropped it (*Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, 103-104).

³⁵ H.W. Matalene, “Sexual Scripting in Montaigne and Sterne”, *Comparative Literature*, 41 (1989) 360-77; Juliet McMaster, “‘Uncrystalized Flesh and Blood’, The Body in *Tristram Shandy*”, *Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, 2 (1990) 197-214; Paula Loscocco, “Can’t Live Without’em: Walter Shandy and the Woman Within”, *Ecent*, 32 (1991), 166-79.; Helen Ostovich, “Reader as Hobby-Horse in *Tristram Shandy*”, *Philological Quarterly*, 68 (1989), 325-42.

in *Bertram Montfichet* focus, if not on the intentions, at least on the special interests of the narrator. In the one I am concerned with here, a game is played with sexual identity. Bertram tells about his uncle Dick, who was born with a rupture in his scrotum. In connection with this, but for unexpressed reasons, Bertram's grandparents gave their Dick the impression that he was a girl. From his infancy up to and including his sixteenth year, he was kept "in petticoats": he was taught the pastimes, interests and skills of young ladies, and for all the boy knew he was a "pretty girl" called Dickey. An interim dénouement follows when on his seventeenth birthday Dick enters, unannounced, the room of cook Margery and gets an unlimited view of her "intima penitralia" (see top part of fig. 22).³⁶

"Margery's forma informans" caused "a hurricane in his spirits". When it had passed, Dick pondered on the "passing worth of the masculine gender over that of the feminine"³⁷ and the "resolution ... was taken to divest himself entirely of the woman, both as to her commodes and the function she is usually conversant in; and to put on man, not only by appearing in the apparel expressive of man, but to think and act as man".³⁸

In spite of this resoluteness, there is no question of an unproblematic coming out. Instead of discussing the matter, Dick first begins experimenting secretly with men's clothes (see the lower part of fig. 22 – as can be seen, Dick had not yet found a suitable alternative for the skirt). He cannot possess his own identity without a fitting set of clothes, but at the same time, "a subrustic shame" prevents him from showing himself as a man. When he is caught out as one by his family, Dick is at first taken for an apparition or an intruder.³⁹ Only after he has been overpowered do people recognize the trusty old Miss Dickey, who then explains her travesty and calls the parents to account. They once more discuss their decision to bring up Dick as a girl. They now appear to

³⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, I, 90. For the occasion, Dickey is dressed in "a new gay Pet-en-l'air, an elbow hoop-petticoat, and a Paris-cap", I, 89.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 91.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 91-92.

³⁹ Not necessarily unrealistic, considering the phenomenon, pointed out by Dekker and van de Pol, of the stronger cognitive fixation on sex-bound symbols in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van de Pol, *Daar was laatst een meisje loos: Nederlandse vrouwen als matrozen en soldaten, een historisch onderzoek*, Baarn, 1981, 31-33).

regret their actions, although it still does not become quite clear why they at first attached a greater taxonomic value to the functions of Dick's genital organ than to its form.⁴⁰



22. *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, frontispiece, Vol. I.

⁴⁰ Likely a reminiscence of the one sex paradigm whose importance in the medical science of the Renaissance was demonstrated by Laqueur. The form correspondences between male and female sexual organs gave the impression that the latter were a mirror (image) of the former; as for hermaphrodites, the ability to penetrate was the criterion for manliness (Thomas W. Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Cambridge: MA and London, 1990). Perhaps the author of *Bertram Montfichet* wanted to suggest that the grandparents had heard vague rumours of “modern” medical notions.

This story highlights aspects of the portrait of Dick as a grown-up man. Bertram calls him “a choice spirit, a high flyer, an uncommon genius, an exquisite fancier, a self-taught philosopher”.⁴¹ In Part Two, which describes a Shandean “visitation dinner”, Dick turns out to have a remarkably varied range of interests. He reveals himself as a scholar, an antiquarian and a political orator, but at the same time he is an enthusiast cook. The latter specialism obviously dates from his days as a girl, for in the first part, Dickey’s training in the field of the preparation of food is spoken of highly.⁴²

The message is, of course, not that sex-determined talents in the forming of character should be negligible. When Dick was still Dickey, an almost irrepressible urge to play the bagpipes was a secret indication of her real nature.⁴³ Traditional role allocations and power relations also are unalterable: “——I never knew a man that wished to be a woman, but I often heard women wish to be men”⁴⁴ – this pronouncement by grandfather Montfichet summarizes the natural course of things, without a hint of either doubt or compassion. Aunt Dinah’s motto is “A good husband and soon”, Bertram’s mother’s “*Fidelity and obedience*”,⁴⁵ and further passages could be adduced where *Bertram Montfichet* presents us with stereotyped mockery. But with the story of Uncle Dick, the boundary between nature and nurture is at any rate introduced for discussion. Dickey feels comfortable in her gender-role, and does not give it up just like that. Uncle Dick’s physical abhorrence of women is ascribed by the narrator to his muted sexual development.⁴⁶ Finally, the digression about Dick seems intended to underline the arrogance of father Montfichet’s philosophical tenets. Dickey-Dick is a changeling like those referred to by Locke to illustrate the linguistic, and hence necessarily failing construction of taxonomic borderlines.⁴⁷ The world cannot be subjected to the logic of deistic philosophers.

⁴¹ *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, I, 84.

⁴² The combination of typically male and typically female knowledge results in a few remarkable dishes. During the “visitation dinner”, dishes are served like, for instance, “Porcus Trojanus” (a pig stuffed with all sorts of poultry and oysters) and goose liver broiled under a burning-lens (with reference to Vitalian and Robert Boyle).

⁴³ *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet*, I, 88.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, II, 24.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 123.

⁴⁷ For this sceptical notion in *Tristram Shandy*, see especially Lila V. Graves, “Locke’s

Although they are different in tone and rhetoric then, it can be said of many of the early Sterne-inspired fictional works that, in the matter of man-woman relations, they reach back, more emphatically than *Tristram Shandy*, to seventeenth-century farce. To put it differently, it can be said that Sterne, when compared to a tradition that was hostile in simplistic ways to the pathetic or philosophical sentimental novel, pursued a more headstrong course. That stubbornness in all cases resulted in unsteady characterizations, and this goes for Tristram, Walter and Yorick as much as for Elizabeth and the widow Wadman.

The sensitive nerves

The change in Sterne's *oeuvre* comes with *A Sentimental Journey*. Because here every trace of plot or development is subservient to Yorick's reflections on his physical vibrations and moral condition, the personages that he meets with on his journey have few surprising characteristics of their own. The women possess traits that pre-eminently call forth violent mixed feelings in a somewhat older, lonely male traveller: they are physically attractive and preferably a little sad. Things become shameful for Yorick when they turn out to have more talent for compassion and to be able to cope with sensuality more easily than he is able to do. In Yorick's infatuations, there is the fear that his fantasies go further than those of the object he lusts after, and for that reason alone, the women are his mentally superiors. The first contact, with the lady from Brussels in Calais, sets the tone. Yorick thinks he recognizes in "a face of about six and twenty —— of a clear transparent brown, simply set off with rouge or powder" concealed distress, fantasizing that he is involved with a young widow. The lady's well-known rebuff in front of the Calais chaise-door⁴⁸ marks the beginning of his confusion. The exchange of looks with the beautiful Grisset in Paris, over her counter with gloves, is described by Yorick in terms of attack and counter-attack.⁴⁹

But these women, although self-confident, are not calculating or fatal,

Changeling and the Shandy Bull", *Philological Quarterly*, 60 (1981), 257-64; see also: Christopher Fox, *Locke and the Scriblerians: Identity and Consciousness in Early Eighteenth-Century Britain*, Berkeley: CA and London, 110-17.

⁴⁸ Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*, ed. Gardner D. Stout Jr., Berkeley, 1967, 96.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 168-69.

as the widow Wadman seems to be. Yorick struggles with his own lusts, but he is no Walter or imitation of Toby, who would put all the blame on womankind. The women in *A Sentimental Journey* are (in the perception of the narrator) more naturally sensitive, and Yorick learns his lesson from his adventures. By her example, and thanks to his own state of infatuation, contact with the Brussels lady persuades Yorick to reconsider his decision to leave the poor monk of the order of St Francis in the lurch. During the sale of a pair of gloves, the grisette sticks to rules of politeness that Yorick, in his confusion, threatens to forget. The *fille de chambre* in Part Two seems to be even more innocent than these first two objects of lust, reducing Yorick to even greater confusion about his mental and physical condition. These sketches have their echoes in the female characters in imitations of Sterne, even though in early sentimental journeys the satirical element is not lacking.

The first spurious continuation of *A Sentimental Journey* bears testimony to the expectation that Sterne was going to restore the normal order. In Parts Three and Four of the *Journey* (1769), which according to the author, one Eugenius, are based on conversations with Sterne,⁵⁰ the “temple of Janus”⁵¹ opens wide. Yorick returns, among other things, to the shop of the grisette, who this time asks him to follow her to a back room and there instead of gloves fits him with condoms.⁵² In the spurious Part Three the innocent but maddeningly seductive *fille de chambre* from Part Two of Sterne’s *A Sentimental Journey* is arrested as a prostitute.⁵³

Richard Griffith too could not imagine Sterne having thought much of ideally sensitive, chaste ladies. In *The Posthumous Works of a Late*

⁵⁰ *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued*, Preface, cliii, in *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, 1783. The author calls himself Sterne’s friend. Oates (*Shandyism and Sentiment*, 14) therefore assumed that the continuation is the work of John Hall-Stevenson, since he is associated with the Eugenius in *Tristram Shandy*. Kenneth Monkman (“KM” in Kenneth Monkman and J.C.T. Oates, “Towards A Sterne Bibliography: Books and Other Material Displayed at the Sterne Conference”, in *The Winged Skull*, eds Cash and Stedmond, 303) doubts (I think rightly so) the ascription by Oates.

⁵¹ *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued*, 162.

⁵² *A Sentimental Journey*, 168-69. *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued*, 178-79. The association is made easier by the French word for condom, “gand d’amour”. The English word is avoided. (For the eighteenth-century trade in these commodities, see Burford, *Wits, Wenchers and Wantons*, 144 ff.).

⁵³ *A Sentimental Journey*, 187-91 and 234-36. *Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued*, 189-90.

Celebrated Genius, Deceased (1770), he has Sterne quote, among others, from Samuel Wesley's *The Battle of the Sexes*, a poem in which modesty only functions in a play for power.⁵⁴ "In fine", is Griffith's alias Sterne's conclusion, "I fancy that your *chaste* ladies seem to consider love as their peculiar merchandise; and look upon courtesans as *smugglers*, who undersell the *fair trader*".⁵⁵

Leonard MacNally, about ten years after this, seems to agree. In the opening pages of his *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places* (1781), as a sentimental traveller in a post-chaise he is sharing with a young woman, he is musing about Cook's discovery of the difference between modesty and chastity among the Tahitians: "*modesty* and *chastity*, which have long been supposed to be inherited in the human mind, are local ideas, unknown in the state of nature, and modified according to the various degrees of civilization."⁵⁶ His fellow traveller, however, appears to feel at home in her own civilization, and MacNally's narrator ends with egg on his face.⁵⁷

In MacNally's *Sentimental Excursions*, as in the works of Sterne and Griffith, the paradox is a central theme, and the chief female conversation partner in the book should therefore be taken seriously for half the time. This woman, called Maria, carries a secret sorrow, which is revealed during a conversation about *Tristram Shandy*. The traveller explains why Sterne has not drawn a picture of the widow Wadman:⁵⁸

—— His description, Madam, would have pleased few but himself; the critics would have fallen foul upon it, would have dissected it to a hair,

⁵⁴ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, 97-98. Without mentioning the name of the author, Griffith quotes the whole 27th stanza of *The Battle of the Sexes* (Samuel Wesley, *Poems on Several Occasions*, London, 1753, 31).

⁵⁵ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius*, 100.

⁵⁶ Anon. [Leonard MacNally], *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places, With Notes Critical, Illustrative, and Explanatory, by Several Eminent Persons ...*, London, 1781, 19.

⁵⁷ His style of courting, incidentally, is a good deal less subtle than Yorick's: "But observe, Madam —— A man and a woman —— a bull and a cow —— a ram and ewe —— a cock and hen, —— Et caetera, said the lady, interrupting my recapitulation——" ([MacNally], *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places*, 50). For the meaning of "etcetera", see Melvyn New, "'At the Backside of the Door of Purgatory': A Note On Annotating *Tristram Shandy*", in *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, ed. Valerie Grosvenor Myer, London and Totowa, NJ, 1984.

⁵⁸ On the white page, *Tristram Shandy*, VI.38.567.

have tortured it limb by limb, bedaubed it and besmugged it, for in the article of beauty, we seldom find two men who think alike.⁵⁹

His remark that boys sometimes prefer older women causes a “shower of tears [to] burst from Maria’s eyes”.⁶⁰ Like Yorick, MacNally’s traveller is infected by feminine vulnerability. Mindful of her nature, he approaches her automatically more cautiously than the objects of his earlier flirtations. During an early meeting, he notices in himself the usual physiological symptoms, but this time there is more: “——Passion stepped in again, but sentiment still kept her post —— we sighed.”⁶¹

Although the pathos around the love affair with this Maria may probably be taken seriously, “sentiment” is still not intended to mean overpowering sensibility. The narrator has his objections when Maria grieves for birds that have to watch while their nests are being plundered.⁶² A conversation about the slave trade (with reference to Sterne⁶³) manages to cause the traveller to voice his compassion and indignation, but because Maria does not really contribute anything and the narrator first and foremost keeps Maria’s tears flowing, our suspicion does not disappear. In the final chapter, Maria can still not forget the slaves, and this time the traveller is of assistance by reminding her of the actions of bad guy Othello. The line “Put out the light, and then put out the light” is used as a pretext by the traveller to get Maria on the couch in the dark. In a footnote this change is branded as a “bull”.⁶⁴

The ambiguity of Sterne’s sentimentalism was also a source of interest to Thomas Cogan, whose imitation of *A Sentimental Journey*, the epistolary novel *John Bunclé Junior, Gentleman* (1776) is at the same time a parody of Thomas Amory’s *The Life of John Bunclé, Esquire* (1756-1766). The earlier Bunclé was a champion of feminine virtue, perhaps not of the stature of Richardson, but in its time nearly as

⁵⁹ [MacNally], *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places*, 161.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 215.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219-26 (Maria is quoting Sterne with her “the poor *Negroes* have no one to stand up for them”).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 248 (“Put out the light, and then put out the light” is from Shakespeare’s *Othello*, V.ii.7).

famous.⁶⁵ *The Life of John Buncl*, in addition to peregrinations and exceptionally many religious quarrels of the protagonist (a unitarist), tells of his seven marriages to women that have been idealized to abstractions. Buncl's loves are all identically sensitive, intelligent, virtuous and beautiful, which implies that they all die young. The main character refers to his talent for compassion ("my soul hath always sympathised with the afflicted and my heart hath ever ached for the miseries of others"⁶⁶), but very regularly reveals the stoical, in modern eyes egoistical side of his character.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ The name of the author behind *John Buncl* remained a subject for speculation until after the death of Amory (1691?-1788). The claim made by his son Robert in the year of his father's death is confirmed by the existence of a religious pamphlet published by Amory under his own name and showing points of correspondence with a passage in the novel (*DNB*). For dubious but understandable reasons, *Tristram Shandy* came to be associated with *John Buncl* in the nineteenth century. This long, extremely digressive novel was something of a nightmare for Augustan humanists, if only because of the favourable portrait of Edmund Curll in II, 382-93. In the abridged version (*The Spirit of Buncl*, 1820) the book could pass for a parody, however, and this may have led Cleeve to assume that Sterne was inspired by *John Buncl* (Brian Cleeve, *Dictionary of Irish Writers: Second Series*, Cork, 1969, 13). The confusion arose because Routledge, in 1907, came out with a new edition, with the title *The Life and Opinions of John Buncl, Esquire*. Day, who obviously did not know that this is not the original title, was then firmly convinced of the link with *Tristram Shandy* (Martin S. Day, *History of English Literature, 1660-1837*, Garden City: NY, 1963, 241). *The Monthly Review* (XV [1756], 497-512, 585-604 and XXXV [1766], 33-43, 101-123) devoted exceptionally long reviews to Amory's book, calling John Buncl a genius and comparing him to Shakespeare (because of a fertile imagination) and Richardson (because of his morals). For further reviews and a discussion of the relationship with *Tristram Shandy*, see René Bosch, "Cul de Sac: Over *The Life of John Buncl* van Thomas Amory", *Optima*, 44 (1994), 3, 62-77.

⁶⁶ [Thomas Amory] *The Life of John Buncl, Containing Various Observations and Reflections, Made In Several Parts of the World*, Vol. I., London, 1756, 2.

⁶⁷ Buncl keeps his eyes firmly fixed on the hereafter, and therefore does not find it difficult, after the death of one wife, to look for another quickly: "Be thou then, Death, our morning and evening meditation: let us learn from thee the vanity of all human things"; and "I think it unreasonable and impious to grieve immoderately for the dead. A decent and proper tribute of tears and sorrow, humanity requires; but when that duty has been payed, we must remember, that to lament a dead woman is not to lament a wife" ([Thomas Amory], *The Life of John Buncl*, II [1765], 18 and 163). Amory's relations with other women is also the subject of the unfinished project *Memoirs: Containing the Lives of Several Ladies of Great-Britain* (the first of twelve advertised volumes appeared in 1755).

JOHN BUNCLE, JUNIOR,
GENTLEMAN.



L O N D O N :

Printed for J. JOHNSON, in St. Paul's Church-Yard;

MDCCLXXVI.

23. [Thomas Cogan] *John Buncler Junior* (1776).

This side is highlighted in *John Bunclé Junior*.⁶⁸ The motto and the accompanying engraving on the title page of the book warn against external moral beauty (fig.23). “Self-importance” and “Sentimental writing” are Cogan’s main subjects, and he claims that the two are related.⁶⁹ All this does not prevent the young Bunclé from also having his Maria with whom he feels above the world of the unfeeling and to whom in confidence he tells stories about human suffering.⁷⁰ The *Monthly Review* called Cogan “Another Sentimental Journey maker, mounted on one of the milky mothers, and wofully galling her, after the nobly wanton courser of Sterne”.⁷¹

The first sentimental portraits of women in the imitations, then, still have a mixed character. Nevertheless, if we exclude the first spurious continuation of *A Sentimental Journey* and the handful of Shandean Grub-street satires which also appeared in the 1770s and 1780s, women with an average or more than average need of sex died out fairly rapidly in Sterne imitations.

The female body becomes the seat of refined emotions, while the male narrator interprets and reflects. The narrators seem gradually less endowed with irony.

The “Sterne” who is the protagonist of George Keate’s much-read *Sketches from Nature* (3rd edition, 1782) counts among his loved ones only women with sensitive nerves, the accompanying talent for

⁶⁸ The title itself of Cogan’s *John Bunclé Junior* tells us something about the factual bluntness of sentimentalist Bunclé senior, for the only thing that gentleman has to tell about his children is that “they never were concerned in any extraordinary affairs, nor ever did any remarkable things, that I heard of; — only rise and breakfast, read and faunter, drink and eat”. That is the end of the matter for Amory’s *John Bunclé*, for “it would not be fair, in my opinion, to make any one pay for their history” ([Thomas Amory], *The Life of John Bunclé*, II, 137). John Bunclé Junior and his many siblings complain about an unhappy youth at the hands of an educator with little paternal affection: “[he] drove us into the world at an early age” (I, 71-72).

⁶⁹ [Thomas Cogan], *John Bunclé Junior, Gentleman*, London, 1776, I, 84-85 and 249-50.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 130-35 and II, 94-99. The “lovely Maria” is described in I, 73-74. J.M.S. Tompkins (*The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*, London, 1932, 110) quotes Bunclé Junior’s complaint about the fact that “every *Cook-Maid* talks sentiment, and every *Porter* boasts of sensibility” (I, 16); the fact that he himself does nothing else, might have alerted Tompkins to the possibility of an ironical reading, and if not, the fact that Bunclé’s bookseller is against “Irony” and “refined speculations” (I, 38) might have.

⁷¹ *Monthly Review*, LV (1776), 160.

compassion, and a dislike of doubles entendres. Even Tristram's Jenny shares in this cleansing. A tragic story about the unrequited loves and deaths of two sisters is dedicated especially to her: "I have long wished, my dear JENNY, to relate to thee this interesting story —— To thee, whose heart NATURE hath so sweetly harmonized, that it vibrates at the slightest touch of another's sorrow; and is therefore worthy to hear a tale of distress.——" ⁷²

An enumeration of sensible heroines in works from the 1770s and 1780s with titles or preliminaries that refer to Sterne would become tedious. Examples are found in *Sentimental Lucubrations* (1770), *The Sentimental Exhibition* (1774), *Travels for the Heart* (1775), *A Sentimental Diary* (1778), *Reveries of the Heart* (1781), *An Excursion to Margate* (1787), and others. It has been said (by Ann Jessie Van Sant ⁷³) that all sentimental journeys of the late eighteenth century are male-centred, in that the physiological-moral state of the enterprising "man of feeling" is examined, while "woman" and "woman of sensibility" are from the start synonymous with each other and with passivity: "an experimental woman of feeling would be an adventuress, remarkable principally for her promiscuity. She could not, as Yorick does, feel her way across France." ⁷⁴ This is, strictly speaking, incorrect. *The Lady's Magazine* began as early as 1770 with *A Sentimental Journey, by a Lady*, a serial publication that dragged on until 1777 as leading article in that paper. The female traveller remains safely in her own country in all those years, but she is not totally averse to experiment, ⁷⁵ and every now and then shows she can distance herself from her own emotional condition. Remarkably enough (and this confirms Van Sant's claim that male and female roles are separate), the usual relation of cause and effect between the pathetic clashes and the sentiments of the traveller is here approached from a negative point of view. The Lady meets with the odd rude man and many women who are somehow affected, rude, or by the new definition unnatural, rendering her out of a condition of heightened

⁷² George Keate, *Sketches from Nature, Taken, and Coloured, in A Journey to Margate, Published From the Original Designs*, London, 1782, II, 111.

⁷³ Ann Jessie Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel: The Senses in Social Context*, Cambridge 1993, 113-16.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁷⁵ Thus, a longing for "sentimental" reflections drives her to a masked ball (Anon., "A Sentimental Journey. By a Lady", *Lady's Magazine*, 4 [1773], 3).

sensitivity. Thus, the narrator is annoyed already in the first chapter by a fellow traveller saying nasty things about the poor people that sit on the roof of their stagecoach:

People on the *outside*! Replies the lady with an air of disdain. What have we to do with them? If a thousand of such creatures were knocked on the head at once, provisions would be cheaper, and those of their class, that remain, might live so much the better.

The reflection shocked me. — I was in no good humour before. — The inhumane temper she discovered made me considerably worse. —⁷⁶

The fact that the traveller owes most of her breakdowns to less sensitive persons of her own sex is characteristic of the didactic slant of the story. The readers are told in this way that their breath should not stink and that they should not hit tame squirrels.⁷⁷ Robert Mayo concludes, probably with reason, that behind the Lady a male pedagogue is hidden,⁷⁸ but it should be said that female authors were sometimes capable of the same trite didacticism. The successor of *The Lady's Magazine*, the *New Lady's Magazine*, which was published from 1786, paid homage to Sterne every month with "A New Sentimental Journey through England. Written by a Lady", which is a practically literal re-narration of the "Sentimental Journey" in the first *Lady's Magazine*, and Mayo in this case opts for a female author/plagiarist.⁷⁹

Naturally, Sterne was not the only or the most important promoter of the ideal type in England. The seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers of etiquette manuals, physicians and theoreticians of the female body, novelists like Mary Davys and Penelope Aubin, and, of course, Samuel Richardson and his followers deserve more prominent places. To account for the rise of the new woman image, socio-historical

⁷⁶ Anon., "A Sentimental Journey. By a Lady.", *Lady's Magazine*, 1 (1770), 3.

⁷⁷ For both misdemeanours, see "A Sentimental Journey. By a Lady.", *Lady's Magazine*, 4 (1773), 4.

⁷⁸ Robert D. Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815, With a Catalogue of 1375 Magazine Novels and Novelettes*, Evanston: IL, 1962, 344.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 346. For the expansion of the reading habits among young women of the "middling classes" and the attitude of the usually older female authors, see Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century*, London and New York, 1992, 130ff.

developments and developments within the history of ideas have been sketched: the discovery of the extra sensitive female nervous system once more confirmed the need for male supervision, and this seems to have coincided with the withdrawal by women from the professional and legal fields.⁸⁰

Maria

A related characteristic theme of the pathetic novels of the late eighteenth century is the mental suffering of women. It is also a subject with long roots (in hagiography), but the new psycho-physiological notions gave it an empirical status: greater sensitivity implies a greater torment in comparable situations.

Sterne's working out of this theme around the character of Maria of Moulines is marked again by rhetorical distance. At her first introduction, in the fifth and last instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, Maria lacks the earthly qualities that Sterne's other female characters possess. The causes of her melancholy condition are rather unclear, and obviously irrelevant to Tristram: "better fate did Maria deserve, than to have her Banns forbid, by the intrigues of the curate of the parish who published them", is Tristram's postillon's vague comment. For the rest, we know only that she is "unsettled in her mind" and cannot speak. The episode as such is mixed: really pathetic and really satirical, as we noted earlier, although the doubts that are called forth, naturally, are in respect to Tristram's state of mind and not to that of the holy virgin.

When Sterne described Maria again, as the Yorick of *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), he could still use the Shandy persona in his letters,⁸¹ while the new Yorick is not that much more innocent in sexual matters than Tristram. He knows himself to be a "lousy prebendary",⁸² and reading the chapters on Maria, one can understand why:

Maria, though not tall, was nevertheless of the first order of fine forms — affliction had touch'd her looks with something that was scarce earthly — still she was feminine — and so much was there about her

⁸⁰ Mullan, *Sentiment and Sociability*, 227-40.

⁸¹ A fact which has been stressed and elaborated on cleverly in Madeleine Descargues, *Correspondances: Étude critique de la correspondance de Laurence Sterne dans son oeuvre*, Paris, 1993, 153-66.

⁸² *Letters*, 105.

of all that the heart wishes, or the eye looks for in woman, that could the traces be ever worn out of her brain, and those of Eliza's out of mine, she should *not only eat of my bread and drink of my own cup*, but Maria should lay in my bosom, and be unto me as a daughter.⁸³

This explanation, of doubtful standard, and the fact that Yorick does practically nothing to get Maria out of her depression (he goes to visit her, cries a little and takes his leave again) justify McGlynn's categorizing the Maria story as "sentimental masturbation".⁸⁴

Nevertheless, Sterne, perhaps because of the structuring of themes in *A Sentimental Journey*,⁸⁵ has less overt irony echoing in Yorick's Maria vision than in Tristram's. Maria herself is less abstract. Of her parents, who in *Tristram Shandy* are just mentioned in passing, the mother has been given a few lines. Maria's suffering has acquired more substance by mention of her deceased father and her unfaithful lover, and, moreover, Maria can now tell how she walked to Rome. The goat in which Tristram could recognize himself has been replaced by a little dog. The repeated glances at Tristram and the goat are echoed in the alternation with which Yorick wipes off his own tears and those of Maria: "I sat down close by her; and Maria let me wipe them away as they fell with my handkerchief — I then steeped it in my own — and then in hers — and then in mine — and then I wiped hers again — and as I did it, I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion."⁸⁶ In combination with the matter and motion phrase, the backwards and forwards movement of something results in a vague sort of innuendo. Those familiar with the works of Andrew Marvell could, in addition, find a parodic reference to his "Nymph Complaining for the Death of her Faun".⁸⁷ In spite of all that, Yorick's pathos seems to have been effective with readers who were averse to satiric undertones.

⁸³ *A Sentimental Journey*, 275.

⁸⁴ Paul D. McGlynn, "Sterne's Maria: Madness and Sentimentality", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 3 (1976), 2 and 41.

⁸⁵ Moulines is Yorick's first stopping-place after his escape from the fashionable Parisian salons. His assessment of Maria's emotions is guided by his intention to find simplicity in the country.

⁸⁶ *A Sentimental Journey*, 271.

⁸⁷ Tom Keymer, "Marvell, Thomas Hollis, and Sterne's Maria: Parody in *A Sentimental Journey*", *The Shandean*, 5 (1993), 13-14.

Therefore, the Maria chapter in *A Sentimental Journey* was preferred by the fictitious letter-writers of *The Correspondents* (1775) above the beauties from *Tristram Shandy*. The latter are “too firmly incorporated; and, like the embroidery on *Martin’s coat*, must adhere to the main stuff, or be torn to rags”. The main stuff of *Tristram Shandy* makes unconcerned enjoyment of described misery difficult. Although *A Sentimental Journey*, too, contains parts that “very few can admire”, they are less contagious in the eyes of the author of *The Correspondents*.⁸⁸

This relatively early imitation, then, heralds a tendency that seems to become dominant in the 1780s – a tendency to imitate only Sterne’s pathetic sensationalism, leaving out the openings for sentimental associations. Reading about distress is pleasant in itself, and for the female correspondent’s part, Sterne might have gone further in this matter: “I have wondered sometimes, as Mr. Sterne shone so much in the pathetic, that he never introduced the distress of a tender mind on a recent loss by death. Perhaps he might intend it, and was prevented by death from increasing the sorrow which some tender mind might feel for *his* loss.”⁸⁹ In the decades that followed, this omission was to be more than compensated for.

Much unbridled pathos is to be found, for instance, in another spurious continuation of *A Sentimental Journey*, the *New Sentimental Journey* (1787), an English translation of Jean Claude Gorgy’s *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental* (1784).⁹⁰ Gorgy introduces himself as the editor of a manuscript in Sterne’s hand that had recently turned up in London, and the translator, one Berg, takes over his part.

During this further journey, Yorick has overcome his philandering, and instead concentrates on the “disastrous love, and ill-timed marriages” of third parties.⁹¹ First, he allows himself to be moved by the story of one

⁸⁸ Anon., *The Correspondents, An Original Novel, In a Series of Letters*, London, 1775, 60. “Martin’s Coat” refers to *A Tale of a Tub*, II, 61–63. The novel was based on letters by Lord Lyttelton, and implies that in his old age he had a platonic relationship with his daughter-in-law. The rumour was confirmed, be it with an admission that the letters were not authentic. See Rose M. Davis “The Correspondents”, *PMLA*, 51 (1936), 207–20.

