

TRISTRAM SHANDY:

THE TRIUMPH OF IMAGINATION, WIT, AND FEELING
OVER
RATIONALISM

A dissertation presented by

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PREFACE

Laurence Sterne thought that Tristram Shandy was "more read than understood." Certainly any comprehensive understanding of Tristram Shandy has never come easily. Explications of Sterne's novel have all too often been distorted by commentators lacking a sense of the age in which Sterne wrote. Even the most perceptive critics have tended either to generalize about all nine books of Tristram Shandy or to write shorter articles on single facets of Sterne's many-sided novel. The interrelation of the varied eighteenth-century themes, one with another and each one with Sterne's central structural device, has never been satisfactorily demonstrated. This in the largest measure is the purpose of my paper.

I have approached Tristram Shandy from the viewpoint not only of a literary critic, but also of an analytic philosopher. This new approach is warranted because of Sterne's obvious amusement with philosophical topics and because previous commentary has suffered from a lack of philosophical rigour.

My overall thesis is this: through a superb union of form and content, Sterne satirizes all philosophical systems based purely upon reason, or claiming to be based upon reason. Tristram Shandy humorously dramatizes the

insufficiency of human reason and proposes instead man's imaginative faculties (wit, sympathy, fellow-feeling, and creativity) as the communicative path to understanding.

Since Sterne's central structural device (Tristram-as-author) is absolutely essential to any understanding of Tristram Shandy, my study begins by considering (1.) Sterne's deployment of his author-persona, and (2.) the personal characteristics which Tristram reveals through 'his' self-dramatization. These characteristics - including his characteristic unreliability and his habit of engaging the reader in mock-dialogue - maneuver the reader into the very form of the novel by demanding unusual imaginative cooperation.

My second chapter concerns the content of Tristram Shandy. Through his author-persona, Sterne satirizes philosophical systems and philosophical problems, while extolling man's imaginative and sympathetic faculties. Repeatedly, Sterne questions man's ability to communicate with absolute certainty. Building humorous scenes from communication failures, Sterne points to the question: What can we know and what is impossible for us to know? This question, developed through the Shandean themes, accords perfectly with Sterne's structural device of the unreliable narrator. Hence, both the form and the content of Tristram Shandy aim to tie the reader in perplexing epistemological knots.

The Shandean spirit further involves the reader in the same problems of certitude and incertitude. Drawing on the tradition of Erasmus, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and especially Rabelais, Laurence Sterne created a narrator who demands imaginative, festive reciprocity from his reader. The spirit of festive merriment accords with Tristram's unreliability and with the Shandean satire of solemn rationalism.

In my fourth chapter I use the techniques of linguistic analysis to explore Tristram's unreliability. My exploration points to the difference between the language of philosophy and the language of literature. The former aims to communicate rationally and with certainty; the latter aims to communicate imaginatively. Sterne cast Tristram not as the "historian" he claims to be, but as a psychologically realistic author, dramatizing his process of creativity.

Sterne's dramatization of the creative process lays bare the limits of language and shows the creative writer's quest for new ways to communicate. My fifth chapter treats this dimension of Sterne's author-persona. Sterne's rendering of the creative process forces us to read Tristram Shandy creatively. It forces us to participate in an imaginative process, rather than a completely rational one.

My final chapter views A Sentimental Journey as the consequence of Tristram Shandy. In Tristram Shandy Sterne's main concern had been with man's creative imagination. Yet

even in that first novel Sterne suggested that intuitive, imaginative sympathy can transcend philosophical scepticism and lead to communication through "feeling". In A Sentimental Journey Sterne repeatedly dramatizes the possibilities of sympathetic communication. Hence, Sterne's second novel reflects the message of his first: men can communicate imaginatively, even though logic, philosophy, and pure rationality preclude absolutely certain communication.

There is, perhaps, nothing startling in my conclusion that Tristram Shandy denigrates rationalism, the better to extol man's imaginative potential. Yet, the detailed analysis that leads to my conclusion gives a new, philosophical exactitude to the epistemological puzzles that most readers "see" at the heart of Tristram Shandy, but do not pause to analyse. In the course of this paper I also throw new light upon such well-worn Shandean issues as "the association of ideas" and "time in the novel", while showing, too, that Sterne's humour and his sentiment both emanate from the faculty of imagination.

Since Sterne himself jettisoned the linear plot-line, I have often followed the tactic of quoting from different volumes of Tristram Shandy to substantiate the particular point I am arguing at the time. Likewise, I sometimes use the same incident in several places to illustrate diverse points. At any given time I may not be saying the single, most

important thing which can be said about the Shandean passage under discussion. Yet, if commentary upon Tristram Shandy is to be orderly, this approach (though it occasions some repetition) seems unavoidable. I have, therefore, abstracted the form for my paper from Sterne's artful confusion in order to provide a pattern for critical exposition.

ABBREVIATIONS

<u>AUMLA</u>	<u>Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language and Literature Association</u>
<u>CE</u>	<u>College English</u>
<u>ELH</u>	<u>English Literary History</u>
<u>MP</u>	<u>Modern Philology</u>
<u>PBA</u>	<u>Publications of the British Association of Philosophers</u>
<u>PMLA</u>	<u>Publications of the Modern Language Association of America</u>
<u>PQ</u>	<u>Philological Quarterly</u>
<u>RES</u>	<u>Review of English Studies</u>
<u>SR</u>	<u>Sewanee Review</u>
<u>TLS</u>	<u>Times Literary Supplement</u>

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

In the following paper my page references for Tristram Shandy refer to the Penguin paperback edition of 1967, introduced by Christopher Ricks and edited by Graham Petrie. This edition is considerably more accessible in Britain than the commonly-cited Odyssey Press edition, edited by J. A. Work (New York, 1940). For accessibility, too, I have chosen to quote from G. D. Stout's recent edition of A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick (California, 1967).

Since none of Sterne's sermons is lengthy and since there is no definitive edition of all his sermons presently in print, it seems useless to provide page references for quotations from Sterne's sermons. Moreover, to avoid confusion I have treated all seven volumes of Sterne's sermons (forty-five sermons in total) under the title The Sermons of Mr. Yorick. Sterne's sermons have often appeared this way, collectively, as The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, even though the final three volumes were originally titled Sermons by the Late Rev. Mr. Sterne.

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CHAPTER I

THE NARRATIVE DEVICE OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

Sterne's first full-scale biographer claimed that Tristram Shandy's original success as a comic vehicle was "owing to the novelty of its coarse suggestions."¹ Whether or not this appraisal is correct, it is certain that the continued popularity of Sterne's humour has much to do with its being suggestive (and not just sexually suggestive) to the point of complex ambiguity. Tristram Shandy appears especially modern to the twentieth-century reader, accustomed as he is to:

the irreversible tendency of the novel . . .
to become difficult in the simplest way -
'hard to read'²

The labyrinth of jokes and puzzles seems to have guaranteed Shandy's popularity by leaving much to the reader's imagination. Many are the "handles", as Sterne called them, which readers have taken in their quest for a suitable interpretation.³

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1. P. Fitzgerald, Days of the Dandies: Laurence Sterne, (London, 1898), Volume I, p. 216.
 2. A. Friedman, "The Novel", The Twentieth Century Mind, ed. C. B. Cox and A. E. Dyson, (Oxford paperback, 1972), p. 415.
 3. In his letter of February 18, 1768, to Dr. John Eustace, Sterne wrote: "Everyone will take the handle which suits his convenience: In Tristram Shandy the handle is taken which suits their passions, their ignorance

In this paper I propose to combine literary criticism with philosophical analysis. It seems to me that a rigorous philosophical approach is especially appropriate for a book which has all too often suffered from loose, muddled, and unsubstantiated critical commentary. Moreover, since it is generally agreed that philosophy is an integral part of the Shandean humour and complexity, it seems especially fitting to analyse the philosophical and pseudo-philosophical core of Sterne's novel by philosophical means. The logical starting point for my enquiry is the narrator, Tristram.

Because of the way Sterne constructed his novel, both the humour and the complexity are attributed not to Sterne himself, but to the fictional author, Tristram. Tristram Shandy is, as Northrop Frye remarked, a novel about the process of writing a novel.¹ It is a novel about a fictional character, Tristram, in the process of creating himself on paper.

Establishing the author-persona device from the outset, Sterne followed through consistently by fashioning

or sensibility." Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 411. For a concise account of the many interpretations of Tristram Shandy see: R. A. Lanham, 'Tristram Shandy': The Games of Pleasure, (California, 1973), pp. 1-18.

1. "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility", ELH, Volume 23, (1956), pp. 144-152.

Tristram Shandy as if every word on the printed page had previously passed through Tristram's consciousness and been coloured by Tristram's memory, wit, imagination, passions, and judgment - in short by all of Tristram's mental and emotional faculties. Accordingly, the reader must in a sense 'go through' Tristram if he is to comment upon Sterne's novel.

This realistic device of the 'fictional author' imposes difficulties on the critic who writes about Tristram Shandy. It is well to identify these difficulties immediately, for they govern the way one should speak about Sterne's novel. When, for instance, are a critic's judgments about Tristram Shandy meant to refer to Sterne and when to Tristram?

Although most readers willingly suspend disbelief and think of the events, both mental and physical, within the book as events in Tristram's life, i.e., fictional events, some uncertainty remains. When, for instance, the novel flames out at Sterne's critics, or when it speaks of "ten cartloads of the fifth and sixth volumes - still unsold," the real-life Sterne would appear to have temporarily dropped his mask.¹ But even here we might expect 'Tristram-author' to have been equally concerned. For the most part,

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 4, p. 175; Volume VIII, Chapter 6, pp. 520-521. All page-references hereafter are to The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy,

it seems advisable to speak of the events in the novel as Tristram's because - and this is important - even those intrusions which could be Sterne's own are not incompatible with their being Tristram's as well.

To consider the style of Tristram Shandy, rather than the events, is to encounter a similar critical difficulty. Is it proper to speak of Sterne's style or of Tristram's? In this case it seems best not to be deceived by the illusion of Tristram-as-author. Although the novel may display stylistic devices that are used to characterize Tristram (as well as devices to distinguish between Tristram's personal rhetoric and the words of the Shandean characters whom he often quotes), it should not be forgotten that Laurence Sterne, not Tristram, did actually write the book. Obviously, the style must be Sterne's. It would be absurd, for example to speak of the stylistic influences of Rabelais and Cervantes upon Tristram. In any sense other than make-believe, the style can hardly be called Tristram's.

It is equally evident that the planning and composition of Tristram Shandy must be spoken of, ultimately, as Sterne's. The real Sterne, the middle-aged vicar who wrote to his publisher Dodson and revealed his early plans for

his novel, is responsible for the conception and execution of Tristram Shandy.

Yet within the bounds of that fiction called Tristram Shandy, Tristram becomes both author and character. The thoughts, jokes, deceptions, and stories are Tristram's. Accordingly, whenever we speak of Tristram's ideas or Tristram's jokes we must always be assumed to be looking within the bounds of the fiction. On the other hand, to speak of Sterne's ideas or Sterne's jokes is to see Tristram Shandy from the larger perspective. Speaking this way implies tacit recognition of Sterne as the real author of a fiction which has an author-persona.

If these points seem obvious or even trivial, it is worth remembering that the confusion of Sterne with Tristram has a lengthy history.¹ Critics have repeatedly scolded one another for overlooking the distinction between author and author-persona. It seems best, therefore, to be as clear as possible when preparing to comment upon a novel as complex as Tristram Shandy.

The difficulty of speaking clearly about Tristram Shandy is one result of the novel's complexity. The

1. Sterne initiated the confusion between reality and fiction, not only in the design of his book, but also by sometimes referring to himself as "Tristram". For the full extent of the confusion see O. P. James, The Relation of 'Tristram Shandy' to the Life of Sterne, (The Hague, 1966).

complexity itself stems in the first place from Sterne's tactic of making Tristram the dirigent force of 'his' novel. I shall employ the term "dirigent force" as a convenient way of referring at one and the same time to (1.) Tristram's central position in relation to the novel he is writing (everything on the printed page has first passed through Tristram's consciousness), and (2.) to the many functions Tristram performs: creating, controlling, simultaneously writing about and participating in his book - in short, masterminding the whole venture.¹

Tristram can be seen as a carefully constructed technical device for story-telling, but he is something more as well. He is a life-like personality. No doubt in the hands of a less skilful author than Sterne the machinations of a narrative device such as Tristram would have seemed considerably less human. But Tristram is human. It is by virtue of his numerous rôles that Tristram develops into an individualistic and life-like character of the first order. He is a self-aware author, under pressure, holding

1. Although Tristram's central importance may seem apparent, critics do occasionally overlook it. For instance, Henri Fluchère asks, "Which of the two or three is most significant: Tristram, his father, or his uncle?" The answer should be clear, though Fluchère finds it problematical. Since the entire novel is written as if it were the product of Tristram's mind, Tristram undoubtedly bears prime significance. Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick, English trans. B. Bray, (London, 1965), p. 32.

out expectations to the reader. He improvises. He rambles. He pleads for time. He pretends to speak frankly, and he asks repeatedly for the reader's imaginative cooperation. Finally, and most disconcertingly, Tristram is an unreliable writer, insofar as some of his statements about his plans for his book are inconsistent with his actual performance. These characteristics, and more, contribute to making Tristram a life-like personality.

Although it seems right to say that Sterne moulded a unique character - a protean, yet singularly life-like character - it must be noted that Tristram had literary precedents. Defoe's narrators project themselves vigorously and realistically. Like Tristram, they remember small details and sharply-etched scenes from the past, and like Tristram they often find themselves in mental turmoil. Again like Tristram, Defoe's narrators often profess moralistic intentions, while some of their stories border on the immoral.

With a clearer rhetorical and intellectual irony than Defoe, Swift had specialized in the artful use of the persona to tempt readers into accepting specious premisses and following valid reasoning patterns to false conclusions. Sterne's technique of the deceptive persona may have sprung in part from Swift's.

Tristram, like Richardson's correspondents, writes spontaneously and under pressure, and like Fielding's narrators, he addresses the reader directly on many occasions. There was, moreover, a dramatic tradition of self-conscious characters, beginning long before Tristram and continuing long after him. Let us look, then, at the precedents available to Sterne to see how he combined and varied the techniques of earlier writers.

If there is any one, primary characteristic implanted in Tristram by Sterne, it is self-consciousness. Tristram forever writes about his own writing. The novel is peppered with self-conscious comments such as:

Take notice, I go no further with the simile,—¹

* * *

All my heroes are off my hands;—'tis the first time I've had a moment to spare,—and I'll make use of it, and write my preface.²

Tristram repeatedly considers aloud the proper stylistic rendering of what he wants to say; then after the event he basks in the glow of a successfully executed rhetorical figure:

You see as plain as can be, that I write as a man of erudition;—that even my metaphors,

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 35, p. 231.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 202.

are erudite,—and that I must sustain my character properly, and contrast it properly too,—else what would become of me?¹

Sterne's device of the self-conscious narrator was not in itself innovative. As Wayne Booth has noted:

Don Quixote is really the first important novel using the self-conscious narrator.²

Yet even a century and a half later the self-conscious narrator remained more noteworthy for being intrusive than for advancing subtly from self-consciousness to self-awareness. Fielding's intrusive narrators, for example, still sounded very much like Cervantes:

As we have now brought Sophia into safe hands, the reader will, I apprehend, be contented to deposit her there a while, and to look a little after other person-ages . . . ³

* * *

But here let good Sancho rest. His master is clamouring for our attention . . . ⁴

Sterne improved upon the techniques of Cervantes and Fielding by advancing from a self-conscious narrator to a more subtly self-aware narrator. Tristram seems not

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 2, p. 106.
 2. "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before Tristram Shandy", PMLA, LXVII, (1952), p. 165.
 3. Tom Jones, Book XI, Chapter 10.
 4. Don Quixote, Part II, Chapter 45, English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1968), p. 760.

simply conscious of his moves, but often aware of their motivations and their implications. In this respect Tristram contrasts somewhat with Yorick, the narrator of A Sentimental Journey, who often seems to deceive himself about his real motives.

Always aware of his impulses, Tristram acknowledges for instance "a strong propensity" that leads him "to begin this chapter nonsensically."¹ He recounts his present emotions as he enters into accounts of past experiences.² He perceives the physical impossibility of writing a truly complete autobiography, for the writing itself becomes part of the autobiography.³ Particularly in the first volume, he realizes the author's perennial problem in circumscribing the subject matter and including only what is relevant. Where does one's life-story begin? With the moment of conception? With the homunculus?

In fact of course the novel progresses in physical bulk as Tristram's stories move, erratically and inconsistently, backward in time from the moment of his conception in Volume I, Chapter 1.⁴ However, Sterne makes his

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 23, p. 96.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 28, p. 222.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 13, p. 286.
 4. Volume VII of Tristram Shandy is the major exception to this over-simplification.

author-persona acutely aware of this paradox. Tristram is perceptive enough to realize that since the book is about him, then whatever comes to mind as he writes is as much a part of him as his experiences forty years previously.

By being perspicuous in expressing his thoughts, Tristram provides a self-conscious, self-aware, and amusing analysis of the very artifact he is engaged in creating. Moreover, the analysis becomes part and parcel of the artifact itself:

The fifteenth chapter is come at last;
and brings nothing with it but a sad signature of 'How our pleasures slip from under us in this world;'

For in talking of my digression—I declare before heaven I have made it!¹

Tristram's self-conscious participation in his own artifact had precedents ranging from Don Quixote to English drama.² In Fielding's comedies one often encounters an author-character who explains and comments upon his own production. Although the first two acts of The Author's Farce, for example, merely make merry with Luckless' difficulties in getting his play produced, the final section is entirely a play within a play, punctuated by Luckless' comments on his own work.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 15, p. 589.

2. Don Quixote, Part II, Chapters 3 and 4 discuss "writing a book" as the book is being written.

Similarly, one of the most popular plays of the mid-eighteenth century (though written in the previous century), The Rehearsal, had featured an author-character engaged in commenting on his own work (a play within a play) as it was being produced.¹ Of course Villiers' character, Bayes, lacks the perceptive self-awareness of Tristram, and because of this deficiency he is held up to the sort of ridicule that Tristram never could be. The audience knows that Bayes is a dolt, but the reader suspects that Tristram is something more than the fool he pretends to be. Tristram is cunning. He is not only self-conscious, but also self-aware. Nevertheless, the rôles of Bayes and Tristram are analogous.

In another burlesque, Distress upon Distress, the playwright inserted copious footnotes to comment - comically and often subversively - upon the actors, the action, and even the playwright's choice of words.² Not surprisingly, this particular technique presented staging impossibilities. But less absurd was the well-worn device whereby a playwright (as a character in the play itself) commented on his

1. The Rehearsal by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, was first staged in 1671, but it achieved its greatest popularity between 1740 and 1755. Garrick played the part of Bayes nearly fifty times in that period, according to Simon Trussler, Burlesque Plays of the Eighteenth Century, (Oxford paperback, 1969), p. 2.