⁸⁹ Anon., *The Correspondents*, 60–61. Maria’s grief at the death of her father has obviously been insufficiently worked out.

⁹⁰ Jean Claude Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, London, 1784; *New Sentimental Journey*, Hamburg, 1787.

⁹¹ *New Sentimental Journey*, 13.; Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 13 (“des amours malheureux et des unions mal assorties”).

Angelike, who was forced to marry an old miser, seeing her boyfriend disappear from distress into the army. In a following long episode around the daughter of an innkeeper, the same theme has been elaborated in a more intricate and even more moving way. Yorick shows his ability to sympathize with an unfortunate visitor by telling him, in exchange for the latter's own tragic story, the story of Maria of Moulines. The innkeeper's daughter listens in and runs off, crying. Yorick's other victim explains that the girl has just received news about the marriage of her beloved, who was assumed to be in German captivity. The bringer of the news, who is still in the inn, makes an unfavourable impression on Yorick, but at that moment he pays little attention to him. He does comply with the request to describe again the symptoms of Maria's melancholy madness. The next morning, the innkeeper's daughter appears to have committed suicide. When Yorick inspects the message about the marriage of the beloved more closely, he discovers that the certificate supposed to prove it is a forgery, and so the messenger must have had evil intentions.⁹² An unpleasant day for Yorick, but things become bleaker still when he finds letters from other unhappy lovers and a copy of Young's *Night Thoughts*, containing notes by a twenty-five-year-old who is likewise contemplating suicide.⁹³ Only Angelike comes to a good end, though the reader is at first supposed to think that she, too, is dead.⁹⁴

It is to be feared that the humour in Gorgy's work is unintentional. His Yorick at any rate lets the readers know that great feelings are no joking matter. In one of his last chapters he tries to get the exclamations of the two lovers who do get reunited (Angelike and the soldier) on paper:

It is thou ! it is thou thyself ! — — ! — — ! — — ! What a happiness!
 — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! —
 — ! What have I suffered ! — — ! — — ! — — ! And I ! — — ! — — !
 — — ! — — ! What tears ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — ! — — !
 — — !⁹⁵

⁹² *New Sentimental Journey*, 36-40; Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 38-41.

⁹³ Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 49-65 and 157-65.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 170-77.

⁹⁵ *New Sentimental Journey*, 158; Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 179.

Etcetera. Yorick remarks that the author of *Le Roué Vertueux* “has made himself merry, about these solitary signs of exclamation”, but he finds that sort of thing improper; “signes and expressions of sorrow”, including the graphical ones, should be respected in all cases. They refer to moments when people rise above themselves “because then one is estranged from all the world”.⁹⁶ Gorgy suggests that Sterne learned much from Rousseau. In comments intended for Eliza, Yorick speaks highly of that philosopher.⁹⁷

To make the story complete, in the very last chapter Gorgy and Berg lead Yorick back to Moulines. Maria is still sitting under a tree with her little dog, but in addition has got a child – as it turns out, of the faithless lover and his bride, who are both dead.

At last, a little noise I made, roused her from her reverie. Languishingly she directed her fine eyes upon me. “Ah! Is it you?” said she to me, in that penetrating accent, which we acquire by long suffering; “you see all, that is left me. He is dead! she is dead too — — — I will live for her child — — — Alas! who would love it like me? — — —” Tears came into her eyes. — — — I endeavoured to divert her, for having not forgot me.

“I shall never forget you. — — You seemed to take so sincere a part in my sorrow.”

“I found you so worthy of participation!”

“You see I am more calm. He is dead! — — — I have no hopes any more.”

“You have got some consolation — — this Child — —”

She fetched a deep sigh, cast down her eyes, and reclined her head — — — she sat for a long time immoveable — — — at last she scratched the cipher of her love, with a little stick in the sand.

“Thus it happens in the world,” said she to me; “the very first wind, will efface it; but there he remains for ever,” in pointing to her heart — — — “this child, is his son — — — Alas! I should be its mother! — — —”

She loaded it with kisses⁹⁸

⁹⁶ *New Sentimental Journey*, 158-59; Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 180 (“...a tiré un parti plaisant de ces points d’exclamation isolés parce que l’on fait abstraction de l’univers entier”). *Le Roué Vertueux* (in fact, in Berg’s translation it reads “*Le Rouévertu Eux*”) is a satire by Charles Georges Coqueley de Chaussepierre.

⁹⁷ *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 43-48.

⁹⁸ *New Sentimental Journey*, 163-64; *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 184-85 (“Enfin, un

Yorick's interest in Maria now seems to be completely unblemished. She has, moreover, been provided with a concrete history, as a result of which the rhetorical meaning of her role (that of the holy innocent versus the unconquerable carnality of Tristram and Yorick) is largely lost.

The need to fill the empty spot Maria is in Sterne's fiction⁹⁹ with anecdote, was also felt by others. This appears, among others, from the publication, a few years later, of *The Letters of Maria* (1790). The most interesting part of this book is the Foreword, in which the anonymous editor states that he undertook a journey to Rome to avenge his murdered brother. The existence of "haughty Italian[s]" and hired assassins is perhaps touched on to make Maria's innocence come out the more clearly. The editor also says that, on his way back, at Moulines, he was informed of the death of Maria. She now turns out to have had a friend, one Annette, who lent to the traveller a bundle of Maria's letters to be translated, so that now for the first time it becomes clear what went on in the years before Tristram and Yorick found her in her melancholy condition. The translator excuses himself humbly for the lack of "correctness and elegance of diction" of the letters.¹⁰⁰ The underlying message is, of course, that there is a language of real feeling, which is lost on "the Critic".

The casual references in Sterne's fiction, to the forbidden bans, to the desertion of the loved one, and to Maria's walking-tour to Rome, now form the framework for a complete epistolary novel. Most of the

peu de bruit que je fis la tira de sa rêverie. Ses beaux yeux se portèrent languissement sur moi! 'Ah! C'est vous,' me dit-elle, avec cet accent pénétrant que donnent les longues souffrances: 'vous voyez tout ce qui me reste. Il est mort! Elle est morte aussi.... Je vivrai pour leur enfant.... Hélas! Qui l'aimerait comme moi?...' Ses yeux semouillèrent... Je cherchai à faire diversion et la remerciant de ce qu'elle ne m'avoit oublié. 'Jamais je ne vous oublierai. — Vous avez paru partager mon chagrin si sincèrement!' 'Je vous ai trouvée si intéressante!' 'Vous me voyez plus calme. Il est mort!.... Je n'ai plus d'espérance'. 'Vous avez une consolation.... Cet enfant....' Elle poussa un long soupir, ses paupières se baissèrent, sa tête se pencha.... Elle fut long-temps immobile... Enfin, avec une baguette, elle traça sur le sable le chiffre de son amant. 'Voilà le monde, me dit-elle; le premier vent l'effacera: mais il est là pour toujours, en me montrant son coeur... Cet enfant, c'est son fils.... Hélas! Je devrais en être la mère!....' Et elle le couvrit des baisers....").

⁹⁹ See on this subject Van Sant, *Eighteenth-Century Sensibility and the Novel*, 109, and McGlynn, "Sterne's Maria", 41.

¹⁰⁰ Anon., *The Letters of Maria, To Which Is Added, An Account of Her Death ...*, London, 1790, viii.

letters bear the inscription “Maria to St. Flos” (the boy-friend has been given a name, perhaps from *floscule*, little flower), but a few go in the opposite direction and towards the end Maria writes only to Annette. The writer has made frantic efforts to convey pure feeling, in a style that is vaguely reminiscent of Sterne, but which soon becomes boring because of the very restricted register at Maria’s disposal (a few samples for enthusiasts are given below¹⁰¹). The formula applied has at the same time forced the author to get Maria out of her lethargic condition. In order to be at all interesting she has to reflect on her situation, which causes the dark abyss that Tristram stares into to be largely closed. Maria’s madness now consists chiefly in her loyalty to the church that prepared her doom: St Flos is inclined to ignore the curate’s judgment and to go and cohabit with Maria, but she fears hell and purgatory, remaining greatly enamoured, after his disappearance, of Roman Catholic mysticism. This mild satire against Roman Catholicism is dissolved at the end of the book, for St Flos and Maria finally find each other and their salvation in a monastery. The editor adds that they both died a short time after their reunion – first Maria, knowing that St Flos was to follow soon. As if to destroy another of Sterne’s ironical trouvailles,¹⁰² the last pages are filled with the full inscriptions on their combined tomb.

Other remnants of the Maria cult at the end of the century are *The Whole Story of the Sorrows of Maria of Moulines* (1793) and *Sterne’s Maria: A Pathetic Story, With an Account of Her Death at the Castle of Valerine* (1800). The former is a compilation of the relevant fragments of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, complemented with a poem

¹⁰¹ “St.Flos! --- my St.Flos! --- whom by this time I ought to have called by a name if not more tender, at least more certain, more secure; is it possible to love with more sincerity than I do? --- and yet is not our attachment criminal? ... The Curate forbids our union;... The vengeance of the Church!---- Dreadful!”; “... Ah, Annette, how my ideas wander! —My brain is giddy —my head aches —My memory is quite, quite gone. — I know not how far I have wandered, or how I was enabled to support myself! It was the goodness of God protected me--- HE, HE, Annette, *tempers the wind to the shorn lamb*”; “... When the shades of evening begin to descend, I play my Evening Service to the blessed Virgin ... My faithful goat is my protector, and seats himself at my feet to guard me. Sometimes, perhaps, I behold a solitary cottage, and obtain a ready admittance ... Ah, Annette, Humanity is not confined to crowded cities; in these solitary cottages, far, far distant from the busy haunts of men, she lives in the greatest purity” (*The Letters of Maria*, 1, 73 and 74).

¹⁰² The tomb of the lovers Amandus and Amanda (*Tristram Shandy*, VII.31.627-29; VII.40.643).

and a few pages of text in which Yorick visits Maria's grave (this time lonely and anonymous): ("Alas, sweet maid, thou art gone! But it is to be numbered with Angels, whose fair representative thou wast upon earth —",¹⁰³). The latter contains much of the same.

In this market Isaac Brendan tried to offer a little extra by way of originality, but from what I have already quoted from his *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne* (1797) it is clear that no major intellectual leaps are to be expected. The subject of repressed female virtue is discussed by him in three combined fragments with the title "Anna" (see also fig. 24).¹⁰⁴ There Trim, greatly moved, tells of the agony of a war widow, who in spite of everything keeps her eye fixed firmly on a celestial eminence called GRATITUDE ("———She is bewilder'd, Trim — quoth my uncle Toby.———").



24. Stipple engraving illustrating "Anna"
(*Fragments in the Manner of Sterne*).

¹⁰³ Anon., *Sterne's Maria: A Pathetic Story, With an Account of Her Death at the Castle of Valerine*, London, [1800], 22.

¹⁰⁴ [Isaac Brendan], *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne*, 97-129.

Just as in the Grub-street imitations from the 1760s, the pathetic Sterne distillations from the 1790s resemble each other closely as regards style and content. Maria and Maria-like characters are introduced as objects of pity, sometimes within the scope of an appeal for charity, but more often without any reference to the world outside the book. The implicit reader finds himself in an exceptional position. If Turner and Raven are right, if this literature is indeed designed for young female readers from a financially safe segment of the middle classes, then they received, in the name of Sterne, the message that they are by nature both virtuous and vulnerable. An isolated late Sterne imitation, *La Souricière* introduces women with sexual desires and initiatives aimed at their gratification (see the Epilogue of this book), but such characters are found in the criminals' corner. Figures like Elizabeth Shandy or the widow Wadman, who possess a range of vices and virtues, seem to have disappeared from the interest of Sterne's direct imitators. In *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne* (1797), exclusively based on *Tristram Shandy*, the Shandy women no longer play a part.

The following chapter will discuss a theme that likewise seems to have passed out of the perspective of Sterne's imitators in the course of the century: the status of the medical profession. On the rare occasions it is touched on in a posthumous Sterne imitation, a difference is once again revealed with the patterns of thought of a previous decade.

Chapter Eight

Physicians

The opening chapters of *Tristram Shandy*, with the story about the spermazoid which through Elizabeth Shandy's unexpected question about the clock is accompanied by insufficient animal spirits are considered to be among the most original contributions by Laurence Sterne to English humorous literature.¹ But here too, originality is a relative notion. The idea of introducing one's hero as a homunculus swimming around and then one night penetrating into an ovum is something Sterne might have found in *The History of the Human Heart: or, The Adventure of a Young Gentleman* (1749).² Tristram's phrases ("—you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, as how they are transfused from father to son &c. &c.—and a great deal to that purpose clattering like hey-go-mad ... ") parody medical science at a Rabelaisian pitch.³

Sterne's intentions with his medical parodies are a popular subject for study. As always, various standpoints are possible. One may, with James Rodgers, find that in the chapters dealing with Tristram's begetting, Sterne is hitting out at all the mechanistic and vitalistic scientists of his time. According to Rodgers, Sterne was very knowledgeable in the field of medical theory, and he was eagerly awaiting the change of paradigm that was to be effected by the embryologist von Haller.⁴ Other people

¹ J.B. Priestley, *English Humour*, London, 1976, 44.

² Maurice Johnson, "A Comic Homunculus Before *Tristram Shandy*", *Library Chronicle*, 31 (1965), 83-90.

³ In *Tristram Shandy*, Vol. I, Chapters 1 and 2, it is specifically Locke who is paraphrased (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Par. 6), intermixed with sentences and terms from *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (420, 713). See *Tristram Shandy, The Notes* to these chapters.

⁴ J. Rodgers, "'Life' In the Novel: *Tristram Shandy* and Some Aspects of Eighteenth Century Physiology", *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 6 (1981), 2/3, 1-20. Rodgers tries to join in with the epistemology of Foucault: "At the 'archaeological level,' ... *Tristram Shandy* and the nascent life sciences evolve out of shared preconceptions about the constitution of knowledge and the characteristics of life" (*ibid.*, 1). Obviously, Sterne as a carrier of the (Foucaultian) epistème of Man and History is pretty early. Rodgers, however, tries to adapt his phasing: in his view, Tristram initially, in the first four volumes, sketches characters in two ways, that correspond at the "archaeological level" to the two current classification systems in natural history, those of Linnaeus and Buffon. Characterization according to the Hobby Horse corresponds to the selection of principal characteristics

have wondered whether Sterne was in fact deeply interested in scientific progress.⁵ Roy Porter and Judith Hawley assume that in *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne is satirizing life itself. The medical vocabulary provides Tristram with metaphors with which he can make imaginable how and why things went wrong in his life. Whether the presentations of the body are accurate or even up to date seems to matter less.⁶

There is something to be said against both positions. For Sterne's even potential knowledge of the latest medical discoveries, there is no indication whatever. However, in 1759 he did write to his publisher Dodsley that his book would deal with "the Weak part of the Sciences, in w^{ch} the true point of Ridicule lies",⁷ which suggests that there is also a strong part. I do not pretend that the knots can be disentangled, but a summary of the imitations at least gives us some idea of the satirical ingredients that his contemporaries found attractive. As a matter of course, most of the imitators went in for theory and practice of procreation, pregnancy and confinement.

Theory

In order to be able to establish in how far a medical satire is progressive in the sense that it must castigate ignorance, one should know something of the level of knowledge of the target audience – in Tristram's case round about 1760. As yet, however, it is impossible to get any clarity. If the Enlightenment had, as Roy Porter puts it, the character of a melting pot anywhere, it is in the field of medical progress.⁸ According to Shorr, medicine was the last of the *artes* to be founded on an empirical basis in

(Linnaeus); characterization through a meticulous analysis of formative details runs parallel with the method of total comparison (Buffon). After that (from volume V), Sterne introduces a principle of gestalt, and we see the "full emergence of the living novel" (*ibid.*, 12): "there is no way of systematically predetermining what is central and what is irrelevant to the whole of the novel until its growth ends" (*ibid.*, 14).

⁵ Friedli thinks that Sterne believed in progress in the field of psychology, admitting that apart from that he had little Enlightenment optimism (Hannes Friedli, *Reflexionen der Fortschrittsidee in Laurence Sternes Tristram Shandy*, Bern, 1988, especially 240-42).

⁶ Roy Porter, "Against the Spleen", *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, and "'The Whole Secret of Health', Mind, Body and Medicine in *Tristram Shandy*", in *Nature Transfigured: Science and Literature, 1700-1900*, eds John Christie and Sally Shuttleworth, Manchester and New York, 1989; Judith Hawley, "The Anatomy of *Tristram Shandy*", in *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, eds Marie Mulvey and Roy Porter, London, 1993.

⁷ *Letters*, 74.

⁸ Porter, "Against the Spleen", 84.

the course of the eighteenth century.⁹ Old and new theories, conventional wisdom and critical anamnesis were adhered to indiscriminately by individual physicians as well as by laymen, and combined in various ways.

Sterne derived much of his knowledge of current scientific notions from Ephraim Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (6th edition, 1750). A perusal of the medical articles of that work may give one an impression of the confusing variety of ideas and theories. Chambers praises the scholars of his days for their preference for experimental methods, and summarizes methods which, although they may perhaps with hindsight be considered incorrect, at any rate are founded on observation and a mechanistic sort of logic. A scientific spirit emanates from Chambers' discussion of the working of the eye, the nerves and irritability. In between, however, he voices, with equally great authority, what some people would probably have called exploded opinions. The body is still described in Galen's terms as being composed of solid matter, humours and spirit. In his classification of diseases Chambers follows Boerhaave and Sydenham, which implies that pathology amounts to a wrong mixture of humours, and that a cure depends on the expulsion of *materies morbi*.¹⁰ In addition, Chambers defends the possibility of the body being influenced from a distance, for instance, by the planets reflecting particles of sunshine, thereby subtly changing the relations between the body fluids, or by certain amulets that give off imperceptible effluvia to the bloodstream.¹¹ Finally, the *Cyclopaedia* contains numerous medical anecdotes which, coming as they do from celebrities, are not provided with critical commentary. The wondrous world of Chambers consequently has room, among others, for children that are born without brains and nevertheless stay alive for a few days, and for mammals that grow in the stomach of the mother and are then regurgitated.¹²

In apparent contradiction with the obvious lack of hierarchy in Chambers, the Grub-street authors seem sometimes to have assumed that

⁹ Philip Shorr, *Science and Superstition in the Eighteenth Century: A Study of the Treatment of Science in Two Encyclopedias of 1725-1750*, New York, 1967, 30.

¹⁰ Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, entry for "Disease".

¹¹ *Ibid.*, entries for "Astrology", "Amulet".

¹² *Ibid.*, entries for "Brain", "Voiding".

with the account of Tristram's begetting, Sterne is ridiculing antiquated prejudices. The account is indeed based on relatively old literature. The idea that for the creation of a full-fledged human being the homunculus had to be animated with animal spirits Myer is unable to find in any text after Nathaniel Highmore's *The History of Generation* (1651). That within the confines of this theory a sudden disruption of the animal spirits might be harmful to the growing individual may be obvious, and it is also in line with Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693).¹³ Nevertheless, the theory of the animal spirits as such seems still to have had every possible *raison d'être*. Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* informs its readers that

The existence of the *animal spirits* is controverted; but the infinite use they are of in the animal oeconomy and the exceedingly lame account we should have of any of the animal functions without them, will keep the greatest part of the world on their side. And, in effect, the learned Boerhaave has gone a good way towards a demonstration of their reality.¹⁴

The scholars of the Enlightenment as a rule re-interpreted old ideas rather than rejecting them. Boerhaave speculated about "a glandular secretion of a very subtle active fluid in the brain",¹⁵ and because those kinds of material had already in Newton's days been termed "spirits", it was useful to prolong the term "animal spirits". Tristram's concrete image of the vital spirits as traipsing up and down a garden path links up with the scholastic interpretation of the notion, but thanks to the continued existence of the term in modern medical literature, that interpretation remained attractive to more laymen.

The personae of *The Clockmakers Outcry* (1760) are such laymen. As always, they warn against Tristram's scant knowledge of the matter, but the reader may surmise that they themselves also missed out on the latest developments:

Our would-be multifarious author exposes himself [...] in many of his unaccountable excursions, as we have been informed by members of a

¹³ Valerie Grosvenor Myer, "Tristram and the Animal Spirits", in *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, ed. Valerie Grosvenor Myer, London and Totowa: NJ, 1984, 100-101.

¹⁴ Chambers, *Cyclopaedia*, entry for "Spirits".

¹⁵ Quoted by Myer, "Tristram and the Animal Spirits", 104.

club we belong to; in which there are men eminent in all the sciences, and in the liberal as well as mechanic arts. Thus then he particularly exposes himself, where he bunglingly wanders to the physiology of the generation of the human species.

P.2. There he advances, "You have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits, *as how* they are transfused from *father to son, &c. &c.*" Whoever has heard so, has heard a very great error, bold Pseudo-Theorist.

The absurd account of the activity and motion of the animal spirits, &c. must make a tasteful reader yawn, and throw the book out of his hand with contempt, when he thinks on the elegant and delightfully, as well as decently entertaining manner in which sweet MATT. PRIOR marshals the animal spirits through every stage of life, under the direction of his captain-general the soul, mounted on a war-horse in the brain, to wit, DES CARTES's *Pineal Gland*.¹⁶

Thanks to their learned friends, the Clockmakers know that Tristram's remark about the transfusion of animal spirits is incorrect. Their reference to Matthew Prior's philosophical poem *Alma, Or the Progress of the Mind* (1718) as a place where an alternative description of the animal spirits can be found, makes it unlikely, however, that they are moving in higher scientific circles. *Alma* repeats, in part seriously, the old animus theory, and is for another part satirical.¹⁷ The Clockmakers have obviously not heard of Buffon or Needham and, moreover, are blind to irony. That, as Descartes had maintained, the pineal gland should be the abode of the soul, was believed in the early eighteenth century by Martinus Scriblerus and Walter Shandy,¹⁸ but not by Matthew Prior, who probably dug up the material for this part of his poem at the Scriblerus club.¹⁹

The humour here seems to consist in a demonstration of overdue maintenance of general knowledge. Belief in medical notions of more than ten years old is not thought advisable. A few references to the phenomenon of pica suggest a similar idea.

Pica stood for the influence that the imagination and the unanswered

¹⁶ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 20.

¹⁷ The relation with *Tristram Shandy* is discussed in Mark Loveridge, "Liberty in *Tristram Shandy*", in *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, ed. Myer, 133 ff.

¹⁸ *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, 137; *Tristram Shandy*, II.19.173.

¹⁹ Kerby-Miller, in *The Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus*, 286.

desires of the mother especially had on the foetus. The existence or otherwise of that influence was a subject for debate in the first four decades of the eighteenth century,²⁰ and possibly, Sterne thought of it as he was writing the chapters about Tristram's conception. Perhaps there is a link between Tristram's messing about with time in his story and Elizabeth's question about the clock. The blow on Tristram's unborn head can have penetrated through Walter, for according to John Maubray's *The Female Physician* (1724), the state of mind of the father during copulation contributes just as much to the formation of the foetus as that of the mother in the following months.²¹

The pseudo-Tristram of *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* confirms that he is a victim of pica, although he does not so much explain his destroyed notion of time in this way, as his general sadness. He was begotten "θαλιη ενιπολλη" (without pleasure), and consequently it is only the Frenchman whose mother went to look at a public breaking on the wheel during her pregnancy, who is worse off.²²

In one of the first scenes of *The Dramatic History of Master Edward* (1763), the father of one of the heroes, old Mr David Llwyddwhuydd, expresses his fear that not giving in to the wish of his pregnant spouse may lead to the dying out of his magnificent family name. The woman feels a violent urge to take the nose of Llwyddwhuydd's business partner into her mouth. To persuade his partner, Llwyddwhuydd cites as many as eleven medical authorities who reported thirteen cases altogether of pica. Among others, we get Swammerdam's story about the Utrecht woman who produced a child with black spots after seeing an African, and a story by Aldrovandus, about a woman who was hungry for a lobster and consequently gave birth to one. To Llwyddwhuydd, the most disquieting account was that of a woman expecting triplets, who every now and then wanted to bite a baker in his bare arm. Because she was prevented from doing this at two thirds of her pregnancy, one of the three children died in the womb.²³

²⁰ P-G. Boucé, "Imagination, Pregnant Women, and Monsters in Eighteenth-Century England and France", in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, eds G.S. Rousseau and Roy Porter, Manchester, 1988, 92-95. The idea lived on until far into the nineteenth century, thanks to *Aristotle's Master Piece*.

²¹ G.S. Rousseau, "Pineapples, Pregnancy, Pica, and *Peregrine Pickle*", in *Tobias Smollett: Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp*, ed. P-G. Boucé, New York, 1971, 84-85.

²² *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, 1760, 7.

²³ George Alexander Stevens, *The Dramatic History of Master Edward*, 4-12 in the

All these fantastic stories remind us of the one by Nathaniel St André about Mary Tofts, the famous rabbit breeder of 1726, and one would think that, ever since Pope's hilaric satire against all those who had given St André the benefit of the doubt,²⁴ readers had no need to be further educated. When the Yorick of *Yorick's Meditations* (1760) warns people that "if the mother has too strong an imagination, 'tis ten to one but the child is born with the head of a dog",²⁵ the irony seems to be safe and dated.

G.S. Rousseau, in a discussion of a number of sources, among them *The Dramatic History of Master Edward*, comes to a different conclusion. According to him, the medical scholars quoted by Stevens had great authority nearly everywhere until the 1760s. Rousseau's sources are all of them earlier than that, and moreover partly fictitious,²⁶ but there is some reason to assume that at least part of the public had to be disillusioned. As late as 1772 an open letter about pica by an unmentioned physician was found important enough to be reprinted in *The Beauties of the Magazines*. With numerous arguments, the physician refutes the stories of Swammerdam and others, after assuring the lady to whom the letter is addressed that she need not be ashamed of her ignorance.²⁷

Reading and comparing comments like this, one should probably bear

illustrated edition (London, 1785).

²⁴ Pope, *The Discovery: Or, The Squire Turned Ferret* (1726).

²⁵ *Yorick's Meditations*, 79-80.

²⁶ In "Pineapples, Pregnancy, Pica", 93-94 (the paper was reprinted without corrections in G.S. Rousseau, *Enlightenment Borders: Pre- and Postmodern Discourses, Medical Scientific*, Manchester, 1991), he writes that "Throughout the 1740s ... *The Gentleman's Magazine* ... contained no fewer than ninety-two articles (essays, reviews and letters) on the question of extraordinary childbirth". In the accompanying footnote, Rousseau states that "A list of references is too long to be given here. The two cases that attracted the most attention were 'A Foetus of Thirteen Years,' *The Gentleman's Magazine*, XIX (1749), 415, and in the same publication, 'Fatal Accident: Woman carry's a child sixteen years,' XIX (174), 211". In her annotated index to *The Gentleman's Magazine* for the 1740s (unpublished offspin of her book *Magnitude in Marginality, Edward Cave and The Gentleman's Magazine, Containing a First-Line Index of all the Poems, With Notes and References on Authorship*, Overveen, 1999) Titia Ram has counted no more than three references to unusual births or pregnancies, among which the two mentioned by Rousseau.

²⁷ Anon., "A Letter from a Physician on the Effects of Imagination in Pregnant Women", in *The Beauties of the Magazines*, London, 1772, 176-84.

in mind that satirists and the editors of most periodicals had different groups of readers in mind as their targets. George Alexander Stevens and the anonymous imitators reacting to *Tristram Shandy* were most probably thinking of a well-read, male public. In a sense, the references to the pica phenomenon are an extension of the satire against women.

A more complex type of satire arose round Tristram's homunculus, though the Clockmakers reproach "the Author of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy" for this unequivocally: "Most of what he says about the *Homunculus* is false and absurd; besides (heaven forgive the poor man's weak and obscene attempt!) *Lewenhoeck's* system of *animalcula in semine humano* hath long, long since been viewed in all the possible lights of drollery and ridicule, in the schools of physic of the different universities of Europe, by ingenious students; which subject ought to be confined there, or to the books of their art."²⁸

The animalculistic theory that van Leeuwenhoek had found confirmed by his discovery of the spermazoids, was controversial already in the seventeenth century, but, as Louis Landa has shown, round 1760 it was not yet so antiquated as the Clockmakers wish to suggest.²⁹ Among those who believed that the whole human being is there in the male sperm, and that the ovum is just a safe bed, were members of the Royal Society. Boswell did not doubt the correctness of this theory, finding in it an argument against his sisters' rights of inheritance.³⁰ The earliest opponents were frightened especially by the implication of waste. If every homunculus was in fact a full-fledged embryo, then even during a legitimate impregnation innumerable individuals were lost. That seemed clumsy and unnecessarily cruel on the part of God.³¹

Tristram alludes vaguely to that implication by describing the

²⁸ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 21-22.

²⁹ Landa quotes from *The Clockmakers Outcry*, without mentioning that according to this pamphlet the animalculistic theory was antiquated (Louis A. Landa, "The Shandean Homunculus: The Background of Sterne's 'Little Gentleman'", in *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature: Essays in Honour of Alan Dugald McKillop*, Chicago, 1963, 50-51). The remainder of Landa's article proves that that theory was at any rate seriously discussed until after the middle of the eighteenth century. The question remains whether the Clockmakers were or were not familiar with the latest recombination theories (for these, see Shirley A. Roe, *Matter, Life, and Generation: Eighteenth-Century Embryology and the Haller-Wolff Debate*, Cambridge, London and New York, 1981, 13-20).

³⁰ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 667n.

³¹ Landa, "The Shandean Homunculus", 63-64.

homunculus as a being with “all the claims and rights of humanity”,³² and more directly by proposing to have all homunculi baptized, if possible, “*par le moyen d’une petite canulle, and sans faire aucun tort a le père*” before consummation of the marriage.³³

Once more the Clockmakers are annoyed, in the first place because of the ungrammatical French,³⁴ but especially because of the proposal itself, which, they state, is anatomically ridiculous: “This indefatigable blunderer has not been aware that the contents of the *vesiculæ seminales* in the male sex, and of the *ovaria* in the female, are out of the reach of any *Injection* whatsoever by the structure of the parts.”³⁵ The reference to the ova as entities to be baptized has been prepared in an earlier paragraph, where the Clockmakers claim that Tristram in the challenged passage is not consistent, keeping the possibility open “that all the animalcula are complete in the ovaria of the woman”.³⁶ Landa does not understand this development in *The Clockmakers Outcry*, thinking that the author of the pamphlet (he assumes a single hand) has read Sterne very badly and/or has wanted to show that he was au courant with a rival theory, that of the “ovists”.³⁷ Landa need not have gone so far, for it is obvious that Tristram’s passage about the homunculi in the father has here simply been ignored to be able to score a double entendre.

A writer who does seem to have wanted to show off his knowledgeability is the author of the spurious *Vol. IX* of *Tristram Shandy* (1766). Rather belatedly, in view of the contents of Sterne’s preceding eight volumes, Tristram here expounds his procreation theory. Moreover, at the instigation of a physician and one of the tutors he appears in this volume to have had (see also Chapter 9 in the present book), he puts his knowledge in a historical framework. Tristram opens with the theory of Hippocrates that male and female seed melt together

³² *Tristram Shandy*, I.2.3.

³³ *Ibid.*, I.20.70.

³⁴ This is evidence that they possessed the first edition, published in York, of *Tristram Shandy* I and II: in Dodsley’s impression the “à le pere” that Sterne wanted was corrected, and the London public did not know what the Clockmakers were talking about (Bandry, *Tristram Shandy: Créations et imitations*, 215). For Sterne to have been behind *The Clockmakers Outcry* seems to me, then, less rather than more probable.

³⁵ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ Landa, “The Shandean Homunculus”, 61.

and that the sex of the embryo is determined by the dominance of one of the two.³⁸ Then follows the more elaborate theory of Hervey and other “ovists”, according to which “the semen masculinum did not create, but only animate”,³⁹ and finally, Tristram discusses the story of “one Mr. Lewenhoek”, which (as will by then be sufficiently clear) he finds the most attractive. The author has tried to copy the tone of Sterne’s opening chapters, but his Tristram is both more digressive and more correct in his explanation than the original:

The ovarium communicates with the uterus by means of a small tube, one end of which is fringed, resembling fingers, and is called by the gentlemen of *Warwick Lane*, *Morsus Diaboli*; it hangs loose over the ovarium. Now when once the sexes have obtained the *summa voluptas*, millions of the animalcules abovementioned are shot, point blank into the uterus. — Instinct teaches them the nearest way up the small tube to the ovarium, so away they go, crossing and jostling, kicking and biting, till one of them has the good fortune to arrive at the small hole in the side of the ovum, into which it enters, and leaves its tail sticking in the passage The little animal being now in possession of the ovum, the *morsus diaboli* clasps the ovarium, and squeezes [*sic*] the ovum with its now inhabitant down towards the uterus. — The ovum becomes the nidus to the embryo, and grows fast to the side of the uterus, from whence it draws its nourishment, — as plants do from their mother-earth.⁴⁰

Although Sterne has not adduced more than a single hint in confirmation,⁴¹ it is easy to see how a male chauvinist like Walter Shandy must have been enamoured of this theory before Tristram could come to know it. The author of the spurious *Vol. III* (1760) assumed that uncritically: in that volume, Walter tells Uncle Toby in detail that “in generation the woman is but little different from being entirely passive. The disposition, figure, situation, number, activity, etc., etc., etc., of the homunculi depend on the male.”⁴² It is, then, a little strange to see that in

³⁸ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. IX*, 102. A father of daughters, therefore, had weak sperm.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-107.

⁴¹ Walter is against maternal authority: the mother “is under authority herself, said my father: — and besides, ... — she is not the principal agent, Yorick” (*Tristram Shandy*, V.31.468).

⁴² *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III.*, 11.

the spurious *Vol. IX*, the account just quoted should be a revelation to the pseudo-Walter there. Tristram looks back on an episode in his adolescence, when he was beginning to take an interest in this kind of things and could also enlighten his father.⁴³ It is also remarkable that Tristram's summing-up should inspire Walter immediately to give theological comment:

I make two reflections, says the old gentleman, upon my son's theory. The first is, that once in our lives we have run a race against thousands of our equals, and obtained a victory. The second is, that the devil lays his clutches upon us the moment of our conception. ——— The one may raise our vanity, but the other should mortify our pride.⁴⁴

This passage reflects a more general tendency in the spurious ninth volume, to transform both Tristram and Walter to more or less serious Christians with an interest in modern science. In this volume, Tristram's tutors have been introduced for the satire against old and materialistic notions – about which more later on. The Shandy's represent primitive faith with a deistic slant, and it does not look as if the real author wanted to present them as ridiculous. Tristram praises Walter for his modern interpretation of original sin.⁴⁵

He himself had also felt the humbling effect of van Leeuwenhoek's discovery, though his vision is less original. The image of the spermazoids seems to him in itself an effective medicine against delusions of grandeur. If he was a court jester, he would say daily to his employer, "O king, thou wert a tadpole".⁴⁶

The author of this continuation possibly borrowed this last-mentioned joke from another Sterne imitation. In *Yorick's Meditations* (1760),

⁴³Tristram has discussions with his father in the spurious *Vol. IX*. Within Sterne's time scheme, this is exceptional. Only in *Tristram Shandy* VIII.27.616-21 does Tristram make mention of a moment when he might be a discussion partner for Walter, Toby, Trim and Obadiah, namely during his grand tour. When Tristram reaches maturity they are all dead. The author of the spurious *Vol. IX* has in general paid little attention to Sterne's underlying schedule; Tristram is, for instance, present at the wedding of Toby and the widow Wadman.

⁴⁴*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. IX*, 111-12.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 112.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 106.

Alexander the Great is put in his place by being represented as an invisible mannikin in Philip's genitals, "Oh! King of Persia, remember thou wert once a homunculus".⁴⁷ This rather feeble, but obviously repeatable joke is typical of the sort of learned wit that people thought they would find in Sterne: "two parts jest and one part earnest."⁴⁸ The part earnest may need some explanation.

Since in these imitations, as also in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*, an ironic light shines over the whole procreational scene, the satire against great men seems rather ineffective. It is, however, imaginable that to contemporary readers the presentation of a king as a homunculus had a serious flavour. The discoveries that owners of microscopes and telescopes were reporting about were seized upon by many people in the eighteenth century to remind others of the relative importance of human ambitions. The existence of innumerable little creatures in a drop of sperm led directly to the thought of millions of people on a tiny planet. Mentioning the ambition of kings, as "Yorick" and the Tristram of the spurious *Vol. IX* do sarcastically, was a commonplace that could be visited seriously. Henry Baker, in *The Microscope Made Easy*, from "microscopical Animalcules" comes to speak of the relation of man to the universe, asking the rhetorical question "What then is the mightiest Monarch that ever lived!"⁴⁹ In a text published as Sterne's *Fragment inédit*, the deeds of Alexander are compared to the swarming creatures in the microscopic world.⁵⁰

Pride is perhaps the most frequently discussed sin of sermon literature, and both the main subject and the thematic problem of Augustan satire. Pride must be fought, but doing that is in itself an instance of pride. This paradox fosters the seemingly self-destructive rhetoric of Sterne and Swift. As we have seen, the author of *Yorick's*

⁴⁷ *Yorick's Meditations*, 49.

⁴⁸ *Tristram Shandy*, IV.29.389.

⁴⁹ Henry Baker, *The Microscope Made Easy: Or, The Nature, Use and Magnifying Powers of the Best Kinds of Microscopes Described, Calculated and Explained ...*, London, 1747, 303.

⁵⁰ A similar physico-theological warning against pride can be found in Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (ed. J.T. Boulton, 1958, II, 72-73), from 1757. New thinks there are links between Baker's book, *Tristram Shandy* and the *Fragment Inédit* (Paul Stapfer, *Laurence Sterne, Sa personne et ses ouvrages, Étude précédée d'un fragment inédit de Sterne*, Paris, 1882; Melvyn New, "Laurence Sterne and Henry Baker's *The Microscope Made Easy*", *SEL*, 10 [1970], 591-604).

Meditations also causes confusion, but he sometimes seems to rely less on the critical faculties of his readers. The whole “Meditation upon the Homunculus”, in which the reference to Alexander is to be found, is inclined, in the uncomfortably bantering manner of “Yorick”, towards a Christian appropriation of the animalculistic theory. In the opening phrases, van Leeuwenhoek is attacked ironically, so that it seems that we need not take his physiological model seriously: “Immortal luyenhokius, thou most profound of all philosophers!” ... etc.⁵¹ The sneer is, however, intended especially for the virtuosi who attached to discoveries like van Leeuwenhoek’s deterministic and materialistic conclusions – although one has to know them to be able to grasp the irony: “If the actions of men, and all that befalls them in the course of their lives, depend, in a great measure, upon the principles of which their constitution is formed, it follows of consequence, that these principles being the same in the homunculus, all the future actions of the man are determined by the nature of the constituent particles of the homunculus.”⁵² With his other conclusions, the author in no way deviates from the picture of the Calvinistic grub. “Yorick” claims that men, if they could determine with a “philosophic microscope” what was to emerge from their spermatozoa, would probably remain childless. He concludes abruptly with the statement, taken from the Book of Job, that corruption is the father of us all.

The associations, from microscopes and animalcula to pride and corruption, tally with the picture that the *Critical Review* had formed in 1760 of Sterne’s intentions in *Tristram Shandy*. Without becoming ponderous, the pseudo-“Yorick” puts into words the Augustan fear that “empiric medicine”⁵³ confirms man in his inclination to shut out the Creator and death from his horizon. The presence of Swift in the first few volumes of *Tristram Shandy* could have suggested that this is also an important thought behind Sterne’s medical parody. If necessary, the idea would have been confirmed by the existence of *The Sermons of Mr.*

⁵¹ *Yorick’s Meditations*, 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 46-47.

⁵³ For Sterne a ridiculous notion in itself, is what is suggested by *Tristram Shandy’s Bon Mots*, 15.

Yorick, with its insistence on pride (“a very bad passion”)⁵⁴ and the unfavourable reference to “some of our busiest enquirers after nature”.⁵⁵

Practice

The ultimate symbol of pride in practice is, of course, Dr Slop, the man who not only adheres to the wrong faith, but also molests, with his modern forceps, the nose, and with his self-prepared ointments, the penis of the young Tristram. Slop is, to begin with, a caricature of one of Sterne’s opponents in the local politics of York, the accoucheur and medical publicist Dr John Burton. Sterne puts words in Slop’s mouth from Burton’s frustrated complaint against a better-known colleague accoucheur (*A Letter to William Smellie*, 1753),⁵⁶ and Slop’s forceps looks in all details like the improved medical instrument that Burton claimed he had invented.⁵⁷ Except perhaps among Sterne’s acquaintances, the portrait does not seem to have made any impression, however.⁵⁸ Whereas the hacks did not need more than a vague indication to recognize Dr Richard Mead (Kunastrokius), Sterne’s more explicit references to the publications and activities of John Burton⁵⁹ met with little response. If the London public, as Cash maintains, saw through the allusions,⁶⁰ then Burton was obviously not interesting enough to expand the satire against his person. In the spurious *Vol. III* of *Tristram Shandy*, Slop and John Burton seem to be different persons, for Slop there, in a

⁵⁴ *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 241. See also *ibid.*, 58 (“the worst of human passions ——— pride ——— spiritual pride, the worst of all pride ——— hypocrisy, self-love, covetousness, extortion, cruelty and revenge”) and Sermons 24 (“Pride”) and 25 (“Humility”) *passim*.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁵⁶ *Tristram Shandy*, III.17.221.

⁵⁷ Arthur Cash, “The Birth of Tristram: Sterne and Dr Burton”, in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented at the David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar*, ed. R.F. Brissenden, Canberra, 1968, *passim*. For pictures of Burton’s forceps, see *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Boucé, 214-15.

⁵⁸ Perhaps Burton was more easily recognizable in the first version of Volume I of *Tristram Shandy*. From a letter that Sterne sent with the copies printed in York of the definitive version of the first two volumes, we may gather that Dodsley had not thought that local satire would pay (see *Letters*, 81; Cash, “The Birth of Tristram” and *Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years*, 179-203).

⁵⁹ See *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, especially 121-22, 161, 165-66, 199-204, 215-16.

⁶⁰ Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 22-23.

discussion with Walter, appeals to “Smellie, Burton, Chamberlain, and every other doctor that has wrote about women and children”.⁶¹

The old tradition of satire against physicians in general and the somewhat later tradition of satire against that hybrid sex maniac, the man-midwife were, of course, continued round the character of Slop. The discussion mentioned earlier between Walter and the accoucheur in the spurious *Vol. III* is about the question of whether babies need clean nappies, which Slop contests vigorously. As we have also already seen, Slop in this volume also makes the wrong diagnosis when Dinah is lying in a swoon, and finally there is a suggestion of a sexual overture by our doctor towards Elizabeth.⁶² Still, Tristram’s tormentor plays a less striking role in the imitations and spurious volumes than in the original. In the spurious *Vol. III* he does make an appearance a few times, but he has no function in the plot. Moreover, his Catholicism seems to be forgotten. In *A Supplement to Tristram Shandy* (1760), Dr Slop is not present at the birth, and in the spurious *Vol. IX* (1766), he does not appear either.

In that spurious continuation, meanwhile, there is a good deal of activity round other practitioners. One Dr Querpo, an old friend of Toby’s who is asked for advice in the matter of the widow Wadman, enters the room saying that he has no truck with momentary ailments, but at least he appears to have had some schooling. Things are different with one “Mr. Bump, who practices, with great success, as an apothecary, surgeon and man-midwife.” This self-made expert takes action in the absence of a qualified doctor and as the performer of prescribed medical procedures. He follows Querpo “as the pilot-fish does the shark, and for the same reasons”.⁶³ When Querpo has gone on a journey, Tristram’s old nurse Mrs Bell falls into the clutches of this quack. A sore throat is treated by him with “all the medicines he could think of”, and with “blisters, cataplasms, sinapisms, liniments, and embrocations”, so that another doctor has to be found as soon as possible. One Dr Macnamara presents

⁶¹ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III.*, 215. This shows that the link Slop-Burton was not known. Notably, the Dr Slop who is the object of *Silenus* (Philater [pseud.], *Silenus, An Elegy Upon the Death of Doctor Slop ...*, London, 1773) is a clergyman.

⁶² *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III.*, 218-20.

⁶³ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. IX.*, 23.

himself, managing with a few pages of inimitable medical jargon (and in spite of his Irish accent) to convince both Walter and Tristram's tutor Mr Martin of his capacities. He suggests administration of "tea, made of *carduus benedictus*", an emetic. Mrs Bell dies of it, after which Macnamara concludes that her stomach has had a good deal of profit out of it and collects his guinea.⁶⁴ Jeremiah Kunastrokius tells a story along the same lines, about his father and one Doctor Frizzle-Tail, arguing over a Welsh baronet with a syphilis-infected nose.⁶⁵

Whatever Trevelyan and other historians may have asserted about England's medical Enlightenment in the eighteenth century,⁶⁶ for those who underwent its blessings, it was, in the words of Roy Porter, "the golden age of quackery".⁶⁷ The number of plays, broadsides, novels and poems in which the fear of the medical profession finds an outlet in black humour, is so large⁶⁸ that the imitators would no doubt have produced blundering doctors even without Sterne's example.

Related more closely to Sterne's text are the discussions and presentations of the midwife, although that, too, was a character with a past in fiction. The professional quarrel between Dr Slop and the local midwife, and the discussion between Walter and Elizabeth about which of the two was to bear the final responsibility for Tristram's delivery, had a topical background. Although Tristram discusses the situation in the first decade of the eighteenth century, early readers thought of the fight that had broken out over the publication of Elizabeth Nihell's *A Treatise on the Art of Midwifery*. Nihell's four hundred-page polemic against the practices of the man-midwives appeared in March 1760, so just after the publication of the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, but her book had been expected for some time.

During the first decades of the eighteenth century, the pressure on the

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-69.

⁶⁵ *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius*, 21 ff.

⁶⁶ See, for instance, G.M. Trevelyan, *Illustrated English Social History*, 4 vols, Harmondsworth, 1964, III, 91-94. For the opinions of other optimists, and for dissenting viewpoints, see Roy Porter, "Was There a Medical Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century England?", *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 5 (1982), 46-63.

⁶⁷ Roy Porter, "Before the Fringe: Quack Medicine in Georgian England", *History Today*, 36 (1986), 17.

⁶⁸ See Porter, "The Whole Secret of Health", *passim*; Peter Wagner, "The Satire on Doctos in Hogarth's Graphic Works", in *Literature and Medicine During the Eighteenth Century*, eds Marie Mulvey and Roy Porter, London, 1993, *passim*.

female professional group from the male medical establishment had strongly increased. Several universities had instituted chairs in obstetrics, and from there ever more surgeons and apothecaries with an extra specialization fanned out over the country.⁶⁹ Those who explicitly offered their services as man-midwives or accoucheurs were looked upon with disdain by their colleagues, and disqualified themselves for positions on the Board of the College of Physicians and the Company of Surgeons; but because the nobility and the well-to-do commercial classes offered good opportunities, many of them put up with the disadvantages. The possibilities for man-midwives increased thanks to their urbane and modern prestige, which was accented by the improvement of the forceps in the 1720s. This surgical instrument made it possible to deliver children that before had been doomed to die. It was increasingly used for ordinary deliveries as well, and so the doctor, who as a rule (and as Elizabeth Shandy stipulates) was kept in the background to be called upon only for emergencies, began to compete with the midwife.⁷⁰ The male midwives intensified this tendency by making much of the dangers of deliveries, in publications, and by accusing the traditional midwives of roughness, superstition and incompetence.

There was a small but stinging grain of truth in that last-mentioned reproach. Midwifedom had regulated itself in a sort of semi-official guild system, within which it was common for a midwife to have some schooling⁷¹ and to train with an experienced colleague for a few years before setting up a practice. To be able to get a licence, it was sufficient, however, to have a good name in the region and with the local clergyman who gave out the licence. Really ignorant midwives were probably to be found only in the lower regions of the market, but found they were, and they had a bad influence on the profession.⁷² At the same time, midwives

⁶⁹ Jean Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men: A History of Inter-Professional Rivalries and Women's Rights*, London, 1977, 22-29.

⁷⁰ Traditionally, physicians had the exclusive right to the use of medical instruments.

⁷¹ Specific classes and dissections were open to women. From the 1740s, women got their training in the newly founded lying-in hospitals (see Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, 25-28).

⁷² Not until the late nineteenth century was there any reaction to the call, both from some well-established physicians and from a number of better-off midwives in the cities, for a good regulation and training and for access to the new scientific insights for everybody (see Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, 116-26).

still had much credit among the population. Tradition and naturalness were their strong points.⁷³ Opponents of man-midwives pointed out the moral dangers of intimate contacts between the sexes⁷⁴ and the force of Dame Nature (not for nothing a female personification), who was better served with gentle hands than with instrumental interference.

The controversy intensified from the late 1730s, with publications by, among others, Brudenell Exton, William Clark, George Counsell, John Burton and William Smellie on the side of modernity, and Sarah Stone and the physicians John Douglas and Frank Nicholls on the side of the midwives. The latter group gained support in 1760 from Elizabeth Nihell and, so it seemed, from Laurence Sterne. In the first volume of *Tristram Shandy* he paints a portrait of a local midwife that, certainly in comparison with that of Dr Slop, may be called favourable: “In the same village where my father and my mother dwelt, dwelt also a thin, upright, motherly, notable, good old body of a midwife, who, with the help of a little plain good sense, and some years’ full employment in her business, in which she had all along trusted little to her own efforts, and a great deal to those of dame nature, —— had acquired, in her way, no small degree of reputation in the world; ”⁷⁵ Tristram relates how the woman, a recent widow with young children, had been set up by the wife of Yorick, and after that by Yorick himself, with a lobby among the female population and a licence, but after this introduction he loses the thread of his story. Nevertheless, the description is elaborate when compared to the scanty role that the midwife is to play in later volumes, and I suspect that originally, Sterne had further plans for this character.

If my assumption is correct, the change can be linked up with the publication of Nihell’s book. Sterne’s contemporaries must have thought, with the Clockmakers, “that the author of TRISTRAM is entered into an association with Mrs. *Elizabeth Nihell*, whose book against men-midwives hath, as is rumoured, greatly piqued them. It must be owned that *Tristram* deserves an invitation-card from Mrs. *Nihell*, in order that they may concert matters together to cry down male practitioners, which he seems inclinable to by all his wild ramblings on and from that

⁷³ A point that has been developed and been related to Tristram’s use of femininity as a metaphor in Robert A. Erickson, *Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth Century Fiction – Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne*, New York, 1986, 204-16.

⁷⁴ Roy Porter, “A Touch of Danger: The Man Midwife as Sexual Predator”, in *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment*, eds Rousseau and Porter, *passim*; Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, 30-31; Cash, “The Birth of Tristram Shandy”, 145.

⁷⁵ *Tristram Shandy*, I.7.10.

subject.”⁷⁶

Others followed suit. The Sterne persona of *Yorick's Meditations* (1760) repeats the usual objections against man-midwives, feeling encouraged by the recent publication of a book by a midwife.⁷⁷ In *Tsonnonthouan* (1763), Sterne is praised as a committed “obstetrick divine”.⁷⁸

The association with Nihell may have been uncomfortable for Sterne, because through it his work got a pamphlet-like character. Nihell went along with puritanical sentiments and fell upon the controversy in a way that was judged to be unsubtle and malevolent. That she was not a logical ally of Tristram's is underlined by the “Yorick” of *Yorick's Meditations*. He suspects that, in reaction to his defence of Nihell, “some critic, some pamphleteer, may join with the clock-maker's outcry, and express his surprise at seeing Yorick become the advocate of modesty”.⁷⁹ The same author also intimates that he really expected different ideas about midwives from Sterne. His “Meditation upon Midwives” opens with the statement – enigmatic, in view of the subsequent argument – “A Quack's as fit for a pimp, as a midwife for a bawd”.⁸⁰ For a moment, the reader is reminded of the old cliché of the midwife as matron of unwanted children and performer of abortions.⁸¹ Within the context of the recent discussion about midwives, this brief sentence probably had an added meaning. Theatregoers would have recognized the opening sentence (after the Prologue) of Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, and no doubt knew what followed: “they are stil [*sic*] but in their way both helpers of nature.”⁸² In this way, Nature, whose handmaid Nihell and the other midwives professed to be, is implicitly linked up by “Yorick” with the natural course of things in Wycherley's world. That the polemizing midwives, like everybody with a sound mind in Wycherley's play, wanted to secure their positions and were not really interested in the public cause was a widely heard insinuation.

A lack of familiarity with Sterne's predominantly positive portrayal

⁷⁶ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 32.

⁷⁷ *Yorick's Meditations*, 37-41.

⁷⁸ *Tsonnonthouan*, 34.

⁷⁹ *Yorick's Meditations*, 42.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸¹ Cf. Erickson, *Mother Midnight*, 21-28.

⁸² William Wycherley, *The Country Wife*, ed. John Dixon Hunt, London, 1978, 1-2.

of the average midwife can also be gleaned from some passages in the spurious *Vol. III* (1760). Apart from being a model of the limited chastity of women in general (see the previous chapter of the present book), the midwife is a paragon of superstition. Thus, a woman in the village who has borne a number of deformed children is a witch in the eyes of the midwife. This fact has consequences for newly born Tristram. When he has gone fast asleep, the midwife interprets that as a bad sign. Since, moreover, the supposed witch has been in the neighbourhood of Shandy Hall, she concludes that a curse has been laid upon the child, and she gives Elizabeth advice on the subject of exorcism.⁸³ These satirical attacks on midwives – in line with the prejudices that the men-midwives were using for their own purpose – do not seem to fit in with the portrait of the midwife in Sterne's fiction.

As we have seen, there is little to be said about the functioning of the midwife in *Shandy Hall*. She is first and foremost a backdrop to the misplaced arrogance of Dr Slop. When Slop is asked, through Susannah, to come to the delivery room as quickly as possible to hear from the midwife what complications have occurred, he feels that his name has been injured, and has the midwife summoned to come to him instead. When she has come downstairs she is further humiliated,⁸⁴ after which she disappears from the story. So far, there seems to be little wrong with Donnison's conclusion that Sterne consistently presents the midwife in a favourable light,⁸⁵ but what Donnison suppresses or has not seen is that in Tristram's story other reasons apart from that of the difficult delivery are given why Slop should replace the midwife. Susannah's account is hurried but significant:

—— BLESS my soul! —— my poor mistress is ready to faint, —— and her pains are gone, —— and the drops are done, —— and the bottle of julap is broke, —— and the nurse has cut her arm, —— ... and the child is where it was, continued *Susannah*, —— and the midwife has fallen backward upon the edge of the fender, and bruised her hip as black as your hat.⁸⁶

⁸³ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [Spurious] Vol. III*, Chapters 19 and 20.

⁸⁴ Slop doubts whether she can tell the head of the baby from the hips.

⁸⁵ Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, 29.

⁸⁶ *Tristram Shandy*, III.13.216.

Folklore and polemizing men-midwives liked to present the average midwife as not being averse to alcohol (see also fig. 25).⁸⁷



25. Rowlandson, *Midwife*.

Although in *Tristram Shandy* the midwife generally comes out more favourably than Dr Slop, the bizarre injuries of Elizabeth's assistants and the broken bottle of julap make clear that in this lost world nobody has reached the degree of perfection that Nihell attributed to herself and her colleagues.⁸⁸ Sterne's rejecting a further contrast with the optimistic

⁸⁷ Donnison, *Midwives and Medical Men*, 33. The complaint was not surprising, in view of the nature of the profession, which entailed long periods of waiting in the presence of palliative alcoholic liquors.

⁸⁸ On this issue Sterne's position seems comparable to that of Bonnell Thornton, who as "Mrs. Midnight" filled the columns of *The Midwife, or the Old Woman's Magazine* (1750-1755). Mrs Midnight is as stupid as may be expected from a midwife, but she saves more patients than her honourable male colleagues (see also Brown, "A Belated Augustan", 340).

introduction of the midwife is perhaps a reaction to the current controversy. If he had described both Dr Slop and the midwife extensively, the readers' attention might have been drawn too much to one part of his fiction. That of all the prejudices about midwives, Sterne should have brought especially their famous alcoholism into play, may be connected with the fact that the other cliché's had already been used in the imitations.

Exploded opinions

The physician and literary critic John Ferriar was the first, at the end of the eighteenth century, to discuss the background of Sterne's medical parodies in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Following a late eighteenth-century trend within neoclassicist poetics,⁸⁹ Ferriar assesses the quality of literary works in relation to the cultural period in which they appeared. So, in order to be able to see Rabelais and other French humorists with whom Sterne felt affinity, in perspective, he sketches the courtly atmosphere round the last princes de Valois. Rabelais and his followers belonged to "an age ... in which the heroic spirit of chivalry seemed to be tempered by letters, and the continued conflict of powerful and intrepid minds produced memorable changes, in religion, in politics, and philosophy". It was a period of transition, in which "rugged materials" were used to shake off old patterns, and that is what modern readers think of when they lose themselves in the remnants of those days.⁹⁰ Ferriar then praises Sterne for having polished away the crudest aspects of Rabelais, but Sterne's passion for the grotesque as such, says Ferriar, was unconnected with history and even with Sterne's real nature. As a child of his age, Sterne had a "natural bias to the pathetic". In the serious parts of his work he had relied on his own strength. When he wanted to be funny, however, he had looked at "the grotesque pictures of manners and opinions" of a bygone era, and it is that which makes *Tristram Shandy* so obscure: "changes of manners ... give an appearance of extravagance to what was once correct ridicule".⁹¹

Ferriar's notion of satire and its historical function leads to the conclusion that *Gargantua and Pantagruel* does clash with contemporary tastes, but that Rabelais is still the better writer. This

⁸⁹ Elizabeth L. Mann, "The Problem of Originality in English Literary Criticism, 1750-1800", *Philological Quarterly*, 18 (1939), 100.

⁹⁰ Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne*, 5-6.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

conclusion differs from Voltaire's judgment:

Voltaire has compared the merits of Rabelais and Sterne, as Satirists of the Abuse of Learning, and, I think, he has done neither of them justice. This great distinction is obvious; that Rabelais derided absurdities then existing in full force, and intermingled much sterling sense with the grossest parts of his book; Sterne, on the contrary, laughs at many exploded opinions, and abandoned fooleries, and contrives to degrade some of his most solemn passages by a vicious levity.⁹²

The idea that the scientific notions of Walter and Tristram were already obsolete when Sterne wrote his book has turned out to be incorrect. There are clear instances quoted by Ferriar such as the belief in astrology at which we can catch Walter twice,⁹³ but they do not dominate the whole book. The point is probably that round the middle of the eighteenth century the difference between what might be called reliable medical insights and superstition was less clear than Ferriar could imagine. Tristram derives his medical notions from all over the place, from ancient humoral scholastics and popular wisdom and from the latest iatro-mechanical science,⁹⁴ and it is not always clear which of these we should reject. As I said earlier, the animalculistic theory still had some prestige. In the same way, it may seem strange to expect a diet of cucumber seed to be able to cure mental diseases, but that was a belief that Tristram shared with many physicians of his day.⁹⁵ Sterne himself seems to have adhered reasonably well to the diet of vegetables and asses' milk that serious patients resorted to, and he let himself be bled regularly.⁹⁶

⁹² John Ferriar, "Comments on Sterne" (1793), in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 287.

⁹³ *Tristram Shandy*, III.3.23; V.28.461.

⁹⁴ Hawley's surveys illustrate this (Judith Hawley, "'Hints and Documents' (1): A Bibliography for *Tristram Shandy*", *The Shandean*, 3 [1991], 9-35; "'Hints and Documents' (2): A Bibliography for *Tristram Shandy*", *The Shandean*, 4 [1992], 49-65). New still thinks that Sterne aimed his arrows mainly at "enthusiasms of medical science" within the "modern" medical establishment (Melvyn New, "Sterne and *The History of Cold-Bathing*", *Notes and Queries*, 44 [1997], 211-12).

⁹⁵ *Tristram Shandy*, VI.40.570; *Tristram Shandy*, *The Notes*, 441.