2. George Alexander Stevens, Distress upon Distress, (1752).

play-within-a-play simultaneously with its production. This witty device seems to have retained popularity throughout the century; Sheridan fashioned his character, Puff, into just such a self-conscious intermediary in The Critic (1779).

The technique whereby a fictional author editorializes upon his work within the pages of that very work had precedents also in the epistolary form. Richardson's correspondents, for instance, comment on their writing as they write. But in Clarissa the characters seldom discuss their style and technique, per se, as does Tristram in 'his' novel. Richardson's correspondents are more likely to write about the psychological effects of their present emotions upon their immediate writing.

But wither roves my pen? How dare a perverse
girl take these liberties with relations so
very respectable, and whom she highly
respects?¹

* * *

-I must here- I must here, lay down my pen,
to hold my sides, for I must have my laugh
out now the fit is upon me.²

* * *

Since my pen will slide into this gloomy
subject, whether I will or not; I will

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1. Clarissa, (Shakespeare Head ed., London, 1931),
Clarissa to Miss Howe, Volume I, p. 90.
 2. Op. cit., Lovelace to Belford, Volume III, p. 30.

once more quit it; nor will I again resume
it, till I can be its master, and my
own . . . ¹

Of course Tristram sometimes does make similar comments upon his immediate emotional states. Sometimes his pen, too, like the pens of Richardson's correspondents, takes on a life of its own:

—why do I mention it?—Ask my pen,—it governs me,—I govern not it.²

Equally, however, Tristram is concerned with the construction of 'his' novel; hence, many of his comments are upon his own style as style. John Traugott has noted, quite rightly, that in Tristram Shandy "rhetoric becomes the subject of rhetoric."³ The outstanding example of this phenomenon (among the many examples of it in the book) can be found in the famous apostrophe to Uncle Toby that concludes the third chapter of Volume II, and in the comment upon the apostrophe at the beginning of the subsequent chapter.

Sterne reinforced the psychological realism of his fictional author by making Tristram subject to the same stresses and strains as a real author. Tristram is a dirigent force under the pressure of creating, evincing nervous energy. The feeling of ideas racing ahead of words, the frustration of never catching up, the apparent defeat (ultimately) of

1. Op. cit., Lovelace to Belford, Volume III, p. 143.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 6, p. 403.

3. Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric, (California, 1954), p. xv; p. 81.

personal creativity by time: these recurring themes are stated with comic whimsicality in Volume IV, Chapter 13. Tristram dwells on the themes for an entire chapter, which reads in part:

As for the proposal of twelve volumes a year, or a volume a month, it no way alters my prospect—write as I will, and rush as I may into the middle of things, as Horace advises, —I shall never overtake myself—whipped and driven to the last pinch, at the worst I shall have one day the start of my pen—and one day is enough for two volumes—and two volumes will be enough for one year.—¹

Glancing behind the fictional persona, we find that Sterne himself sought to produce a continuous creative flow, ideally two volumes of Shandy per year. One result of this ambition was Sterne's habit of promising his readers interesting episodes (e.g., Uncle Toby's love affair) or amusing chapters (e.g., the chapter upon chapters) in the volumes yet to come. He sought to sustain the reader's interest until he could, so to speak, catch up with his own plans.

Of course the literary practice of holding out expectations to the reader had appeared at least as early as Rabelais and had become standard fare to the eighteenth century. But usually upon encountering an author's promise, the reader could rest assured that the author had sufficient

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 13, p. 286. See also Volume I, Chapter 14, p. 65, where Tristram plans to write and publish "two volumes of my life every year."

control of his writing to fulfil his promise. Not so, however, with Sterne's author-persona. Things which he says will nappen often do not happen.

Tristram does not, for example, provide the twentieth volume in which an engraved map was to appear.¹ Similarly, although Tristram intimates he will reveal how Trim became so adept at oratorical gesture, the reader is never the wiser.² Then, too, despite Tristram's promise, we never learn whether or not he is married.³ Moreover, Tristram ignores his undertaking to "speak of my father's religious notions in the progress of this work", and he breaks his vow to relate the details of Uncle Toby's death.⁴

As a literary figure, these falsified expectations are a kind of peripeteia and are similar to the wide variety of rhetorical figures comically suggested by Pope in The Art of Sinking in Poetry. But at another level, unreliability actually contributes to Tristram's authenticity as a person. Because he is depicted as a spontaneous writer, he must be, in the first instance, uncertain of his future writing at the time he writes. But the essential improvisation at any

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 13, p. 63.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, p. 138.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 333.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 16, p. 368; Volume VI, Chapter 25, p. 435.

given moment when he is writing precludes the fulfilling of some of his earlier promises.

The effect of the author-persona's promises is to whet the reader's appetite in expectation. The effect on Sterne of this sedulously forward-looking approach was to put great pressure on his creative agility. This in turn contrasts with the pretended desire of the author-persona to be truthful and to relate his past life in detail. Hence, Tristram becomes a pressure centre, always seeking to fulfil some expectations, yet continually generating new ones. The tension forces the style into improvisational and spontaneous eruptions, as Tristram nervously fluctuates between discharging former promises and making new ones.

In a wider perspective Sterne's spontaneous style can of course be traced to the heritage of Augustan conversational wit, and, more immediately, to Sterne's quick but mild humour in the pulpit. With chagrin, Sterne in 1759 had discovered that the obviously over-contrived and satirical wit of his political writing was not his best form.¹ More natural for Sterne, as Margaret Shaw has aptly remarked, was:

the whimsical gaiety of a style that follows
the swift transitions of the author's fancy,

1. For the adverse reaction to Sterne's A Political Romance, see L. P. Curtis, The Politicks of Laurence Sterne, (Oxford, 1929).

the laughter that leaves no sting behind it,
the wit that touches lightly on folly but¹
in no wise attacks the true dignity of man.

Sterne's natural inclination toward scintillating improvisation was given literary impetus by the most popular prose vehicle of his day, the memoir. This literary form, along with the comic novel, had predominated in English and French literature for over fifty years by the time Sterne dashed off the opening lines of Tristram Shandy.² And the first-person narrator was as much the 'sine qua non' of the memoir form as it is of Tristram Shandy.

Half a century prior to the publication of the first two volumes of Sterne's novel, Shaftesbury, the moralist and aesthetician, had found the same faults with memoir writing in general that later critics were to find with Tristram Shandy. Shaftesbury recognized the faults as inevitable consequences of spontaneous, first-person writing.

An author who writes in his own person has the advantage of being who or what he pleases. He is no certain man, nor has any certain or genuine character; but suits himself on every occasion to the fancy of his reader, whom, as the fashion is nowadays, he constantly caresses and cajoles. All turns upon their two persons. And as in an amour or commerce of love-letters, so here the author has the privilege of talking eternally of himself,

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1. M. R. B. Shaw, Laurence Sterne: The Making of A Humorist, 1716-1762, (London, 1957), p. 67.
 2. The preponderance of memoirs on both sides of the Channel is cited by P. R. Stewart, Imitation and Illusion in the French Memoir Novel: 1700-1750, (Yale, 1969), p. 3.

dressings and sprucing himself up, whilst he is making diligent court, and working upon the humour of the party to whom he addresses. This is the coquetry of a modern author, whose epistles dedicatory, prefaces, and addresses to the reader are so many affected graces, designed to draw the attention from the subject towards himself, and make it be generally observed, not so much from what he says, as what he appears, or is, and what figure he already makes, or hopes to make in the fashionable world.

These are the airs which a neighboring nation give themselves, more particularly in what they call their memoirs. Their very essays on politics, their philosophical and critical works, their comments upon ancient and modern authors, all their treatises are memoirs. The whole writing of this age is become indeed a sort of memoir-writing. Though in the real memoirs of the ancients, even when they writ at any time concerning themselves, there was neither "I" nor "thou" throughout the whole work. So that all this pretty amour and intercourse of caresses between the author and the reader was thus entirely taken away.¹

While lamenting the abuse of authorial self-concern, Shaftesbury, nevertheless, praised the "method of inward colloquy" which Sterne was later to employ to make his author-persona life-like.

Samuel Richardson preceded Sterne in exploiting the prospects of making first-person prose appear spontaneous. Even at the surface level of graphic devices, Richardson's use of the dash foreshadowed the Shandean dash "so suggestive of disorder, yet used with such care."²

1. Characteristicks, Treatise III, "Soliloquy or Advice to An Author", Section 3.

2. W. Holtz, "Typography, Tristram Shandy, the Aposiopesis,

In his "Preface" to Clarissa Richardson had stressed the importance of "instantaneous descriptions and reflections." Similarly, Richardson's character, Belford, after reading the bulk of Clarissa's letters comments approvingly:

It is my opinion, that there never was a woman so young, who wrote so much, and with such celerity. Her thoughts keeping pace, as I have seen, with her pen, she hardly ever stopp'd or hesitated; and very seldom blotted out, or altered.¹

Elsewhere in Clarissa, Lovelace exclaims, "I know thou likest this lively present-tense manner . . . "² In fact of course this is the manner of nearly every correspondent in Clarissa, and Sterne may have studied the technique of Richardson.

The qualities of improvisation and spontaneity serve also as a reminder of Sterne's acknowledged debt to Montaigne,³ whose 'essai' style flouted classical decorum by encouraging authorial improvisation and allowing the

etc.", The Winged Skull, ed. A. H. Cash and J. M. Stedmond, (London, 1971), p. 251.

1. Clarissa, (Shakespeare Head ed., London, 1931), Belford to Lovelace, Volume VIII, p. 17.
2. op. cit., Lovelace to Belford, Volume V, p. 312.
3. See Sterne's letter of September 9, 1760 to the Rev. Robert Browne. Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 121.

author's personality (or the persona's) to shine through the prose, regardless of the topic under discussion.

Sterne's ideological obligation to the more dignified musings of Sir Thomas Browne and Robert Burton has been well established. Like Browne and Burton, only much less seriously, Sterne leads his author-persona through discussions both of man's sublime potential and of his worldly misfortunes.¹ In particular Sterne expatiated humourously upon Burton's dictum, "How careful then we should be in begetting of our children."²

There is a resemblance, too, as Northrop Frye has noted, between Burton's use of the "anatomy" format and Sterne's comic anatomy:

The digressing narrative, the catalogues, the stylizing of character along 'humor' lines, the marvelous journey of the great nose, the symposium discussions, and the constant ridicule of philosophers and pedantic critics are all features that belong to the anatomy.³

Yet the first-person "I" of Tristram Shandy contrasts vividly with the eloquent "I" of Browne and Burton.⁴

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1. For the most obvious example of Sterne's borrowing from Burton compare Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, with The Anatomy of Melancholy, "The First Partition", Section 1.
 2. The Anatomy of Melancholy, Part I, Section II, Mem. I, Subsection VI.
 3. Anatomy of Criticism, (Princeton, 1957), p. 312.
 4. The "Eloquent I" is the title of a study of literary

One wonders how much can be gained by subsuming Burton's work and Sterne's under the same heading, "anatomy". Not only does the tone of the two authors differ, but so does the seriousness of the content. More important, however, in this particular discussion is the difference in mood between such formally eloquent narrators and the mischievous Tristram.

Sterne's capriciously volant narrator is a far cry from the measured and controlled narrators of Religio Medici and The Anatomy of Melancholy. Although both these older works purport to be personal and informal, their formal structuring belies their informality. Although Burton's persona, Democritus Junior, claims 'his' book was composed from "a confused company of notes" and written with "as small deliberation as I do ordinarily speak", such a pose fails to square with the text.¹

A closer resemblance in informal, high-spirited tone can be seen between Sterne's author-persona and the voice of Erasmus' Praise of Folly. Even though Erasmus speaks through a personification (Folly) and Sterne contrariwise goes to great lengths to present a life-like

self-consciousness (including sections on Browne and Burton) by Joan Webber. The Eloquent I: Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose, (Wisconsin, 1968).

1. The Anatomy of Melancholy, "Democritus Junior to the Reader".

persona, one could, nevertheless, imagine the following (actually spoken by Folly) as a statement of Tristram's:

The writer who belongs to me is far happier in his crazy fashion. He never loses sleep as he sets down at once whatever takes his fancy and comes to his pen, even his dreams, and it costs him little beyond the price of his paper.¹

Like Erasmus and Montaigne, and unlike Browne or Burton, Sterne manages to sustain the illusion of personal interlocution between narrator and reader at an informal level. Yet even Montaigne's intimacy is magnified in the person of Tristram:

I have dropped the curtain over this scene for a minute,—to remind you of one thing,—and to inform you of another.

What I have to inform you, comes, I own, a little out of its due course;—for it should have been told a hundred and fifty pages ago, but that I foresaw then 'twould come in pat hereafter, and be more advantage here than elsewhere.—Writers had need look before them, to keep up the spirit and connection of what they have in hand.²

Montaigne also foreshadowed Sterne in his penchant for digressing. Montaigne had written that "there is nothing so contrary to my style as continued narrative."³ As a

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1. Praise of Folly, English trans. B. Radice, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 148.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, p. 159.
 3. "Of the Force of Imagination", Essays of Michel de Montaigne, English trans. C. Cotton, (New York, 1947), p. 414.

pitfall for story-tellers, however, the digression had been recognized as potentially disruptive even by Chaucer, and the digression was still viewed aesthetically as more of a faulty than a useful technique in Sterne's day.¹

Traugott's remark that "digressions were a popular device in the eighteenth century" refers to their frequent use, not to their acceptability as a technical device among literary critics.²

By means of a digression Swift had satirized the practice of digressing.³ Richardson prided himself on his concerted efforts to avoid digressing.⁴ Fielding had judged unfavourably upon Montaigne-like digressions.⁵ Sterne, therefore, flew in the face of literary theory (though not of contemporary practice) by allowing Tristram to ramble wherever the next idea might transport him.

But Tristram's rambling is digressive only if judged by its variance from the normal, linear plot-line

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1. The Rime of Sir Thopas burlesques a story-teller who digresses so far with petty details that he is unable to relate his main tale.
 2. Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric, (California, 1954), p. 45.
 3. Tale of A Tub, "A Digression in Praise of Digressions".
 4. Clarissa, "Postscript".
 5. Fielding would not imitate "the celebrated Montaigne, who promises you one thing and gives you another" Joseph Andrews, Book II, Chapter I.

of conventional narrative fiction. Sterne's novel does not pretend to be conventional in its chronography.

Given Sterne's premiss that Tristram Shandy is to tell the life and opinions of its author, then the author's mental life at the very moment he writes has great import. The idea that just came to mind, the imaginative fancy of the moment, is as essential as Tristram's more settled opinions and his overall plan for writing. Every successive remark, insofar as it represents Tristram's sequence of ideas, succeeds in revealing the paths Tristram's mind follows as he writes 'his' book.

By virtue, then, of the way Sterne constructed Tristram Shandy, none of what we might be tempted to call "Tristram's digressions" can be totally irrelevant. Each and every remark reveals what Tristram has in mind and the way his mind functions. Moreover, the functioning itself is a real part of Tristram's life. Hence, the truth of Tristram's remark:

My work is digressive [i.e., digressive in the normal narrative sense], and it is progressive too [i.e., the reader continually learns the present state of Tristram's mind],—and at the same time.¹

When Tristram called digressions "the sunshine" of 'his' book and proclaimed his freedom to digress, he was

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 22, p. 95.

repeating the claims for autonomy made by numerous authors.¹

Colley Cibber, for instance, promised early in his autobiography to:

make no scruple of leaving my history when
I think a digression may make it lighter,
for my reader's digestion.²

Likewise, Fielding's narrator in Tom Jones records his intention:

to digress, through the whole of this history, as often as I see the occasion . . .³

But Sterne wrote a novel in which the stereotyped authorial claims in favour of, or against, digressions were irrelevant, precisely because anything that Sterne's author-persona recorded on paper was, ipso facto, relevant.

Sterne's digressions are closely associated with his strategic aim of presenting the mental life of an author: a mental life containing, at least potentially, many time-schemes at once, but a mental life which an author must dramatize in some order, i.e., an ordered time-scheme for the reader to comprehend. In this regard it is important to note that whenever Tristram discusses his difficulties with form he always speaks in the same breath of digressions, time, and organization.

1. Ibid.

2. An Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, (Michigan, 1968), p. 7.

3. Tom Jones, Book I, Chapter 2.

The digression serves Sterne well (however much it may have confused the eighteenth-century reader, accustomed as he was to a linear plot-line), for digressions enable Sterne to hold several aspects of his story in simultaneous abeyance, while proceeding with yet another aspect. Thus, Sterne's complexity of form mirrors with psychological accuracy man's inner-complexity of thought, wherein the conscious thought of the moment co-exists with a vast potential of unexpressed memories, images, opinions, plans, etc., that are all a continuous part of one's mind.

The digressive freedom that Sterne gives Tristram accounts for Tristram's failure to fulfil some of the promises he makes. This improvisational freedom feeds the reader's inquisitiveness while paradoxically making the reader expect something unexpected. Sterne's reader is forever asking: What next? A good-humoured guessing game, a give and take, develops between narrator and reader.

—You may raise a system to account for the loss of my nose by marriage-articles,—and show the world how it could happen, that I should have the misfortune to be called TRISTRAM, in opposition to my father's hypothesis, and the wish of the whole family, Godfathers and Godmothers not excepted.—These, with fifty other points left yet unravelled, you may endeavour to solve if you have time;—but I tell you beforehand it will be in vain, for not the sage Alquife, the magician in 'Don Belianis of Greece', nor the no less famous Urganda, the sorceress his wife, (were they alive) could pretend to come within a league of the truth.

The reader will be content to wait for a full explanation of these matters till the next year,—when a series of things will be laid open which he little expects.¹

The spontaneity of such give-and-take repartee is heightened by Sterne's habit of apostrophising the reader and engaging Tristram and the reader in a running dialogue. In reality of course the dialogue is a mockery. It is a comic extension of the mock dialogues that Sterne occasionally held with the congregations when he preached. Of necessity the narrator/reader dialogue in any literary work must be one-sided. Yet, as happens in Tristram Shandy, the fact of the one-way communication can be superceded in the reader's imagination by the illusion of interlocution.

Of course there was nothing unique about a writer using the mock-dialogue technique. Rabelais had employed the 'cri' to address his readers. Direct address from a stage player to the audience was standard theatrical fare. In the late seventeenth century Congreve had resolved that dramatic writing was the most flexible and appropriate style for the novel.² Many eighteenth-century authors had used the persona/reader intercourse with varying success.

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, pp. 167-168. Don Belianis, Alquife, and Urganda are characters from a Spanish romance, mentioned in Don Quixote, Part II, Chapters 1 and 34.
 2. Incognita, "Preface", (1691).

Colley Cibber addresses his anonymous "Sir Critick" and Fielding, his "sagacious reader" almost as frequently as Sterne's author-persona singles out his "Madam" or "Your Reverence".