⁹⁶ Porter, "The Whole Secret of Health", 63. An account by a certain W. Baster ("Observations on the Medical Treatment of the Rev. Mr. Sterne", 1776) suggests that

Walter's ideas are always more absurd, but often absurd ideas in *Tristram Shandy* remind one of how much people were in the dark. For instance, the passage where Walter agrees with Trim's suggestion that, speaking literally, life without brains is possible⁹⁷ could have been clarified by the editors of the *Florida Notes* with a reference not only to the anecdote mentioned earlier from the entry for "BRAIN" in Chambers' *Cyclopaedia*, but to the general discussion among theologians and natural philosophers about the question whether God, if He wanted to, could give the power of thinking to all matter. Sterne's position in that discussion cannot be deduced from *Tristram Shandy*. We live, as Tristram says with John Norris of Bemerton, Locke and Yorick, "amongst riddles and mysteries — ... and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works".⁹⁸

The early imitations are in this respect fairly faithful to their original. More attention is paid to really outdated ways of explanation such as pica, witchcraft and astrology⁹⁹ (by which the authors prove that they are not country bumpkins), but even then the first subject for satire is pride. Sterne, says Porter, "brings the quest for ultimate medical truth into question",¹⁰⁰ and a number of Sterne's earliest imitators add implicitly that he does that because there are higher truths available. No scientific system can really unriddle the body, and no physician or midwife escapes the universal ricketiness of body and mind.

Sterne's physicians could already have known better.

⁹⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, II.19.174.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, IV.17.350. The "riddles and mysteries" passage, which is a starting point for many a postmodern discussion of Sterne's work (see, for example, Lilian R. Furst, *Fictions of Romantic Irony*, Cambridge: Mass, 1984, 221ff.), is a repetition of *Sermons*, 21-30, derived verbatim by Sterne from Norris' *Practical Discourses* (1691). See New, "The Odd Couple" *passim*, for the implications of this derivation and the echoes in Norris' rival Locke.

⁹⁹ The protagonist of *Miss Sukey Shandy* (1760, 5) thinks that "so profound a philosopher" as her brother should have reckoned more with astrology. In the spurious *Vol III* (1760) we find an astrologer with the name Radical. In *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760, 36-37) Tristram himself is in favour of astrological explanations, in spite of the objections by freethinkers. In *Tsonnonthouan* (1764, 20) Sterne is represented as a great astrologer. The author of *Veni Vidi Vici Ivi* (1768, 18-19) says that "A conjurer cast the nativity of Mr Yorick and found that it appertained to the whole zodiac".

¹⁰⁰ Porter, "The Whole Secret of Health", 69.

Ferriar's boredom with "abandoned fooleries" suggests new priorities. It is not that Ferriar found satire against "speculative opinions" in general uninteresting, or that he was very critical of *Tristram Shandy*, but he had the idea that Sterne's humour had been noncommittal in comparison with that of Rabelais: "the application of the satire is more clear in Rabelais, [who] attacked boldly the scholastic mode of education ... and shewed the superiority of a natural method of instruction, more accomodated to the feelings and capacities of the young."¹⁰¹ There is a suggestion of progress in all fields, scarcely hidden behind the belief that Sterne is the imitator and hence the inferior writer.

There are too few indications to be able to claim that Ferriar represented a new generation of readers, unless negative indications are allowed as well. During the popularization of Sterne's work in the late eighteenth century, the enthusiasm for medical parody seems to have ebbed away among the imitators. The sham sentimental travellers would sometimes make mention of their nerves being on edge, but a droll jargon for the description of a grotesque body had become a rarity. The editors of *The Beauties of Sterne* (1782, 12th edition 1793¹⁰²) and *Extracts from Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey* (1799) permitted their readers to learn about Walter Shandy's ideas on name giving, but fought shy of everything to do with the physiology of procreation.

The notion that medical satire ought in the first place to be progressive is embodied in at least one imitation of *Tristram Shandy*, and that in one that appeared relatively shortly after his death. "A Sentimental Journey through Life" (1773) has little connection with the *Journey*, being one of many variations on Tristram's memoirs. In spite of his frequent use of typographical devices, the protagonist does not, in contrast to most Tristrams, make an unreliable or confused impression. The author seems more than anything else, to have sought a voice to bring the midwife controversy to rest, and he does it by firmly taking the side of the man-midwives.

One of the first chapters seems to set out to illustrate that women and womanly wisdom have their long-merited place. The hero's mother showed signs of anorexia during her pregnancy. Quacks threatened to

¹⁰¹ Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne*, 26.

¹⁰² The twelfth edition is in fact the first of a new selection.

worsen the situation, but “A good old woman, who had learned by experience more than the whole body of irregulars ... brought her safely to the critical minute”. Then things begin to go wrong:

My mother being set against the men-midwives by some persons of her sex, who had more *delicacy* than prudence, a woman was retained, who was desired by my father, if there should appear any difficulty in the case, to let him know, that a man might be sent for, as he had spoken to doctor ****, who promised to give his attendance on the most early notice.

But the midwife’s jealousy of the faculty so far smothered the cries of humanity, that she kept my mother for sixteen hours in her anguish, without making any application for farther assistance.¹⁰³

The father decided to try and find ****, who was found after some adventures, and “performed that operation, which never would have been performed had he not entered”. The physician even had to take action twice: the midwife thought that our hero was dead and pushed him under the bed, but the doctor “took me from my covert --- and though the members of life seemed to have lost their fire --- he recovered me --- and my cries gave my mother no inconsiderable delight”.

This is a summary of the first instalment of this story. The following seven instalments, which appeared between April and October 1773, continue along the same lines, with anecdotes around child care, baptism etc., in which women can always learn something from the male professionals. In the ninth volume, where the narrator jumps from his school years to his experiences at university, the story gains a little more momentum, but the real author died in a fire before he could hand in the tenth.¹⁰⁴

The periodical that permitted this didactic pseudo-Tristram to have his say, *The Sentimental Magazine*, was founded by George Kearsley, a producer specializing in magazines for ladies.¹⁰⁵ “A Sentimental Journey through Life” was probably started to compete with *The Lady’s Magazine*, in which, at practically the same time, the “Sentimental Journey by a Lady” mentioned in the previous chapter, was unfolded.

¹⁰³ Anon., “A Sentimental Journey through Life”, *The Sentimental Magazine*, March 1773, 8.

¹⁰⁴ *The Sentimental Magazine*, Nov. 1773, 390.

¹⁰⁵ *The Royal Female Magazine* was also owned by him (see Mayo, *The English Novel in the Magazines*, 289).

Nevertheless, an editor's Preface in the first instalment suggests that men, too, might find something to their taste in it. They would have to be men that played a part in cultural progress: "Our Ancestors placed their Amusement in Laughter, we place ours in Chastity of Sentiment. If they are more witty, they are less modest than us."¹⁰⁶

The changing market for printed matter is one element that may be related to the accent shifts and transformations that we found in late Sterne imitations. Before summarizing the trends and considering other related elements, I will once more compare early and late Sterne imitations – this time by focussing on the treatment of some philosophical notions.

As I pointed out in the Introduction, common opinion has it that Sterne's first readers did not look upon *Tristram Shandy* as a philosophical novel. This is true if by "philosophical novel" we mean a work of fiction which, as a whole, aims at developing or communicating an original vision of life or theory of knowledge, somehow related (maybe adversely) to the canon of Western philosophy. Indeed, there is little evidence that early readers realized how the intricate play with time and memory inherent in Sterne's general scheme interferes with some basic assumptions of British empiricism.¹⁰⁷ Nor have early readers left traces which may prove their understanding of the anti-normalizing qualities of Tristram's discussions and show of creativity.¹⁰⁸ That is to

¹⁰⁶ *The Sentimental Magazine*, March 1773, 3.

¹⁰⁷ A "realization" of the 1950s which has ensured the relevance of *Tristram Shandy* for modern readers for several decades (see John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1954; and Ernest Tuveson, "Locke and the 'Dissolution of the Ego'", *Modern Philology*, 52 (1954-55), 159-74; *The Imagination as a Means of Grace: Locke and the Aesthetics of Romanticism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962; "Locke and Sterne", in *Reason and the Imagination: Studies in the History of Ideas, 1600-1800*, ed. J.A. Mazzeo, New York and London, 1962; also Howard Anderson, "Associationism and Wit in *Tristram Shandy*", *Philological Quarterly*, 48 (1969), 1, 27-41; "Structure, Language, Experience in the Novels of Laurence Sterne", in *The First English Novelists: Essays in Understanding*, ed. J.M. Armistead, Knoxville: Tennessee, 1985; Holtz, *Image and Immortality*; Helene Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne*, Gainesville: FA, 1975 and James E. Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy: an Essay in Phenomenological Criticism*, New Haven, 1977.

¹⁰⁸ Wolfgang Iser, *Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy*; John Vignaux Smyth, *A Question*

say, eighteenth-century readers were not familiar with the terms, categories and pursuits of existentialist and postmodernist analysis.

However, many imitators and commentators were familiar with current philosophical discussions and sensed that Sterne had some opinion in these matters too. Even if they did not consider *Tristram Shandy* as a “Rhetoric” (John Traugott’s term) about the problematical sides of John Locke’s theory of knowledge, they did perceive that Sterne was interested in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and were not shy of interpreting and following his hints. Naturally, they did so within the framework of the eighteenth-century debates that Locke’s approach had occasioned. In so far as Sterne was dealing with philosophical concerns, these had to be the crucial issues of what we now call the Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment: the status of the soul or self and the validity and moral dangers of materialism and scepticism.

Chapter Nine

Philosophers

From the seventeenth century onwards, the defenders of Christianity recognized a connection between deistic or atheistic materialism and libertinism. According to one early eighteenth-century critic, the idea that thinking could be understood to be a property of matter, was propagated particularly “by the very Beaux ... in *Letters to the Ladys; to persuade 'em, for what ends 'tis not difficult to determine, out of their Immaterial and Immortal Souls*”.¹ Allegations like this can be encountered until the end of the eighteenth century.² The philosophical libertine is a stock figure, fully established in the 1760s.

The next double entendres in *Tristram Shandy* were therefore not only commercially useful and morally risqué, but could be linked up directly with supposed materialistic ideas of Tristram or even Sterne. For the Clockmakers, the situation was clear from the start. Where *Tristram Shandy* begins with a presentation of Walter and Elizabeth “Not saying their prayers”, the base philosophical justification could not be far away. The bed scene and the subsequent reference to the physiology of procreation had to be read as an ill-disguised espousal of materialism:

The Next step of all declared libertines, in order to give full swing to their lustful passions, and not be liable to their grating follower, Remorse; is to espouse the accursed doctrine of Materialism, which the author of TRISTRAM gives headlong into....

Thus in the very first paragraph of this perverse work the standard of copulation is erected, and the belief of the immortality of the soul kicked out of doors. A hopeful beginning truly!³

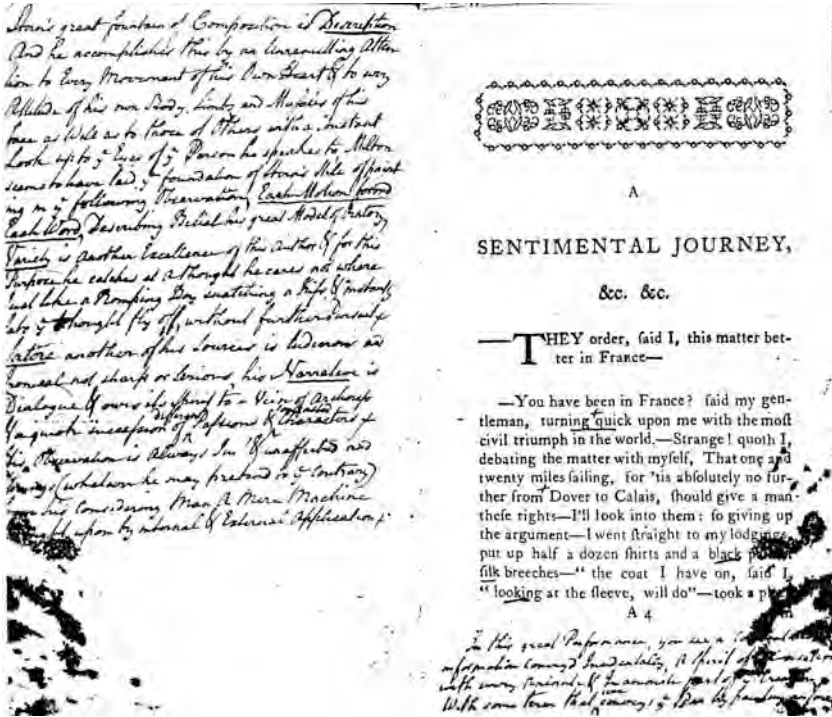
Although he does not quote any materialistically inspired passages, the author of *Miss Sukey Shandy* (1760) saw the same connection. He has Sukey praise her brother alternately for his openness in sexual matters, as

¹ John Witty, *The First Principles of Modern Deism Confuted*, London, 1707, v (cited in John. W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter: Materialism in Eighteen-Century Britain*, Oxford, 1983, 42).

² Yolton, *Thinking Matter*, 42-43, 119-20; James G. Turner, “The Properties of Libertinism”, *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 9 (1985), 75-87.

³ *The Clockmakers Outcry*, 19.

a philosopher, and as an unworthy clergyman.⁴ In this case, the identification of Sterne with Tristram is set up sardonically in the Grubstreet myth of social decline: not a satirical persona, but an acclaimed member of the Church of England holds materialistic notions.



26. Marginalia to *A Sentimental Journey* by the Earl of Clonmell.

⁴ *The Life and Opinions of Miss Sukey Shandy*, 5, 15-17.

And yet, the notion of an author promoting narratively the spread of materialistic principles, did not spring from the thirst for sensation of marginal authors only. At one moment Sterne must have begun to enjoy a serious reputation in this field, as appears, for instance, from the comments that the Earl of Clonmell wrote in the margins of his copy of *A Sentimental Journey* (see fig. 26). Clonmell read the *Journey* as a sort of case-history book of practical psychology, believing, moreover, that Sterne had sexual morals that he found pleasant.⁵ Presenting himself as a connoisseur in amorous matters, Clonmell describes in his comments what lessons can be drawn from Yorick's unfulfilled flirtations, and how women can be courted better. Although this does not appear explicitly, it is to be surmised that this image of Yorick as a libertine was for Clonmell an extra indication of what he had deduced first of all from the stylistic details of *A Sentimental Journey*, namely that Sterne had been a materialist. On one of the first empty pages, Clonmell scribbled: "His Observation is always Just & unaffected and springs (whatever he may pretend to the contrary) from his considering Man a Mere Machine Wrought upon by internal & External Application."⁶

This theme returns frequently in Clonmell's marginalia. From one of these, it appears that someone had informed him beforehand of this specific philosophical background of the book: "One great Source of Stern's Observation & Language is his considering Man as a Meer Piece of Clock-Work & so he I have heard constantly treated them ..."⁷ Once he realized this, Clonmell seems to have needed only the merest indication to know that Sterne's style and language presupposed a materialistic concept of man. "Machine" it says when Yorick, in

⁵ As appears from his marginalia, Clonmell considered Yorick's judgment of human nature and powers of observation to be radically important. These, after all, determined the style and rhetoric of the book, which, incidentally, he discusses very knowledgeably: "Stern's great fountain of Composition is Description: And he accomplishes this by an Unremitting Attention to Every Movement of his Own Heart & to every Attitude of his own Body, Limbs, and Muscles of his face as Well as to those of Others with a constant Look up to the Eyes of the Person he speaks to ..." (quoted in Paul Franssen, "Great Lessons of Political Instruction": The Earl of Clonmell Reads Sterne", *The Shandean*, 2 [1990], 164, see also fig. 26). The impression of libertinism may have been strengthened because Clonmell read *A Sentimental Journey* in the so-called fourth (pirated) edition, with in it the portrait with the four stars, reproduced here as fig. 13 (on page 105).

⁶ Quoted in Franssen, "Great Lessons of Political Instruction", 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 176.

connection with the “spirit” of the Franciscan monk, uses the word “regulated”.⁸ Clonmell clearly did not regard Yorick’s Sentimentalism as an acceptable code of conduct,⁹ and this also makes his comment on Yorick’s heart-rending protestation of love to Eliza during the Amiens scene¹⁰ understandable: “This I think shews Stern a Materialist.”¹¹ And when Yorick, quasi-astonished, mentions the “disagreeable sensation” caused by seeing the desobligeant,¹² Clonmell writes: “Which most clearly shews first that man is in his Opinion a Mere Machine, & that things are not decided by Reason further than as it is the Colouring of Passion.”¹³ Neither the special emphasis on compassion, nor Yorick’s explicit anti-materialistic remarks in *A Sentimental Journey*,¹⁴ nor even perhaps the orthodoxy of the *Sermons* (of which he seems to be aware), could suggest to Clonmell that Sterne wanted to see man as more than a complicated machine. Sterne was to Clonmell a materialist, whatever he may pretend to the contrary. If anybody should doubt that the content of a text is dependent on the reader’s preoccupations, this aristocrat’s marginalia can be taken as evidence.

Satires

It seems safe to suppose, with Mark Loveridge,¹⁵ that in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne is usually poking fun at the materialistic interpretation of Locke, but, as I said earlier, the irony is not always clear. Moreover, since it became increasingly difficult to associate a fascination for “the passions of procreation”, with orthodoxy (Clonmell’s reaction illustrates that difficulty just as much as Warburton’s), Sterne’s role as a rake or Covent-Garden-buck caused extra confusion. The author of the spurious *Vol. III* (1760) alludes to the problem by having Tristram express his regret over “those unfortunate pages in the first and second volume, which some have thought were intended to help on the design on

⁸ *A Sentimental Journey*, 100 (Franssen, “Great Lessons of Political Instruction”, 176).

⁹ Franssen, “Great Lessons of Political Instruction”, 184-85.

¹⁰ *A Sentimental Journey*, 148.

¹¹ Franssen, “Great Lessons of Political Instruction”, 176.

¹² *A Sentimental Journey*, 109.

¹³ Franssen, “Great Lessons of Political Instruction”, 176

¹⁴ *A Sentimental Journey*, 271.

¹⁵ Mark Loveridge, *Laurence Sterne and the Argument about Design*, London, 1982, 30-39, 76-78, 148.

overturning religious opinions ...”.¹⁶ Apart from the indecent passages, the pseudo-Tristram seems to refer also to passages that cause doubts as to the status of the soul – as the sequel suggests, especially Tristram’s sarcasm about the duplicity of the soul.¹⁷

The theory according to which the autonomous nervous system (anima) and the soul (animus) are independent of each other, was widely adhered to, probably, as the editors of the Florida edition of *Tristram Shandy* remarked, because it took the atheistic sting from speculations about the brains as the seat of identity and consciousness. Only few writers within the Christian tradition seem to have realized that their co-religionists who accepted the doctrine, had partly already capitulated before the arguments of materialistic philosophers.¹⁸ Sterne, who ascribes the theory of animus and anima to “these latter and more enlightened ages”, and has it originate with one “Metheglingius”, may be alluding to this danger too, but as will appear in due course, not everybody has interpreted this ascription in the same way. It was held against Locke that, by refusing to define the soul, he implicitly denied the theological definition of the soul as a thinking substance – and this seems to apply to Sterne as well. The scepticism poured by Sterne, through Tristram, over all psychological speculation could also be understood, by whoever felt so inclined, simply as a scepticism about the soul. While Sterne may have written with Bishop Butler in the background, for some of his readers Lord Kames stood watching in the wings.

In the early imitations, there is a marked tendency to take Sterne in protection, as it were, against himself. The author of the spurious *Vol. III* (1760) found it necessary to give the readers more support with regard to the problem of the soul than Sterne was wont to do. All “thinking beings”, this author has Tristram remark, are somehow aware of “that

¹⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [Spurious] Vol. III*, 70.

¹⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, II.19.174.

¹⁸ Robert Whytt complained about this: “Upon the whole, as I cannot agree with those who, in ascribing all our powers to mere matter, seem willing to deprive us wholly of mind; so neither, at the same time, do I see any reason for multiplying principles of this kind in man” (see *An Essay on the Vital and other Involuntary Motions of Animals*, 1763 [1751], 312 – cited in *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 197). From a moral theological point of view, unity of, or at least interrelation of animus and anima, of soul and “sensorium commune” was a prerequisite for the maintenance of a concept of personal responsibility (see Karl M. Figlio, “Theories of Perception and the Physiology of Mind in the Late Eighteenth Century”, *History of Science*, 12 [1975], 177-212).

perception within them or without them, or somewhere or nowhere, which they call soul".¹⁹ Those who try to rob their fellow creatures of this awareness are "silly creatures, never likely to succeed the chief difficulty these reformers find, is their own inconsistency".²⁰

At the end of this section, just when he is about to haul the "right honourables", by name, over the coals, the pseudo-Tristram eases up a little, startled, he says, by the "graver turn" the subject is prompting him to take. The danger of taking part in a philosophical debate is that of being carried away by the jargon and "the regular dulness of narrow-minded zealots". Shandeism, as this Tristram knows, ought to remain a weapon against dogmatism. "To be serious, is, in itself, an excellent thing; but, when improperly continued too long, it too often degenerates into moroseness and ill nature."²¹

Other orthodox-minded imitators, too, seem to have found, in the matter of materialistic views, the borderline between Fideistic scepticism and Phyrionism in the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*, too unclear. The Yorick of *Yorick's Meditations* (1760), although causing confusion about his intentions as always, repeatedly lashes out at "those sagacious philosophers, the materialists". Like the author of the spurious *Vol. III*, he seems to have found the arrogance of materialism especially irritating. Though he expects of the "bucket of philosophy" no less than that it will bring up "truth" from the bottom of the imaginary well, the certainty of contemporary philosophers that "in nothing we all end" is not acceptable to Yorick. A physiological notion of man, he writes, leads to non-explanations. From his illustration of this proposition it appears who it is especially that he holds responsible for the spread of materialism:

—suppose I was to ask you in what the smell of the violet consists—could you tell me—you'll doubtless answer no—because you are no philosopher—well, but I am, and yet I really know as little of the matter as you do yourself. Here one of those blockheads who have usurped the name of philosopher, would advance with a supercilious air, that the smell of a violet proceeded from certain contexture of the small particles of the flower, which is of a nature to affect the organs of those

¹⁹ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [Spurious] Vol. III*, 58.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 61, 60.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

that smell it just as it does, and no otherwise.—But what is this but saying, that it consists just in the very thing in which it consists—²²

The blockhead with the violet is perhaps Locke himself, and certainly a Lockean. Where Locke distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities, he gives as examples of the latter the smell and colour of a violet: the ideas of these are produced, through sight and smell, by “insensible particles of matter”, and therefore depend, as distinct from mass and extension, on the observer. How the specific ideas of smell and colour are related to the movements of the molecules, Locke pretends not to be able to account for, but he thinks it conceivable that “God should annex such *ideas* to such motions.”²³

The distinction between primary and secondary qualities is one of the most remarkable and notorious blind spots in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. As is well known, Berkeley remedied the inconsistency of it by presuming God’s presidium over perception to be complete, while Hume took the opposite course by showing that the connection between object and sensory perception is in all cases unknowable.²⁴ Now, whereas Yorick postulates the mysteriousness of perceived facts, he appears, superficially, to sympathize with Hume’s scepticism, but his statements elsewhere make clear that, more along the lines of Berkeley, or perhaps rather Malebranche, he is apt to see the transcendent origins of the world. What irritated him more than anything else in Locke is his tendency to accept material causes, which seemed to be an overture to the materialistic *Weltanschauung*.

The Yorick of *Yorick’s Meditations* alludes more often to atheistic ideas. A speculation consisting of variations on Montesquieu’s comparison between social factors and the mechanism of a clock is interrupted:

²² *Yorick’s Meditations*, 8-9.

²³ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 8, Par. 13.

²⁴ Berlin believes that Berkeley’s immaterialism even found its origin in the manifest inconsistency of Locke’s categorization (Isaiah Berlin, *The Age of Enlightenment: The Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, New York, 1956, 144-47). Although Berkeley mentions Locke, he also seems to be taking up position with regard to Malebranche. Hume’s *Treatise* begins with a discussion of Locke (David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, Oxford, 1978, 1).

Some red-hot theologian may very probably fulminate against me, as an adopter of the odious system of materialism. But reader, take my word for it that I am herein accused unjustly, as perhaps the author of the spirits of laws [*sic*] was before me. I think spirit as necessary to move the universe, as to keep the constitution agoing, and make no doubt that if nothing had existed but matter, it would have stood still from all eternity.²⁵

Orthodoxy seems to have a not very weighty supporter in this Yorick, with his unreasonable arguments, his preference for alcoholic refreshments and his enthusiasm for esoteric science. That does not alter the fact that the arguments he advances against materialism were well known and respected, and as such contrasted with his pronouncements in favour of, for instance, physiognomy. Although this Yorick-text can be read, then, like Sterne's book, in different ways, its creator, more so than Sterne himself, appears to have been taken aback by the possibility of Yorick's Christianity being in doubt. In a passage like the following, the irony is at any rate unequivocal and direct:

I doubt not but the critics will accuse me of credulity and superstition, but what care I? this is an atheistical age, and whoever believes anything out of the common road is sure of being stigmatized as superstitious—nay, there are certain persons who call themselves moral philosophers, who look upon every man as superstitious who believes the Christian religion.²⁶

If this explains anything at all, it is that a higher degree of probability is to be ascribed to the Christian articles of faith than to the other vague theories that Yorick is defending.

The ambiguous humour of *Yorick's Meditations* follows naturally from what is explained in the spurious *Vol. III* as Tristram's alertness concerning other people's, and especially his own, intolerance. Meanwhile, the authors of these two imitations are wrestling with the danger involved in Sterne's procedure, namely that the vaguely parodistic handling of materialism can be seen as a defence of it.

Tolerance is Tristram's consistent character trait in the spurious *Vol.*

²⁵ *Yorick's Meditations*, 13.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

IX (1766), too, but with respect to Tristram's views about materialism, the author of this continuation has come to a conclusion slightly different from those of the earlier imitators.

Deism in the spurious *Vol. IX*

Obviously in the realization that the characters Toby and Walter are not weighty enough to represent the extreme positions of orthodoxy and materialism, two new figures are introduced in the spurious *Vol. IX*, who, as teachers, push out the others from the stage. In their emblematic functions, these two types are related to Square and Thwackum, the tutors of Tom Jones, although the points of view of the two lie further apart, and moreover, Tristram, in contrast with both the hero and the persona of Fielding, is seriously interested in the disputations of the two gentlemen. The clergyman in the spurious *Vol. IX* is the Mr Martin who was already mentioned in the previous chapter. He is "a little oily man of God" and "a near relation of Mrs Wadman". The physician Querpo is the philosopher. While Martin "is a worthy member of the church of England, and is look'd upon, by all his male and female hearers, as a very good soul-saving priest".²⁷ Querpo indulges in scepticism, of which the intellectual background becomes clear right at the beginning: his "favourite study" is the "anatomy of the human mind", and his discoveries in this field, "which the doctor is preparing to make public, will most effectually silence all disputes concerning our simple and complex ideas".²⁸ Both gentlemen fill the pages of *Tristram Shandy* with soporific philosophical speeches, and at first sight, their backgrounds are made equally ridiculous. Querpo possesses "a kind of prism, which he applies to the occipital bone", with which he "can separate our ideas", while Martin, who "constantly presumes to fatigue the whole family, with his metaphysical and abstruse notions of angels and spirits", demonstrates "that God did exist from all eternity" (something that none of the Shandy's doubted in the first place).²⁹ So far, the contestants are even-matched.

What occupies Tristram, however, is the fact that there *is* a contest. To him this makes a difference. His aversion to ideological quarrels (underlined with a masculine metaphor: "Whenever they meet, their

²⁷ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [Spurious] Vol. IX*, 38.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19, 121.

daggers are immediately out”³⁰), has been instilled into Tristram by Querpo and is not appreciated at all by Martin. Now it also becomes clear why the Anglican church can no longer be defended here by Yorick: Mr Martin, as is made clear by a key at the back of the book, is the same as “Dr W——”.

As the counterpart of Warburton, Querpo resembles Yorick, enjoying Tristram’s sympathy for about the same reasons:

For my part, I have always esteem’d Dr. *Querpo* as a sensible man, honest in his dealings, liberal in his sentiments, a ready help to the infirm, and a good practical Christian. Mrs. *Wadman*’s cousin has painted him worse than the devil, and why? Because Mrs. *Wadman*’s cousin is a mean, narrow, and uncharitable wretch, worm-eaten with bigotry, pride, and vanity. He hates Dr. *Querpo* in his soul. The doctor despises, but pities him.³¹

Tristram not only has a moral appreciation for Querpo, the philosopher has also made a greater impression intellectually. In this spurious volume, Tristram on several occasions treats the reader to philosophical ideas which he appears to have borrowed from Querpo. In contrast to the current heroes of *Tristram Shandy*, those of the spurious continuation are still alive at the time of writing, and therefore, the chapters in question cause Tristram, too, to fall foul of the clergyman. He occasionally calls Querpo his friend.

This friendship also throws a new light on Tristram’s intellectual baggage in the eight original volumes. In his sketch of Dr Querpo’s world-picture, the imitator has used exclusively views that are present in a diluted form in Sterne’s work. The spurious *Vol. IX*, then, offers an index of those elements of the first eight volumes that betray Tristram’s suspected deistic sympathies. The order in which I will deal with them here is partly suggested by considerations of composition – specific ideas that feature prominently also in sources to be dealt with further on, will be kept to the last.

The first long passage in which Tristram shows himself from his Querpian side, and which I will quote, also happens to be the first in the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

volume, and also the most important, in the sense that the hero harps back to it most frequently and that it is the only passage the reader is supposed, at a given moment,³² to re-read. In Chapter 3 of the spurious *Vol. IX*, Tristram retracts a little from his earlier suggestion (in *Tristram Shandy*, Vol. III, Chapter 4) that body and mind are of equal value – like jerkin and jerkin’s lining. Making clever use of a few of Sterne’s typical phrases, the imitator has Tristram state:

My nerves and animal spirits are eternally in motion, insomuch that my poor mind has no more command over them, than I have this present moment over king Herod with *Singleton* on his back.—The mind must follow the impulse of the body; so away we go, helter-skelter, either to the house of prayer, or to the den of thieves the poor soul is merely passive, and quite out of the question.³³

The imitator appears not to have assumed (what, only a few years later, Clonmell must have thought) that this was for Sterne an unimpeachable philosophical truth. In this spurious volume, too, Tristram never becomes a moral example, and he also explains later on that he is not quite certain himself as to how this is. To the author of this spurious final volume, Tristram seems to have been an undecided Latitudinarian with deistic leanings, and as such he seems to have taken him seriously. That impression is created for example when Tristram goes a second time into the problem of “the amazing dependence of the mind upon the body”, adding as an amplification (also of “the theory of chapter the third”):

as I do not know any way to separate my soul and body, I always pray for them both in my morning and evening devotions, and hope your worships will do so too.