Several of Fielding's comedies begin with dialogues in which one of the speakers takes the audience's point of view. Similarly, Henry Brooke, a novelist and contemporary of Sterne's, concluded each of the first fourteen chapters of The Fool of Quality (1760) with a schematic dialogue between "Author" and "Friend". But Sterne's technique of mock-dialogue is less formal. Although Sterne, too, habitually closed his volumes with persona/reader dialogue, Tristram's colloquies are not so tidily organized. Moreover, Sterne's narrator is less restrained than Brooke's. Tristram is likely to burst out, unpredictably, anywhere in the novel to engage the reader.

The device of mock-dialogue between an author, or persona, and his reader already had a history and was still in regular literary use in Sterne's day. Sterne's particular achievement lay not, as some critics have intimated, in his very employment of mock-dialogue, but in his sustained use of it - continually to attract and often to dupe the reader.

Tristram's duping and hoodwinking of the reader during mock-dialogues clearly differentiates his relation

to his reader from that which the narrator of Tom Jones, for instance, established with his reader.

The narrator of Tom Jones makes common cause with his reader. He offers a helping hand to guide the reader through the labyrinth of the story. He can offer such assistance because he already knows the whole story at the time he begins to narrate. Moreover, his life while he relates the story is irrelevant to the story itself - not an integral part, as is the case in Tristram Shandy. Fielding's narrator can be said to be omniscient, or nearly so, in regard to the events he relates. The narrator of Tom Jones knows exactly where he is, how he got there, and where he is going:

As our history doth not, like a newspaper, give great characters to people who never were heard of before, nor will ever be heard of again; the reader may hence conclude, that this excellent woman will hereafter appear to be of some importance in our history.¹

Contrariwise, Tristram's apostrophies to the reader are only sometimes helpful. The pretence on Sterne's part is that Tristram - although strategically the dirigent force of his book - is disorganized, not in tactical control, and not likely to gain control:

One would think I took a pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to

1. Tom Jones, Book XIII, Chapter 5.

make fresh experiments in getting out of
'em—Inconsiderate soul that thou art!'¹

By addressing their readers directly both Fielding and Sterne were practising Cervantes' technique of 'parrhesia', or authorial frankness. Parrhesia is conventionally associated with a narrator who knows his story and by reason of his omniscience stands outside of the events he relates as he relates them.

The technique of parrhesia operates smoothly in Tom Jones. In Tristram Shandy, however, parrhesia is ludicrously combined with peripeteia. Tristram's supposed frankness often proves deceptive. But, like the Shandean digressions, this paradoxical tactic contributes to the life-like presentation of the author-persona.

Tristram's story is his own life, and his life (as Tristram makes explicit) includes the writing of his book. The book is of course his life story, and since his life will include not only memories but also future thoughts, Tristram can only speculate about the unwritten portion of his work at any given time within that work. Tristram's frankness, therefore, must necessarily differ from that of an omniscient author.

By virtue, then, of his position as dirigent force of an autobiography-in-progress, Tristram can only frankly

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 6, p. 520.

intimate - not foretell - the future, for he is still in the midst of living and writing. This extremely realistic rendering of the position of an author who sets out to write his life and opinions can be observed in apostrophies such as:

—you will see why when you read LeFever's story:—fool that I was! nor can I recollect, (nor perhaps you) without turning back to the place, what it was that hindered me from letting the corporal tell it in his own words;—but the occasion is lost,—I must tell it now in my own.¹

* * *

the conveniences and the inconveniences of which will be considered at large in the history of my uncle Toby's and the corporal's campaigns, of which, this I'm now writing is but a sketch, and will be finished, if I conjecture right, in three pages (but there is no guessing)—²

Sterne's realistic portrayal of the uncertain future keeps us on edge. It tempts us to doubt Tristram's statements of intention. With a narrator such as Fielding's, on the other hand, we expect to find what he says we shall find. For instance, there is no doubting the narrator of Tom Jones when he comments frankly:

I must . . . not trespass too far on the patience of a good-natured reader. Here therefore I put an end to the chapter.³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 5, p. 402.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 21, p. 428.
 3. Tom Jones, Book VI, Chapter 3.

If Sterne had given these same lines to his author-persona, we might find, prior to the next chapter, that Tristram had changed his mind and, indeed, given us another paragraph or two, "trespass" though it might upon the reader's patience.

Continually kept off balance, the reader of Tristram Shandy can only persevere to encounter the next unreliable promise, unexpected digression, or sudden anti-climax. Neither in the long term nor in the short can the reader predict Tristram's moves.

Over three or four volumes, for instance, Tristram encourages the reader to anticipate a titillating account of Toby's amours; yet, when the time comes for Tristram to relate the amours, he pleads "want of powers".¹ On a smaller scale Sterne continually provides anti-climaxes within single paragraphs. Here, possibly, one can notice again a similarity with Fielding, although Tristram's descents from the sublime to the ridiculous occur more frequently, more unexpectedly, and with less mock-heroic aplomb than those of Fielding's narrators. It is as if Sterne had put to use the bathetic devices that Pope had collected in his Art of Sinking in Poetry.² To give just two examples from many:

1. For this sequence see Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 23; Volume IV, Chapter 32, Volume VI, Chapter 36; Volume IX, Chapter 24.

2. Peri Bathous, or Martinus Scriblerus His Treatise of

So much for my chapter upon chapters, which I hold to be the best chapter in my whole work; and take my word, whoever reads it, is full as well employed, as in picking straws.¹

* * *

'Tis either Plato, or Plutarch, or Seneca, or Xenophon, or Epictetus, or Theophrastus, or Lucian—or some one perhaps of a later date—either Cardan, or Budaeus, or Petrarch, or Stella—or possibly it may be some divine or father of the church, St. Austin or St. Cyprian, or Barnard, who affirms that it is an irresistible and natural passion to weep for the loss of our friends or children—²

Not only in anti-climax does Sterne seem to exploit Pope's tongue-in-cheek advice. Tristram Shandy is rife with the prolixity, periphrase, and amplification that Pope 'encouraged'. Likewise, the style which Sterne gives to Tristram skips from the florid to the pert to the prurient, as Pope said all 'good' bathetic writing should. And what could be more bathetic than Sterne's yoking of parrhesia with peripeteia?

Thus far in this chapter I have tried to show how Sterne positioned his author-persona in relation to the

the Art of Sinking in Poetry, (1727?). Shaftesbury had also commented here and there in his Characteristicks (1711) on the false-sublime and the anti-climax.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 10, p. 284.
2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 3, p. 347.

book which the author-persona is writing. I have noted a number of structural and stylistic devices, and have suggested their literary precedents. Most importantly, I have selected those characteristics of Sterne's author-persona which contribute greatly to the illusion of Tristram as a real person.

Tristram's nervous self-consciousness, self-awareness, and conversational spontaneity, together with his habit of holding out expectations, of making digressions (which aren't really digressive), and of addressing the reader with purported frankness: all seem to support Sterne's conception of a life-like author-persona. Even Tristram's unreliability in regard to his future writing is truly the unreliability of an author in the process of writing his life-story.

Like a real person (and unlike an omniscient author) Tristram can and does change his mind at times. In this respect Tristram's unreliability advances the illusion of his reality as a person. Yet it is also possible to call Tristram "unreliable" in another sense - in a sense which points to the artificial, rather than the realistic, nature of the book.

By "unreliability" in this second sense I mean that some of the events Tristram relates are purely and simply impossible. We know, for example, that a circumcision

could not have occurred in the way Tristram describes it. Similarly, we realize immediately that the group of comical, rhetorical figures, adjudicating the change of Tristram's name to Trismegistus, is preposterous and imaginary.

Tristram's absurd accounts of some past events raise the larger question - a popular one among eighteenth-century theorists - of probability and possibility in fictional writing.¹ Debate on this question continued through the century, while in practice, as Ian Watt has convincingly argued, the emphasis shifted from the extravagances of romance-writing toward the "truth of individual experience."²

At this point, however, I wish to waive discussion of the Shandean absurdities and their relation to literary theory; discussion of possibility and probability is more naturally accommodated in my third chapter (in conjunction with the topic of the Rabelaisian spirit of Shandy) and in my fourth chapter (where I treat "memory-reports" and fanciful statements). Suffice it to say here that although

1. For illustrations of the theoretical debate about this matter see Novel and Romance: 1700-1800, A Documentary Record, ed. I. Williams, (London, 1970), and Taste and Criticism in the Eighteenth Century, ed. H. A. Needham, (Freeport, N. Y., 1969).

2. The Rise of the Novel, (Penguin paperback edition, 1968), p. 13. Defoe continually insisted he was no writer of wild romances, which he deplored in his "Preface" to Roxana as "meretricious books full of improbable people and incredible adventures."

Tristram-as-author is life-like, some of the events he relates are not.

To bridge the gap between his life-like narrator and the sometimes absurd events that Tristram relates, Sterne used a stereotyped literary tactic. He made Tristram request the reader's imaginative cooperation. In the following three examples Tristram first admits that some of his material is imaginary, then asks for a meeting between his imagination and the reader's, and finally pays tribute to the reader who will surrender his imagination to an author:

—Writers of my stamp have one principle in common with painters.—Where an exact copying makes our pictures less striking, we choose the less evil; deeming it even more pardonable to trespass against truth, than beauty—¹

* * *

The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.²

* * *

I would go fifty miles on foot, for I have not a horse worth riding on, to kiss the hand of that man whose generous heart will give up the reins of imagination into his author's hands,—be pleased he knows not why, and cares not wherefore.³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 4, p. 111.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 11, p. 127.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 12, p. 193.

Again a comparison can be made with the narrator of Tom Jones, who like Tristram, was not reluctant to apostrophise his readers on the subject of imagination:

The reader will perhaps imagine . . . ¹

* * *

Most of my readers will suggest it easily to themselves . . . ²

* * *

If the reader's imagination doth not assist me, I shall never be able to describe the situation . . . ³

The difference between Fielding's narrator and Sterne's, however, is obviously in the content of their tales. Although the events in Tom Jones are, per se, as fictional as those in Tristram Shandy (both books are novels, not true histories of real people), some of Tristram's stories, unlike those in Tom Jones, go beyond the realm of possibility. Clearly, then, the imaginative collusion requested by Tristram is essentially of a more hyperbolic nature.

Of course if any fiction is to succeed it must evoke the reader's imagination in some degree. Most fiction—even highly fantastic works such as The Memoirs of Martinus

1. Tom Jones, Book V, Chapter 3.

2. Tom Jones, Book IV, Chapter 14.

3. Tom Jones, Book XV, Chapter 5.

Scriblerus and Candide - presupposes the reader's imaginative cooperation without demanding it in so many words. Swift's *Gulliver*, too, simply relates absurd adventures "as true." A plea for the reader's imaginative cooperation would be superfluous. Why then is Sterne so bent on underscoring the obvious? The answer can be pieced together, I think, from the conclusions already drawn in this chapter.

Each thing which we call "a work of fiction" exists within the real world. An author must draw in some degree upon the real world for the substance of his fiction. Now Tristram Shandy was conceived as a fiction depicting an author writing his life and opinions. For this reason it was incumbent upon Sterne to fashion a life-like author-persona. But one of Tristram's characteristics, viz., his unreliability, can be understood in several ways. Tristram's unreliability is realistic insofar as it portrays a person's inability to know the future, and his propensity to forget or alter his plans. But insofar as Tristram relates events which we know to be impossible, his unreliability fails to contribute to the illusion of his being a real person . . . Or does it?

If we grant in the first place that Tristram is a life-like person, then it follows by virtue of his being so, that his remarks, like those of a real person, are a product of his consciousness; the imagination is an especially active part of

an author's consciousness. Consequently, even Tristram's imaginary accounts of impossible events may contribute to our seeing him as a real person, a real author. But to see him in this light the reader, too, must cooperate imaginatively.

In the course of this paper Sterne's interest in man's imaginative powers will reappear in various contexts. We shall see the rôle imagination plays in spanning the epistemological gulf between Shandean characters, the necessity of imagination for sympathetic understanding, the imaginative game the reader must play to appreciate the festive spirit of Tristram Shandy, the great potential (and the inherent perils) of artistic imagination, and finally the contrast of man's solitary imagination with his social imagination. However, here at the outset of this paper, when we speak of the necessity for a reader to surrender "the reins of imagination into his author's hands", we are clearly using "imagination" in a primary sense.¹ This sort of imaginative cooperation is a prerequisite for appreciating Sterne's novel at any level.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 12, p. 193.

CHAPTER II

THE PHILOSOPHY OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

Having examined Sterne's positioning of the author-persona and the qualities which make Tristram a life-like character, I want now to consider the most persistent themes in Tristram Shandy.

That these themes are philosophical is not surprising. Sterne lived in an age which was absorbed with the ideas of the scientific and philosophical awakening of the previous century. These ideas had been popularized by writers such as Addison, who made it his aim:

to have it said of me, that I have brought
Philosophy out of Closets and Libraries,
Schools and Colleges, to dwell in Clubs
and Assemblies, at Tea-Tables and in
Coffee-Houses.¹

Thirty-five years later The Female Spectator went on to proclaim that "this science [philosophy] is not too abstruse for our sex . . . "² With perhaps more historical accuracy D'Alembert, Sterne's friend, noted the tendency during the mid-eighteenth century to call the period "the

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1. Spectator, Nbr. 10, Monday, March 12, 1711.
 2. Mrs. Eliza Heywood, "Study of Philosophy Recommended", The Female Spectator, ed. M. Priestly, (London, 1929), p. 60.

age of philosophy", and Sterne of course was very much a man of the age.¹

Many commentators have felt that philosophy - in some way or other - lay hidden just below the surface of Tristram Shandy. The scholarly digging was begun by John Ferriar, author of the first book about Sterne.² Yet the work has progressed piecemeal, and the findings have been fragmentary - often restricted solely to Sterne's borrowings from Locke. Even today the philosophy behind Tristram Shandy has never been explored systematically or in depth.

In the chapter which follows, I cannot claim to have exhausted the philosophical wealth of Sterne's novel. Nor is that my purpose. I shall, however, attempt to demonstrate the range, interrelation, and purposes of what I think to be the most important philosophical themes. In particular I shall attempt to show how Sterne's structural device of the author-persona suits his thematic material - how the dialogue between author and reader is given an added dimension by the philosophical themes.

1. "Essai sur les élémens de philosophie", quoted in The Enlightenment, ed. J. Lively, (Longman's paperback, 1967), p. 4.

2. Illustrations of Sterne, (London, 1798).

1. The Satire of Philosophical Systems

Following a lengthy post-Renaissance tradition in which the Scriblerus Club and Swift had recently excelled, Sterne originally conceived Tristram Shandy to be a satire of "the Weak part of the Sciences."¹ Since science had yet to be split into disciplinary specialities, the word "science" still encompassed a wide field. It included the physical sciences and the natural sciences as well as philosophy: the speculative metaphysics of the Schoolmen, Neoplatonism, Cartesianism, and the newer more empirical philosophy of Bacon and Locke. Sterne located "the Weak part of the Sciences" in philosophy generally, and more particularly in the fatuous speculations and rhetoric of Scholasticism. There was nothing new in this. Scholasticism had been a primary target of humanists, rationalists, and satirical writers for several hundred years.

Scholasticism was both a body of doctrine and a methodology. The doctrine had been based primarily, but not exclusively, upon the philosophy of Aristotle and the theology of Aquinas. The doctrine provided 'unquestionable truths' (unquestionably 'true' by virtue, for example, of

1. "The Plan, as you will perceive is a most extensive one,—taking in, not only, the Weak part of the Sciences, in w^{ch} the true point of Ridicule lies—but every thing else, which I find Laugh-at-able in my way—" May 23, 1759, to Robert Dodsley, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 74.

the authority of Aristotle or Aquinas) which served as a basis for the methodology, viz., syllogistic argumentation. In the course of centuries a formidable body of Scholastic dogma had been polysyllogised into existence.

Neither Scholastic dogma nor Scholastic methodology was viewed kindly by Bacon and the new scientists. Newton and Locke questioned the old and revered authorities. They ridiculed the seemingly meaningless abstractions that had become crucial terms in the network of syllogistic ratiocination. They discredited the prolix arguments which seemed to exist purely for the sake of argument.

Scholasticism was attacked in at least three ways. First, historical authority was often denied by simple assertion. As John Tollin crudely rephrased Locke:

I believe nothing purely upon his [another man's] word without Evidence in the things. Not the bare Authority of him that speaks, but the clear Conception I form of what he says, is the Ground of my Persuasion.¹

Secondly, Scholasticism could be attacked by showing some of the conclusions of Scholastic reasoning to be absurd. If this were accomplished, it could be shown in turn that the premisses were usually faulty. Satirists such as Erasmus, Rabelais, and Swift employed this 'reduction ad absurdum' technique.

1. Christianity not Mysterious, (London, 1696), Section II, Chapter II, Paragraph 11.

Finally, Scholasticism was open to charges of sterile theorizing. It generated terms such as "innate idea" and "substance", and speculations such as, "How many angels can fit on a pin-head?" Obviously, this latter speculation shows Scholasticism at its worst. Yet the vacuousness of at least some Scholastic terms was generally apparent, as was the grotesque uselessness of arguing over empirically irresolvable problems.

Under the post-Renaissance ideal each thinking man was potentially an observer and experimenter. Authority gave way to individual observation. Inductive reasoning gained prominence over deductive. Many were the satirists who:

had a humour to pick the worms out of the schoolmen . . . ¹

Though appearing repeatedly in Tristram Shandy, the satire of Scholasticism remains too undeveloped to constitute the major philosophical theme of the novel. Even so, the anti-Scholasticism merits examination as a preliminary to Sterne's more subtle development of original philosophical themes. Let us consider several examples.

Tristram's account of the "Romish rituals" directing the "baptising of the child . . . before it is

1. J. Swift, The Battle of the Books, (Everyman paperback, 1968), p. 149.

born"¹ and his rendering of Ernulphus' "digest of curses"² satirize the ludicrously wide scope of Scholastic authority. A speculative dogma existed to fit every human activity.

In a similar vein Sterne provides a highly-stylized satirical episode in which Walter seeks the authority of the pedants Triptolemus, Didius, Phutatorius, and Homenas, concerning the possibility of nullifying Tristram's christening. The ridicule spans four chapters, alternating between high and low burlesque. One conclusion of the debate, i.e., that neither father nor mother are akin to the child, reduces to absurdity syllogisms based upon false premisses, while ridiculing, too, the force of authority upon which the debate was grounded.³ "How finely we argue upon mistaken facts!" remarks Tristram.⁴ Our conclusions are as "groundless as the dreams of philosophy."⁵

But Sterne's ridicule, here as elsewhere, is not caustic. One senses that Sterne, like his character Walter, is "delighted" with legal and philosophical "subtleties of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 20, p. 83.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapters 11, 12, 41.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapters 25-29.

4. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 316.

5. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 320.

this kind." ¹ Unlike Walter, however, Sterne looks for humour, not truth, in philosophy. Philosophical subtleties appeal to Sterne's fancy, rather than to his intellect. He continually uses his satire of philosophical reasoning to further the cause of fancy or imagination, which he believes to be a more efficacious way of communicating than through 'supposedly' rational argument.

Sterne employs Hafen Slawkenbergius as a personification of all those speculative philosophers who devoted themselves to impractical and useless scholarship. Hafen spent "many years of his life" upon his "one work". He "examined every part" of his subject "dialectically", and included in his Decads:

all that had been wrote or wrangled upon
in the schools and porticos of the
learned.²

But what after all was Hafen's subject? Nothing more sublime than "noses".

Even Tristram's 'selection' from Slawkenbergius' writing satirizes the obscurantist doctors and logicians at the two universities of Strasburg. Neither Protestant nor Papist reasoned inductively from empirical evidence.³ Both

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 29, p. 323.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 38, p. 237.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, (prior to Chapter 1), p. 264.

groups began with authoritative speculation and proceeded deductively. Regarding the stranger's nose:

—they concerned themselves not with facts—they reasoned—¹

And how absurdly they reasoned!

Now the steeple of Strasburg being the biggest and the tallest church-steeple to be seen in the whole world, the Antinosarians denied that a nose of 575 geometrical feet in length could be worn, at least by a middle-aged man—The Popish doctors swore it could.—The Lutheran doctors said No;—it could not.

This at once started a new dispute, which they pursued a great way upon the extent and limitation of the moral and natural attributes of God—That controversy led them naturally into Thomas Aquinas, and Thomas Aquinas to the devil.

The stranger's nose was no more heard of in the dispute—it just served as a frigate to launch them into the gulph of school-divinity,—and then they all sailed before the wind.²

The observable phenomenon of the stranger's nose is forgotten as the argument shifts, abstractly, to the limitations of the Infinite. Here Sterne's satire may have been directed at Descartes and other philosophers who had argued that God was unlimited even by the laws of logic. Sterne returns to satirize this same speculative question two more times in Tristram Shandy.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, (prior to Chapter 1), p. 260.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, (prior to Chapter 1), p. 266.

In Volume III, Chapter 41, Walter delights in:

the various accounts which learned men of different kinds of knowledge have given the world, of the causes of short and long noses.¹

Toby replies:

There is no cause but one . . . why one man's nose is longer than another's, but because that God pleases to have it so.²

The same straight-faced reply to a ludicrous notion occurs later in the novel, when Toby argues that Bohemia could not have had a seaport:

—It might, said Trim, if it had pleased God—³

Sterne even revived that hoary classic of anti-Scholastic ridicule, the debate about the number of angels on a pin-head. Changing the issue slightly, Sterne has Tristram quote the Jesuit theologian, Leonardo Lessius:⁴

That one Dutch mile, cubically multiplied, will allow room enough, and to spare, for eight hundred thousand millions, which he supposes to be as great a number of souls (counting from the fall of Adam) as can possibly be damned to the end of the world.⁵

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 41, p. 245.

2. Ibid.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 19, p. 541.

4. See footnote, p. 472 in the Penguin paperback edition of Tristram Shandy, (London, 1967), for Graham Petrie's brief identification of Lessius (1554-1623).

5. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 14, p. 472.

Even more explicitly, Sterne's author-persona derides Scholasticism for its empty verbiage:

What a pudder and racket . . . in the Schools of the learned about power and about spirit;—about essences, and about quintessences;—about substances, and about space.¹

Two points need be made about the anti-Scholastic humour of Tristram Shandy: first, that the main vehicle of the satire, Walter Shandy, does not become an object of the satire, secondly, that by ridiculing the Schoolmen, Sterne does not extol the new scientists.

In Volume I, Tristram informs the reader that his father "was a philosopher in grain,—speculative,—systematical."² In the final volume Tristram remarks similarly that his father's way "was to force every event in nature into an hypothesis", and so truth was "crucified".³ Throughout the book Tristram provides illustrations of Walter doing just these things.

Undoubtedly, Walter's tendency to allow his speculations to harden into absolute belief, his preposterous harangues, and his syllogistically-strained arguments carry

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 2, p. 108.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 24, p. 91.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 32, p. 613.

the burden of the anti-Scholastic satire. Additionally, Walter's recourse to irrelevant antiquarian authorities serves to satirize the traditionalist view that the ancients were necessarily wiser than the moderns. But it must be noted that if this were all that Sterne was doing with Walter - if Walter were purely an object of satire - then he could hardly become a sympathetic character. In fact Walter is a vehicle for Sterne's anti-pedantic satire, rather than an object of it.

It is not so much Walter's penchant for daft theories nor his equally strong penchant for attempting to put them into practice (although these are common human failings with which we can sympathize), as it is the comic failure of theory after theory that evokes our sympathy. Sterne, like Cervantes, makes us feel for the whimsical character whose struggle between intentions and real accomplishments, between imagination and reality, renders him absurd to others. Moreover, Walter's odd theories do not affect his ability to feel for Uncle Toby, "whom he truly loved."¹ The reader can hardly dislike a character who is "frank and generous" despite "little ebullitions" of "sub-acid humour".² Although Walter's ideas are clearly ridiculed, he himself comes through Tristram's memory and, so

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 12, p. 132.

2. Ibid.

to speak, reappears on paper as a humorous Original, one of those harmless eccentrics that the eighteenth century cherished as fondly in fiction as in real life.

Sterne found the new optimism, the limitless faith in scientific method, almost as comical as the old speculative certainty of the metaphysicians. He was, as was Swift before him, reluctant to believe that mankind's every problem could be solved by close observation and experiment. If Slawkenbergius' conclusions were absurd, so too were those of the empiricist, Prignitz. After conducting "a most candid and scholar-like examination of above four thousand different skulls" Prignitz produced a scientific conclusion about noses which vies with Slawkenbergius' in nonsensicality.¹

In a frequently-quoted chapter from Volume III, Tristram finds the empiricist Locke guilty of stressing stolid reason and judgment to the exclusion of man's wit and imagination.² By emphasizing man's perceptive faculties to the exclusion of his erective (imaginary) faculties, science de-humanizes. Sterne makes this same point elsewhere, when his author-persona reduces to absurdity the optimistic foundation of the Age of Reason:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 38, p. 237-238.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, pp. 201-211.

Thus—thus, my fellow labourers and associates in this great harvest of our learning, now ripening before our eyes; thus it is, by slow steps of casual increase, that our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical, nautical, mathematical, enigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and obstetrical, with fifty other branches of it, (most of 'em ending as these do in 'ical') have, for these two last centuries and more, gradually been creeping upwards towards that *Ἀκμή* of their perfections, from which, if we may form a conjecture from the advances of these last seven years, we cannot possibly be far off.

When that happens, it is to be hoped, it will put an end to all kind of writings whatsoever;—the want of all kind of writing will put an end to all kind of reading;—and that in time, 'As war begets poverty; poverty peace,'—must, in course, put an end to all kind of knowledge,—and then—we shall have all to begin over again; or,¹ in other words, be exactly where we started.

At one level, then, Tristram Shandy is a satire of philosophical systems - especially of the old Scholasticism, but also of the new Empiricism. At a less superficial level, however, Sterne amused himself with many of the philosophical problems which systems such as Scholasticism and Empiricism attempted to resolve. I shall consider these in detail for the remainder of this chapter.

2. The Satire of Philosophical Problems

In the broadest sense Tristram Shandy is a continual, comical rehearsal of the perennial philosophical

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 88.

question - it was a Renaissance as well as an Enlightenment question - What can man know and what is impossible for him to know? We can see at once how apropos this question is as a thematic motif in a novel structured so that the reader must struggle to separate the narrator's sincere remarks from his deceptions.

What can we know? This basic question is implicit in every philosophical topic that appears in Sterne's novel. The topics do not of course occur in organized sequence. Sterne was writing a comic novel, not a philosophical treatise. Nonetheless, for exegetical purposes it is possible to isolate at least four clearly philosophical topics from the overall welter of Tristram Shandy.

Primarily, Sterne found amusement in the traditional distinction between the corporeal and the incorporeal, i.e., between matter and spirit. I shall consider this topic first, for it leads naturally to three related topics: knowledge of other minds, the insufficiency of language, and the association of ideas.

i. The Corporeal and the Incorporeal

Since the problem of corporeality and incorporeality concerns us only insofar as it relates to Tristram Shandy, the nature of the problem and its background need only be sketched briefly.

The problem stems from the temptation to divide the world into material objects and immaterial things, such as thoughts or the immaterial "substance" postulated by the Schoolmen. Naturally, the presuppositions behind this division can be questioned. Are we really speaking of two different things when we speak of matter and spirit? If not, then we must account for the temptation to draw the distinction in the first place. If on the other hand two different categories are actually represented by the distinction, then to pursue the subject is to question the interrelation between matter and spirit, and to ask how they influence one another.

The distinction between matter and spirit (or mind) was of major controversial interest in eighteenth-century Europe, but the question is probably as old as philosophy itself, and the answers have been manifold. Plato believed the mind to be a prisoner of the body. The Stoics held that mind is material, but much more finely textured than ordinary matter. Hobbes reduced the mind to motion in the brain. Cartesian dualism taught that a person consisted of mind distinct from body, contact being made in the pineal gland. Locke and his empirical followers envisaged the mind as a blank tablet, which records the material world through sensations. Sterne, as we shall see, made

merry with all these specific theories and with the problem in general.

Sixteenth and particularly seventeenth-century writers had been concerned about the duality of the corporeal and the incorporeal.¹ The English Metaphysical Poets yoked the two together, wittily, using exaggerated metaphors to animate the inanimate, or vice versa.

Other writers treated the problem somewhat less seriously than the poets, and much less seriously than the philosophers. Rabelais,² for instance, travestied the body-soul relationship in much the same fashion that the Scriblerus Authors were to travesty it in the final seven chapters of Martinus Scriblerus, and Swift, in The Mechanical Operation of the Spirit.

Sterne, therefore, was dealing with a basic philosophical problem, whose popularity had reached its zenith among scientists, philosophers, and poets in the previous century. He also had literary precedents in his own century for his comic handling of the problem. We know, too, from Sterne's sermons that the moral aspects of the problem interested him. He wrote for instance:

I cannot conceive, but that the very
mechanical motions which maintain life,

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1. The point is well made by A. N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (Cambridge, 1928), Chapter 3.
 2. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book III, Chapters 4, 13.

must be performed with more equal vigour
and freedom in that man who has. . .a
great and good soul.¹

Sterne's light-hearted ridicule of the body/soul problem appears most openly in the Shandean passages dealing with Platonism and Neoplatonism. Renaissance England, as evidenced through the school of courtly poets, had thought seriously of Platonism. Under the influence of Ficino, the Neoplatonic popularizer, the doctrine of the Forms and other Platonic dicta had filtered through to Spenser, Sidney, Henry More, Donne, Shaftesbury, and John Norris, to name but a few. With the advent of the new science, however, Platonism began to become something of an anomaly. The Platonists' stress on 'a priori' ideas and their belief in the possibility of one's attaining an ineffable, mystical union with the Godhead were an easy target for the more empirically-minded eighteenth century.

A long passage in Volume V finds Sterne satirizing the supposedly ancient and revered heritage of Hermetic Platonism. The heritage is traced comically to its origin in Alexandria, and Sterne's rendering parodies the seriousness with which all Platonists and Neoplatonists viewed the origins of their beliefs. The quotation, "—That we and our children were born to die,—but neither of us born to be

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, Sermon 5, "The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zarepliath, Considered".

slaves", refers to the Neoplatonic belief that, although man's body is mortal, his soul is distinct from his body, of a higher order, and Godlike.¹

Earlier in the same volume Sterne adeptly added an anti-climax to a passage from Burton's Anatomy, deflating the pretensions of Hermetic Platonism:

Who made MAN, with powers which dart him from earth to heaven in a moment—that great, that most excellent, and most noble creature of the world—the 'miracle' of nature, as Zoroaster . . . called him—the SHEKINAH of the divine presence, as Chrysostom—the 'image' of God, as Moses—the 'ray' of divinity, as Plato—the 'marvel of marvels', as Aristotle—to go sneaking on at this pitiful—pimping—pettifogging rate?²

Similarly, in Volume VII, Chapter 13, an anti-climax deflates Tristram's remark:

I love the Pythagoreans . . . for . . .
[their] 'getting out of the body in
order to think well'.³

Later, Walter and Toby discuss the "two different and distinct kinds of love" - the one springing from bodily passions, the other (Platonic love) from man's soul.⁴ But this conversation, too, turns into buffoonery.

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 12, p. 363.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, pp. 339-340; Anatomy, "The First Partition", Section 1.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 13, p. 472.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 33, pp. 559-561.

The Neoplatonic distinction between physical love and spiritual love receives repeated comical treatment whenever Toby's amours are discussed. Chapter 36 of Volume VI questions whether love is a physical state or an idea. There Tristram cites Plotinus, as well as Ficino. Toby himself doesn't believe love to be so mysterious. Naïvely, he thinks that falling in love (incorporeal) is no less natural than cutting one's finger (corporeal).¹

Volume VIII, too, contains a low-burlesque of the two kinds of love: the one in the body, the other in the mind.

It is a great pity—but 'tis certain from every day's observation of man, that he may be set on fire like a candle, at either end—provided there is a sufficient wick standing out; if there is not—there's an end of the affair; and if there is—by lighting it at the bottom, as the flame in that case has the misfortune generally to put out itself—there's an end of the affair again.²

The subject of physical and spiritual love will reappear shortly in connexion with Sterne's interest in the insufficiency of language. To pursue it further at this point would lead us away from the more general topic of Sterne's play with the mind/matter difficulty.

In Volume III, Chapter 4, Sterne applies his low-burlesque to the Stoical tenet that external good and

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 27, p. 554.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 15, p. 528.

external evil are material matters of indifference to the real self. In Rasselas¹ Dr. Johnson had shown with irony the psychological impossibility of total stoicism, but Sterne's interest lay in the comic possibilities of the Stoical position.

A Man's body and his mind, with the utmost reverence to both I speak it, are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining; rumple the one—you rumple the other

. . .

Zeno, Cleanthes, Diogenes Babylonius, Dionysius Heracleotes, Antipater, Panaetius and Possidonius amongst the Greeks;—Cato and Varro and Seneca amongst the Romans;—Pantenus and Clemens Alexandrinus and Montaigne amongst the Christians; and a score and a half of good, honest, unthinking Shandean people as ever lived, whose names I can't recollect,—all pretended that their jerkins were made after this fashion,—you might have rumpled and crumpled, and doubled and creased, and fretted and fridged the outside of them all to pieces;—in short, you might have played the very devil with them, and at the same time, not one of the insides of 'em would have been one button the worse, for all you had done to them.²

Later in the novel Sterne has Tristram employ a similar model of a man and his clothing to suggest comically that one's clothes influence one's mind:

Ludovious Sorbonensis makes this entirely an affair of the body . . . but he is deceived: the soul and body are joint-sharers in everything they get: A man cannot dress,

1. Rasselas, Chapter 18.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 4, p. 174.

but his ideas get cloathed at the same time; and if he dresses like a gentleman, every one of them stands presented to his imagination, genteelized along with him—so that he has nothing to do, but take his pen, and write like himself.¹

Making merry with the ambivalence of the mind-matter relationship, Sterne's author-persona suggests that a proper diet will aid him in the composition of his book:

I am now beginning to get fairly into my work; and by the help of a vegetable diet, with a few cold seeds, I make no doubt but I shall be able to go on with my uncle Toby's story, and my own, in a tolerable straight line.²

Significantly perhaps, the final volume of Shandy exhibits a disproportionate concern about the influence of material factors on a writer's creativity. Tristram is perplexed: Does creativity depend upon one's brain-matter or upon one's spiritual inspiration?

It is one comfort at least to me, that I lost some fourscore ounces of blood this week in a most uncritical fever which attacked me at the beginning of this chapter; so that I have still some hopes remaining, it may be more in the serous or globular parts of the blood, than in the subtle 'aura' of the brain—be it which it will—an Invocation can do no hurt—and I leave the affair entirely to the 'invoked', to inspire or to inject me according as he sees good.³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 13, pp. 587-588.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 40, p. 453.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, p. 598.

By treating the mind as if it were a material thing, Sterne reveals just how inappropriate such a treatment really is. Sterne may even have been spoofing Hobbism by showing the peculiarity of talking about the mind as if it were matter. In A Sentimental Journey, it will be remembered, Sterne's narrator had denied the possibility of human feelings arising from "combinations of matter and motion."¹

Early in Shandy, after the gossips have cruelly ruined Parson Yorick's reputation, he asks Eugenius "to take a view" of his head. Yorick claims his head to be "bruised and mis-shapen with the blows which ***** and ***** and some others" had given him "in the dark."² Obviously, Yorick's claim is metaphorical, yet the droll suggestion is that verbal abuse can cause not only mental anguish but also physical bumps.

Similarly, Sterne sports with the mind/body problem when the chaise-vamper's wife inadvertently misappropriates the pages of Tristram's travel diary:

The wife of the chaise-vamper stepped in, I told you, to take the papillotes from off her hair—the toilet stands still for no man—so she jerked off her cap, to begin

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1. A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, ed. G. D. Stout, (California, 1967), Volume II, "Maria, Moulins", p. 271.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 12, p. 60.

with them as she opened the door, in doing which, one of them fell upon the ground—I instantly saw it was my own writing—

O Seigneur! cried I—you have got all my remarks upon your head, Madam!—'J'en suis bien mortifiée,' said she—'tis well, thinks I, they have stuck there—for could they have gone deeper, they would have made such confusion in a French woman's noddle—She had better have gone with it unfrizled, to the day of eternity.¹

In Sterne's day the physiological sciences were just emerging from their infancy. Of course Natural Philosophers, as they were then called, had speculated upon the criteria for distinguishing between the material and the immaterial. Terms such as "extension" and "primary qualities" were bandied about in philosophical circles. Not until the 1790's, however, were the first scientifically acceptable distinctions drawn.² The problem is still debated by philosophers.

In joking about the relation of the material to the immaterial, or the body to the mind, Sterne was, therefore, exploiting the scientific and philosophical uncertainty of the mid-eighteenth century. This is apparent in passages such as:

No body, but he who has felt it, can conceive what a plaguing thing it is to have a man's mind torn asunder by two projects of

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 38, p. 505.
 2. S. Toulmin and J. Goodfield, The Architecture of Matter, (Pelican paperback, 1965), p. 225.

equal strength, both obstinately pulling in a contrary direction at the same time: For to say nothing of the havoc, which by a certain consequence is unavoidably made by it all over the finer system of the nerves, which you know convey the animal spirits and more subtle juices from the heart to the head, and so on—It is not to be told in what degree such a wayward kind of friction works upon the more gross and solid parts, wasting the fat and impairing the strength of a man every time as it goes backwards and forwards.¹

The ambiguity between the physical brain and the immaterial mind runs all through Sterne's novel. At one point the self-conscious Tristram regards his mental confusion as being within "the registers of the brain."² During the tale of Amandus and Amanda, the adolescent tendency to sentimentalize love is explained by Sterne in terms of:

a sweet era in the life of man . . . (the brain being tender and fibrillous, and more like pap than any thing else)³

In his Rabelaisian story of Phutatorius and the hot chestnut, Sterne continually speaks of the mind in material terms, which because of their grotesque awkwardness call attention to the absurdity of identifying mind with matter.

But the heat gradually increasing, and in a few seconds more getting beyond the point of all sober pleasure, and then advancing

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 31, p. 331.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 37, p. 504.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 31, p. 496.

with all speed into the regions of pain,—the soul of Phutatorius, together with all his ideas, his thoughts, his attention, his imagination, judgment, resolution, deliberation, ratiocination, memory, fancy, with ten battalions of animal spirits, all tumultuously crowded down, through different defiles and circuits, to the place in danger, leaving all his upper regions,¹ as you may imagine, as empty as my purse.

The philosopher's term "substance" stands out by virtue of its being personified in the following excerpt from the same chapter:

The mind of man, which is an inquisitive kind of substance, naturally takes a flight behind the scenes to see what is the cause and first spring of them [unexpected events].²

In an important sense the mind/matter interaction is central to the entire novel. Tristram's moment of conception is rendered in terms of the physical and the spiritual. The novel begins with Tristram comically lamenting an interruption that had occurred some forty-two years previously, at the time of his conception. Here at the outset, Tristram hints that his life-long propensity towards being scatterbrained was caused by a clock which occasioned his mother's ill-timed remark, which in turn distracted Walter Shandy and dispersed Tristram's animal spirits at the very moment of conception. During a lengthy discussion of the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 318.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 320.

immaterial soul and the material brain, Tristram recounts his father's speculations about "that part where the soul principally took up her residence."¹ Walter "was satisfied" that the soul:

could not be where Des Cartes had fixed it,
upon the top of the 'pineal' gland of the
brain.²

Walter's thoughts about possible other locations develop into a comic ramble that travesties the entire question. He seems to identify the "finer network and the texture of the cerebellum itself" with the faculties of the soul.³ He returns to his belief that a child's character depends upon his parents' mental and physical concentration at the moment of conception. Walter believes in:

the due care to be taken in the act of propagation of each individual, which required all the thought in the world, as it laid the foundation of this incomprehensible texture in which wit, memory, fancy, eloquence, and what is usually meant by the name of good natural parts, do consist.⁴

When Tristram himself claims to have inherited his disorganization from Walter, the effect is most grotesque. Through a typically Sternean low-burlesque, the mind is

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, p. 162.

2. Ibid.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, p. 163.

4. Ibid.

reduced to the level of material - on this occasion, literally, 'material':

—But 'tis my father's fault; and whenever my brains come to be dissected, you will perceive, without spectacles, that he has left a large uneven thread, as you sometimes see in an unsaleable piece of cambric, running the whole length of the web.¹

Appearing in many guises throughout the novel, the relationship of the corporeal to the incorporeal is never settled. Obviously, Sterne is making fun of materialism, but there are no hints that he is opting for idealism. Indeed, writing about the immaterial in material terms spoofs the idealists as well as the materialists, while, simultaneously, revealing the inadequacy of language to synthesize, successfully, the conceptual world of the mind with the extra-mental physical world.

Of course it was not in Sterne's interest as a humourist to settle such a bed-rock philosophical problem. Nor was it in the interest of Tristram Shandy that he should come down on one side or other, for the ambivalent relation between his narrator-device and his readers could best be supported by ambivalent thematic material.

ii. Knowledge of Other Minds

Sterne's satire of Scholasticism, Empiricism, and Neoplatonism, as well as his play with the mind/matter

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 33, pp. 444-445.

relationship is surpassed by his subtle and sustained treatment of another philosophical problem. This problem is epistemological, but, as might be expected, the reader of Tristram Shandy does not find it presented straightforwardly or in obviously epistemic terms. Rather, Sterne suggests the difficulty obliquely and delights in offering fanciful solutions in a variety of muddled ways, as befits the confused consciousness of his author-persona.

The difficulty arises when we attempt to answer the question, "How can I know the thoughts of another person?" Of course we all take it for granted, occasionally at least, that we know what another person is thinking, experiencing, planning, or believing. But what logical grounds have we for taking these things for granted?

Stripped of its subtlety, the difficulty develops as follows: we claim that we can know the thoughts, feelings, purposes and beliefs of other people. How? Well, by what they say, or by their looks and actions. But obviously we do not 'see' the thoughts of another person; we do not experience his thoughts, feelings, purposes, and beliefs the way we experience our own. On the contrary, we infer what someone is thinking from his speech, facial expression, behaviour, and the like.

To infer in this manner is to base our inferences on our past observations. For example, I attribute

religious belief to a regular church-goer, or I attribute angry thoughts to someone who shouts and stamps his foot. But, while such inductively-reached conclusions often prove correct, they are not correct by necessity. I might, for example, find the church-goer to be acting from habit rather than belief; I might discover the person who stamps and shouts to be cheering, rather than expressing anger. Inductive inferences are not necessary inferences. Therefore, there is a sense in which we can never 'know' with certainty what is in the mind of another person.

Sterne satirizes the problem of 'knowledge of other minds' at several levels. First, as I demonstrated in my initial chapter, Sterne structured his novel so that statements by his author-persona often prove deceptive. How can the reader, then, ever really 'know' what Tristram has in mind? Secondly, on the level of content rather than form, Sterne piles example upon example, scene upon scene, of comical misunderstanding based upon false inferences which one character makes in regard to another.

Sterne's reader is constantly reminded that the author-persona is supposedly struggling with the task of conveying his thoughts and feelings to the reader. The reader is meant to infer Tristram's thoughts, to infer them from his remarks and sometimes even to infer from his

present remarks what he will say next. Tristram finds this situation extremely amusing:

Lay down the book, and I will allow you half a day to give a probable guess at the grounds for this procedure.¹

Conversely, Tristram enjoys rallying the reader for failing to infer what should have been inferred:

——How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, 'That my mother was not a papist.'—— Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to repeat it over again, That I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing.²

These passages illustrate the impossibility of predicting with certainty what Tristram will say in the future on the basis of his past remarks, and the possibility that when Tristram implies something we may fail to make the right inference. Nor is Sterne's author-persona reluctant to tease the reader for inferring what should not have been inferred and for making such false inferences on the basis of his (the reader's) own thoughts, prejudices, and hobby-horses.

As shown in my first chapter, Sterne's author-persona is unreliable in regard to his own writing. For one reason or another, Tristram does not always include

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 10, p. 47.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 20, p. 82.

what he says he will include in his book. As the reader discovers the discrepancies, doubts begin to form. How can we be certain of knowing Tristram's 'real' thoughts about anything?

Coming to know what Tristram really has in mind is, therefore, complicated by his unreliability. In the next chapter I shall suggest one way - not strictly a logical way, but a way nonetheless - of adjusting to Tristram's unreliability. For the present, even if we leave aside the matter of unreliability, a more basic epistemic difficulty remains.

Even if Tristram were always totally reliable, how could the reader know what Tristram has in mind merely from his words? Sterne's self-aware author-persona perceives the logical difficulty that confronts a reader trying to draw logically certain inferences from an author's words. I shall offer several examples of Tristram's self-awareness in this matter before going on to consider the many scenes of mistaken inferences between Shandean characters.

Acknowledging the difficulty of conveying thoughts from one person to another, Tristram writes of his urge to get the reader to understand a particular episode in his book:

the events of which [episode] are of so singular a nature, and so Cervantic a cast, that if I can so manage it, as to convey but the same impressions to every other brain, which the occurrences themselves excite in my own—

I will answer for it the book shall make its way in the world, much better than its master has done before it.¹

The connexion with the mind/matter relationship is evident. If Tristram is to convey his exact thoughts across the epistemological gap, he thinks he must excite the same series of impressions in the reader's brain as he has in his own. Whether or not this particular passage was meant to satirize Hartley's mechanical sensism must remain a matter for conjecture. It is likely, however, that Tristram's wish to transmit his exact impressions may strike a familiar chord with modern readers versed in T.S. Eliot's doctrine of the 'objective correlative'.

When considering how best to convey Uncle Toby's true character to the reader, Tristram again comments on the epistemological barrier between himself and his reader. Since man's mind shines "not through his body", Tristram is precluded from offering anyone else direct access to his knowledge of Toby.² This entire chapter is of course fanciful, but Sterne's amusement with the problem is real enough.

Tristram's goal of transporting his exact thoughts across the epistemological gap into the reader's mind occasions several far-fetched metaphors. Perhaps Locke's remark

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 332.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 23, p. 97.

that a man's thoughts "are all within his own breast, invisible, and hidden from others [i.e., hidden from other people]"¹ inspired Tristram's thought that a "Momus's glass in the human breast" would give direct insight into the sincerity of thoughts.²

Chapter 38 of Volume III finds Tristram in a typical turmoil. Comically distraught over being misjudged by others, Tristram cries out: "such a head!—would to heaven my enemies only saw the inside of it!"³

Elsewhere in the same volume, an even more hyperbolic Tristram imagines men's brains as alchemical stills, undergoing processes of putrefaction and sublimation. Continuing his extravagant metaphor, Tristram envisions the final chemical state of condensation, which will filter away the misunderstandings of mankind, leaving all men with a pure, intuitive understanding of one another.⁴ Such ludicrous solutions to a philosophical problem satirize the problem itself.

The problem of 'knowledge of other minds' seems to me absolutely essential to the comic groping which goes on

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1. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter III, Section 1.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 23, p. 96.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 38, p. 240.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, pp. 203-204.

as one Shandean character attempts to understand another. Having noted Tristram's concern with communicating, I want now to examine the problem in relation to each of Tristram's main characters: Walter, Toby, and Yorick.

When Tristram's nose was crushed at birth, Walter's reaction was to fling himself despairingly upon his bed. Tristram relates Walter's dramatic response in absurdly minute detail. With the occurrence of a second misfortune, viz., Tristram's being christened "Tristram" instead of "Trismegistus", the reader naturally expects a similarly histrionic reaction from Walter. But the reader is fooled, and his expectation proven gratuitous:

When the misfortune of my NOSE fell so heavily upon my father's head;—the reader remembers that he walked instantly upstairs, and cast himself down upon his bed; and from hence, unless he has great insight into human nature, he will be apt to expect a rotation of the same ascending and descending movements from him, upon this misfortune of my NAME:—no.

The different weight, dear Sir,—nay even the different package of two vexations of the same weight,—makes a very wide difference in our manner of bearing and getting through with them.¹

The point seems to be that we cannot infer (with certainty) someone's future actions on the basis of his past actions. Indeed, Tristram makes the same point later in the novel:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 17, p. 291.

As many pictures as have been given of my father, how like him soever in different airs and attitudes,—not one, or all of them, can ever help the reader to any kind of preconception of how my father would think, speak, or act, upon any untried occasion or occurrence of life.¹

To be sure, this last passage highlights Walter's eccentricities in particular and cannot be construed as a blanket statement of the futility of attempting to predict the reactions of another person. Yet a more universal epistemic scepticism becomes evident when this passage is viewed in the context of the episode of which it forms a part.

The subject of the entire episode is Tristram's accidental circumcision. The passage about Walter's unpredictability refers to his odd reaction to the news of his son's accident.² But just a few pages before Tristram's account of Walter's unpredictability, Tristram cryptically relates the circumstances of his accident.³ The reader can hardly make head nor tail of what happened, and Tristram, always self-aware, enjoys his prerogative to write

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 24, p. 374.
 2. In fact Walter's reaction is this: When Obadiah recounts the accidental circumcision, Walter replies, "I thought as much," walks upstairs, and consults ancient authorities on the rite of circumcision. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 26, p. 376.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapters 17-18.

cryptically. Archly, Tristram suggests the impossibility of anyone coming to know what he has in mind:

It is vain to leave this to the Reader's imagination:—to form any kind of hypothesis that will render these propositions feasible, he must cudgel his brains sore,—and to do it without,—he must have such brains as no reader ever had before him.—Why should I put them either to tryal or torture? 'Tis my own affair: I'll explain it myself.

To an outsider Tristram's mind is equally as inaccessible as Walter's.

Sterne repeatedly uses the inaccessibility of minds to create situations of comic misunderstanding, which in turn give rise to the fumbling that characterizes so much of the Shandean farce. I shall consider many examples of this technique in a moment. But first it should be noted that, despite the pervasive ambiguity and confusion, Shandean characters do communicate - however inexactly. They 'know' through the heart and not the head, through affection not logic. They appreciate and understand one another almost supra-rationally.

Tristram Shandy indicates, therefore, Sterne's recognition of the fact that certitude admits of degrees. There is a relative certitude which will do for everyday life, but which falls short of logical certitude. Although

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 18, p. 370.

we may lack rigidly valid criteria (and, therefore, lack valid reasons) for inferring what others are thinking, we do nevertheless make inferences from the best available information and fumble along accordingly. Walter, Toby, Yorick, Trim - all Sterne's characters are engaged in just such comic fumbling. Fumbling is the essence of Shandeism. Yet, Sterne isn't always satirizing our illogical modes of communication. Indeed, as I shall argue in my final chapter, he even sees them as ways of transcending the philosophical impasse between minds.

Because Sterne makes farce from the problem of other minds and because the Shandean fumbling embodies communication (though rationally inexact), the epistemic scepticism of the novel need not be taken with great seriousness. To see Sterne as a pre-Kierkegaardian figure, evincing dread at man's utter loneliness, evoking the terror of despair, and believing in a recrudescence "mal at the heart of the universe", is to overlook the humour and the communication-through-fumbling.¹ The examples which follow will serve to substantiate and justify the non-serious approach to the epistemology of Tristram Shandy.

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1. E. H. Lockridge, "A Vision of the Sentimental Absurd: Sterne and Camus", SR, LXXII, (1964), p. 660. See also, W. Kayser who finds Tristram "possessed by a strange power which is secretly allied with the maliciousness of inanimate objects . . . and man's estrangement from his fellow man." The Grotesque in Art and Literature, English trans. U. Weisstein, (Indiana paperback, 1966), p. 51.

In Volume V, Chapter 13, Mrs. Shandy thinks she knows what Walter means when he says, "I have three desolate children," but Tristram and the reader realize that Walter was quoting Socrates, not speaking for himself.¹ Clearly, Sterne contrived the scene to exploit the humour of misunderstanding.

Later this comic situation is reversed when Walter demands what he judges to be a more accurate word than "curiosity" to describe Mrs. Shandy's "impulse" to peep through the keyhole at Widow Wadman and Uncle Toby.² Mrs. Shandy becomes highly indignant at Walter's demand. In her opinion Walter has misjudged her "impulse". Beneath the comedy a philosophical issue is at stake. Who can deny that Mrs. Shandy has more immediate access to her private motives than anyone else, her husband not excluded? As Toby remarks elsewhere in the novel:

God only knows who is a hypocrite,
and who is not.³

Sterne develops Toby as the focal point for illustrating the difficulties of knowing what other people are thinking. Others have trouble inferring Toby's thoughts, and he, likewise, has trouble understanding them, rationally.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 13, p. 364.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 1, p. 571.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 7, p. 408.

There is of course intuitive rapport between Toby and Walter, and between Toby and Trim. Sterne highly valued such intuitive, non-rational rapport. Yet, rapport through feeling does not satisfy the utopian demand for perfect, logically-conclusive communication.

For example, the reader is told of Walter's inability to transpose his erudite knowledge into Toby's mind. This may seem an unnecessarily awkward way of saying that Toby simply isn't interested in such nonsense, but it gives Sterne the opportunity of satirizing wildly speculative thought, the mind/matter relation, and 'knowledge of other minds' all within the space of three paragraphs:

Not any one of these was more diverting, I say, in this whimsical theatre of ours,—than what frequently arose out of this self-same chapter of long noses,—especially when my father's imagination was heated with the enquiry, and nothing would serve him but to heat my uncle Toby's too.

My uncle Toby would give my father all possible fair play in this attempt; and with infinite patience would sit smoaking his pipe for whole hours together, whilst my father was practising upon his head, and trying every accessible avenue to drive Prignitz and Scroderus's solutions into it.

Whether they were above my uncle Toby's reason,—or contrary to it,—or that his brain was like wet tinder, and no spark could possibly take hold,—or that it was so full of saps, mines, blinds, curtains, and such military disqualifications to his seeing clearly into Prignitz and Scroderus's doctrines,—I say not,—let schoolmen—scullions, anatomists, and engineers, fight for it amongst themselves.¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 39, p. 241.

In this same episode, to stress the impossibility of predicting another person's thoughts from external evidence, Sterne's author-persona includes a lengthy paragraph, saying that an impartial observer:

would have concluded my uncle Toby had got hold of the 'medium terminus'; and was syllogizing and measuring with it the truth of each hypothesis of long noses . . . ¹

But actually, the author-persona goes on to say, Toby had no comprehension of, nor interest in, Walter's pseudo-learned discourse.

Toby is depicted as having equally great difficulty in conveying his ideas to others. He was "an eye witness at Namur" and he knows his military terminology, yet he finds "almost insurmountable difficulties" in describing the battle to other people.² To overcome his inarticularity, Toby constructs scale-model fortifications on the bowling green. As originally conceived, the fortifications were to serve as an external model of Toby's thoughts. Like the Momus's glass and the brain sublimation wished for by Tristram, the mock fortifications are a grotesque solution to the difficulty one has in making his thoughts understandable to outsiders. Toby's solution is reminiscent

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 40, p. 242.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 1, p. 103.

of a solution proposed for a similar difficulty by the academics of Lugado in Gulliver's Travels:

An expedient was therefore offered, that since words are only names for 'things', it would be more convenient for all men to carry about them such 'things' as were necessary to express the particular business they are to discourse on.¹

The supposed dichotomy between 'words' and the 'things' they signify provided a popular controversial topic for the eighteenth century.² The connexion between the idea, the word for the idea, and the thing the word represents is of course a variation of the mind/matter difficulty.

Sterne's author-persona writes of "sins", for instance, as if they were physical objects, capable of being halved.³ He speaks of etiquette being split into "atoms".⁴ In particular Tristram discusses two of Uncle Toby's personal qualities, his frankness and his modesty, in a most peculiar way - a way that relates to the problem of 'knowledge of other minds'.

Tristram struggles to show how Toby's "frankness" differs from run-of-the-mill frankness. He attempts to give the word a special meaning as applied to Uncle Toby.