When disengaged from this scurvy body, the soul will have all its powers extended beyond conception, but what it will then see, or what it will then feel, is not in my power to describe, or in your worships to conceive.³⁴

The question asked by mother Shandy, “what sort of soul has a lunatic in the next world?”, is called by Tristram a-propos: “Old Grey-beard never

³² *Ibid.*, 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.

once saw a mad soul claiming entrance into heaven, or into hell. The body was mad, but the soul was pure.”³⁵

All these thoughts, as appears later, Tristram has derived from his “friend the doctor one evening as he sat brimful of punch and infidelity” (*sic*).³⁶ Naturally, Tristram thereby relativizes the importance of his ideas, but that does not alter the fact that he feels at least attracted by Querpo’s materialism.

To indicate more precisely how far this interest goes, the author of the spurious *Vol. IX* later reverts extensively to the theory which, as we have said, Sterne only alludes to in an interjection, the one about animus and anima. Tristram’s rendering of the philosophical state of the union comes in the middle of the expatiation, mentioned earlier, about Love or “animus”, according to the theory of Van Gropen. The animus thesis is discussed light-heartedly, but Tristram’s position is nevertheless Sternesquely unclear. The description of animus and anima is fairly detailed and accurate, and can hardly be called ironical: the animus is “immortal, and the chief director of all voluntary actions”; the anima controls “the different involuntary functions of the body, such as the motions of the heart, the powers of respiration, the concoction of the aliment, the secretion of the fluids, and other minute operations, which are not immediately under the guidance of the soul.”³⁷ Tristram seems to be in doubt especially about the specific theory of Van Gropen. On one and the same page he writes “I have a good opinion of his [Van Gropen’s] judgment, whatever the world may have”, and “I do not take upon me to vindicate this theory of Dr. *Van Gropen*”.³⁸ The second sentence has been positioned in such a way as to form a link with Mr Martin’s comment on Tristram’s psychological reveries: extreme as always, Martin expresses the wish “that the college in Warwick-Lane was blown up by gun-powder”. It houses “hereticks and schimaticks”, for whom Martin has a none too bright future in store:

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35. The speculation seems related to Locke’s speculations about the souls of idiots (*Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book I, 11), monstrous births (III, 20; IV, 16) and negroes (IV, 16).

³⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, [Spurious] *Vol. IX*, 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

I hate all innovations in religion, and was I to have sufficient power delegated to me, I would send every mother's son of them to the gallows. They no more believe the immortality of the soul, or the resurrection of the flesh, than a *Saducee*. From such men good Lord deliver us, from lord *Herbert*, down to doctor *Van Gropen*.³⁹

Querpo, who is apparently reading Tristram's chapters at that moment, tries to calm Martin down. Within this immediate context, Tristram's abrupt switch to a defence of the "rule of faith" seems little more than a form of lip service to a much-feared ideology.⁴⁰

That Tristram sympathizes with "innovations in religion", and especially with those connected with the name of Lord Herbert,⁴¹ but does not admit it openly, is suggested in another place. Before starting on his survey of theories about human procreation (see above, Chapter 8), he assures the reader that the study of nature is not inherently irreligious, concluding that

The proofs of God are to be found in his works, and he that refuses to find him there, is an infidel.—Your worships will observe, that I do not deny but that he may be found somewhere else.—This last reflection, I expect, will keep me out of the inquisition.⁴²

The Tristram of this last continuation, too, is writing under the aegis of the dunce. His presentation of deistic notions breathes superficiality, and seems to have to be attributed *in toto* to his friendship with the rather inconsistent materialist Dr Querpo. On the other hand, the continuous presence of the extremely intolerant Martin warrants the association of a harmless trace of scholarship-friendly theology (the theory of a dual soul was, as we saw, not more than that) with freethinking in its most literal sense: the right to doubt. The author of the spurious *Vol. IX* has thereby left more of an opening for serious research into the philosophical problems touched on by Tristram than the authors of the spurious *Vol. III* and *Yorick's Meditations*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁴⁰ It is even possible to read the opening sentences of Chapter 39 as remarks made by Martin, not by Tristram.

⁴¹ In the eighteenth century Herbert of Cherbury was considered to be the "father of deism" (see Peter Gay, *Deism, An Anthology*, Princeton: NJ, 1968).

⁴² *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, [Spurious] *Vol. IX*, 101-102.

One problem was, to the author of the spurious *Vol. IX* – and probably many others, too – of crucial importance: that of personal responsibility. When Tristram in this spurious volume tends towards the view that the soul is passive, he does not in the first place ask himself if he can inherit the hereafter, but whether the system of punishment and reward linked up with it can be called just. It is “nerves and animal spirits”, not the soul, that lead someone to the “den of thieves”. Naturally, this matter was high on the agenda of all those writing about the implications of Locke’s sensationalism, but there are reasons for assuming that *Tristram Shandy* readers in particular were drawn in this direction. Let us examine this.

A digression on misdemeanour and hobby horses

In Sterne’s book, little mention is made of the kind of crimes that usually had the attention of moralists (and other novelists). Nonetheless, misconduct is one of the main themes of Tristram’s story: young Tristram suffered from the thoughtless behaviour of the adults in the Shandy household. After the very first complaint about the inconsideration of his parents (“I wish ...”), Tristram is remarkably sparing with reproaches. The squashing of his nose, a central event in the first three volumes, is accounted for by Tristram from unfortunate circumstances: “Sport of small accidents, Tristram Shandy!” In Tristram’s opinion, obviously the inclinations of the persons involved form part of these, for apart from the midwife’s fall, Elizabeth’s earlier phantom pregnancy and the proviso on that point in the marriage contract, Slop’s irritation and cut in his thumb as consequences of his collisions with Obadiah (accidents – although one might be inclined sometimes to judge differently⁴³), it is of course Walter’s intellectual stubbornness more than anything else that works against Tristram. Hardly a bad word about Walter, however. Rather, the reader learns to have sympathy for his hobby horse, which for its rider appears to have an important mental function. Walter recovers from the misfortunes in his life – Bobby’s death, the goings-on with Tristram – by finding in them inducements to invent new systems. The nature of his monomania may be called arrogant, the hobby horse as such is a form of psychological defence: without a hobby horse, few people are equal to “the cares and

⁴³ For a discussion of cause and effect in the episodes around Tristram’s birth, see Loveridge, *Laurence Sterne and the Argument about Design*, 30-39.

solicitudes of life—'Tis as useful a beast as is in the whole creation—nor do I really see how the world could do without it—.”⁴⁴

Tristram's ideas about the psycho-physiological use of this type of mania emerge most clearly in the story about Toby's hobby horse. In order to explain “how my Uncle Toby came by him”,⁴⁵ Toby has to go back to the “multitude of dykes, drains, rivulets, and sluices” round Namur, where he received his war wound. What began as a method to illustrate for himself the troop movements that decided his fate and to be able to give the visitors round his sickbed an idea of the place and the circumstances of the fatal shell-burst, ended in the all-pervading interest in fortifications and the model-building madness. Tristram shows how the development of Toby's hobby horse correlated with a mental and physical recovery process. The “many perplexities he was in” concerning the events in Namur at first led for Toby to unfavourable “affections of the mind” and these in their turn led to “sharp paroxysms and exacerbations of his wound”.⁴⁶ From the moment that Trim made he suggestion to act out the sieges he had missed in the garden maquette, Toby's impatience increased, astonishing his physician with his sudden recovery. Seated on his hobby horse, Toby feels “the consciousness of his existence”.⁴⁷ Outside, sombreness and “a costive habit of body” await him. Toby's hobby horse, it could be said, is a pathological form of defence against what present-day psychologists call post-traumatic stress. Referring to this case-study, Tristram boasts of his deep understanding of “the first causes of human ignorance and confusion”.⁴⁸

Toby's hobby horse is also the indirect cause of the second physical mutilation around which the action in the first five volumes of *Tristram Shandy* is built up: the “murder” of Tristram, as Susanna calls the fall of the sash window, could happen because Trim had melted down the counterweights of the windows for Toby's war model. The discussion about who are the “principals” of this crime is led by Yorick, which can be taken as an indication of Sterne's moral intentions with this part of the story. I shall not bother my readers here with speculations about the exact bearing of these intentions. The point is that Tristram is inclined to

⁴⁴ *Tristram Shandy*, VIII.31.716.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I.24.87.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, II.1.95.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, V.30.465.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, II.2.97.

reduce the inadvertence to which he has fallen a victim, to a combination of chance and psychological necessity. His interest in early causes shows Tristram to be a “man of erudition”, as he says himself: he is a reader of Locke, but one with stoic and deterministic leanings.⁴⁹

Locke’s apparent acceptance of physiological causality was among the greatest objections against *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The clockwork universe of deists and materialists did not seem to be far removed from this. Inherent in Locke’s philosophy, the orthodox feared, was the erasure of moral categories, and they were not entirely wrong in this. Locke himself had shrunk from this consequence of his sensationalism, but others, the likes of Kames and Bolingbroke, saw it too, and simply postulated a connection with the teleological principle: if thinking and acting can be reduced to physical circumstances, God is the creator of all misery. The deistic or Spinozist interpretation of this insight (the partial evil, universal good notion) differs from its atheistic version (the godless world of Voltaire’s *Candide*) in the recognition of a deity, but not with regard to the category of necessity. For those who used this notion in a positive sense, any action, capital crime included, sprang from a combination of passions, motives, and thoughts.

This last summing up I have distilled from Hume’s analysis of “wilful murder”.⁵⁰ It was not for nothing that the request for excommunication issued against Hume in 1755 stressed first and foremost his assumed denial of free will.⁵¹ With his family and (it was believed) spiritual

⁴⁹ For Sterne on Providence, see *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 74-80 (“Time and Chance”). Rosenblum has objections against Battestin’s conjecture that already in Sterne, divine Providence is collapsing: “The tone of the novel [*Tristram Shandy*] is elegiac about many kinds of losses, but not, I think, about the loss of a Divine order” (Michael Rosenblum, “Shandean Geometry and the Challenge of Contingency”, *Novel*, 10 [1977], 245).

⁵⁰ Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, 469. Although Hume’s moral philosophy in fact ignores the causal reasonings of the materialists, his approach to the passions as instigators of actions was also regarded as a materialistic approach. The misunderstanding probably stems from the fact that Hume, though he classes the passions among the irreducible impressions (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 7-8), later comes out with an anthropologico-historical explanation for the feelings of approval or indignation that some actions call forth in the great majority of mankind (*ibid.*, 495).

⁵¹ Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, Oxford, 1970, 336-55.

relative Henry Home, Lord Kames, Hume was thought to mean that “murder” in a philosophical sense does not exist.⁵²

Murder and homicide

This example of the extreme terms in which this discussion about determinism was conducted, may explain something of the need among writing readers of Sterne to broach the philosophical interpretation of the notion “murder”.

The author of the spurious *Vol. IX* is one of them. In connection with his musings about body and soul, Tristram frequently admonishes the reader of this spurious volume to be “candid and merciful” towards “constitutional vices”.⁵³ The idea that the soul is dominated by “a passionate, drunken, jealous, revengeful, morose, covetous, selfish, lewd, or peevish body” is originally Dr Querpo’s, as I have indicated, but it is again Martin who forces Tristram into an extreme position. He fears that this method of pleading might be used in a case of murder (and, indeed, Querpo does not reject that), exclaiming: “It matters not who advis’d us to commit a murder. The law of God convicts the murderer.”⁵⁴

In the *Sermons of Mr Yorick*, Sterne is quite clear on the subject of the necessity of capital punishment for murder and homicide in all cases,⁵⁵ but the pseudo-Tristram has his doubts. And in an attempt to combine the two positions within himself, he lands in an undefined middle territory:

Pray, Mr. *Martin*, do not put yourself into such a heat. I do not defend Dr. *Querpo*’s doctrine. I admit that it may be too lax, and perhaps, my good Sir, yours may be too rigid. If I might presume to be a judge, I think the truth lies in the middle way---⁵⁶

It is an Aristotelean, but still rather vague, conclusion. It seems to point forward, however, to the sort of philosophical “reasonableness” that Isaac Brendan later attributed to Sterne.

⁵² Henry Home, Lord Kames, in 1751 called down the fury of the clergy on himself with his *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion*. Hume’s *Treatise of Human Nature* was not read as much, but was said to be the inspiration of Kames’ essay on “Liberty and Necessity”, in which he combats Clark’s defence of free will.

⁵³ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, [Spurious] Vol. IX, 36.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁵⁵ *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*, 331-39.

⁵⁶ *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, [Spurious] Vol. IX, 39-40.

Brendan's *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne* (1797), too, contains a discussion about murder and determinism in the context of *Tristram Shandy*. In this case, it appears that, in addition to Tristram's style of reasoning and the current terms of the philosophical debate, a specific passage from Sterne's fiction served as a model. Brendan is referring to the passage in which Walter mentioned the difference between murder and death:

How many thousands of 'em are there every year that come cast away, (in all civilised countries at least)—and considered as nothing but common air, in competition of an hypothesis. In my plain sense of things, my uncle Toby would answer,—every such instance is downright MURDER, let who will commit it.—There lies your mistake, my father would reply;—for, in *Foro Scientiae* there is no such thing as MURDER,—'tis only DEATH, brother.⁵⁷

Further illustration is lacking in Sterne, because Walter's disquisition is short-circuited by Toby's lillabulero argument. That this, however, should make eighteenth-century readers think of a scientific undermining of traditional morals, is in fact likely. Isaac Brendan, at any rate, seems to have regarded it a missed opportunity that Walter should never have got round to an explanation of his thesis in precisely this direction.

Brendan's Fragment "Necessity" repeats the situation of the domestic quarrel about names and aunt Dinah. A clamorous Walter tries to convince Toby, with the aid of Lockean metaphors, of one of his dogma's. In this case it is the thesis that "the mind of Man ... is equally open to good and bad impressions".⁵⁸ This idea brings the brothers to the same opposite points of view as in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*:

—Now, Toby,—continued my father—if a man were to seize his father by the throat,—without provocation—but by inward depravity,—and led on by a combination of ideas—each new idea pressing more forcibly on the last—till the brain, informed by the velocity of their motion,—and the combustibility of their nature—in such a case, my dear Toby—were this man to massacre his father—it would be but an act of necessity—

⁵⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, I.21.77-78.

⁵⁸ [Brendan], *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne*, 81.

—It is an act of murder!—exclaimed my uncle Toby—and punishable with death—by the laws of God and our Country.⁵⁹

Walter, talking along deistic-materialistic lines, tries to make Toby see that everything is controlled by “immutable Laws of Nature.—From the dropping of our nail-pairings, to the velocity of a ball from the mouth of a cannon”.⁶⁰ Even this last instance cannot convince, and when Trim and Yorick raise objections in terms of conscience and personal responsibility, Walter’s “philosophic nag was prick’d into a full gallop. Every effect, (cried my father, pursuing his doctrine), every effect must be produced by a cause”⁶¹

It is Brendan’s Yorick who finally tries to elicit a useful element from Walter’s philosophy. To this late-eighteenth century Yorick, free will is linked to Shaftesburian notions of elite education and a natural inclination towards the good. His reply to Walter implies that free will has been given to those who can afford it. Only they are responsible, both for their own actions and for those whose course of their lives is governed by necessity. Walter’s Philosophical Necessity then remains valid as a “necessity for education, Mr Shandy”:

—Trace those who have felt the cruelty of law, and we shall find them for the most part trained in those numberless parts of the metropolis, which are the very dens of immorality, and kennels of plunder;—bred without the advantages of instruction, the only polisher of Nature;—from their infancy, taught those lessons which lead them to execution.⁶²

Isaac Brendan has been quoted a few times as an extreme representative of philosophical Sentimentalism-in-the-name-of-Sterne. The fragment cited here throws more light on Brendan’s ideology. A Yorick who stands up for a frightening wretch who “hurries from his den and prowls for prey”⁶³ is not a madman that Sterne might have dreamed up, but Brendan obviously found in *Tristram Shandy* idealism enough to assume

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 84-85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 93.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 94.

that his pragmatic variation on Locke is typical of the *Manner of Sterne*.

So, while Tristram entered upon the world stage as a satirical persona in the tradition of Swift, a roving soul whose *Life and Opinions* illustrate the poverty of causal arguments, he has, within a few decades, been transformed into an emblem of philosophical optimism and forgivingness. From the late 1760s, these qualities have been attributed to Sterne himself, resulting in a new picture that has come to influence the interpretation of his works.

Both progressive admirers and orthodox opponents have contributed to the metamorphosis. Let me give only two examples: a couple of Freemasons found that Sterne's "incomparable performances evidently prove him to have acted by the rule and square", having near Sterne's fresh grave a stone placed with, among others, the statement that the "keenest knowledge of mankind / Unsealed to him the springs that move the mind".⁶⁴ An example from the opposite corner: Thomas O'Brien MacMahon put Sterne, together with, among others, Shaftesbury and Hume, and diametrically opposite to Swift, in the category "Apologists for Mankind". MacMahon thought he had discovered a liberal passage even in the *Sermons*.⁶⁵

The uncertainty as to Sterne's philosophical premises, in the first few years after his death, is beautifully illustrated also by William Julius Mickle's complaint against deism *Voltaire in the Shades* (1770). This book once more suggests that Sterne was associated with a deterministic interpretation of Locke.

Mickle's Sterne

As its title suggests, Mickle's satire is grafted on the well-known genre of the dialogue of the dead with Voltaire in the leading part. The story is to be read as a prophecy, since Voltaire was not to die in fact until 1778. The philosopher finds himself in Purgatory, where he is visited first by

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 209.

⁶⁵ O'Brien MacMahon, *An Essay on the Depravity and Corruption of Human Nature*, 166-79. That Sterne, even in his capacity as a clergyman had forgotten the perniciousness of human nature, appears, according to MacMahon, from a passage in *Sermons*, 50-51, where the tears shed by the mass murderer Alexander when he was looking at a pathetic play are adduced as proof of the "seeds of compassion in every man's breast". The illustration proves to have been a commonplace in the sermon literature of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and was not, therefore, an invention of philosophico-sentimental Sterne (see *Sermons, The Notes*, 106-107).

the spirits of Rousseau (who likewise died in 1778) and Socrates. The latter explains that Voltaire, before he has to answer for his sins, will be allowed to remain for some time in a “region of unjudged spirits”, to reflect upon his behaviour. Conversation and deliberation with other dead people are allowed. Socrates himself usually abides in higher places; Rousseau, as will appear later, is, like Voltaire, still awaiting his trial. Strangely enough, his ethereal position does not convince Voltaire of the wrongness of the religious writings that he has left behind him, and he looks for support among the dead for them. After disappointing conversations with Porphyry, Julian and Augustine, Rousseau brings “the shade of a celebrated modern” to Voltaire.

The conversation between the spirits of Voltaire and Sterne is the longest in the book, covering 66 of a total of 214 pages.⁶⁶ That Sterne and Voltaire had been on good terms appears to have been a current rumour. It is echoed in Richard Griffith’s *Posthumous Works*, where Sterne looks back on a conversation with Voltaire about his *Lettre sur la Tolérance*. Sterne shares Voltaire’s aversion to dogmatism in it, but he associates that with Catholicism, not with the Anglican Church.⁶⁷

In Purgatory they are equally good friends, and although Sterne, who dominates most of the conversation, will eventually appear to disagree with Voltaire, they salute each other as colleagues in free thinking. From Rousseau, Sterne has heard about Voltaire’s collision with the classical authors, and he expresses his astonishment at the way in which Voltaire has represented modern profanism so far. Voltaire apologizes, blaming his lack of wit on the peevishness of his opponents. He expects approval from Sterne, and, particularly, greater intelligence: “tell me, my Fellow-Philosopher, what capital arguments have escaped me?”⁶⁸

The arguments adduced by Sterne in the course of the conversation with Voltaire, with Rousseau listening in, have been derived mainly from the works of Kames and Hume. The general purport is that Sterne, as an authority on the Scottish Enlightenment, is better informed about the matter than Voltaire, but that he has also thought more intelligently about the psychological and social effects of deism and atheistic scepticism.

Sterne’s main objections concern the concept of moral necessity. The

⁶⁶ Anon. [William Julius Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades, Or Dialogues on the Deistical Controversy*, London, 1770, 99-166.

⁶⁷ [Griffith], *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased*, I, 59-62.

⁶⁸ [Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades*, 101.

advantage of this concept for Voltaire, Sterne suggests, is that it operates disturbingly in an article of faith defended by contemporary Christians, namely that Revealed Religion is a well thought-out elaboration of Natural Religion. If one wishes to maintain that the doctrines of the New Testament have a logical basis in the axioms of Natural Religion, one should not be surprised if certain philosophers should regard the human transgressions of these doctrines in the same way as they do the apparent cases of injustice in nature. Positing an analogy requires us to assume the same logic in the natural world as in the moral world.⁶⁹ Voltaire is happy with this argument, exclaiming “Glorious indeed!”, and he summarizes:

A deep insight into human motive will prove an absolute necessity, and therefore what men call sin; God accounts only error; all is good, and Christianity, as useless, is at last philosophically defeated. My ingenious Tristram, let us congratulate one another.⁷⁰

Sterne, however, has arrived at a different conclusion from that Voltaire is assuming. His problems with deism are the same as those the Anglican Church had with stoicism, and his argumentation befits a Latitudinarian clergyman. From the ease with which philosophers produce statements about human sin and suffering it becomes clear, says Sterne, that they do not know what they are talking about: “some of our Philosophers from their elbow-chairs, amidst all the elegancies of life, very gravely pronounce the earth to be a mighty agreeable sort of a place, and for their heart and blood cannot find out the evil which some folks talk so much about.”⁷¹ For Sterne to associate wealth with short-sightedness, was not a new idea. The author of the spurious *Vol. III* suggests the same thing when he has Tristram declare that atheism is something for rich and unexperienced youngsters.⁷² In *Voltaire in the Shades*, the sneer is aimed especially at Rousseau, who is then prepared, however, to give his metaphysical concept of “superabundant goodness” a rest for a while. Together, the three thinkers now agree on Sterne’s

⁶⁹ Mickle obviously did not want to mention Spinoza, although he once hints at him; the stoic-determinist’s moral view is explicitly associated with Kames.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 132-33.

⁷² *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [Spurious] Vol. III*, 59-60.

point that life is no picnic, and, moreover, that man is always well aware of his suffering. Stoic acceptance is rejected as unnatural and inaccessible for many people. What has to be explained still is why the human species should live in such a state of torment. Rousseau mentions the argument of “an English Philosopher” (apparently Soame Jenyns) that perhaps human suffering contributes to the happiness of beings who occupy a higher position in the great chain of being. This provokes Sterne to a dramatic performance in which he impersonates a disabled roofworker with young children and “Philosophy with a fool’s cap, rattle, and bells”. In the end, the latter has to admit that it is “entirely inconceivable” who will profit by the misery of the former.⁷³

However, Voltaire is alert enough to remark that by illustrating the value of active Christianity above abstract philosophy, Sterne has not yet refuted “the Scottish Philosopher’s doctrine of a fatal necessity”. Sterne thinks he has, though his arguments do not touch the materialistic core of Kames’ argument. Mickle seems to have deliberately covered up this problem – he has Sterne suddenly conclude with a counter question: “Leaving all the labyrinths of physical and moral necessity, ... let us come to the certain result of the whole, to this short alternative, Is the Almighty Eternal a good or an evil Being? Is he perfect or imperfect?”⁷⁴

This is shifting the argument, but Rousseau knows Bolingbroke’s answer to Sterne’s question: one cannot, in fact, take God’s goodness for granted. The opinions diverge here, for while Voltaire considers this a valid point (“evil does exist; ... it is an impeachment of the Almighty’s goodness”⁷⁵), Rousseau cannot bear the consequence, reverting to the idea of the great Chain of Being. Having earlier on emphasized the inhumanity of this concept, Sterne now turns to meet Rousseau on metaphysical ground:

We can very easily conceive that thousands of degrees of angels might exist without man. You cannot prove, nor even conceive a necessity why angels should be linked to brutes. You produce the allusion of a chain; but allusions prove nothing: And how, in the name of wonder, is a thing of continued parts applicable to beings of individual existence?⁷⁶

⁷³ [Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades*, 137-38.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 145-46.

Human misery, moreover, does not just have external causes, which may yet be related in an incomprehensible way to positive events in higher strata, it is for a large part effectuated internally, by feelings of fear and guilt. The existence of feelings of guilt in particular is evidence to Mickle's Sterne that man is more than a taxonomic intermediate form: "Imperfect happiness might become such a link, but guilt could have no necessary part in it."⁷⁷

In the psychology of suffering, Sterne eventually finds the quasi-definitive argument against "the system of absolute necessity". With the assistance of legitimate inhabitants of the higher realm of the dead, the spirits of a negro slave and of ancient Egyptian, Persian and Celtic priests, Sterne demonstrates that the great majority of mankind have an inner awareness of the fundamental imperfection of the world. Without God's intervention, that imperfection will endure, but in order to keep their awareness of it alive, the Almighty has to grant his creatures some freedom of action. The impossibility of bringing about little self-made improvements would immediately have dulled people into "machines or irrationals" and with that, have extinguished the knowledge that "the present is not the original State of Nature".⁷⁸ Mickle's Sterne believes that knowledge of evil is universal and (a well-known idealist stance) that knowledge without free will is unthinkable.

Mickle has devoted the last part of the discussion between Sterne, Voltaire and Rousseau to the isolation of Hume, a compatriot against whom he had a lifelong aversion. In Mickle's story, Hume is called forward by Sterne to confirm that according to him in fact the creation does not prove the existence of a Creator. This goes too far for even Voltaire and Rousseau. The remaining arguments are directed less against Hume's work than against his person, or are less interesting for other reasons.⁷⁹

In all his books and pamphlets, Mickle stood for orthodoxy and Augustan values in general – it was no accident that he was a friend of

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 150-54.

⁷⁹ Mickle repeats the information (of course, Rousseau is the informant) that "that Philosopher often talks through his sleep", adding that "even asleep his voice is ominous" ([Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades*, 104-105). For more details, see René Bosch, "Sterne and Voltaire in Purgatory: A Prophecy by W.J. Mickle", *The Shandean*, 8 (1996), 98-112.

Samuel Johnson's.⁸⁰ I suspect that Mickle's evaluation of Sterne's religious position could find favour in Johnson's eyes (the popular notion that Johnson and Sterne were each other's opposites has to be qualified⁸¹), but from 1770, that evaluation seems to have become increasingly rare. The *Monthly Review* complimented Mickle upon his rehabilitation of Sterne, whose reputation as a clergyman had come to be somewhat suspect.⁸²

Without doubt, Sterne was suspect especially as a clergyman. Mickle underlines this by having, after Sterne, also Swift appear on the scene in his capacity of Protestant figurehead. In Mickle's sketch, Swift is more resolute in the faith. In contrast with Mickle's Sterne, Swift does not himself bring ammunition for freethinkers. Going into sceptical arguments is in itself suggestive of doubt, and, Mickle has Swift say, "to doubt is to wither the nerves of virtue".⁸³ Mickle's Sterne is, more so than Mickle's Swift, interested in the relationship between faith and reason.

That impression can hardly have been created by the *Sermons*. Like all Latitudinarian clergymen, Sterne emphasizes the necessity to base faith on reason, but this claim, meant to be anti-charismatic, for his contemporaries would not imply any special interest in deism. Because Sterne is continually addressed as Tristram, I think that Mickle's ideas about Sterne's philosophical interests were largely based on *Tristram Shandy*.⁸⁴ Inasmuch as he associates with the name of Sterne in particular

⁸⁰ Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 485, 743, 1257-58.

⁸¹ Johnson and Sterne met once, in Joshua Reynolds' house, almost certainly in 1761, and apparently to their mutual displeasure. A number of recorded remarks by Johnson suggest that he did not take to Sterne's commercial opportunism and penchant for coarse humour (Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years*, 109-10). Some other comments are less negative. The famous remark "Nothing odd will do long. *Tristram Shandy* did not last" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 696, also printed to the detriment of Johnson on the back of the Penguin and Oxford Classics editions of *Tristram Shandy*) probably refers, as Keymer ("Dying by Numbers", 54) argued convincingly, to Sterne's motivation for continuing with his project, not to the success of the book as such. To Oliver Goldsmith's remark that Sterne was "a very dull fellow", Johnson answered merely "Why no, Sir." (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 517). The *Sermons of Mr Yorick* was among the few books that Johnson took with him on his tour of the Hebrides (James Boswell, *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, ed. L.F. Powell, London, 1958, 152).

⁸² *Monthly Review*, XLIV (1771), 27-32.

⁸³ [Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades*, 205.

⁸⁴ Mickle's familiarity with *Tristram Shandy* appears from a note in *The Lusiad* (book 7,

a conflict of ideas about determinism, Mickle appears to have been inspired by the same source as were Isaac Brendan and the author of the spurious *Vol. IX*.

Freethinking Sterne

A special feature of Mickle's story is the association of Sterne with Hume. In contrast with many a contemporary, Mickle was aware that Hume's scepticism is something completely different from Lord Kames' deism. Sterne, in *Voltaire in the Shades*, presents them as opposites. Kames is a Spinozist – Hume is, among others, the historian of religion without even a "Spinozan God",⁸⁵ maintaining "that there is no relation between cause and effect".⁸⁶

The fact that Mickle specifically chose Sterne as an author who could present Hume's theory of knowledge and outlook on life may attract the attention of Shandy-readers with modernist or postmodernist erudition. As was said earlier, in the twentieth century it has been assumed that in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne wanted to convey a vision of knowledge largely similar to the one unfolded in *A Treatise of Human Nature*: Sterne and Hume both deny that cognitive concepts can be objective, and both emphasize the importance of the passions in social intercourse and as a means to come to terms – along sympathetic or associative lines.⁸⁷ Partly as a reaction to this reading, later critics have emphasized the undermining or "anti-normalizing" qualities of Sterne's fiction, but this has also led many of them (eventually via Barthes, Derrida and Nietzsche) back to Hume, who is now looked upon as the eighteenth-century philosopher *par excellence* with a foretaste of postmodern epistemological doubt.⁸⁸

313), where Walter Shandy is mentioned as a typical system builder (*Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 314).