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1. Gulliver's Travels, Book III, Chapter 5.
 2. For a valuable discussion of the eighteenth-century obsession with words, ideas, and things, see G. W. Hatfield, Henry Fielding and the Language of Irony, (Chicago, 1968), Chapters 1 and 2.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 25, p. 486.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 9, p. 524.

There was a frankness in my uncle Toby,—not the 'effect' of familiarity,—but the 'cause' of it,—which let you at once into his soul, and shewed you the goodness of his nature.¹

The frankness that leads to, rather than being a product of, familiarity is understandable because the reader had already been given examples of Toby's innate candour and benevolence. The immediate sympathy shown to Le Fever, for instance, typifies Toby's spontaneous frankness. It is a frankness that encourages mutual empathy without necessitating the inferring of the thoughts of the other party. Toby's benevolence to Le Fever is, to use a favourite Sternean phrase, from the heart not the head. It is the product of natural feeling, not calculated thought.

In Volume I, Tristram attempts to define Toby's especial, unique, modesty. Here Sterne immerses himself playfully in the complexities of the word/thing debate. During the discussion of Toby's character, Tristram states that the word "modesty" can signify a thing. Uncle Toby's modesty was:

modesty in the truest sense of it; and that is Madam, not in regard to words, for he was so unhappy as to have little choice in them—but to things.²

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 10, p. 412.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 90.

On the face of it, this seems an odd construing of the concept of modesty. Usually to say that someone is modest involves making a value-judgment based on the behaviour (actions, responses, words, etc.) of that person. What was Sterne (or Tristram, if you like) getting at by attempting to circumvent our usual criteria for calling someone "modest"?

Sterne, I think, was making the same point about Toby's modesty that he later made about Toby's frankness. Both qualities are somehow prior to his actions. But why make this point? It needed to be made, most probably, because of the doubt expressed all through the novel that one man can ever come to know the mind of another person. Tristram wants the reader to know that Toby did more than act modestly (for a person can pretend to be modest); Toby was modest - truly modest.

This point could more easily have been made if Sterne's narrator-device had been omniscient and if the novel itself had stressed certitude instead of doubt. As it stands, the attempt to push the truth of Toby's modesty beyond the mere word "modesty" draws attention to the gap between real meaning and the word that goes proxy for the real meaning.

Sterne must have anticipated that the reader would probably not pause to consider the peculiar

relationship between the word "modesty" and the thing "modesty", so he inserted a secondary, less subtle puzzle to bring the reader up with a start.

Tristram informs the reader that Toby got his modesty "by a blow". Such a queer claim can only set the reader wondering if Tristram means by "modesty" what is usually understood as "modesty". We don't customarily speak of "getting modesty". What does it mean to "get modesty"? What connexion can exist between the modesty and the blow?

Obviously, Sterne is sporting once again with the interaction of the immaterial (the quality of modesty) and the material (the blow which somehow occasions Toby's modesty). But while Tristram reveals the circumstances surrounding the blow, he fails to indicate the connexion between the physical blow and the quality of modesty supposedly acquired from the blow.

Yes, Madam, it was owing to a blow from a stone, broke off by a ball from a parapet of horn-work at the siege of Namur, which struck full upon my uncle Toby's groin.— Which way could that affect it? The story of that, Madam, is long and interesting;— but it would be running my history all upon heaps to give it you here.— 'Tis for an episode hereafter; and every circumstance relating to it, in its proper place, shall be faithfully laid before you:—¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 91.

Like many of Tristram's promises, however, this promise to reveal the relation between the blow and Toby's modesty is not kept. The reader is never told directly what Tristram really has in mind by his peculiar use of the word "modesty", although there are comic examples of Toby's modest behaviour, particularly in the Widow Wadman affair.

Through his structural device (i.e., Tristram), Sterne involves the reader in the problem of thought-transference. Tristram's striving to make the reader understand exactly what he means by Toby's frankness and modesty is indicative of the search for perfect communication that carries all through the novel. Toby himself strives to make his ideas intelligible, while he faces concurrent difficulties in determining what lies in the minds of the other characters. Let us consider several instances of comic fumbling occasioned by Toby's failing to infer the real thoughts of other characters.

Toby is forever infuriating Walter by being inattentive to Walter's disquisitions. This situation exists, for example, at the beginning of Chapter 5, Volume III, where we find Toby oblivious to the surface manifestations of Walter's anger. Walter's flushed face and knitted brows imply fury, yet Toby fails to draw the inference. For emphasis, Tristram states this fact outright several times in the chapter.

In Volume V, Chapter 3, Toby fails to understand what Walter has in mind, and then interrupts another of Walter's preposterous harangues. This time Walter has been solemnly expatiating upon the transitory existence of even the greatest city-states: "Troy and Mycenae, and Thebes and Delos, and Persepolis and Agrigentum."¹

Quoting "Servius Sulpicius's consolatory letter to Tully", Walter says aloud, "Returning out of Asia, when I sailed from Aegina towards Megara," and Toby wonders, "When can this have been?" Not realizing that Walter was reciting "whole pieces of antiquity", Toby presumes that Walter himself is claiming to have journeyed the classical route. The dénouement of the misunderstanding leads to a further misunderstanding when Walter fails to realize what Toby has in mind:

And pray, brother, quoth my uncle Toby, laying the end of his pipe upon my father's hand in a kindly way of interruption—but waiting till he finished the account—what year of the Lord was this? [i.e., what year had Walter travelled from Aegina to Megara]—'Twas no year of our Lord, replied my father.—That's impossible, cried my uncle Toby.—Simpleton! said my father,—'twas forty years before Christ was born.²

Near the close of the novel Tristram recounts a series of misunderstandings between Toby and the Widow

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 3, p. 349.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 3, p. 350.

Wadman. The difficulty of achieving a meeting of minds is illustrated in the quizzical encounter wherein Toby means one thing and Mrs. Wadman infers something quite different from Toby's remark, "You shall lay your finger upon the place."¹

The pleasantly embarrassed Widow thinks Toby means to show her the place of the wound on his body; while for Toby "place" means the position of the St. Nicolas Gate on the map of Namur. Writing of the ensuing confusion, Tristram displays a Lockean distrust of words, as indeed he has throughout the novel. This comical misunderstanding between Toby and the Widow Wadman "shows what little knowledge is got by mere words."²

In Chapter 17 of Volume I, Sterne offers a variation upon the question, "How can one know for certain what another person has in mind?" There Tristram records Trim's emotional account of his brother's harsh treatment by the Inquisition. Toby, Walter, and Dr. Slop listen to Trim. When the short tale is completed, Walter expresses his sympathy in words to Trim. Toby remains silent, but his sympathy may be inferred, for the reader has already been given insight into Toby's benevolent nature. Tristram describes the situation:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 20, p. 594.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 20, p. 595.

—The tears trickled down Trim's cheeks faster than he could well wipe them away.
—A dead silence in the room ensued for some minutes.—Certain proof of pity!¹

But is "dead silence" certain proof of pity?

Obviously, silence cannot deceive in the same way words can. But is Dr. Slop, like the others, moved to pity? Just a few sentences earlier Tristram had recorded Slop's remark that the Inquisition "has its uses."² Might not Slop remain silent merely for reasons of discretion? Sterne could have been using the phrase "certain proof of pity" ironically. In any case a challenge is thrown at the reader. Can we really judge internal mental states on the basis of external evidence? And of course the external evidence itself, in this instance, is of a most peculiar kind: silence - the opposite of words.

In Tristram Shandy the problem of 'knowledge of other minds' only once approaches near-seriousness. Consider the story of Parson Yorick in Chapters 10, 11, 12 of Volume I, and Chapter 27 of Volume IV.

Tristram's capsule summary of Yorick's personality reveals the difficulty others had in determining why Yorick chose to ride such a "lean, sorry, jack-ass of a horse."³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, p. 141.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, p. 140.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 10, p. 47.

According to Tristram, Yorick had a reason which he kept to himself and even tried to disguise:

—he could have explained it to his honour,
but his spirit was above it.¹

Yorick's reason for preferring his "Rocinante" and his reasons for "every other action of his life" were not identical with "the opinions which floated in the brains of other people", concerning Yorick's reasons.² Others judged peremptorily upon Yorick's motives, and these unfair judgments were, Tristram indicates, symbolically responsible for Yorick's death.

But Yorick's position is ironical. He, too, seems to be impulsive in judging others solely by their actions. "A pitiful or ungenerous proceeding" brings an immediate, open condemnation from Yorick.³ In a strictly philosophical sense, then, Yorick, too engages in inferring people's thoughts from their actions. Moreover, Yorick has a quick and satirical wit. When he judges an action to be a "dirty action":

—without more ado,—The man was a
dirty fellow,—and so on.⁴

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 321.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 10, p. 52.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 11, p. 56.
 4. Ibid.

Although Tristram never reveals the exact details, we learn that Yorick's precipitous judgments of others sprang not "thro any malignancy;—but on the contrary, from an honesty . . . "¹ Be this as it may, the victims of Yorick's wit are resentful. As targets of Yorick's wit they infer (wrongly) his motives, and decide to take action. Hence, the "grand confederacy"² against Yorick, like Yorick himself, is guilty of inferring the thoughts of other people on the basis of external, and therefore logically inconclusive, evidence. There seems to be a vicious circle of inferences.

But Sterne wants us to know that Yorick is unquestionably the moral superior of his adversaries. Sterne treats Yorick as a martyred hero, so, clearly, there is a moral judgment here as well as a philosophical problem.

Like Fielding, Sterne seems to be developing the view that the good man is not necessarily prudent and the prudent man, not necessarily good. Tactless as they are, Yorick's actions spring from a good heart and an "unhackneyed"³ intuitive ability to recognize evil when he sees it. Indeed, it is Yorick's flair for intuitive moral

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 12, p. 57.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 12, p. 58.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 11, p. 56.

insight that enables him to transcend the logical problem of 'knowledge of other minds'.

Yorick's death is a tragic example of communication failure between him and his enemies. However, those critics who find Sterne despairing at the isolated human condition are precluded from using Yorick's death-scene to illustrate their thesis, for Yorick's dying gasp is a communication - from Yorick's heart to Eugenius'. Human communication or empathy is achieved at the positive level of feeling, rather than at the logically inconclusive level of ratiocination.

Sterne's rendering of the problem of other minds gives rise to many more incidents of perplexed fumbling. To list just six at random: (1.) Susannah misunderstands Trim, and takes him to be flattering her when he asks rhetorically, "What is the finest face that ever man looked at?";¹ (2.) When Trim remarks, "Nothing . . . can be so sad as confinement for life," he is referring to the Inquisition, but Toby applies the reference to the state of matrimony;² (3.) Tristram in one place catches himself trying to infer the 'thoughts' of an ass, and at another point he weeps while imagining the thoughts of the madwoman, Maria, on the basis of her appearance, her music, and the testimony

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 9, p. 359.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 4, p. 575.

of the postillion;¹ (4.) The young Beguine who nursed Corporal Trim often told him "she did it for the love of Christ."² Her motive is irreproachable, but Sterne makes merry with the equivocality of the indefinite "it";³ (5.) The impossibility of any external procedure for determining qualitative differences between the pains of two persons (impossible because each person has direct knowledge only of his own pain) receives comic treatment when Toby and Trim argue "whether the pain of a wound in the groin . . . is greater than the pain of a wound in the knee";⁴ (6.) Perhaps most ingeniously of all, Sterne leaves the reader to infer that Tristram's window-sash accident resulted in a real circumcision. Never are we told outright that a circumcision occurred, although Walter does consult antiquarian sources concerning that rite.⁵

iii. The Insufficiency of Language

Sterne's amused preoccupation with the problem of 'knowledge of other minds' has close ties with his equally amusing critique of language.

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 32; Volume IX, Chapter 24.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 20, p. 546.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapters 20, 21, 22.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 19, p. 544.
 5. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapters 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 26, 27.

The evidence most frequently employed to infer the thoughts of another person is the word, written or spoken, of that person. Obviously, however, anyone can say he holds certain views or beliefs while really knowing he does not. On the other hand, even when a person tries to convey, with truthful precision, what he has in mind, the words he uses may admit of varying interpretations. Tristram's particularly subjective understanding of the word "modesty" has already been noted, as has the divergence between Toby and Mrs. Wadman over what the word "place" was meant to denote.

The humour of many Shandean scenes hinges solely upon misunderstood words. When for instance Trim enters after converting Walter's old boots into imitation military mortars, the word "mortar" generates a series of divergent denotations:

Pray what's the matter? Who is there? cried my father, waking, the moment the door began to creak.—I wish the smith would give a peep at that confounded hinge.—'Tis nothing, an' please your honour, said Trim, but two mortars I am bringing in.—They shan't make a clatter with them here, cried my father hastily.—If Dr. Slop has any drugs to pound, let him do it in the kitchen.—May it please your honour, cried Trim,—they are two mortar-pieces for a siege next summer, which I have been making out of a pair of jack-boots, which Obadiah told me your honour had left off wearing.—By heaven! cried my father, springing out of his chair as he swore,—I have not one appointment belonging to me, which I set so much store

by, as I do these jack-boots,—they were 'hereditary'. Then I fear, quoth my uncle Toby, Trim has cut off the entail.—I have only cut off the tops, an' please your honour, cried Trim,—¹

Skilfully rendered and typically Sternean, this passage illustrates a philosophical difficulty which David Hartley had stated a decade earlier:

It follows . . . that persons who speak the same language cannot always mean the same things by the same words; but must mistake each other's meaning. This confusion and uncertainty arises from the different associations transferred upon the same words by the difference in the accidents and events of our lives.²

Of course verbal misunderstanding had long been a conventional technique in stage farce. For a dramatist to have one character take a word in a different sense from what was meant does not necessarily indicate a conscious exploitation of a philosophical problem. One must look closely at Sterne's writing to separate the more original philosophical puzzles from the conventional literary tactics.

Aside from its comic illustrations of linguistic problems, Tristram Shandy contains two descants upon language which prove Sterne's interest in language, per se. The first

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 22, p. 213.

2. Observations on Man, Chapter III, Section 1, Prop. LXXX, Cor. 4.

is "The Author's Preface" of Volume III.¹ There Sterne defends the very type of Shandean writing in which he is engaged. Asserting the need for witty as well as serious writing, the author-persona advances the anti-empiricist argument that truth can be conveyed through wit. Earlier in the novel of course Sterne had shown Yorick as the vehicle for just such a conveyance.

In justifying his own work Sterne was also criticising the plain prose style - product of unornamented judgment - which had become fashionable since the previous century.² Bacon had advocated such a style:

The understanding must not therefore be supplied with wings, but rather hung with weights, to keep it from leaping and flying.³

Sterne, on the other hand, felt that man's understanding subsumed the faculty of wit as well as the faculty of judgment; wit, therefore, is equally natural and necessary to man:

All I know of the matter is,—when I sat down, my intent was to write a good book; and as far as the tenuity of my understanding would hold out,—a wise, aye, and a

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, pp. 202-211.
 2. The change in English prose style during the seventeenth century is a vast topic with many ramifications. For short but useful discussions see: J.R. Sutherland, On English Prose, (Toronto paperback, 1965), Chapter 3; A. Alvarez, The School of Donne, (Mentor paperback, 1967), Chapter 8.
 3. Novum Organum: First Book of Aphorisms, Nbr. civ; Works, IV, p. 97, cited by A. Alvarez, *Op. cit.*

discreet,—taking care only, as I went along, to put into it all the wit and judgment (be it more or less) which the great Author and Bestower of them had originally thought fit to give me—¹

The writer's problem of proportioning wit and judgment, harmoniously, was a well-worn issue in the eighteenth century. Pope's famous couplet married the two:

For Wit and Judgment often are at strife,
Tho' meant each other's Aid, like Man and Wife.²

Forty years later, the topic was far from dead.

Fielding derived good taste in writing from:

a nice harmony between the Imagination
and the Judgment.³

Although Sterne's critics found Tristram Shandy disproportionately witty and imaginative, Sterne himself claimed otherwise. Like Pope and Fielding, Sterne paid a typical eighteenth-century tribute to the golden mean:

—Here stands 'wit',—and there stands
'judgment', close beside it, just like
the two knobs I'm speaking of, upon the
back of this self-same chair on which I'm
sitting.

—You see, they are the highest and most
ornamental parts of its frame,—as wit and
judgment are of ours,—and like them too,
indubitably both made and fitted to go
together, in order as we say in all such

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 202.
 2. An Essay on Criticism, ll. 82-3.
 3. Covent Garden Journal, Nbr. 10, Tuesday, Feb. 4, 1752.

cases of duplicated embellishments—
'to answer one another'.¹

In his "Author's Preface" Sterne grinds a particularly anti-Lockean axe. Locke had demoted wit to the position of sheer ornament. For Locke, wit was a faculty capable of insinuating "wrong views".² Tristram believes;

—that the great Locke, who was seldom outwitted by false sounds,—was nevertheless bubbled here.³

Tristram has even harsher words for those who think that, because 'his' book is witty, all authorial judgment is precluded:

Now, Agelastes (speaking dispraisingly) sayeth, That there may be some wit in it, for aught he knows,—but no judgment at all. And Triptolemus and Phutatorius agreeing thereto, ask, How is it possible there should? for that wit and judgment in this world never go together; inasmuch as they are two operations differing from each other as wide as east is from west—So, says Locke,—so are farting and hiccuping, say I.⁴

Sterne's second descant upon the nature of language appears at the close of Volume V, in the form of an enthusiastic harangue by Mr. Shandy. The harangue is of course re-dramatized by Tristram, so it comes to the reader

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 209.

2. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter X, Section 34.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 210.

4. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 202.

in more second-hand fashion than "The Author's Preface". For this reason caution is required in determining precisely what Sterne meant, although it is certain he was once again satirizing obscure scholastic doctrines through the person of Walter.

Chapters 42 and 43 of Volume V find Walter and Yorick discussing the ideal education for the infant, Tristram. Walter recalls with dismay the many ancients who were exceedingly slow learners. He concludes:

I am convinced, Yorick, continued my father, half reading and half discoursing, that there is a North-west passage to the intellectual world; and that the soul of man has shorter ways of going to work, in furnishing itself with knowledge and instruction, than we generally take with it.¹

To Yorick's surprise, Walter's short-cut to knowledge depends "upon the auxiliary verbs",² and has close connexions with the systems of the thirteenth-century occult philosopher, Ramon Lull.³

Lull's method, or "Art" as he called it, constitutes an extreme example of complicated, speculative metaphysics. The "Art" ignores the evidence of man's senses,

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 42, p. 394.