⁸⁵ [Mickle], *Voltaire in the Shades*, 114.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁸⁷ Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World*, 19: "The undermining skeptical arguments of Hume ... find almost a descriptive statement in *Tristram Shandy*." *Ibid.*, 73: "the closest parallel to [Sterne's] view of human concourse is Hume's doctrine of sympathy." Similar statements are to be found in Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne*, 16, 24, and several others.

⁸⁸ Iser also reads *Tristram Shandy* as a work inspired by Hume, but he believes it shows Sterne to be the greater philosopher: "Die Dekonstruktion [des Lockeschen Bezugsrahmens] geschieht durch ein Wörtlichnehmen der Erkenntnisnormen, um das

Unfortunately, Mickle's somewhat loose association of Sterne with Hume remains unique among the early imitations and commentaries. Of course, this does not rule out that there were other readers who sensed a congeniality. If we take into account that *Tristram Shandy* was often believed to advocate a sceptical position with regard to materialist presumptions, that would even be likely. And indeed, where imitations stay close to the original, the works of false Tristrams and pseudo-Yoricks may sometimes be interpreted as suggesting a philosophical awareness similar to Hume's. However, the problem is that serious references are lacking,⁸⁹ while the most intriguing remarks and passages are as enigmatic as some of Tristram's original riddles. Where we get a chance to consider these apparently philosophically inspired passages in their wider context, they may just as well be said to reflect the author's penchant for traditional (fideistic) scepticism as his familiarity with radical epistemological doubt.

Once again, one of Richard Griffith's Shandean texts may be taken to illustrate the situation. His *Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased* (1770) contains an interesting pastiche of Sterne's well-known Lockean-Rabelesque excursion into the workings of the mind, the "Author's Preface" between Chapters 20 and 21 of the third Volume of *Tristram Shandy*. Griffith's, alias Sterne's, use and abuse of the notions of "wit" and "judgement" extenuates Sterne's/Tristram's juggling with these terms – and if we wish to take inspiration from the modern and postmodern commentaries in which the original "Author's

hervorzutreiben, was sie verdecken: die Differenz zwischen Norm und Wirklichkeit Wichtiger als dieser Gleichklang Sternes mit Humes Kritik am Lockeschen Empirismus ist das Auseinandertreten von Norm und Erfahrungswirklichkeit" (Iser, *Laurence Sterne's "Tristram Shandy"*, 32). Löschen places "der Philosoph Sterne zwischen Locke und Hume" (Karl H. Löschen, *Laurence Sterne, "Tristram Shandy" – Landpfarrer und "Gentleman": Sozialethische Betrachtungen zu einem Original*, Heidelberg, 1977, 105–13).

⁸⁹ The author called Christopher Flagellan ironically defends his lies about Sterne's death by explaining that, in modern times, anything goes: "A famous Scotch philosopher, who has for many years past, been blowing with great self-complacence, pretty, glittering, dazzling bubbles of metaphysick into the atmosphere of science, has denied the connexion between *cause* and *effect* ..." (Christopher Flagellan [pseud.], *A Funeral Discourse Occasioned by the Much Lamented Death of Mr. Yorick, Prebendary of Y—k and Author of the Much Admired Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* ..., London, 1761, 8.)

Preface” is said to contain the core of Sterne’s philosophy, Griffith’s pastiche could easily be taken as evidence of his understanding of a Humean streak in Sterne. The fact that Nietzsche showed particular interest in *The Posthumous Works* (which he believed to be genuine) could add to the relevancy of this coordination and strengthen the impression that Sterne and Griffith were focussing on the unjust claims of rationalism and empiricist rationality. However, these issues were not alien to Christian philosophy and the way they are raised in *The Posthumous Works* may not necessarily lead us away from that tradition. While Sterne was personally acquainted with Hume and probably knew a lot about his philosophical stance, no such external link can be reconstructed for Griffith. Moreover, if we look for serious reflections in the latter’s output which may be related to the pastiche of the “Author’s Preface” in *The Posthumous Works*, the best we have is a series of short essays and riddles in *Something New* in which Griffith means to tackle Spinozist determinism and stoicism by defending the fundamental unaccountability of the imagination and free will. Rather unsurprisingly, Griffith ascribes human creativity to a transcendent sphere and associates it with God, Whom he finally wants to honour for all art and constructive action.⁹⁰

There are some passages in *Tristram Shandy* that could be explained as suggesting similar intentions in Sterne. However, as always, readers expecting disguised anti-idealist thinking are not alert to these passages, or they explain them differently.

Surveying the printed reactions, we might conclude that such readers began to form a loud minority during the first decades following Sterne’s death, and have continued to raise their voices up to the late twentieth century. Initially, these commentators were inclined to loosely associate Sterne’s bawdy and sensualism with epicurism. It appears that some of them came to assume that Sterne had had radical sympathies.

We see this, for instance, in the Rev. Vicesimus Knox. As compiler of *Elegant Extracts*, he appreciated Sterne’s pathetic fragments, but he also warned insistently against the sensualism in which their attraction was rooted. Sterne had made out a case for “the benignant doctrines of a general philanthropy” as a “heathen philosopher”, without distinguishing

⁹⁰ Griffith, *Something New*, I, 51, 81; *ibid.*, II, 11-12.

between affections that lent an import to a Christian way of life and those that ought to be controlled by that same attitude.⁹¹

Knox is still weighing the moral pro's and con's of Sterne's fiction, but in the last decade of the eighteenth century, with the threat of revolution in the background, some other conservatives lost their patience with everything that might reek of libertinism. As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, the idea that Sterne had been trying to find subtle and indirect ways of propagating and spreading deism or materialism, at first appears to have been proclaimed by readers who themselves saw little danger in such a demeanour. Now, their vision was taken up by moralists who could feel little sympathy for any branch of free-thinking.

One D. Whyte is prominent among them. In his *The Falacy of French Freedom* (1799), he claims that it was not accidental that the popularization and canonization of Sterne's works kept pace with "a general corruption of manners, — infidelity, insincerity, and debaucheries of every kind".⁹² Although Whyte's tone is sometimes reminiscent of inverted praise like that of the Clockmakers and the pseudo-Whitefield, his attack on Sterne has probably to be taken seriously.⁹³ Least balanced of all is his recital of Sterne's literary testators, a sort of shortlist of the radical Enlightenment:

The system of impiety and corruption of manners was begun by Rabelais, carried on by Bayle, and completed by Voltaire.

In England, the same cause has also had its advocates:—there have been Bolingbrokes, and Humes, and Tindals; but their sophistry not being well adapted to the bulk of mankind, their converts have been few.—Sterne, having discovered the mistake of his predecessors, concealed his cloven foot under a flowing tunic, and endeavoured to allure by the gaudy gilding of his nauseous pill.⁹⁴

⁹¹ *Elegant Extracts: or Useful and Entertaining Passages in Prose, Selected for the Improvement of Scholars at Classical and Other Schools in the Art of Speaking, in Reading, Thinking, Composing, and in the Conduct of Life...*, ed. Anon. [Vicesimus Knox], London, 1784, III, 218.

⁹² D. Whyte, *The Fallacy of French Freedom and Dangerous Tendency of Sterne's Writings*, 1799, 1.

⁹³ *The Monthly Review*, XXIX (1799), 115, did just that.

⁹⁴ Whyte, *The Fallacy of French Freedom*, 2.

Whyte, we read on the title page, was “late surgeon to English prisoners in France”. This qualification may suggest some explanation for the over-excited tone of the pamphlet, which contains few substantial, and many ad hominem arguments. The combination of Rabelais, Bayle, Voltaire, Bolingbroke, Tindal, Hume, and Sterne does not evoke many thoughts as to what exactly the last-mentioned is accused of, apart from profane motives.

And yet, we do not need a war trauma or a very restricted knowledge of Sterne’s work to place it in this corner. In the age of Enlightenment studies, the assumption that creators of bawdy wit in eighteenth-century England were as a rule non-religious is still very much alive and lucrative. Peter Wagner has proved this with his famous study *Eros Revived*. Using a rather wide definition of pornography,⁹⁵ Wagner allows himself the liberty of lumping bawdy satire together with libertine-licentious texts. As a result, the two genres can be associated with what Wagner calls “the systematic atheism of the Enlightenment”.⁹⁶ Wagner’s thirst for atheism is too great for his sources, and he often has to exaggerate to justify his chapter headings. In a paragraph on British libertinism, he discusses Sir Francis Dashwood’s Hell-Fire-Club, the connections of Wilkes and Churchill with the Franciscans, and the *Essay on Woman*, which originated in the club. In passing, he mentions that Laurence Sterne was a member of a similar club, Hall-Stevenson’s Demoniacs, to conclude that all these gentlemen “gave expression to a new ideology, combining sexual libertinism and anti-christian attacks”.⁹⁷ Wagner seriously thinks that Wilkes and Churchill worked hard “against religious forms and religion as such”, and that Sterne “joined the ranks of those who wrote against their own profession”.⁹⁸

The point Wagner should have made is that the mock rituals of the Hell-Fire-Club were aimed at dreaded Catholicism, and that *An Essay on Woman* is a parody on a text by a Catholic poet. Wilkes may not have been a religious man, but he was positively inclined towards “the twin

⁹⁵ Namely, as “the written or visual presentation in a realistic form of any genital or sexual behaviour with a deliberate violation of existing and widely accepted moral and social taboos” (Peter Wagner, *Eros Revived: Erotica of the Enlightenment in England and America*, London, 1988, 7).

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 58, 60.

virtues of Hope and Charity” of Anglican Protestantism.⁹⁹ The Anglican Church did not treat Churchill well when he was still a clergyman, and that is obvious from his poetry, but nowhere did the poet show himself to be an atheist.¹⁰⁰ During his last illness, Churchill made haste with the Dedication in verse for an edition of his sermons, and although it is a complex poem, it does not seem to have been aimed at undermining the values defended in the rest of the book: “Truth best becomes an *Orthodox* Divine / And, spite of hell, that Character is mine.”¹⁰¹

As we have seen, the thought that Sterne propagated an atheist-libertine moral occurred to few, and almost exclusively late-eighteenth-century readers. How unreasonable and at the same time understandable that thought was, is something I have tried to make clear.

⁹⁹ Peter Quennell, *Four Portraits: Studies of the 18th Century*, London, 1947, 243.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, *Charles Churchill*, 27-29.

¹⁰¹ “Dedication to the Sermons”, ll. 7-8, *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, II, 298.

Epilogue

The Waning of the Satirical Age

Probably the most generally acknowledged fact about *Tristram Shandy* is that it is a work “by Laurence Sterne”. This study gives reason to qualify that assumption. Not that Sterne didn’t hold the quill. On the contrary: he had a firm grip on his endeavour, felt confident enough to refer to his satire as “a picture of myself”, inserted autobiographical elements and created original characters and situations. Paradoxically, as a consequence of his success, Sterne also lost part of his artistic freedom. Almost from the very beginning, the commercial printing world threatened to run away with the Shandy project and while he sometimes professed to be immune to social contamination, it is unlikely that he really remained untouched by the exuberance and reputation of the spurious Tristrams and Yoricks.

I suppose that the early imitations and related reactions had a general influence on Sterne’s artistic course, in the first place because he must have felt the need to steer away from the ever more predictable cynicism of Grub-street satire. When he began to mitigate his humour and make the continuing story of Tristram’s family more pathetic, it was not, I believe, because he was impressed by the advice of the reviewers, but because he felt obliged to react to this far stronger pull from the opposite forces. Avoiding the moral-aesthetic codes of the sentimental school and Grub-street satirists alike, Sterne began to combine and balance their styles and rhetorical devices to create a unique and highly ambiguous work. If he wanted to hold the vanguard, he had to be constantly aware of what others were doing in the name of Yorick. In that indirect way, a complete milieu of London scoundrels and gentlemen can be said to have contributed to the composition of *Tristram Shandy*.

Throughout this work, I have also presented circumstantial evidence for more direct influences of the imitations on the development of themes and characters. It is probable that Sterne’s original plan with *Tristram Shandy* included about as much satire against George Whitfield and Methodism as against Dr Burton and Catholicism, a lengthy confrontation of Man-midwifery and female professionals, and discussions of scientific and medical progress in the style of the Scriblerians. After he had indicated them in the first instalment, these

themes may well have been abandoned by Sterne because they were already amply and enthusiastically taken up by the hacks. Likewise, the typologies of Toby as a hypocritical “miles gloriosos”, Elizabeth as a silly woman, Mrs Wadman as a scheming widow and Tristram as a traditional fool or “nincumpoop” were recognized and fully exploited in the imitations. It could have convinced Sterne that the emblematic functions of these characters were well understood, and that he could balance this mode of understanding with other, more realistic aspects. Avoiding the predictable and the predicted, Sterne gave a new and personal turn to the tradition of Augustan satire.

Even if he never admitted to have been influenced by his imitators, “the author of *Tristram Shandy*” was certainly aware of them. As we have seen, in his letters to Warburton, Sterne distanced himself not only from Hall-Stevenson, but from a complete subculture of commercial “scribblers” – and this was not just an isolated instance of opportunism. Tristram’s seemingly ironic (because largely plagiarized) appeal for originality at the beginning of volume V of *Tristram Shandy* ends in a (non-plagiarized) cursing of all those who re-used his texts “without working one — one single miracle with them”:

I scorn to be as abusive as Horace upon the occasion ---- but if there is no catachresis in the wish, and no sin in it, I wish from my soul, that every imitator in *Great Britain, France, and Ireland* had the farcy for his pains; and that there was a good farcical house, large enough to hold — aye — and sublimate them, *shag-rag* and *bob-tail*, male and female, all together....¹

These lines are from the opening chapter of the third installment of *Tristram Shandy*, written at some time in 1761, when the imitation industry had proved its ability to produce more Tristramiana and deliver them more quickly than the man himself.

Meanwhile, the imitators were very much aware of the situation – and loved it. As true blue Augustan and Mandevillian satirists, the parasites of the first hour generally tended to emphasize the dishonourable character of their activities and hoped to get money even out of their self-mockery. Apparently with the intention of highlighting their own practices, a few even ironically aspired to the position held by Sterne,

¹ *Tristram Shandy*, V.1.408.

suggesting that they themselves might become the victims of imitators and continuation writers. Thus, “Bertram Montfichet” is unwilling to announce what subjects he will deal with in following volumes of his work, arguing that

By so doing I should leave an open for every poultry scribbler to comment insipidly upon my subject-matter, and palm it upon the Public as the sequel of the genuine *Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet, Esq*; No, no; I give fair warning against such surreptitious dealings, and I cordially advise my friend the *Black Goose* in *Pater-noster-Row*, that she will stick none of her feathers in my tail by the name of a third, or fourth, or fifth, or sixth volume.²

“Jermiah Kunastrokius” threatens his fellow hacks in legal jargon:

I make this solemn protestation, that if any of the writers of our weekly political papers, either composed of a sheet and a half, to avoid the payment of duty,—or in the form of a journal, whereby a whole week’s news is, besides a political essay, sucked in at the easy charge of two-pence half-penny, — or in the shape of a chronicle, where piracies do manifestly abound:—I say, if any printers, publishers, editors, compilers, writers, authors,— whether garetteers, first floorers, house keepers, chariot-keepers, shop-keepers, stall-keepers, or cellar-keepers — hawkers, and chapmen, do, in manifest opposition to this my will, dare to borrow, rob, steal, quote, cite, mention, hint—(except in my own genteel advertisement) *from, of, or that* ————— there is such a book in *esse* as this present volume — I hereby declare solemnly ————*I believe I shall prosecute them*;—and that I certainly will never give them, or either of them, respectively, a good introductory letter, or essay, or so much as a paragraph, or hint, concerning such things as no one else can be acquainted with but myself,—those are my *ideas*: nay, I furthermore declare,---I will never read, peruse, *run-over*, or look upon, in any light whatever, their papers, &c. &c. &c. respectively;---but give my opinion---which goes a great way (with *myself*) right or wrong,---and damn them all.³

² *The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet* (1761), II, 223.

³ *Explanatory Remarks upon the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), 32-33.

The paradox seems perfect, for this protest against imitation of other writers' work is couched in the terms of the marriage contract in *Tristram Shandy*. Everybody must have known that Sterne in his turn had cribbed that part of his text from elsewhere,⁴ so that what we get is an intertextual game in which the concept of creativity itself is endlessly postponed. Looking at it from this angle, even the paradox of a plagiarized appeal for originality does not appear to have been Sterne's own invention. That paradox, so famous among postmodern Sterne-commentators, was first introduced by Jeremiah Kunastrokus and the likes of him, in the profitable game of Sterne aping. It grew out of and reflected the complex social situation in which *Tristram Shandy* was created.

The last decades, this social situation is getting more attention from literary historians. Among them, Peter Briggs has rightly emphasized the importance of "Sterne's public performances" for his sudden jump to fame. By creating several roles, Sterne intuitively adapted to what Briggs calls "the still-emerging rules of the new, more entrepreneurial marketplace". Tristram was at the same time "a scandal" and "a hero of social sympathy". A majority must have seen him as "an essentially 'literary' figure, a self-conscious invention designed to confirm favourite English mythologies concerning eccentricity and good-heartedness, a character to be placed in the tradition of Don Quixote, Roger de Coverley, Parson Adams, the Vicar of Wakefield, and their literary kin".⁵

As we have seen, the idea of a connection between Tristram's elusiveness and Sterne's popularity among several groups of readers was formulated in the period itself, too. *Tristram Shandy* was, in Richard Griffith's words, a work for "pit, box, and gallery". It was therefore also a typically "modern" work. I have shown, however, that the adaptation to the world of commerce did not, round the middle of the eighteenth century, go as easily with civic virtue as Briggs appears to suggest. Sterne's opportunism and lack of "character" were shocking in themselves. The tradition that Tristram was placed in at first was therefore not that of good-natured eccentrics, but a tradition of

⁴ The Clockmakers knew the "excursionary lick at the Law on account of its tautologous verbosity" of several plays and romances, among which Richard Steele's *The Funeral*, probably Sterne's model (*The Clockmakers Outcry*, 30; see also *Tristram Shandy, The Notes*, 81-83).

⁵ Briggs, "Laurence Sterne and Literary Celebrity", 271, 272-73.

honourless characters from popular culture, the fool, the “nincumpoop” and “Nobody”. Sterne’s Tristram and Yorick, and not Fielding’s Adams or Goldsmith’s Primrose, have given their names to jest-books.

The popular or modern aspects of Sterne’s performances appear to be incompatible with Sterne’s explicit affinity with the Tory satirists. That impression is based on an underestimation of the light-hearted, parodistic and commercial qualities of the prose satires of the Scriblerians as well as the degree to which modern popular writers like John Dunton and Coley Cibber confirmed the values pattern of the Augustans. Swift and his adversaries lived in the same fallen world, projecting their own errors onto satirical personae. Therefore, the fact that Sterne included playful, obscene and autobiographical elements in *Tristram Shandy* did not prevent early readers from sensing the Augustan slant of the book.

That slant was apparent first of all in the disorderliness of the narration. The rambling, digressive style of *Tristram Shandy* was looked upon by many of its readers as a symbol of excessive pride. By not binding himself to rules, and by resolving at the same time to skip “nothing which has touched me”,⁶ Tristram’s complacency about his own mental make-up pushes the history that he sets out to narrate into the background. That made Tristram an egotist, a wanderer in his own labyrinth – and that was good, clean fun.

What is striking is that the sentimental anecdotes in *Tristram Shandy*, too, were read in a traditional framework by early readers. The pathos of stories like that of Le Fever and Maria of Moulines was experienced as sincere and convincing, but that did not mean that Sterne’s work could be placed in a context of innate-goodness optimism. The stories are interspersed with indications of obtuseness and unjustified self-satisfaction in the sentimental heroes (Toby, sometimes Trim, and always Tristram), and the reader has to remain on his guard. In that sense they are like Sterne’s *Sermons* – they, too, have to stir the emotions and incite sympathy, while at the same time they warn us not to take our own positive sentiments but the New Testament as moral guideline. In these respects, *Tristram Shandy*, in spite of all its madness, was a book about faith. The phased publication of *The Sermons of Mr Yorick* alongside the instalments of *Tristram Shandy* secured the awareness of this among readers during Sterne’s lifetime.

⁶ *Tristram Shandy*, I.5.9.

Tristram Shandy is, however, also an ambiguous text, which, probably more so than other literary texts, adapts itself to the reader's preoccupations. After his death, Sterne obtained the reputation of having been a sentimental modernist, and evidence of that was also to be found in his work. By lifting four themes from early and late Sterne imitations I have tried to disentangle a few of the lines that formed the fabric of Sentimentalism-in-the-name-of-Sterne. The choices I have made suggest rather abrupt changes around 1770.

In relation to this, a few things remain to be done. First, the changes in the imagery of war and professional medicine, assumptions about femininity, and the connections between sexual humour and philosophy in Sterne imitations should be placed in a wider historical context. Also, a little more needs to be said about the historical order in which the several elements that define Sentimentalism appeared in Sterne imitations. Finally, the impression that may have been created, of a simple redemption of the Augustan mode of imitation by the sentimental vein, should be corrected. Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that nobody after about 1770 felt inspired or took pains to write intelligent parodistic or satirical continuations or pamphlets related to *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*.

Indeed, although they are largely outnumbered by flatly pathetic Sterneana, still a number of books and pamphlets of the late eighteenth century explore other possibilities inherent in Sterne's fiction. Some reflect as much understanding of Augustan values as many of the earliest imitations, while others begin to detract from these values in unforeseen directions. By presenting a few of these incidents at some length, I hope to give a more balanced overview of the situation after 1770 and have a look at the differences between early and late imitations from other angles.

Sterne's bawdy

So far it has not been explicitly mentioned that the protests against Sterne's innuendo and sexually tainted humour seem to have marked the first major step in the direction of philosophical Sentimentalism. Notably, in sentimental pamphlets of the 1770s, Sterne's bawdy is played down as irrelevant. Readers who began to call themselves his greatest admirers emphasized Sterne's social nature, thereby taking their distance from the

pamphleteers of an earlier generation, whom they blamed for a superficial and blurred understanding of Sterne's books.

To give one example, the author of *An Humble Tribute to the Memory of Mr. Sterne* (1775) twisted facts in such a way that she could actually make Sterne's bawdy into proof of his self-sacrificing character. In the Foreword to her book, a supplement to the *Letters to Eliza*, the author is introduced by the publisher as an acquaintance of Sterne's. At first, the lady had avoided Sterne's company: "An unfavourable representation of him, together with an opinion she had pre-conceived, *from the constructions put on his writings*, had like to have deprived her of the felicity of his friendship."⁷ When she eventually met him in the flesh, the real Sterne turned out to be quite different from the public one. The role of Tristram, Sterne is said to have explained, he had maintained only because he could not disappoint anybody:

if I was to be myself sentimental in some companies, they would stile me a dull, incomprehensible fellow; when they looked up to me to set the table in a roar, was I to chill their warm mirth with some grave reflection, in place of a well turned jest, I should forfeit the character I have gained with them. I own in secret to you, that I feel no pleasure equal to that resulting from associating with people of sensibility and discernment.⁸

It may be observed that, here, unchastity and social engagement are not yet supposed to exclude each other. Perhaps we owe it to the publication of the *Beauties of Sterne* that later on the existence of bawdy passages in *Tristram Shandy* is often denied, while the early imitators are depicted as simply malevolent. For instance, John Henderson, in his "Ode, Intended to have been spoken at the Tomb of the Rev. Mr. Lawrence [*sic*] Sterne, on his Birth-Day" (1786), claimed that Sterne, "by dunces thron'd", had remained misunderstood in his own time:

Vex'd, inly vex'd, that on inspection clear,
They search'd their hearts and found no Toby there,
Stung, inly stung, they snatch'd the pen,
And told the tasteless sons of men,
That he whose spirits warm and full,

⁷ Anon., *An Humble Tribute to the Memory of Mr. Sterne, By a Lady*, London, 1775, v (my italics).

⁸ *Ibid.*, vi-vii.

Could charm the gay, and wake the dull,
 Could fix a smile on Sorrow's brow,
 That he, with all these powers fraught,
 Was loose in language, and impure in thought ...⁹

The dislike of bawdy in later years is not only evident from sources such as these – it also affected the older humoristic genres that continued to be practiced alongside the sentimental imitations. Sterne jest-books are a case in point. Placing examples from two periods side by side, it is hard for us to escape the impression that editors of a later generation thought differently about their readers. To mention but a few: *Tristram Shandy's Bon Mots* and *The Cream of the Jest*, both from 1760, contain jokes “by Sterne” about women with a fire office between their legs and in which words like “prick” and “cunt” are played upon almost shamelessly.¹⁰ By contrast, the compiler of *Yorick's Jests* (1783) says in his Foreword that he had wanted to make a booklet that would be successful “in this hour of public reform”; it is a “collection, which we have reason to think will suit all tastes” and in which “gross indecencies [are] avoided”.¹¹ Needless to say, the jokes that follow are not spicy but feeble. The same goes for the side-splitters in *Scrapeana* (1792).

From an historical point of view, there is little that should surprise us here. There is a general feeling that the aversion to obscene humour has become ever greater from the late Middle Ages onwards, and it seems evident that this part of the civilization process must have had its bearing on the appreciation of *Tristram Shandy*.

Our sources also seem to confirm some basic ideas, current among historians of humour and etiquette, relating to these shifting “frontiers of the comic”. In the first place, “delicacy” appears to have been a territory signal of the middle classes, rather than, as the initial model of Elias would suggest, a value that percolated “from above” to the less powerful.¹² Novels, private letters, and critical reports alike suggest that, round the middle of the eighteenth century, exchanging obscene, cynical, misogynous jokes was part of the social style of gentlemen with a

⁹ *The Fashionable Magazine*, June 1786, 35.

¹⁰ *Tristram Shandy's Bon Mots*, 15-16, 23-24; *The Cream of the Jest*, 14-15.

¹¹ *Yorick's Jests*, v, viii.

¹² Brewer, “Prose Jest-books”, 97-98; *A Cultural History of Humour*, eds Bremmer and Roodenburg, 7.

classical education, land, and titles, as well as of low-paid townsmen. Men from the classes in between prided themselves on their self-restraint.

Another point of contact with this branch of social history concerns the complex role of the churches within the civilization process. It is worth noting that from the Middle Ages until far into the eighteenth century, clergymen of various important denominations approved of laughter, sometimes commending it in their sermons.¹³ As we have seen, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Anglicans with otherwise orthodox opinions, including those who were not funny themselves, still set great store by “mirth”, “wit” and “humour”, for theological reasons. Nevertheless, round 1760, the atmosphere seems to have changed. Whether it was from a concern about the attractive power of Methodism, or from sympathy with the movements for the reformation of manners within the urban middle classes, the higher clergy began to actively set limits to the possibilities of clowning around in the pulpit. Sterne’s conflict with Warburton appears to reflect the initial resistance and uncertainties arising from this offensive. Obviously, Sterne was very much aware that the margins had become smaller in the course of the centuries, but at the same time suggested that there should be room for imitation of the humorous clergymen of the past: “[Swift] keeps a due distance from Rabelais —— & I keep a due distance from him —.”¹⁴

As we have seen, it was only a matter of years before the notion of a humorous divine became unacceptable for many, and the reputation of Sterne decayed into that of an underhand libertine, among some of his fans as well as his critics. Here, our reception history might correspond with some New Historicist observations on sexual morals and pornography in the eighteenth century.

Digression on pornography

Watchful as they are for links between modernity and the circulation and changes in content of obscene printed matter, New Historicists such as Lynn Hunt and Walter Kendrick have pointed at more hidden aspects of the civilization process. Their essential points are that, with the

¹³A *Cultural History of Humour*, eds Bremmer and Roodenburg, 6, 85-86; Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 76-77; Dekker, *Lachen in de Gouden Eeuw*, Figure 4.

¹⁴ *Letters*, 76.

democratization of culture, the political and moral self-confidence of the middling classes must have increased, but that there was also a growing concern about the accessibility of obscene reading-matter for traditionally dependent groups – women in particular.¹⁵ The subsequent need for regulation, censorship and self-censorship should have found its reflection in the naughty writings that circulated among the male elite. Attention has been drawn, in this connection, to the decrease in popularity of the poems of Rochester, and to the more serious tone of some libertine works from the eighteenth century. The writers of obscene booklets were moved by a bourgeois ethos to the point where they began to glorify sexual love and to provide their works with a philosophical (usually deistic) rationale. The old bawdy clichés were superseded by medical terms, suggesting male intellect and an analytic, enlightened view of the body. Stripped of satire, the obscene books for male audiences became automatically more exciting.¹⁶

There have been attempts to fit Laurence Sterne somewhere in this or a similar scheme: on very dubious grounds, as we have seen, by Peter Wagner, but with more justification by Martin Battestin.¹⁷ His claim is that Sterne was influenced by deist ideas concerning the importance of sexuality for the emotions related to love and social intercourse. It coloured *Tristram Shandy*, and especially *A Sentimental Journey*, where the emotions caused by conversations with melancholy young women are analysed and weighed as evidence for the existence of the soul. Battestin believes that even some of Sterne's first readers were already aware of this deist undertone in his work and therefore recognized the

¹⁵ Walter Kendrick, *The Secret Museum: Pornography in Modern Culture*, New York, 1987, 50-57; Lynn Hunt, "Editorial", in *The Invention of Pornography: Obscenity and the Origins of Modernity, 1500-1800*, ed. Lynn Hunt, New York, 1993, 13.

¹⁶ *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Hunt, 33; Margaret Jacob, "The Materialist World of Pornography", in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Hunt, 128; Randolph Trumbach, "Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism in Enlightenment England", in *The Invention of Pornography*, ed. Hunt, 266-71. The influence of the first volume of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* on Trumbach and Hunt especially is noticeable. Foucault argues that in the course of the eighteenth century, sex did not so much become a taboo (which it had always been) as a serious subject, both for Puritans and for their apparent opponents, the pornographers with deistic ideals. In two fronts there was a development of what Foucault calls a "scientia sexualis", a science or will to know, concentrated on a definition of normal sexuality.