2. Ibid.

3. For commentary on Lull (1235-1315) see E. Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, (New York, 1955), pp. 350-353; F. A. Yates, The Art of Memory, (Peregrine paperback, 1966), pp. 175-196.

concentrating instead upon the intellect, the will, and the memory as true sources of knowledge. To this anti-empiricist doctrine, Walter couples the "auxiliary" language scheme of "the elder Peligrini".¹

Now the use of the 'Auxiliaries' is, at once to set the soul a-going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracts of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions.²

Walter believes this marriage of 'a priori' thought and language generates knowledge. Clearly, through the course of the novel Walter, the rhetorician and speculative philosopher, practises what he preaches.³ Clearly, too, Sterne was satirizing the excesses of metaphysical web-spinning. But there was nothing new in this. Two hundred and fifty years earlier, Erasmus had satirized rhetoricians who believed that a comprehensive knowledge of language would render them omniscient.⁴

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 42, p. 394.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 42, p. 395.

3. Walter's belief that language is somehow prior to, more important than, and a determinate of, external reality is of course consistent with his theory of the importance of Christian names (they determine the person's life), advanced in Volume I, Chapter 19, and Volume IV in the interruption to "Slawkenbergius' Tale".

4. Praise of Folly, Eng. trans. B. Radice, (Penguin paperback, 1971), pp. 146-147, 170.

Yet in this same section of Shandy there is something modern, something extremely modern, about Walter's consideration of how language refers to external objects.

Which comes first, Walter asks, sense-experience or man's ability to use language? If the latter, then there are difficulties. How, Walter wonders, can we succeed in forming a mental image of a white bear if we have never seen one?¹ If we can, Walter implies, then there must be a way in which language is prior to sense-experience.

The harangue itself may be a satire of Lullism or even a satire of the contemporary rhetorician, James Harris, who also believed that we come to know the world by coming to know how to use language.² Yet on the other hand, the dilemma of the white bear is also an objection against the Lockean doctrine that all knowledge comes first through the senses.

These two descants - the first in "The Author's Preface", the second in Walter's harangue on education - reveal beyond doubt Sterne's awareness of the philosophical intricacies of language.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 43, p. 396.

2. John Ferriar was the first critic to comment on Sterne's satire of Lullism. Illustrations of Sterne, (London, 1798), pp. 26-27. Harris' popular book, Hermes, or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Language and Universal Grammar (1751), explains external reality by illustrating the proper use of grammar.

I want now to examine two instances of Sterne's subtlety at illustrating linguistic problems. Then I shall present a series of verbal misunderstandings between Shandean characters, similar to the one which began this section.

Without unfolding the implications, Sterne involves Tristram in a linguistic morass in Chapter 13 of Volume V. The discussion continues for several paragraphs, but the crux of the matter is this:

—Now my father had a way, a little like that of Job's (in case there ever was such a man—if not, there's an end of the matter . . .)¹

Sterne's amusement here is with remarks containing a term (in this case "Job") which may not have a reference in the real world. The problem remains alive today. The debate continues whether a sentence which contains a proper name that has no reference is false or neither true nor false. Of course Sterne's interest was in the humour of the problem, not in its resolution. He inserted this passage, perhaps, as a touch of seasoning for his larger dish of Shandean philosophical bemusement.

Such philosophical tid-bits are worth observing, for they reveal Sterne's conscious and careful forethought - regardless of his author-persona's claim to be improvising

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 13, p. 363.



and writing spontaneously. Consider a second short example.

In Volume I, Chapter 21, Tristram mentions:

my great-aunt Dinah, who, about sixty years
ago, was married and got with child by the
coachman . . . ¹

The reader realizes from Toby's attempts to avoid mentioning this misalliance and by Walter's raillery of Toby that the affair is an embarrassment. But the reader does not know, nor is he ever told, whether the embarrassment was occasioned by Dinah's marrying beneath her social class, or possibly by her having to get married, or by the combination of both. Everything hinges on the word "and" in the phrase "was married and got with child". If taken in a non-temporal sense, the "and" merely links two propositions, saying nothing about their chronological sequence. On the other hand, if the "and" is taken temporally, then Dinah became pregnant after marriage; in this sense "and" is equivalent to "and then" or "and so". But, if the "and" is understood as central to an hypallage - that figure of speech which places the consequence before the antecedent - then indeed Dinah's child was conceived prior to her marriage. Typically, in this short sentence Sterne leaves the reader to infer a great deal, and none of it with certainty.

Three volumes later, however, Tristram tells of the coach-painter's error in portraying the Shandy coat of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 89.

arms with a "bend-sinister" (symbol of bastardry) rather than a "bend-dexter".¹ The mistake reminds Walter and Toby of Aunt Dinah. In retrospect, therefore, the reader may reasonably conclude that the phrase "was married and got with child" did indeed constitute an hypallage.

Like most humourists before and since, Sterne turned uncertain connotations and denotations into witty puns and double entendre. Throughout the final two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* the word "it", for instance, has sexual overtones.

There was nothing for widow Wadman to do,
but to go on and love my uncle Toby—or
leave it alone.²

* * *

—'Not touch it for the world', did I say—
Lord, how I have heated my imagination
with this metaphor!³

Widow Wadman's soliloquy in Volume IX continues Sterne's fun with the ambiguity of "it":

'L--d! I cannot look at it—
What would the world say if I looked at it?
I should drop down, if I looked at it—
I wish I could look at it—
There can be no sin in looking at it.
—I will look at it.'⁴

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 25, p. 311.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 11, p. 525.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 12, p. 526.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 20, p. 594.

The next chapter exploits still further the humour of the ambiguity. And in the next chapter but one, Bridget has decided:

that whilst my uncle Toby was making love to her mistress, the corporal could find nothing better to do, than make love to her—'And I'll let him as much as he will,' said Bridget, 'to get it out of him.'¹

Although Bridget's objective was to secure from Trim the truth about Toby's wound, the word "it" appears once again as an obviously sexual equivoke.

The subject of sex almost, but not quite, surfaces beyond the suggestive level at the close of the book. Toby's potency, like that of Walter Shandy's bull, has been embarrassingly called into question, as has the metaphorically parallel idea of Tristram's potency as a writer.

In this last volume, too, Tristram records Walter's comments upon the social taboo against sexual words. Without speaking a single indelicate word, Walter first fashions a ludicrous criticism of the physicality of the sexual act. Then in the next paragraph with equal decorum he complains about the meta-language society employs to circumvent sexual words. Ironically, his very complaint is couched in that meta-language. This passage is quoted in full; the "affair" that Walter speaks of is copulation:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 23, p. 597.

I know it will be said, continued my father (availing himself of 'prolepsis') that in itself, and simply taken—like hunger, or thirst, or sleep—'tis an affair neither good or bad—or shameful or otherwise.—Why then did the delicacy of Diogenes and Plato so recalcitrate against it? and wherefore, when we go about to make and plant a man, do we put out the candle? and for what reason is it, that all the parties thereof—the congre-dients—the preparations—the instruments, and whatever serves thereto, are so held as to be conveyed to a cleanly mind by no language, translation, or periphrasis whatever?¹

In polite conversation ordinary words go proxy, so to speak, for sexual words. By its nature this sexual meta-language places the onus of interpretation upon the auditor's imagination. There are, as Tristram remarks elsewhere, "two senses" of some words, like "two roads": "a dirty road and a clean one."² Moreover:

When a proposition can be taken in two senses,—'tis a law in disputation, That the respondent may reply to which of the two he pleases, or finds most convenient for him.³

We are back again to the problem of 'knowledge of other minds'. One of the ways a person can misjudge what another person has in mind is by inferring that the speaker is using his words as a sexual meta-language, when in fact

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 33, p. 614.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 31, p. 225.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 15, p. 197.

he is not. Or alternatively we can go wrong when we infer that a speaker is using language straightforwardly, when in fact he means to convey sexual overtones.

Sterne's structural device of the deceptive narrator, whose real meaning is difficult to pin down with certainty, is therefore ideally suited to a book whose subject matter deals with the philosophical uncertainty of perfect thought-transference between characters. If interpretation rests upon the reader's imagining what Tristram means, then a sexual translation of any particular ambiguity convicts the reader of riding a sexual hobby-horse.

Sterne's play with language is, then, closely aligned to his play with 'knowledge of other minds'. Occasionally Sterne swings the mind/matter puzzle into humorous juxtaposition with the other two topics.

In Volume III, Chapter 37, for instance, Sterne reduces to ontological absurdity the idea that a word can 'be' a material thing. This episode also spoofs the difficulty of interpreting the written word (i.e., the 'knowledge of other minds' problem) as well as illustrating Sterne's amused interest in language, per se.

In this episode Tristram relates Walter's 'non plus ultra' at the words of Erasmus, recorded in Slawkenbergius' Decads. To no avail, Walter repeatedly studied these words in their "most strict and liberal

interpretation." Then he tried "the mystic and the allegoric sense." Finally:

He got out his pen-knife, and was trying experiments upon the sentence, to see if he could not scratch some better sense into it. —I've got within a single letter, brother Toby, cried my father, of Erasmus his mystic meaning.—You are near enough, brother, replied my uncle, in all conscience.—Pshaw! cried my father, scratching on,—I might as well be seven miles off.—I've done it,—said my father, snapping his fingers.—See, my dear brother Toby, how I have mended the sense.—But you have marred a word, replied my uncle Toby.—My father put on his spectacles,—bit his lip,—and tore out the leaf in a passion.¹

The written word, like the spoken word, can lead to a mare's nest of difficulties. What is written cannot be recognized, *prima facie*, for what is meant. In the case that puzzles Walter, the meaning of the statement is uncertain, and before we can judge the truth of a statement we must be able to understand its meaning.

A similar problem of understanding the meaning of the written word perplexes Tristram when he comes to examine the old holographs of Yorick's sermons. Tristram encounters value-judgments and suggestions for the delivery of the sermons. The marginal notations are not cast in everyday language, but in the meta-language of a musician. Yorick's scribbled comments about each sermon are:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 37, pp. 235-236.

musical terms, and have a meaning;—and as he was a musical man, I will make no doubt, but that by some quaint application of such metaphors to the compositions in hand, they impressed very distinct ideas of their several characters upon his fancy,—what-ever they may do upon that of others.¹

Tristram pretends that he can't see the application of such words as "lento" and "con strepito" (part of the vocabulary of music) to theological works. He pretends not to grasp the metaphorical connexion between sermons and songs. By having his author-persona adopt this posture, Sterne ridicules Locke's suspicion that figurative language leads to misunderstanding, for the reader makes the analogy readily and wonders why Tristram doesn't. In a travesty of Locke's position, Tristram "dare not venture to guess" Yorick's meaning because the "ideas" which might be "impressed" in the reader's mind (i.e., Tristram's mind) might not be the same as Yorick originally had in his own.²

The paragraph that follows contains a subtle Sternean trick, devised once again to emphasize the difficulty of interpreting the written word. The trickery is partly typographical and partly a matter of timing.

Tristram relates that Yorick's sermon on the death of Le Fever had the word "Bravo!" written in the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 11, p. 414.

2. *Ibid.*

lower right-hand margin. But Tristram defends Yorick from the charge of vanity because:

The word was struck through some time afterwards (as appears from a different tint of the ink) with a line quite across it in this manner, ~~BRAVO~~ —as if he had retracted, or was ashamed of the opinion he had once entertained of it.¹

In its first appearance on the page of Tristram Shandy, Yorick's "Bravo!" is not scored across with a cancellation line. In its second appearance it is. Yet in both cases Tristram was supposedly representing the word graphically - exactly as Yorick had inscribed it in the margin of his sermon. Why does Sterne represent the same ideograph by two differing constructions?

Tristram's unreliability here can be seen as a matter of skilful timing on Sterne's part. Between the two 'bravos' Tristram suggests a number of ludicrous minutiae to indicate that we need not infer Yorick's vanity from his terse self-approval. After this build-up, the fact that "Bravo!" was scored-out is an anti-climax. Had we known in the first place of Yorick's retraction, we would have judged him immediately to be somewhat self-critical. As it stands, Sterne has allowed a period of reading time to elapse, paralleling a period of time that must have elapsed between Yorick's first writing "Bravo!" and his later retraction.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 11, p. 415.

But there is yet another puzzle. In its second appearance the word "bravo" is in capital letters (BRAVO), whereas originally only the first letter was capitalized, the remainder being in lower case. Both "Bravo!" and "BRAVO" should depict, hieroglyphically, the word which appeared on Yorick's sermon, but of course Tristram must have misrepresented one or the other.¹

This strange, unexplained trick casts further doubt upon the transmissibility of thought through printed words and upon the ability of the printed word to convey precise meaning. Speaking generally of Sterne's typographical tricks, a recent commentator has aptly remarked that they:

call attention to the mechanical imposition of static form on the movement of human awareness; like tiny mines, they explode in the reader's face just as he turns the corner of a conception.²

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1. It is possible of course that I have merely located a printer's error that has continued unnoticed since the first edition. However, Sterne seems to have taken considerable pains with his typography, and it is unlikely he would have overlooked the difference between Bravo and BRAVO. By the same token, it is possible that a typesetter would not have been able to rule-through the diminutive, lower case letters 'ravo'. But if this were so, why couldn't the word "Bravo" have been set in capital letters in its first appearance?
 2. W. Holtz, "Typography, Tristram Shandy, the Aposiopesis, etc.", The Winged Skull, ed. A. H. Cash and J. H. Stedmond, (London, 1971), p. 253.

Sterne's amused scepticism about language and his fascination with the philosophical inadequacy of words should be put into perspective. Lest Sterne appear from my discussion to be portraying Tristram as a logophobe - with a pathological fear of words, though no hesitancy in using them - it is well to recall the popular concern with language during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. All philosophers and nearly all authors, even down to the Grub Streeters, seemed acutely aware of the many ways in which language itself was obscure and the ways that linguistic usage could be, and was being, abused. Locke was cited not only by philosophers but also by less serious writers for his skill in showing:

how greatly true knowledge depended on a right meaning of words, and a just significance of expression.¹

Still current in Sterne's day was the belief that language had degenerated over the years to the point where words no longer stood for things. Equally alive was the question of the purpose of language. Locke felt that language should express truths about the world, but Mandeville suggested archly that the purpose of language was to deceive. The most widely held belief about language had been proffered by Locke. On the subject of "words" he wrote:

1. Thomas Amory, The Life and Opinions of John Bun-
Esquire, (1756), (London, 1904), p. 3.

They interpose themselves so much between our understandings and the truth which it would contemplate and apprehend that, like the 'medium' through which visible objects pass, their obscurity and disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our eyes and impose upon our understandings. If we consider, in the fallacies men put upon themselves as well as others and the mistakes in men's disputes and notions, how great a part is owing to words and their uncertain or mistaken significance, we shall have reason to think this no small obstacle in the way to knowledge.

Sterne, therefore, drew upon an established theme.

Yet Sterne was questioning the theme. Indeed, Tristram Shandy brings to a head the difficulties inherent in Locke's goal of a language which could communicate perfectly. In the first place, as I have shown, Sterne points to the impossibility of inferring conclusively (from someone's words) exactly what he has in mind. Secondly, as I have also shown, an auditor's interpretation of someone else's words often depends upon the auditor's own mental predisposition, i.e., hobby-horse. Hence, the Shandean scenes of comic fumbling (as well as the reader's fumbling over ambiguities) make a philosophical case against the possibility of perfect linguistic communication. But this is only one side of the Shandean coin.

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1. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter IX, Section 22.

At the literary level, rather than the philosophical, it is precisely the multiplicity of meaning, the suggestiveness, which does communicate. If perfect thought-transference is precluded epistemologically, then, Sterne indicates, we must rely upon imaginative communication. Hence, Sterne makes frequent demands for the reader's imaginative cooperation. Hence, Sterne employs an author-persona whose confusion, deceptions, ambiguities, and wit leave much for the reader's imagination. Sterne urges us to 'see past' the words on the printed page, for it is in the reader's imagination that the events of fiction come to life.

The creative writer is able to convey images, feelings, and states of mind precisely because he illogically circumvents the 'knowledge of other minds' impasse. In my next chapter I discuss the creative spirit behind Tristram Shandy - a spirit that continually mocks philosophy - and in my fourth chapter I show what happens if we pursue a logical, linguistic analysis of Tristram's words.

Among the many examples of Sterne's amused interest in language there is one master-stroke of depth analysis. In the final four volumes of Tristram Shandy Sterne takes the word "love", as it represents our concept of love, and proceeds to enlarge the reader's understanding of the

concept of love by exploring the manifold meanings of the word.

From Volume VI onward, Sterne deals intermittently with the topic of love. The sequence begins with Toby relinquishing "the trumpet of war" for the lute of love.¹ From that point Sterne's discussion of love is structured around, but not exclusively confined to, Toby's amours.

Now, because I have once or twice said, in my inconsiderate way of talking, That I was confident the following memoirs of my uncle Toby's courtship of widow Wadman, whenever I got time to write them, would turn out one of the most complete systems, both of the elementary and practical part of love and love-making, that ever was addressed to the world—are you to imagine from thence, that I shall set out with a description of 'what love is'? whether part God and part Devil, as Plotinus will have it—²

In ordinary usage, Sterne's author-persona finds "love" too general a word to subsume the many meanings we make it bear. Platonic love lies at one extreme, physical love at the other. Again, the Shandean preoccupation with the relation between matter and spirit becomes apparent. Quoting Ficino, Tristram seeks to determine:

'How many parts of it [love]—the one,—and how many the other'³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 35, p. 447.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 36, p. 448.
 3. Ibid.

Tristram proceeds cautiously:

—All I contend for is, that I am not 'obliged' to set out with a definition of what love is; and so long as I can go on with my story intelligibly, with the help of the word itself, without any other idea to it, than what I have in common with the rest of the world, why should I differ from it a moment before time?—When I can get no further,—and find myself entangled on all sides of this mystic labyrinth,—my Opinion will then come in, in course,—and lead me out.

At present, I hope I shall be sufficiently understood, in telling the reader, my uncle Toby 'fell in love'.¹

Before concluding Volume VI, Tristram suggests that Mrs. Bridget knew:

of my uncle Toby's falling in love with her mistress fifteen days before it happened.²

This amusing suggestion raises the problem of 'knowledge of other minds' and self-knowledge, for who should know better than the lover that he is in love?

Tristram's preamble to the subject of love concludes Volume VI. The next volume recounts Tristram's journey to France, and is usually construed as an extraneous digression, a satire on Smollett-type travel-books, inserted by Sterne in anticipation of A Sentimental Journey. This explanation is credible, but it overlooks other important

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 37, p. 449.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 39, pp. 449-450.

aspects of Tristram's trip. It also assumes, gratuitously I think, that Sterne was joking in his title-page motto for Volume VII:

'Non enim excursus hic eius, sed ipsum est.'¹

What actually happens in Volume VII? On the naturalistic level Tristram relates his hurried and mildly adventurous trip to the south of France. At the symbolical level Tristram sees himself to be fleeing Death, whom he eventually leaves far behind and muttering:

I have followed many a man thro' France²
 . . . but never at this mettlesome rate.

In the final chapter of Volume VII the naturalistic narrative and the symbolism merge.³ Tristram has successfully eluded Death and found life. In what does this new life consist? Primarily in the forgetting of self-interest. Tristram's egoism is shown evolving into an outward-looking interest in others. He mixes with humanity. He gets carried away by a feeling of consanguinity and love for mankind.