¹⁷ Martin C. Battestin, "A *Sentimental Journey*: Sterne's 'Work of Redemption'", *BSEAA*, 38 (1994), 189-204.

influence of the French Enlightenment.¹⁸ As evidence for this claim he quotes one of the many writers who, in 1760, identified themselves aggressively with Sterne, this one posing as “Tristram Shandy, Gent. Experientia docet”. In imitation of Hall-Stevenson, this pseudo-Tristram wrote a rhymed piece of advice to “the grown Gentlemen, the students of divinity in ———— College, Oxford”,¹⁹ who are told that they will have it made when they write about sex, on condition that they use the language of science. The experienced expert even has a concrete tip: “And if you’re to seek, / Consult——do ye see—— / *The Venus Physique* / Of the sage Maupertuis”.²⁰ Maupertuis’ *Venus Physique* (1744) is one of the many scientific treatises from this period in which the coitus is described.²¹

We may wonder how seriously this source must be taken as evidence for a French-enlightened view of sexuality in Sterne. In the context of the other early Shandean satires, not mentioned by Battestin, the nod to atheist philosophy rather seems to fit in with the tendency to mock all sorts of modernisms. Indeed, the possibility of exchanging smutty for physiological terms was used by many of Sterne’s direct imitators. Dr Kunastrokius, the non-biological father of Jeremiah, describes his recollection of his wedding-night in terms of “inflated Homunculi” and “Hymenial Carunculae”.²² Hall-Stevenson, in his “Epistle to the Grown Gentlewomen, the Misses of ****”, imagines the situation in which the addressees are “inflated / To a degree, / So as to be / Homunculated”.²³ In his turn, one of the Clockmakers, referring to this passage in Hall, feigns concern about the fact that it had become usual for lovers in “high

¹⁸ Battestin, “A Sentimental Journey”, 193.

¹⁹ John Hall-Stevenson’s *Two Lyric Epistles: One to my Cousin Shandy, on his coming to Town; and the Other to the Grown Gentlewomen, The Misses of ***** was published in April 1760. *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* that month printed the first of the two poems from that collection, and a month later came out with what looks like a reaction to the first, “A Lyric Epistle to The Grown Gentlemen, the students of divinity in ————College, Oxford” (*The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, 26, April 1760, 202-203; May 1760, 265-66.) “A Lyric Epistle To the Grown Gentlemen” was reprinted in *Tristram Shandy’s Bon Mots* (June, 1760), 48-51.

²⁰ “A Lyric Epistle to the Grown Gentlemen”, 1760, lines 92-95.

²¹ Pierre Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, *Venus Physique, Suivi de la Lettre sur le Progrès des Sciences*, Paris, 1980, 82. Maupertuis was an atheist friend of La Mettrie.

²² *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius* (1760), 92.

²³ [Hall-Stevenson], *Two Lyric Epistles* (1760), 17.

life” to address their beloved ones in terms like “My dear, if you are desirous of being inflated, pray grant me the favour of homunculating you”.²⁴ Serious historians might find excitingly Enlightened reflections on the body here; still I find it hard to see how either science or sexuality is idealized.

If we accept the historical narrative of the New Historicists, it seems that the original *Tristram Shandy* should be given no more than an aside. Tristram’s innuendo and double entendres exclude, it is true, “prudes and tartufs”, but that does not mean that a new sexual ethics is at hand. When Tristrams refers to sexual intercourse in medical terms, it does not imply that such a natural phenomenon can be discussed without prejudices, but only that our sinful brains are appropriating those terms, too. Sterne was looking for a playful middle position between puritanism and anti-puritanism.²⁵ That is why his book is about sex and is nevertheless innocent. Sterne’s bawdy, as C.E. Vaughan once very accurately remarked, “works, as it were, in a void which he has created specially for the purpose and of which he alone, of all writers, holds the secret. In this dry handling of the matter, the affections of the reader are left unenlisted and unmoved.”²⁶

In this respect, *Tristram Shandy* was the exact opposite of a book like *Fanny Hill*, which, as Trumbach has argued, represents the new bourgeois ethics, in the sense that it arouses male hetero-lust, tries to remove feelings of guilt about that in a discursive manner, and idealizes sex between lovers and in marriage at the same time.²⁷ It is not surprising that John Cleland should have been more irritated by Sterne than by the defenders of ethics who held a safe distance from his freethinking world. “Sterne’s bawdy”, Cleland is said to have remarked to Boswell, is “too plain It gives no sensations.” When he said the same thing to Sterne, the latter is said to have replied that he considered that as a compliment (“You have furnished me a vindication”).²⁸

²⁴ *The Clockmakers Outcry* (1760), 39.

²⁵ For beautiful analyses and one-liners, see Richard Lanham, *Tristram Shandy: The Games of Pleasure*, Berkeley: CA, (1973) 116-27.

²⁶ C.E.Vaughan, “Sterne and the Novel of His Times”, *Cambridge History of English Literature*, 10 (1913), 52.

²⁷ Trumbach, “Erotic Fantasy and Male Libertinism”, 265-81.

²⁸ *Private Papers of James Boswell*, 13 April 1779, cited in *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 228.

But of course, even if Sterne and the imitators of the first generation should be given a rather humble place in the New Historicist model of sexual expressions, that model as such might still be relevant. As we have seen, there have been readers who imagined Sterne's work to silently propagate a materialist anthropology – and, obviously, they were male and interested in the sexual aspects of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*. At least one later imitation appears to have been written exactly to serve this type of reader and, as such, comes very close to the serious and ambivalent ethics of *Fanny Hill* and other favourite sources of the New Historicist school.

La Souricière

This work, *La Souricière* (1794), is the description of a sentimental journey on the Continent undertaken by one “Timothy Touchit”. It is partly a funny book (or is supposed to be), but distinguishes itself by a more extensive use of the medico-libertine jargon that we find in the works of Sterne and early imitations. Like Yorick, Touchit philosophizes about the strength of the passions and their divine origin, but he thinks more often about physical love, and is more outspoken about the inherent obligations for men and women. As he says,

Modesty is the most amiable ornament of the fair sex. It is the nurse of virtue, and the grand inspirer of that intercourse with the other sex, which is founded in the law of nature, and the express command of the Almighty Lord and Father of the Universe; and whatever droning moralists may think, the effects of love between the sexes, are too violent to be the result of an artificial passion²⁹

Touchit then describes in detail the sexual experiences he has had in Flemish and French inns and brothels, for which the “natural philosophers” provide him with the necessary terminology. It is nearly always women who take the initiative – Touchit's body cannot resist the temptations. For instance, when the narrator has managed to keep an over-willing chambermaid outside his door, he wakes up the next morning with an elevated “Barometer of Health”:

²⁹ Timothy Touchit, Esq. [pseud.], *La Souricière: The Mouse-Trap, A Facetious and Sentimental Excursion Through Part of Australian Flanders and France ...*, London 1794, I, 71.

Finding, by its great and continued elevation, that, according to *anatomical cant*, the *Pyramidalia* had been too assiduous in supplying the *testiculi* with an abundant stock of the *vivifying fluid*, I began to be alarmed for the consequence of such a repletion; for where there is irritation we are to expect inflammation, and where there is inflammation a conflagration generally succeeds.

The hero wants to send for a doctor, but the *fille de chambre* has dealt with this sort of situations before:

“...*il ne fera plus de mal.*”—— On this she *prepared what I wanted*, and by *collision* effected a *deliquation*, which produced a very *happy crisis*; and after *repeating the application* three or four times, *pro re nata*, as physicians say, the *elevation of the Barometer* fell down to changeable, and I became relieved and composed.³⁰

The book abounds in this sort of descriptions, with medical terms sometimes being combined with popular ones like *hobby-horse* and *mousetrap*:

My companion was full of fire, but I had little of the *Je-ne-sçai-quoi* about me; however she perfectly understood the *necessary arts* of bringing the *point principal* to its *proper bearing*, for by a few pleasing touches, she brought on the *genial flow*, and I found the *mercury* sufficiently in motion to raise the *Barometer* to a *promising elevation*. Still I did not discover much ardour, which she perceived; and wisely knowing that little is gained by delay, she resolved to take *the whole business upon herself*; whereupon, she bestrode her *Hobby-horse*, and after *being secure of her seat*, jogged on till she arrived at *the point of her wishes*.³¹

The pornographic potential of “anatomical cant” is exploited here more fully than in any other Sterne imitation. The effect may remain funny, but in the context of Touchit’s advertising of sex, the neutrality of the vocabulary is more prominent.

As is also to be expected in this kind of quasi-confession literature, the reader is directed to a moral conclusion that is seemingly at odds with

³⁰ *Ibid.*, II, 4-5.

³¹ *Ibid.*, II, 89-90.

the amusement offered by the text. Touchit feels constantly guilty, especially when judging his own conduct by that of his French guide and servant, a carbon copy of Yorick's *La Fleur*. Thanks to the intervention of this servant, Touchit eventually marries the only woman not-perverted in the book, a lady from Brussels, who had given herself to him out of love, so that the final conclusion can be that "the highest summit of human enjoyment is only to be found in THE MATRIMONIAL MOUSE-TRAP".³² The author may indeed, as Wagner suspects, have thought that he "continue[d] where Sterne drew the curtain",³³ but the moral is more obviously Cleland's,³⁴ than that of the Anglican clergyman with the unhappy marriage. Like the chaste sentimental travellers of the late eighteenth century, Timothy Touchit knows exactly what is sinful and what is not. Yorick had his doubts.

New readers and old ones

A major theme of the early Grub-street imitations was hypocrisy, the visibly incomplete "know thyself" of the "Somebodies". It was connected with a cynical or bleak view of a constant human nature, originating, it seems, from Augustan as well as modern sources – Swift as well as Mandeville. It does not seem coincidental, in that light, that an aversion to (or an incidental modernization of) Sterne's sexual humour should shortly have been followed by, and gone hand in hand with a new faith in the improbability of society. This new belief appears to have been on the rise during the last decades of the eighteenth century. While imitations from the 1770s are usually characterized by a passive, aesthetic sort of sorrow (the protagonists or letter-writers mourn over a world that makes the implicit reader sad as well), later on Sterne's name became linked to a politically slanted Sentimentalism. Thanks to his exchange of letters with Ignatius Sancho, the liberated Montagu slave who had felt comforted by "Job's Account of the Shortness and Troubles of Life, Considered", Sterne won posthumous sympathy with the abolitionists.³⁵ While at first his name was used to express a general

³² *Ibid.*, II, 153.

³³ Wagner, *Eros Revived*, 210.

³⁴ Fanny Hill eventually gets married to her first love.

³⁵ Madeleine Descargues, "Ignatius Sancho's Letters", *The Shandean*, 3 (1991), 145-66; James Walvin, "Ignatius Sancho: The Man and His Times", in *Ignatius Sancho, An African Man of Letters*, ed. Sukhdev Sandhu, London, 1997; *Sermons*, 99-100.

aversion to war and slavery, later on, honest soldiers and wise and good-hearted slave traders³⁶ somehow became part of the Shandean universe. Medics were no longer the predictable topic of black humour and criminal behaviour was suggested to be corrigible by means of education. Imitators like Isaac Brendan and Jane Timbury suggested that an ability to sympathize as Sterne possessed would bring a better world within reach.

The importance of these sources for a more general cultural history is hard to deny, although the old historicist, the late Donald Greene has done well to at least scale it down somewhat. In several papers, Greene emphasizes the continuation of the Augustinian tradition in theology and in the portrayal of mankind by the writers who were, in the eighteenth century, considered to be the most important of their time, besides the theologians especially Johnson. However, even Greene cannot deny that his authors were worried about new developments. The worry of the late Augustans itself suggests that the commercialization of the press and evangelical tendencies in theology were elements of some importance. These elements can very well be associated with the literature that is now described as Sentimental and which, as is also shown by the late-eighteenth century imitations of Sterne, must have had a considerable number of readers. Though Greene rightly objects to the usual dating of the Sentimental movement (from the 1740s), he does realize that something was going on. Faced with the facts, he feels the need to think of an explanation, which, finally, turns out to be alluringly simple and satisfactory: "If it could somehow be established statistically that there was an unusual upsurge in the amount of sentimental literature ..., a hypothesis that would account for it ... would be the growth of a much larger and less discriminating reading public than in the past."³⁷

Investigations into the consumption of printed matter in the eighteenth century appear to rescind the quantitative component of this thesis. The great increase in the number of publications per annum from about 1770 should probably be ascribed to people reading more rather than to a dramatic rise of the number of readers.³⁸ Which social groups began to read more is far from clear, although the evidence for a greater book consumption among women in the 1780s and 1790s is quite

³⁶ In [William Combe], *The Philosopher in Bristol*, Bristol, 1775, Vol. II, 49-50.

³⁷ Greene, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility", 180.

³⁸ Turner, *Living by the Pen*, 34.

convincing.³⁹ A few decades ago, one did not make oneself popular by identifying this group with Greene's "less discriminating reading public", but the fact remains that the novel of Sensibility in the late eighteenth century can be regarded as a genre for women.⁴⁰ That reviewers were prepared to overlook stylistic and compository weaknesses as long as a story propagated their version of civic virtue, offered possibilities for those with less schooling. From the moment that women could count, not wit, but chastity and sensitivity as their special qualities, they were to be entrusted, as readers and writers, with the novel of manners.⁴¹ As it turned out, many late Sterne imitations confirm this new interpretation of femininity, and some of them were published with the explicit aim to instruct older girls. A number of sentimental Sterne imitators appear to have been women.

Whatever the role of female readership for the sentimental movement, the other part of Greene's consideration deserves at least as much attention. In attempts to describe the culture of the late eighteenth century, the rise of Sentimentalism may have been given too much attention. Taking a wider view of the cultural landscape, one gets the impression of a strong continuity of traditional religious values, and esteem for the classics. Also, the reputation of Samuel Johnson in this period belies the assumption that the subtle expression of moral dilemmas became out of fashion. Against this background, it would be odd indeed if none of the younger generation were sensitive enough to appreciate Sterne's satirical undermining of sensitivity.

Indeed, Sterne readers like Richard Griffith or John Eustace have been there from the beginning and never really ceased to comment on their favourite writer. They witnessed the rise of a new sort of tastelessness in the name of Yorick and some of them did attempt to stop the tide. In an article from 1785, an anonymous "Eugenius" warns against the new philosophically based taste, at the same time venting his anger at "the imitators of Sterne". Giving a number of quotations from recent Sentimental Journeys, the author wonders if it is not ridiculous for

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34-45.

⁴⁰ Tompkins, *The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800*, London, 1932, 17; Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction*, London and New York, 1986, 133.

⁴¹ Turner's statistics (*Living by the Pen*, 35-37) are illuminating. For instance, in 1740, two women published novels. In 1795 there were 80.

“this herd of scriblers to expect to excite any other sensation, except that of disgust, by their imitations of a writer, whose consummate learning, and originality of sentiment, are not his only recommendations, but who is a like distinguished for the finest satire”. Without the combination of satire and “the most delicate sympathy ..., which seldom unite, no writer, I will maintain, can give the faintest imitation of Sterne”.⁴²

And there were others, both in England and elsewhere, who especially found Sterne’s ambiguity wonderful.⁴³ If they did not comment on the biased light of the sentimental imitations, these Sterne fans continued to produce ironical satire, and submitted their curious, part-pathetic, part-sarcastic story fragments to English and often Irish magazines under the names of Yorick and Shandy.⁴⁴

The Whitsun Donative

If Shandean satire was being marginalized, it does not really seem to have bothered the authors, who apparently assumed there were enough readers who did read their classics and felt confident enough to adapt the tradition of non-literary parody to actuality.

The Whitsun Donative (1787), a wild pamphlet in imitation of *Tristram Shandy*, the Scriblerians and Horace’s satires, is conceivable in this way. Parts of it are an attack on Wilkes, whose heroic defence of

⁴² Eugenius [pseud.], “On the Imitations of Sterne”, *The Westminster Magazine*, November 1785, 587.

⁴³ In Germany, for instance, Lichtenberg (see *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Howes, 441-43), and especially Goethe, who produced the beautifully concise characterization: “Er schertzt gar anmuthig über die Widersprüche die seinen Zustand zweideutig machen” (W.R.R. Pinger, *Laurence Sterne and Goethe*, Semicentennial Publications of the University of California, n.p., 1918, 37). An example of an old-fashioned satire reader in the Netherlands is the Sterne commentator and imitator J.A. Weiland, author of, among others, *Scribleriana*, a book in imitation of the Scriblerus club, and in the spirit of Democritus.

⁴⁴ For instance, “A Shandean Dialogue”, *The Westminster Magazine*, November 1774, 1; “The Sentimental Rambler, or Sketches of Rural Scenery on a Vernal Day” (*Walker’s Hibernian Magazine*, July and August 1792); “The Friseur: Being an Attempt at an Imitation of Sterne” (*Ireland’s Mirror*, II [September 1805], 485) sounds like a joke, but then again, perhaps it isn’t: a pseudo-Yorick overhears a story about three young children who have lost both their parents. The narrator is so deeply moved and tells his story so movingly that the hero offers him his last money. In the last line the narrator turns out to be the uncle of the orphans. “Rambles through Dublin, A Sentimental Fragment after the Manner of Sterne” (*The Dublin Magazine or Monthly Memorialist*, I [November 1812], 18-19) has similar moments.

Parliamentary Reform, the parliamentary press and the interests of the commons in the 1760s are contrasted with his political deeds at that moment. For the writer of *The North Briton No 45*, to approve of requests for greater religious tolerance and the bloody raids in India once he had attained the position of Lord Mayor of London seemed a cynical illustration of the unreliability of human nature.⁴⁵ In his political observations, however, the author of *The Whitsun Donative* is far from ponderous. He himself is not reliable, either. His argument, if it may be called that, is mixed up with fragments of a military picaresque novel, with innuendo's, comments on *Tristram Shandy* and references to the financial motives behind the booklet itself and to its composition. It sets out to be a specimen of a larger work, in which the author is to discuss his "Life and Opinions", with as its main merit the claim that it was written in "seven days, on night, and a halve".⁴⁶ The cheap pamphlet, whose author leans on "writers whose works have accidentally fallen into his hands", is meant to take "the pulse of the public".

The atmosphere of the book reminds one strongly of that of the earliest *Tristram Shandy* imitations. There is a slight difference in that this seems to have been a privately financed folly, rather than a commercial product (whatever its author might pretend). Nevertheless, as a piece of irony, the story about a forthcoming *Life and Opinions* appears to reflect the old disgust with commercial novels and novelettes, while the confusion of the narrator should obviously be read as a satirical warning against the sort of opportunism and shamelessness the work is suggested to have inspired.

In a way, Green is right, in that it is mysterious and retrospectively disappointing that works such as this became so exceedingly rare after 1770. If one only takes a glance at some of the best known literary tracts of the second half of the eighteenth century, one would expect a fertile soil for this type of satire. The moral aesthetics of Pope's *Essays* appears to have had a long afterlife in the literary theories of Kames (*Elements of Criticism*; 1762), Beattie (*Essays on Poetry and Music as they affect the Mind*; 1762), and Hurd (*On the Idea of Universal Poetry*; 1766), where "Character", "self-knowledge", "taste", "discernment" and "learning" are

⁴⁵ *The Whitsun Donative*, 34-38.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

still very much interrelated.⁴⁷ Sometimes it looks as if the trading classes are spared more than, for example, Shaftesbury would have deemed justified,⁴⁸ but the foundations have remained practically the same. Kames still emphasizes that only few people should be allowed to occupy themselves with art and literature: “there must be a good natural taste ...; that taste must be improved by education, reflection, and experience; it must be preserved in vigor by living regularly, by using the goods of fortune with moderation.”⁴⁹ When it was a matter of a slightly increased respect for the better off of the middling classes, this had no direct bearing on the status of the novel and other heterogeneous matter. Hurd observed with undisguised horror that “of late through all Europe ... ‘novelties’ have been generally well received, ... for the gratification they afford, or promise at least, to a vitiated, palled, and sickly imagination ——— that last disease of learned minds, and sure prognostic of expiring letters”.⁵⁰ At the end of the century, the Augustan ideal found strong support in Reynolds, who explained to the students of the Royal Academy the difference between particular and general nature, telling them that those who had time and money for it could acquire, through the study of philosophy, classical poetry and nature, “intellectual grandeur” and self-knowledge, and that they would then be able to approach a “general Idea of perfection”.⁵¹

Hacks who understood all this, writers of the Richard Savage type, who chose their own destitution as a subject for satire, may have operated there as well, but they seem to have become unexpectedly rare. In any case, after the 1760s the aggressive tone of self-conscious duncery

⁴⁷ For Kames and Hurd, see *Literary Criticism in England*, ed. Chapman, 305-306, 316-17, 393-96. For Beattie, see M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, Oxford, 1953, 16-18, 36.

⁴⁸ Kames keeps emphasizing that only financially independent people can aspire to the ideal, but he does not exclude the possibility that citizens with leisure time have taste, potentially. Only “those who depend for food on bodily labor are totally devoid of taste” (*Literary Criticism in England*, ed. Chapman, 317).

⁴⁹ *Literary Criticism in England*, ed. Chapman, 317.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁵¹ Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. Robert R. Wark, New Haven and London, 1975, especially the IIIrd Discourse, 44-50, But also Discourse XV, where the same demands are made on the art-loving public: “It must be remembered, that as this great style itself is artificial in the highest degree, it presupposes in the spectator, a cultivated and prepared artificial state of mind.” (227)

disappears almost completely from *Tristram Shandy* imitations. The persona of *The Whitsun Donative* (1787) is a very special character among the sentimental travellers and correspondents that in those days also claim a link with Tristram or Yorick. When these last-named writers commit their sentiments to paper incoherently and digressively, the reader understands that the narrators are moved by their passions, but the personae explain that to their own advantage. Characters like the Yorick of *Yorick's Meditations* (1760), the Tristram of *A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1760), the narrators and protagonists of *Jeremiah Kunastrokius* (1760), *Bertram Montfichet* (1761), *Hafen Slawkenbergius* (1762) and *Christopher Wagstaff* (1762) were unmistakable egotists. The chaos that spreads through their works is occasioned by their inability to express self-criticism and analysis, by the extraordinary importance they attach to their private associations, by self-conceit and a need of padding. They will commit everything “that either in its Cause or Consequence may have any Connexion, or oblique Affinity to the main Business in Hand” to paper, only to lose their way in “the inward Recesses of the Heart, and all the Labyrinths of the Soul”.⁵²

The End of the Lusorium

The place of an incident somewhat similar to that of *The Whitsun Donative* gives an additional indication of what has changed since the days of Tristram's great success. The writer behind the pseudonym of Larry Lusus, esq., produced what is probably the most bizarre Sternean text of the eighteenth century. Tristram's placing of his “Author's Preface” and other fragments, the black, marbled and missing pages, lines and diagrams, were always much imitated, even in the days of soft sentimentalism. Lusus, however, has carried madness to extremes. The title-page of his book (see fig.27) opens with what looks like a final sentence of another text: “———— he is your Idol, put a NB to her words, & act accordingly.” Written beneath it, by what I would like to call the last Tristram (the tone is that of Rabelais, the graphics are Sterne's), we find:

And now my fellow travellers, my laughing, crying, singing, dancing, praying, swearing, loving, fighting companions; whom I thus tumble out of my panniers, whether with [crown]ed heads, [laurel]ed heads, [bold]

⁵² *The Life and Opinions of Jeremiah Kunastrokius*, 21.

heads, or mere Apologies for heads; after all this curvical, elliptical — uphill, downhill — zigzaggical — retrogadatory — rectilinal — diagonal — excursion in the wilderness — of — excentricism — without the help of a single type of letter press, written nearly as thought, transmitted to copper nearly as written, & sent into the wide world nearly as forlorn as it's Father [,] We, at last, are arrived to the END of the LUSORIUM, involving in its lusorius emanations, a dish of tea for Ladies, a Feast for the Votaries of Mirth, a Delicious regale for Epicures in exotic excentricities, including songs, Lectures, Anecdotes, &c^t. entirely original, The First 550 Moons of the Author's life, a tri-tripte Dedication, &c^t.&c^t.&c^t. Printed for the Author & Sold by Lewis Covent Garden, Barry Wapping & Burford Fleet Market & all Booksellers. Entered at Stationer's Hall, 1798.

No Man is wise at times.

And, being now come to the end, 'tis certainly time to give the Preface, which, of course, should precede the beginning.

As to the GREAT QUESTION, namely, Does Man [rule] Circumstances, or Circumstances [rule] Man? It must remain as we found it [,] but the great Inference from the excursion is partly locked up in this frame: / To boast the command of rational or divine faculties, / or to set up Reason as the Deity & yet offer incense / to folly, & sacrifices to Hatred & Revenge, thou aughtst / O Man, to be treated as a Child or a Maniac — for if — / see preceding pag. / as to the title page — it's to be heard of, in the course of the excursion. Printed for the Author ... as a tribute of Loyalty & part of the profits in aid of that ORDER inculcated throughout the Work.

The End of the Lusorium (that seems to me to be the title, although librarians may think differently) is not exclusively a whim.⁵³ As is indicated by the title pages of the two volumes of the book, Great Questions are raised, and the French Revolution is discussed. Perhaps, the sentence that Lusur seems to be elaborating on (“He is your Idol”, etc.) is the last one of some serious tract or other. However that may be, Lusur in his booklet professes to be loyal to George III, calling himself an upholder of “ORDER” in general.

For order in literary composition, however, he shows less talent. Just as was the case with Swift's hack and the *Tristrams* of the 1760s, the dis-

⁵³ The ESTC describes the work as such.

—he is your Idol, put a *PS* to her words, & act accordingly.

And now my fellow travellers, my laughing, crying, singing, dancing, praying, swearing, loving, fighting companions; whom I thus tumble out of my hammocks, whether with *And heads*, *And heads*, *And heads*, or more Apologies for heads; after all this *circumlocution*

without the help of a single type of letter press, written nearly as thought, transcribed to copyer nearly as written, & sent into the wide world nearly as forlorn as it's Father *W. A. last*, are arrived to

the **END** of the



And, being now come to the *End*, tis certainly time to give the *Preface*, which, of course, should precede the beginning. As to the *Great Question*, namely, Does *circumstances*, or, *circumstances* *most*? it must remain as we found it, but the *great Inference* from the *excursion* is partly locked up in this frame.

To see is the command of rational or divine faculties, or to set up Reason as the *Deity*, & yet offer violence to *Folly*, & sacrifice to *Hatred* & *Envy*, those who are *O man*, to be treated as a *child* or a *maniac*.

27. The End of the Lusorium (1798) Vol. I, Title page.

orderliness of the work goes hand in hand with the self-imposed pursuit of directness and authenticity. Lusus not only commits his associations freely to paper, he thinks it important that the reader should have the text in front of him as it originated at the moment of writing. Each page of the book, therefore, is an engraving of a sheet of the original manuscript. Naturally, the author is proud of this improvement on book printing, though he professes to be open to criticism: “I am no egotist — nay I like to be told of my faults — how d’ye like the manner of it? — ... & my anecdotes, did you observe the point I gave them — now say, candidly, d’ye think any ever written in such a mode before?”⁵⁴ What the subject of the book is, is hard to say (“’tis whimmy, is it not — ... my sending ye hunting for the subject”), but at least there is a thread running through it all, which, moreover, can be tied up to the title. Lusus describes, from “garret N^o 35 Clerkenwell Close”, his social descent from playwright and actor of comical parts to coal porter. His failure in the lusorium (court theatre) is in the work itself commented on by a respectable bourgeois public:

— now I, to speak without prejudice, think there is one good song in it
 — Now I hate songs, especially if they an’t very serious — Had it been full of Anecdotes, I might possibly have liked it better — I think, all together, ’tis a heterogeneous mass of nonsense, you young folk may like such fooleries, but I say we have too many of them already — true Mr. Classic so I say — & publications as well as publick entertainments are quite degenerated: right sir, they should all be serious & improving — I agree with you, miss Novelia — Ay, miss Gravely, but most of them are now quite childish — clearly so, I can’t bear them — nor I — ... — Oh I hate them — I detest them too — So do I, serious conversation is better than all —⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Anon., *The End of the Lusorium*, London, 1798, II, 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 4.

One Mr Candid stands up for Lusus by remarking that his humour offers a counter-balance to “the present perversion of Reason”, and that nothing in his book is “irreligious, immoral, immodest or disloyal”, but this critic is himself jeered off the stage.

When in his second volume, Lusus looks to the future, it seems that he has become really crazy. An insulting remark from a reader/spectator makes him lose his temper, but Lusus expects that this will not happen to him again in a hurry:

I suppose this time twelvemonths at farthest (this is Feb. 1798) we shall be quite civil, quite reformed, & quite every thing; as every body talks of it, if —— plague take these ifs; they spoil many a fine closet hatch'd project —— but if I —— oh no more ifs —— how I am wasting paper! —— well nothing shall stop me now.⁵⁶

From there on, Lusus only talks nonsense. The book ends with a few slogans about poverty, foolishness and “Plato’s fancies”, written around and through music-staves, and a dedication to great rulers, in the form of a sort of letter-maze (fig. 28). Lusus’ last words are “plague —— let’s get out somehow ——”

With thanks to Huizinga, Richard Lanham characterizes the eighteenth century as the last golden era of play.⁵⁷ In England, it was also the age of satire, and if we regard Swift and Sterne as the most prominent representatives of that genre, we can see how closely satire and play were interwoven. With Larry Lusus, their tradition witnessed its final flickering.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, II, 3.

⁵⁷ Lanham, *The Games of Pleasure*, 42, 55.

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2. IMITATIONS, COMMENTARIES, PARODIES, FORGERIES

(By year of appearance; anonymous, unless otherwise stated; reviews not included; title pages of books represented.)

1760

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- The Life and Opinions of Miss Sukey Shandy of Bow-Street, Gentlewoman. In a Series of Letters to her Dear Brother Tristram Shandy, Gent.* ... London: Printed for R. Stevens, at Pope’s Head in Pater-Noster Row; MDCCLX.
- The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, [spurious] Vol. III.* London, Printed in the Year MDCCLX.
- “A Lyric Epistle To the Grown Gentlemen, the Students of Divinity in —College, Oxford; never before printed. By Tristram Shandy, Gent.,

- Experientia Docet”, *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, May, 1760, 265-66.
- Observations, Good or Bad*, see Boswell, section 3.
- “A Receipt for a Soup for Tristram Shandy”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, XXX (1760), 289.
- Sketch of Yorick (*Tristram Shandy* I.11 and I.12), *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, XXX (1760), 35-37 (reprinted in *London Chronicle*, 5 Feb., 1760).
- [Stevens, George Alexander,] *The History of Tom Fool*, see section 3.
- A Supplement to the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. Serving to elucidate that work*. By the Author of Yorick’s Meditations. London: Printed for the Author, in the year MDCCLX.
- “To the Proprietors of the Universal Magazine” (letter, signed G.), *The Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure*, April, 1760, 189-90.
- “Tristram Shandy” (poetical essay), *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, XXX (1760), 243.
- “Tristram Shandy” (poem), *Lloyd’s Evening Post and British Chronicle*, VI, 443 (Friday May 16, – Monday May 19, 1760), 475.
- “Tristram Shandy: A new Game at Cards.”, *The Grand Magazine*, June, 1760, 290-93.
- Tristram Shandy’s Bon Mots, Repartees, odd Advenures, And Humorous Stories; All warranted Originals; Being taken from Actual Conversations; or collected from the most Authentick Intelligence. To which are added, by way of appendix: A Story of a Cock and a Bull, in the Shandy Stile; A Poetical Epistle, never before printed; A discourse well worth the perusal of all who are curious in the Sermon Way; and a New Dialogue of the Dead, between Dean Swift, and Henry Fielding, Esq; London: Printed for E. Cabe, in Ave-Mary-lane, Ludgate-street. MDCCLX.*
- Yorick’s Meditations upon Various Interesting and Important Subjects ...* London, Printed for R. Stevens at Pope’s Head in Pater-Noster Row. 1760.

1761

- An Admonitory Letter to the Rev. Mr. S-----. Upon the Publication of his Fifth and Sixth Volumes of Tristram Shandy. By a Layman ...* London: Printed for G. Burnet, at Bishop Burnet’s Head, near Arundel-Street, in the Strand. 1761.
- A Funeral Discourse, Occasioned by the much lamented Death of Mr. Yorick, Prebendary of Y--k and Author of the much admired Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Preached before a very mixed Society of Jemmies, Jessamies, Methodists and Christians, At a Nocturnal Meeting in Petticoat Lane, and now published at the unanimous Request of the Hearers By Christopher Flagellan, A.M. and enriched with the Notes of Various Commentators ...* London: Printed for W. Nicoll in St. Pauls Church Yard MDCCLXI.

- [Hall-Stevenson, John,] *Fables for Grown Gentlemen*, see Hall-Stevenson, section 3.
- A Letter from the Rev. George Whitfield [sic], B.A. to the Rev. Laurence Sterne, M.A. The supposed author of a Book, entitled, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ...* London: Printed in the Year MDCCLXI. (2nd edition of *A Genuine Letter*, 1760)
- The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfichet, Esq; Written by Himself.* Vol. 1 [Vol. 2] ... London: Printed for C.G. Seyffert, in Pall-Mall. [n.d.]
- Yorick's compleat Jests, and Universal Songster; Being a Collection of the most Poignant Jests, Witty Sayings and New Songs.* London: printed for J. Fuller; and J. Fuller, Jun., 1761.

1762

- Dialogues of the Living ...* ; London, Printed for J. Cooke, at Shakespeare's-Head, in Pater-Noster-Row. 1762.
- Jack and his Whistle. Whith Annotations. To which is added, A Paper dropt from Tristram Shandy's Pocket-book* Edinburgh, printed in the year MDCCLXII.
- The Life and Amours of Hafen Slawkenbergius; Author of the Institute of Noses. Compiled from Authentic Materials, Communicated to the Editor, by the Learned Mr. Heydegger, of Strasburg ...* ; London: Printed for W. Flexney, near Gray's Inn, Holborn MDCCLXII.
- The Life, Travels, and Adventures of Christopher Wagstaff, Gentleman, Grandfather to Tristram Shandy. Originally published in the Latter end of the last Century, Interspersed with A Suitable Variety of Matter, By the Editor. The Whole being intended as a full and final Answer to everything that has been, or shall be, written in the Out-of-the-Way Way ...* Vol I. [Vol. II], London: Printed for J. Hinxman, in Pater-Noster-Row. MDCCLXII. (2nd edition [*The Humorous Life, Travels, and Adventures of Christopher Wagstaff*], 1763)
- Stayley, George, *The Life and Opinions of an Actor. A Real History, in Two real Volumes.* Vol. I [Vol. II] By Mr. George Stayley, Late of Smock-Alley, Comedian. ... Dublin: Printed for the Author. And sold by G.Faulkner, in Dublin; J. Hinton, bookseller, at the King's Arms in Newgate-Street, London; and all the Author's Friends in England and Ireland. MDCCLXII.
- [Stevens, George Alexander,] *Tom Fool's History: or, modern taste displayed* (2nd edition of *The History of Tom Fool*), see section 3.
- Tristram Shandy's Description of General Elections, and Septennial Parliaments Proper to be read by every one in Ireland at this Juncture.* Dublin: printed for R. Lewis, at the Register-Office, in Crane-Lane. MDCCLXII. the Second Edition.
- [Hall-Stevenson, John,] *Two Lyrick epistles: or, Margery the Cookmaid to the Critical Reviewers*, see section 3.

Yorick turned Trimmer; or, The Gentleman's Jester: And newest Collection of Songs. Embellished with three Copper-plate Cuts, the most interesting Scenes in Yorick's Works, viz.—1. Yorick riding through the Village; 2. Dr.Slop and Obadiah; 3. Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim;—containing, besides a Variety of Jests and other Subjects, the following interesting Articles: Songs, Catches, and Glees, sung at the Public Places this Summer, viz. Royalty Theatre, the Haymarket, the Beef-Steak Club, and the Anacreontic Society—with Pieces of Wit of the Choicest Spirits of the last and present Age London: Printed for the Proprietor; and sold by W. Nicoll, No. 51, St. Paul's Church-yard; at the Circulating Library, No. 2, Shoe-lane; and may be had of all the Booksellers and News-carriers in Great Britain.

1763

Folly, a Satire on the Times. Written by a Fool, and younger brother to Tristram Shandy ... London: Printed for J. Pridden, at the Feathers in Fleet-Street, and sold at all the Pamphlet-Shops in Town.

Memoirs of the Life and Adventures of Tsonnonthouan, a King of the Indian Nation called Roundheads. Extracted from Original Papers and Archives ... Vol. I. [II.] London: Printed for the Editor: And Sold by J. Knox, at the Three Poets, in the Strand. 1763.

[Hall-Stevenson, John,] *A Pastoral Cordial*, see section 3.

[Stevens, George Alexander,] *The Dramatic History of Master Edward*, see section 3.

1764

[Griffith, Richard,] *The Triumvirate: or The Authentic Memoirs of A. B. and C.*, see section 3.

[Hall-Stevenson, John,] *A Pastoral Puke*, see section 3.

1765

Miss C———y's Cabinet of Curiosities; Or the Green-Room broke open. By Tristram Shandy, Gent. ... Utopia: Printed for William Whirligig, at the Maiden's Head, in Wind-Mill-Street. 1765.

1766

“The castrated Chapter of the fourth Volume of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, restored.”, in *The St. James's Chronicle, or The British Evening-Post*, Tuesday Nov. 11, – Thursday Nov. 13, 1766.

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman [spurious] Vol. IX London: Printed for T. Durham, at Charing-Cross, and T. Caslon, in Pater-noster Row. 1766.

1767

“The Adventures of an Author”, *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, XXXVII (1767) 116.

1768

A Catalogue of a Curious and Valuable Collection of Books, Among which are included The Entire Library of the late Reverend and Learned Laurence Sterne, A.M. Prebendary of York, &c. &c. Author of The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. And several other Works of Wit and Humour ... Which will begin to be sold exceeding cheap ... on Thursday, August 25, 1768, and continue till all are sold, By J. Todd and H. Sotheran, (Successors to the late Mr. Hildyard) Booksellers in York.

The Life and Adventures of Sir Bartholomew Sapskull, Baronet. Nearly Allied to most of the Great Men in the Three Kingdoms. By Somebody. Vol. I [vol. II] London: Printed for J. Williams, No. 38. near the Mitre Tavern, Fleet-Street. 1768.

Occasional Verses on the Death of Mr. Sterne. To which is added, An Epistle to a Young Lady, on the Taste and Genius of the Times. ... London: Printed for J. Murdoch, opposite the New Exchange Coffe House in the Starnd. MDCCLXVIII.

Sentiments on the Death of the Sentimental Yorick. By one of Uncle Toby’s illegitimate Children. With Rules for writing Modern Elegies. Alas Poor Yorick! London, Printed for Staples Steare, No.93 Fleet Street MDCCLXVIII.

Veni, Vidi, Vici, Ivi: or, He’s Gone! Who? Yorick! Grim Death Appears! ... London: Printed for L.Tomlinson opposite the White Swann Inn, White Chapel. MDCCLXVIII.

1769

“Anecdotes of Mr. Sterne, from the Preface to the new edition of the third and fourth Volumes of Yorick’s Sentimental Journey”, *The St. James’s Chronicle, or The British Evening-Post*, Tuesday June 27, – Thursday June 29, 1769.

Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued. To which is prefixed, some Account of the Life and Writings of Mr. Sterne. Vol III. [IV] London: Printed for S. Bladon. 1769. (2nd edition [“By Eugenius ... Corrected, with Additions”], 1769; here cited from *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, eight Volumes, Vol VII, 1783.)

1770

[Griffith, Richard.] *The Posthumous Works of a Late Celebrated Genius, Deceased. ...* In Two Volumes Vol. I. [Vol. II.] Dublin: Printed for J. Exshaw, H. Saunders, W. Sleater, D. Chamberlaine, J. Potts, J. Williams,

and C. Ingham. MDCCLXX. (4th edition [*The Koran: or, Essays, Sentiments, Characters, and Callimachies of Tria Juncta in Uno, M.N.A. Or Master of No Arts*. Three Volumes complete in One. Vienna: printed for R. Sammer, Bookseller], 1798; reprinted in *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, 1783 and 1799].

Mickle, William Julius, *Voltaire in the Shades*, see section 3.

“A Sentimental Journey, by a Lady”, *Lady’s Magazine, or Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, I (Aug., 1770) –VIII (Apr., 1777).

Sentimental Lucubrations. By Peter Pennyless. London: Printed for T. Becket, and P.A. De Hondt, in the Strand. MDCCLXX.

Yorick’s Jests: Being a New Collection of Jokes, Witticisms, Bon Mots, and Anecdotes, of the Genuine Sons of Wit and Humour of the last and the present age ... The whole being intended as an antidote for the spleen, vapours, and melancholy. – London: Printed for S. Bladon, 1770. (2nd edition, 1783; 3rd edition 1790.)

1771

“Imitation of the Imitations of Yorick”, *Oxford Magazine, or Universal Amusement*, Aug., 1771, 67-69.

1772

[Paterson, Samuel,] *Joineriana: or the book of Scraps*, see section 3.

[Griffith, Richard,] *Something New*, see section 3.

1773

“The Life and Opinions of Timotheus Randy, Stay-Maker”, *Covent-Garden Magazine, or the Amourous Repository*, II (1773), April, May, June.

“The Sentimental Coquette, a Fragment from the French”, in *The Sentimental Magazine, or General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment*, I (Nov. 1773) and II (Jan. 1774).

“A Sentimental Journey through Life”, *The Sentimental Magazine, or General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment*, I (March-Nov, 1773).

Silenus, An Elegy upon the Death of Doctor Slop, by Way of a Dialogue between a Curate and a Sexton, the Doctor’s Butler, and a Livery Servant. By Philater. ... London, Printed for S. Bladon, No. 28, in Pater-noster-Row. MDCCLXXIII.

1774

“Sentimental Biography: The Life of Mr. Sterne”, *The Sentimental Magazine, or General Assemblage of Science, Taste, and Entertainment*, II (Jan., 1774) 4-5.

The Sentimental Exhibition; or Portraits and Sketches of the Times. ... London, Printed for T. Lowndes, No. 77, in Fleet-Street. MDCCLXXIV.

“A Shandyan Dialogue”, *The Westminster Magazine*, II (1774), Nov., 580-81.

1775

[Combe, William,] *The Philosopher in Bristol ...* ; Bristol: Printed by G.Routh, in the Maiden-Tavern, MDCCLXXV.

The Correspondents, An Original Novel; In a Series of Letters. ... A New Edition. London; printed for T. Becket, corner of the Adelphi, in the Strand. MDCCLXXV.

An Humble Tribute to the Memory of Mr. Sterne. By a Lady. London: Printed for J.Wilkie, St. Paul’s Church-Yard. MDCCLXXV.

Letters from Eliza to Yorick. London; Printed for the Editor, And Entered in the Hall-book of the Company of Stationers, the 15th of April 1775.

1776

Baster, W., *An Essay, on the Nature, Causes, and Cure, of the Rheumatism: Being An Attempt to form an exact Theory of the Disease, and Facilitate the Means of acquiring Relief to those who are unfortunately subject to its Attacks.* To which are added, *Observations on the Medical Treatment of the Rev. Mr. Sterne, During his last Illness. Pointing out The Impropriety of the Means employed.* By W. Baster, Surgeon and Manmidwife, in Devizes. Devizes, Printed and Sold for the Author, by T. Burrough; Sold likewise by Mr. Robinson, Pater-noster-Row, London; Messrs. Cadell and Becket, Bristol; Mr. Hazard, Bath; Messrs Collins and Johnson, Easton, and Hodson, Salisbury; and by most other Country-Booksellers. 1776.

[Cogan, Thomas,] *John Buncl, Junior, Gentleman. ...* London: Printed for J. Johnson, in St. Paul’s Church-Yard; MDCCLXXVI.

1777

Yorick’s Skull; Or, College Oscitations. With Some Remarks on the Writings of Sterne, And A Specimen of the Shandean Stile. By the Author of A Monstrous Good Lounge. ... London; Printed for J. Bew, In Paternoster-Row. MDCCLXXVII.

1778

Heard, William, *A Sentimental Journey to Bath, Bristol, and their Environs; a descriptive Poem. To which are added Miscellaneous Pieces.* By William Heard. ... London, Printed for J. Sewel in Cornhill, T. Becket and T. Evans in The Strand. MDCCLXXVIII.

A Sentimental Diary, Kept in an Excursion to Little Hampton, near Arundel, and to Brighthelmstone, in Sussex. ... London: Printed for J. Ryall, in Union Street, Westminster; And sold by W. Lee, Printer, in Lewes, And all the Booksellers and News-Carriers in Town and Country.

1779

- “The Character of a True Philosopher, in the Manner of the Celebrated Mr. Sterne”, *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement* XLVI (1779), 292-94.
- [Combe, William,] *Letters supposed to have been written by Yorick and Eliza*. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. [Vol. II.] ... London, Printed for J. Bew, in Pater-Noster-Row. MDCCLXXIX
- Thomas, Rowley, *A Familiar Epistle to Roger Kenyon, Esq; in Memory of Sterne; to which are added the portraits of the Socinian and the Orthodox Divine*: By Rowley Thomas. ... Shrewsbury: Printed and sold by Stafford Pryse, for the Author; and by J. Bew, Paternoster Row, London. M,DCC,LXXIX.
- “Fragment in the Shandean Stile” (signed Bob Short), *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement*, XLV (1779), 85.
- The Shandysonian: Containing A Conclamation of Original Pieces, A Higgledy-Piggledy of Controversies and Opinions on various interesting Subjects; Detections and Confutations of Vulgar Errors, and Errors not Vulgar; Extraordinary Incidents; and a Salmagunda of Lucubrations, Intended as the true Pabulum Mentis; Consisting of Morsels of History, Physiology, Fragments of Art, Portions of Humour, Goblets of Ratiocination, Crumbs of Comfort, Piece-Meals of Oeconomy, &c. Adapted to all Climes and Capacities, And composed of such useful Materials that no wise Person in the World ought to be without. The Second Edition. By Thomas Medley, Esq; Vice President of Bollimong College, Doctor of Gallimafray, Utopian Professor of Oddities, and Fellow of Civil Society.* ... London: Printed for W. Nicoll, G. Haweis, N. Collins, and T. Stears. MDCCLXXIX.

1781

- [MacNally, Leonard,] *Sentimental Excursions to Windsor and Other Places, with Notes Critical, illustrative, and explanatory, by several eminent Persons, male and female, living and dead.* ... London, Printed for J. Walker, Pater-noster-Row. MDCCLXXXI.
- Reveries of the Heart. During a Tour through Part of England and France; In a Series of Letters to a Friend.* Vol.I. [II.] ... London, Printed for J. Johnson, No.72, St Paul’s Church-Yard, MDCCLXXXI.
- “A Trip to Margate, by Ansegise Clement, Gentleman”, *London Magazine and Monthly Chronologer*, L (Oct., 1781) – LI (Nov., 1782).

1782

- [Douglas, James,] *Traveling Anecdotes through Various Parts of Europe*. In Two Volumes. Vol I. [Vol. II] ... Rochester: Printed by T. Fisher. Sold by J. Dodsley, Pall-Mall; J. Debrett, Piccadilly, W. Elmly, T. Beckett, Strand; and Richardson and Urquhart, Royal Exchange, London. MDCCLXXXII. (2nd

edition ["By James Douglas"], 1785; 4th edition, Dublin, 1787.)

Keate, George, *Sketches from Nature; Taken, and Coloured, in a Journey to Margate. Published from the Original Designs. ... the Third Edition. Vol. I. [Vol. II.]* London, printed for J. Dodsley, Pall-Mall. MDCCLXXXII.

"The Oxonian's Sentimental Trip to London", *British Magazine, or Monthly Repository for Gentlemen and Ladies*, I (July, 1782), and II (Jan., 1783).

"Sterne's Grave" (series "The Man of the Town"), *European Magazine and London Review*, II (1782), 325-28.

Sterne's Witticisms, or Yorick's Convivial Jester; Containing a new Variety of pleasing Bon Mots, Anecdotes, Humorous Tales, Funny Jokes, Smart Repartees, of the Geniuses of the present Age: With some Theatric Squibbs, - Army and Navy Adventures. To which are added Select Poems, Songs, Epigrams, Toasts and Sentiments, humorous and sentimental, The Amusement of Convivial Assemblies. London: Printed for A. Milne, Holborn, and Sold by all Booksellers in Town and Country. [n.d.]

"Umbra's Dialogues. Dialogue V.: Shandy Sen. – Matthew Bramble", *London Magazine: Or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, LI (1782), 319-23.

1783

Tristram Shandy, a Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle, In Two Acts. By the Author of Retaliation. London: Printed for S. Bladon, No. 13 Pater-noster-Row. MDCCLXXXIII.

Yorick's Jest: Or, Wit's Common-Place Book. Arranged on a New Plan. Being a Choice Collection of Humorous Jest, Happy Bon-Mots, Strange Adventures, Whimsical Sayings, Difficult Riddles, Perplexing Aenigmas, Smart Repartees, Ridiculous Blunders, Droll Tales, Pleasant Stories, Keen Epigrams, Puzzling Rebusses, Original Cross-Readings, &c. &c. &c. Selected from the Works and Anecdotes of Voltaire, Foote, Ld. Chesterfield, Dr. Johnson, Mat. Prior, Dean Swift, Sterne, Quin, Thornton, Garrick, Colman, Chase Price, G.A. Stevens, Beau Nash, Ned Shuter, Geo. Selwyn, Col. Boden, & C. & C. And other Celebrated Wits of the last and present Age. To which is added, A Choice Collection of Toasts and Sentiments. ... London: Printed for S. Bladon, Paternoster-Row. 1783.

1784

[Gorgy, M.] *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental.* A Londres; Et se trouve à Paris, Chez Bastien, Libraire. 1784. Also as: *Nouveau Voyage en France, de Sterne. Suivi de l'Histoire de le Fevre, & d'un Choix de Lerttres familiares du même Auteur.* Traduit de l'Anglois par M.D.L*****, Avocat-Général au parlement de *** ... A Geneve. 1784.

*Unfortunate Sensibility; or, the Life of Mrs. L*****. Written by Herself. In a Series of Sentimental Letters. Dedicated to Mr. Yorick, In the Elysian Fields.*

In two Volumes. Vol. I. [Vol. II.] London: Printed for Mess. Richardson and Urquhart, under the Royal Exchange. MDCCLXXXIV.

1785

“On the Imitations of Sterne”, *The Westminster Magazine, or the Pantheon of Taste*. Nov., 1785, 585-87.

1786

“A New Sentimental Journey through England, written by a Lady”, *The New Lady’s Magazine, or Polite and Entertaining Companion for the Fair Sex*, I (Feb., 1786) – III (May, 1788).

“Fragment of a Novel”, *Town and Country Weekly Magazine* (Dublin), Jan.2, 1786, 49-54.

Henderson, John, “Ode, Intended to have been spoken at the tomb of the Rev. Mr. Lawrence Sterne, on his birth-day. Written by the late Mr. Henderson”, *The Fashionable Magazine, or Lady’s and Gentleman’s Monthly Recorder of New Fashions*, June, 1768, 34-35.

“Sentimental Vagaries”, *The Fashionable Magazine, or Lady’s and Gentleman’s Monthly Recorder of New Fashions* ..., I (June-Dec., 1786), 23.

1787

Lewis, Hardwicke, *An Excursion to Margate in the Month of June, 1786: Interspersed with a Variety of Anecdotes of well-known characters*. By Hardwicke Lewis, Esq. ... London: Printed by Ritchie & Sammells, Bartholomew-Close. For J. French, Bookseller, No. 164, Fenchurch-Street. MDCCLXXXVII.

New Sentimental Journey. Translated into English by F.C.A. Berg ... Hamburg, printed for H.J. Matthiesen, 1787. (Translation of: M. Gorgy, *Nouveau Voyage Sentimental*, 1784.)

Timbury, Jane, *The Story of Le Fevre, from the Works of Mr. Sterne*. Put into Verse by Jane Timbury London: Printed for R. Jameson, No. 227, Strand. M,DCC,LXXXVII.

“A Tale in the Manner of Sterne”, in *Favourite Tales, Translated from the French*. London: Printed for G.G.J. and J. Robinson, Pater-Noster-Row. MDCCLXXXVII, 75-79.

The Whitsun Donative, Being a hasty Sketch of an intended Publication under the Title of The Life and Opinions of Tristram’s Papa; Interspersed with some curious Anecdotes of Capt. Bobadil Shylock. ... London: Printed for the Author. MDCCLXXXVII.

1788

[Combe, William,] *Original Letters of the Late Reverend Mr. Laurence Sterne; Never Before Published*. London: printed at the Logographic Press, and sold

by T. Longman, Pater-noster-row; J. Robson, and W. Clarke, New Bond Street; and W. Richardson, under the Royal Exchange. 1788.

“Lines supposed to have been written by the late Laurence Sterne”, *The Town & Country Magazine; or Universal Repository of Knowledge, Instruction, and Entertainment*, Aug., 1788, 382.

A Tour, Sentimental and Descriptive, through the United Provinces, Austrian Netherlands, and France, Interspersed with Parisian, and other Anecdotes: With some Observations on the Howardian System. Two Volumes. Vol. I. [II.] London: Printed for J. Lowndes, No.77, Fleet-Street. MDCCLXXXVIII.

1789

The Father; or, American Shandy-ism. A Comedy, as performed at the New-York Theatre, by the Old American Company. Written in the Year 1788. ... New-York: Printed by Hodge, Allen & Campbell MDCC,LXXXIX.

1790

The Letters of Maria; to which is added, An Account of her Death. ... London. Printed for G.Kearsley. No. 46, Fleet Street. 1790.

1792

[Croft, John.] *Scrapeana. Fugitive Miscellany.* ... Sans Souci. MDCCXCII.

“The Sentimental Rambler, or Sketches of Rural Scenery on a Vernal Day”, in *Walker’s Hibernian Magazine*, July and Aug., 1792.

1793

The Whole Story of the Sorrows of Maria of Moulines. Selected from Various Works of the Celebrated Sterne. A Tale, founded on Fact. ... Boston – 1793. Printed, and for sale at the different Book-stores in town.

1794

La Souriciere. The Mouse-Trap. A Facetious and Sentimental Excursion through part of Austrian Flanders and France. Being a Divertisement for Both Sexes. By Timothy Touchit, Esq. ... In Two Volumes. Vol I. [Vol. II.] Printed for J. Parsons, Paternoster-Row – 1794. Entered at Stationer’s Hall.

1796

“The Bagpiper, a Fragment attempted after the Manner of Sterne”, in *Asylum, or Weekly Miscellany* (Glasgow), III (1769), Feb., 296-98.

1797

[Brendan, Isaac,] *Fragments in the Manner of Sterne.* London, Printed for the Authors and Sold by Debrett, Piccadilly; and Murray & Highley, Fleet-Street. 1797. (2nd edition, 1798; 3rd edition, Dublin, 1798; 4th edition,

Leipzig, 1800; 5th edition, 1802).

Ferriar, John, *Illustrations of Sterne: with Other Essays and Verses*. By John Ferriar, M.D. ... Printed for Cadell and Davies, London, by George Nicholson, Manchester. MDCCXCVIII.

1798

The End of the Lusorium, involving in its lusorius emanations a dish of tea for Ladies, a Feast for the Votaries to Mirth, a Delicious regale for Epicures in exotic Excentricities, including songs, Lectures, Anecdotes, &ct., entirely original. The First 550 Moons of the Author's Life, a tri-tripte Dedication, &ct., &ct., &ct. ... Printed for the Author and sold by Lewis, Covent Garden; Barry, Wapping & Burford, Fleet-Market & all Booksellers. Entered at Stationer's Hall 1798.

1799

Whyte, D., *The Fallacy of French Freedom, and Dangerous Tendency of Sterne's Writings. or An Essay Shewing that Irreligion and Immorality pave the way for Tyranny, and Anarchy: and That Sterne's Writings are both Irreligious and Immoral: Concluding with some Observations on the Present State of France*. By D. Whyte, M.D. Late Surgeon to the English Prisoners in France. ... London: Printed for J.Hatchard. opposite Burlington House, Piccadilly. 1799.

1803

"The Influence of Riches, in Imitation of Sterne", in *Lady's Monthly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction*, XI (October 1803), 236-42.

1805

"The Friseur, being an Attempt at an Imitation of Sterne", in *Ireland's Mirror, or a Chronicle of the Times* (Dublin), II (Sept. 1805), 485.

1812

"Rambles through Dublin, a Sentimental Fragment after the Manner of Sterne", in *Dublin Magazine, or Monthly Memorialist* (Dublin), I. (Nov. 1812), 18-19.

3. OTHER PRIMARY SOURCES

- Anon., *The Adventures of Jonathan Corncob, Loyal American Refugee*. Written by Himself. ... London: Printed for the Author, 1787, and now newly reprinted, ed. David R. Godine, Boston, 1976.
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Appendix

5. NOT FOUND, OR FALSELY ADVERTISED

- Anon., *The Clockmaker's Kne'l for the Dialogues of the Dead* [*Public Advertiser*, 20 June, 1760].
- , *The Clockmaker's Meditation upon Yorick's Sermons* [*Public Advertiser*, 20 June, 1760].
- , *The Clockmaker's Political Humbug* [*York Courant*, 8 July, 1760].
- , *Dialogues of the Living: Particulars Between the Following Celebrated Personages, 1. Parson Tristram and the Revd. Mr Sterne, on the Danger, Sin, and Folly of being Righteous Over-much. 2. Mrs N-h-l, Dr Slop, Dr S——t, and the A-b-p of———, on the Inoculation of Christianity, or the Baptism of unborn Infants. 3. Mrs Shandy and her Husband, on the Critical Minute. 4. Peter A-nn-t and the Rev Mr W–tf–d, on the New Birth. 5. Dr Brown and Mr Buckhorse on the Effimanicity of the Times. 6 J-F- and Mother Douglas, on a Reformation of Manners. 7. Mr S——*** and Jacob Henriques, on the Good of the Nation. 8. P.F. and L.G.S. &c.&c.&c. By Littleton Shandy, Gent.* [*Public Advertiser*, No. 7976, Thursday 29 May, 1760].
- , *Did You Ever See Such Damned Stuff?* 12mo 1s6d Seyffert, London, 1760. [*Monthly Review*, XXIII, 84: “No, never!”].
- , *Explanatory Remarks upon the Third and Fourth Volumes of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy; wherein the Wit and Humour of this Piece are disclosed and elucidated to the conception of the meanest capacity*, Vol. II, by the Author of the First. 12mo 1s Cabe, London 1761 [*Public Advertiser*, 25 Feb., 1761; *Monthly Review*, XXIV, 275: “We need say no more of this article than to refer readers to what we said on the first part of these remarks: See Review, vol. XXII, p. 549, art. 11.”].
- , *A Letter from one of the Jolly Sons of Comus to the Author of Tristram Shandy*. R. Griffiths, 6d. [*Public Advertiser* No. 7969, Friday 23 May, 1760, 490].
- , *A Shandean Essay on the Human Passion; with a Smack here and there of Butler, Prior, Swift, Pope, &c.* By Caleb Mac Whim. 4to 1s Coote, London, 1760 [*Monthly Review* XXIII, 527: “A droll medley of poetizing Philosophy, or philosophizing Doggrel; the random work of some comical Genius, who affecting the unconnected manner of Tristram Shandy, has thrown together a number of shrewd imaginations relating to the nature of the passions, pride, Lust, &c. but with a declared disregard of all order, distinction, or conclusive meaning whatever. The Author, notwithstanding, is evidently capable of writing to better purpose, and therefore we wish him better employment for the future.”].

- , *Tristram Shandy at Ranelagh* 8vo 1s Duntan, London, 1760. [*Public Advertiser* No. 7993, Friday 20 June 1760; *Monthly Review*, XXII, 548: “An obscene and contemptible catch-penny. Tho’ few can contend with Mr. St—— for wit, yet every Scribbler can write asterisms, and make blanks for bawdy words; but if such vile stuff is encouraged, the public are still more to blame than these miserable Pamphleteers, who are compelled by hunger to prostitute their talents, such as they are, to please the depraved taste of their Readers. Few Chapmen carry any goods to market but such as they know are saleable.”].
- , *Tristram Shandy in a Reverie, Containing among other Choice Things, his Thoughts on two late Remarkable Trials and the Delinquents - An Answer to the Clock-makers - Adventure at the Bedford - Hints upon Matrimony, &c. &c. To which is added, the Litera Infernalis, or Poor Yorick! Recorded by Himself. And by him adressed to the Admirers of his Life and Opinions.* 8vo 1s Williams, London, 1760. [*Public Advertiser*, No. 7977, Friday 30 May, 1760; *Monthly Review*, 22.549: “All froth and folly: imitating Mr. Sterne’s manners, as Alexander’s Courtiers did their Master, by carrying their heads awry”; *Critical Review*, IX, June 1760, 493: “The most stupid, unmeaning, silly attempt to humour that ever insulted the public curiosity after every thing that bears the name of Shandy”].
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