We realize at the close of Volume VII that Sterne has been exploring the mystical experience of a certain type of love, viz., altruistic or benevolent love for one's

1. "For this is not an excursion from it, but is the work itself," p. 457.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 42, p. 509.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 43.

fellow man. Tristram's hint at the end of Volume VI that he would not really be digressing from the topic of love in Volume VII (as well as his motto for Volume VII) is thus substantiated.

Early in the eighth volume Tristram returns again to express, as he had in Volume VI, his dismay at the inadequacy of the word "love". This time he finds fault not with the fact that the word "love" has too many connotations, but with our use of other words, when really only the word "love" (despite its varied connotations) will suffice.

'It is with Love as with Cuckoldom'—the suffering party is at least the 'third', but generally the last in the house who knows any thing about the matter: this comes, as all the world knows, from having half a dozen words for one thing; and so long, as what in this vessel of the human frame, is 'Love'—may be 'Hatred', in that —'Sentiment' half a yard higher—and 'Non-sense'—no, Madam,—not there—I mean at the part I am now pointing to with my forefinger—how can we help ourselves?¹

The final volume contains the love scene between Trim and Bridget, the story of Trim's brother's love for the Jewish widow, the interpolated tale of the mad Maria's forbidden love, the main account of Toby's amour, and a final chapter which deals with the meta-language of sexual love. Sterne's ninth volume, therefore, focuses pointedly upon love. Continually, Sterne illustrates the variety of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 4, p. 518.

states of affairs and states of mind which can count as 'love'. His examination of the concept becomes inclusive rather than exclusive, and ultimately reveals the folly of trying to define (as some philosophers might), once and for all, what love is.

For instance, Tristram Shandy offers no satisfactory synthesis between the two extremes, physical love and spiritual love, which would enable us to group the two under the same definition. They are both forms of love, just as the corporeal and the incorporeal are both forms of life, and judgment and wit are both a part of good writing.

It would be an oversimplification to say that the Widow Wadman represents physical love and Uncle Toby (who "knew not . . . so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong")¹ symbolizes spiritual love. Yet Sterne employed symbolism in Volume VII to illustrate man's experience of love for the human race, and he may well have been writing symbolically in Volume IX to emphasize our antithetical and seemingly mutually-exclusive definitions of love.

The problem of 'knowledge of other minds' also plays an important part in the Toby/Wadman finale. The possible consequences of Toby's wound aroused the Widow's inquisitiveness, and in panic she sought to discover if

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 3, p. 574.

Toby's 'modesty' meant 'impotency'. Toby on the other hand attributed the Widow's interest in his battle-scar to her sympathy, her "humanity".¹ Walter, with his penchant for "motive mongering" would ascribe it caustically to lust.² Thereafter, Toby and the Widow enact a charade in search of physical fact and motivational truth, and the charade underscores the overall Shandean question: Where is truth?

Toby's amour ends when Trim makes him understand rightly (rather than infer wrongly) what the Widow has in mind regarding the wound. Using military language (a meta-language which appeals particularly to Toby and which can communicate to him better than the language of courtship) Trim succeeds in conveying the true situation to Toby. The reader is left to infer that Toby saw this imputation of impotency as an offense to his modesty and that Toby's sudden realization of the Widow's real motive was the beginning of the end of the amour.³ Hence, by the end of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 31, p. 611.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 31, p. 440.

3. It is certain that Toby and Mrs. Wadman never marry each other, and that Toby never marries at all. Years after the Wadman amour (although preceding the amour by six volumes) Toby is quoted as saying, "that the shock I received the year after the demolition of Dunkirk, in my affair with widow Wadman;—which shock you know I should not have received, but from my total ignorance of the sex,—has given me just cause to say, That I neither know, nor do pretend to know any thing about 'em. . ."
Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 7, p. 121.

Volume IX Sterne has further developed the concept of love (by showing us that what we call "love" is often deceptive and based on a lack of communication) as well as our knowledge of what he meant earlier in the novel by Toby's "modesty".

Such a rapid summary does no justice to Sterne's sophisticated, replicating irony. Recall for example that Trim learns the motivation of Mrs. Wadman from her maid, Bridget, after a sexual encounter.¹ Bridget herself approached this liason with the ulterior motive of finding the true extent of Toby's disability. This she does, prior to her love-making with Trim. Afterwards she reveals to Trim the motives behind Mrs. Wadman's interest in Toby's wound. Bridget and Trim, therefore, have communicated corporeally and incorporeally. There is an open meeting of minds before and after the sexual act - a meeting which parallels at a conceptual level their physical union. As a consequence of their encounter, Trim is able to reveal to Walter the truth about Mrs. Wadman's interest in his wound.² Hence, the Bridget-Trim coupling ultimately acts as something of a cause preventing a Toby-Wadman coupling.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapters 28, 29.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 31.

In his lengthy treatment of love, Sterne has led the reader through linguistic puzzles, as well as meta-physical ones about the material and the immaterial, and 'knowledge of other minds'. While Sterne enjoyed writing about the uncertainty of the criteria by which men claim to know the thoughts of others, he especially delighted in illustrating the inadequacy of one particular criterion, viz., words. As we have seen, many Shandean episodes are constructed to exploit the comic ambiguity of words and the meta-language of sex.

Sterne's amusement with various linguistic functions is demonstrated also in his character portrayals. Walter belongs to the old rhetorical school: starting from 'a priori' opinions, reasoning deductively, and believing in the efficacy of grammar. Like Walter, Tristram values rhetoric. In particular he values wit, and rebukes Locke for praising grave judgment while denigrating sheer wit. Yet Tristram has been influenced by Locke's suspicion of language. He comments with droll explicitness upon the inadequacy of words, while, ironically, using words unreliably himself. Only Toby, the man of few words, seems uninterested in language for its own sake. Indeed, he communicates as well with a shrug or a whistle as he does with words.

On the whole, then, Sterne deals in many ways and at many levels with the problem of the insufficiency of

language. If Tristram's comments on the abuse of language are abstracted from the text of Tristram Shandy they resemble the sectional headings for "The Analytical Table of Contents" of Locke's Essay. Some obscurity, Tristram tells us, arises from the "unsteady uses of words."¹ In other cases, says Tristram, a single word suffers because it encompasses too wide a range of meaning.² Words of this sort are too general. They lack precision. Conversely, Tristram notes that language sometimes suffers from over subtlety, i.e., sometimes we have too many words for the expression of a single concept.³

iv. The Association of Ideas

The problems of corporeality and incorporeality, knowledge of other minds, and the insufficiency of language, are integrally related to the final philosophical problem to be discussed in this chapter, namely, the association of ideas.

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 2, p. 108. Cf. Locke, Essay, Concerning Human Understanding, Bk. III. Chapter 10, Section 5.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 37, pp. 449-450; Volume IX, Chapter 20, pp. 594-595. Cf. Locke, Essay, Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter 10, Section 3.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 4, p. 518. Cf. Locke, Essay, Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter 10, Section 8.

The meaning of "association of ideas" and the ramifications of idea-association are by no means self-evident, though commentators on Sterne have tended to treat them so. In fact it is instructive to ask, "What is meant by the association of ideas?" before advancing to the question, "How does Sterne employ idea-association in Tristram Shandy?"

Insofar as anyone attempts to describe or explain successive states of consciousness, he must rely upon introspection of his own mind, and then match his observations against what others say goes on in their minds. A procedure of this kind has led philosophers to conclude that men typically experience a sequence of ideas in which each idea is associated (in one way or another) with the previous idea and the next idea.

Although the eighteenth-century particularly lauded Locke's "trains of ideas", the idea-association theory dated back to the Greeks. The Stoics, the Epicureans, and numerous philosophers since classical times had considered idea-association:

as a fundamental guide to rational as well
as irrational behaviour.¹

Of course it is one thing to acknowledge that we experience a train of ideas, but quite another thing to

1. G. Murphy, Psychological Thought from Pythagoras to Freud, (Harbinger paperback, 1968), p. 90.

say (1.) what influences the idea-sequence at any given moment, and (2.) how the ideas tend to be associated.

Considering the first point: at times a person may experience an undeliberated flow of uncontrolled ideas, while at other times the individual's will-power guides the ideas along intentional paths. Hobbes put it this way:

This train of thought, or mental discourse is of two sorts. The first is unguided, without design.

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The second is more constant; as being regulated by some desire, and design.¹

My first chapter discussed Sterne's technique of making his author-persona appear sometimes as an extemporizing, improvisational writer and other times as a calculating planner. The style of Tristram Shandy, then, reflects Hobbes' two sorts of consciousness; on the whole, however, Sterne chose to make his novel appear to be based on Tristram's spontaneous flow of ideas.

Aside from the restrictive power of the will, one's flow of ideas can also be influenced by sensations of the external world. What we see, hear, feel, touch, and taste: all will impinge upon the free flow of our ideas. Recall the extravagant fears set off in Phutatorius' fancy by the sensation of the hot chestnut.²

1. Leviathan, Part I, Chapter 3, Paragraphs 3, 4.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, pp. 318-319.

Sterne's central structural device, *Tristram*, is, however, oblivious (as he writes) to his sense-perceptions of the external world. Sequestered in the study, he lives in imagination and memory. His book is the product, supposedly, of his fertile mind, not a record of his present sensations of external objects.

I want next to consider Locke's view of how ideas are associated and to explore Sterne's use of this view within his novel. Beforehand, however, it should be emphasized that there is a sense in which all literature is structured by idea-association. This uncomplicated sense of associationism was fully appreciated by eighteenth-century authors. John Hawkesworth, writing about novels in his Adventurer for November 18, 1752, made the point:

It is always necessary, that the facts should appear to be produced in a regular and connected series, that they should follow in quick succession, and yet that they should be delivered with discriminating circumstances. If they have not a necessary and apparent connexion, the ideas which they excite obliterate each other, and the mind is tantalized with an imperfect glimpse of innumerable objects that just appear and vanish; if they are too minutely related, they become tiresome; and if divested of all their circumstances, insipid. . .

If idea-association is a prerequisite for all writers, why then has Tristram Shandy so often been singled out as an example of a novel structured according to the

association of ideas principle? The answer, obviously, is that Sterne's novel calls attention to the fact that it is supposedly the direct product of its author's consciousness. Tristram records his thoughts. He draws attention to his latest remark, his present word, his future plans. The streams of ideas flow before the reader, inviting him to make sense of them. Moreover, Tristram sometimes thinks of Locke and cites him regarding the association of ideas. So it is to Locke that we turn (Essay, Bk. II, Chapter XXXIII) to examine his two categories of idea association. Once these are clarified we can ask what use Sterne made of Locke's principle.

1. Locke wrote of a natural correspondence that exists between conceptually connected ideas. If idea "*" brings to mind idea "+" by virtue of a conceptual connexion between the two, this association is deemed natural by Locke, and he approves. Presumably, he approves because conceptual connexions in his view will be similar in all men and this would assist communication, once the ideas are put into language.
2. On the other hand, Locke noted that if idea "*" brings to mind idea "+", not because of a conceptual connexion inherent in the two ideas, but because of a subjective, idiosyncratic (perhaps habitual) association of "*" and "+" in the memory of the individual thinker, then the probability of another person understanding this association (once the two ideas are put into language) is not good. Possibly, though Locke does not say so, the objection is this: a person making a subjectively idiosyncratic association of ideas would have to explain his association

each time by additional words and connexions between words. These in turn would require similar explanations, and so on, ad infinitum.

This is a free interpretation of Locke. I have drawn some inferences that Locke left unsaid. But it can be seen at once, I think, that Sterne interpreted Locke along these lines and made comic use, especially, of Locke's second category of association. The difficulty lies in grasping how Sterne employed Locke's doctrine of associationism.

Some critics have argued that Sterne used the association of ideas as a structural form for Tristram Shandy.¹ But it is not clear what is being claimed in these arguments.

One possible meaning of the claim that Sterne used Locke's associationism to structure his novel is as follows: that Sterne constructed his author-persona, Tristram, so

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1. Kenneth MacLean cites the introduction to Wilbur Cross' edition of Tristram Shandy, and agrees with Cross that Locke's association of ideas principle gave Sterne a structural backbone for his novel. John Locke and English Literature of the Eighteenth Century, (New York, 1962), p. 133. J.A. Work in his "Introduction" to Tristram Shandy claims, "The most important structural device is the principle of the association of ideas upon which the whole progression of the work is based." (New York, 1940), p. xlix. Rufus Putney believes in the Lockean inspiration behind the first five volumes of Shandy, but holds that Sterne abandoned his idea-associationism in the middle of Volume VI. "Laurence Sterne, Apostle of Laughter", in The Age of Johnson, (Yale, 1949), pp. 159-170. In the opinion of Arthur Cash, too much altogether is made of the Lockean

that one thought in Tristram's mind suggested the next (by virtue of one or the other of Locke's two categories of association) and that a reader of Tristram Shandy encounters one lengthy train of Tristram's continuously associated ideas.

I want to say three things about this view. (1.) There is a sense (and this is the sense in which Hawkesworth, above, speaks of an author's associated ideas) in which any work of literature is a product of the flow of ideas of its author. If this were all that were being claimed when Sterne is said to have employed Locke's principle, then the claim is critically uninteresting. (2.) Based on the evidence of the text it seems incorrect to say that a recognizable association exists between every transition of ideas in Tristram's mind (as represented on paper, of course), but the possibility of this cannot be disallowed. After all, Tristram Shandy is written as if it comes straight from the mind of its author-persona, and how is the reader to know all the idiosyncratic idea-associations that are in Tristram's

influence: "Tristram Shandy is not organized upon Lockean association." "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy", ELH, Vol. 22, (1955), pp. 125-135. Henri Fluchère designates the association of ideas as "the form Sterne's dialectic assumes", but does not attempt any close examination of the idea-association principle as Locke proposed it or as it functions in Shandy. Laurence Sterne: from Tristram to Yorick, English Trans., B. Bray, (London, 1965), pp. 68-72.

mind? (3.) Clearly, the reader can recognize the natural correspondence (Locke's first category) between some of Tristram's ideas. Less clearly, but still with some degree of probability, the reader can - as he becomes acquainted with Tristram through the course of the novel - determine some of the peculiar connexions of ideas (Locke's second category) which lead Tristram from one topic to another.

A second possible meaning for the claim that Sterne used Locke's associationism to structure Tristram Shandy is this: that Sterne makes some of the Shandean characters (aside from the author-persona in his rôle as author-persona, which has already been considered above) associate their ideas either by virtue of a natural correspondence between the ideas or by virtue of their own, individualistic and idiosyncratic, mental connexions. Again, it seems wrong to say that the reader can always recognize a character's associations. But again, too, the possibility that such associative connexions exist cannot be disallowed, for it is impossible for the reader to know all the potential idiosyncratic associations in the minds of the Shandean characters.

Both explanations of the claim that idea-association acts as a structure for Tristram Shandy lead back to the epistemological question previously investigated, viz., "How can I know what you are thinking?" Only now the

question becomes, "How can I know what brings this present thought (which presumably you are uttering or acting out) to your mind?" How can the reader know the associative link between Tristram's antecedent idea "*" and his present idea "+"? How can the other characters know the associative link between Toby's (or Walter's) antecedent idea "*" and his present idea "+"?

The 'natural' association between ideas - either the natural association of Tristram's ideas or of the ideas of the other characters, as related by Tristram - can most easily be noticed when the connexion between ideas is causal.¹ If the thing, concept, or state of affairs for which idea "+" stands represents a cause or effect of the antecedent idea, "*", then the connexion between ideas is recognizable. Hence, when looking retrospectively, for instance, at Tristram's account of the window-sash circumcision, the reader can determine that Tristram's thoughts were moving from the effect toward the cause.

This particular sequence begins in Chapter 17 of Volume V with a short, cryptic statement:

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1. Locke seems to assume that we know which are natural connexions of ideas or natural associations. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter XXXIII. Hume distinguishes Resemblance, Contiguity, and Cause/Effect as three modes through which we naturally associate ideas. A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Part I, Section 4.

—'Twas nothing,—I did not lose two drops of blood by it—'twas not worth calling in a surgeon, had he lived next door to us—thousands suffer by choice, what I did by accident.¹

Tristram tells us that Susannah had lifted the sash and helped him into the window seat. Chapters 18 and 19 reveal Corporal Trim's part in the affair. He had "taken the two leaden weights from the nursery window" to make into field-pieces.² Chapters 19 and 20 note Toby's earlier request for two more field-pieces.

Tristram has offered, therefore, an account from effect to cause, at both a mechanical level and a moral level. At the mechanical level Tristram's account moves from the falling of the sash to the fact of the removal of the leaden weights. At the moral level Susannah is to blame for being the proximate cause of the incident. Trim is the intermediary cause, or as Tristram calls him, the "general or comptroller of the train" of events.³ And Toby, by virtue of his request for the lead, is the remote or final cause.

Idea associations that flow along causal lines are natural associations because all men tend to think in

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 17, p. 369.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 19, p. 371.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 20, p. 371.

categories of cause and effect. Of course within Tristram Shandy there are many causal relationships between events, most of which are not so neatly recorded by a corresponding flow of Tristram's ideas from cause to effect or effect to cause. Yet here and there the reader can detect Tristram's thoughts to be paralleling the cause/effect sequence he is relating.

Another type of association which might be called "natural" is that between one idea and its opposite. Sterne's author-persona seems to be amused by this anomaly:

In mentioning the word 'gay' (as in the close of the last chapter) it puts one (i.e. an author) in mind of the word 'spleen'—especially if he has anything to say upon it: not that by any analysis—or that from any table of interest of genealogy, there appears much more ground of alliance betwixt them, than betwixt light and darkness, or any two of the most unfriendly opposites in nature—only 'tis an undercraft of authors to keep up a good understanding amongst words, as politicians do amongst men—not knowing how near they may be under a necessity of placing them to each other—which point being now gained, and that I may place mine exactly to my mind, I write it down here—

SPLEEN¹

It is, however, the idiosyncratic, rather than the natural idea-associations, that are so typically Shandean. If we examine the idiosyncratic associationism within Tristram Shandy, we find, quite plainly, that the reader comes

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 19, p. 479.

to understand some of these peculiar associations through Tristram's explanations of the custom or habit that gave rise to a particular character's associational pattern.¹ In the case of Toby and Walter, we can trace their habitual associations to their hobby-horses.

Sterne lays the foundation for the reader's understanding of some peculiar, habitual idea-associations in the earliest pages of his book. At the outset the author-persona illustrates an idiosyncratic association of ideas in Mrs. Shandy's mind. It is an association that links Sunday-night clock-winding with the "family concernments" that take place punctually on the first Sunday-night of each month.

It [Tristram's conception] was attended with but one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that from an unhappy association of ideas, which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up,—but the thoughts of

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1. Although Locke's account of the association of ideas overlooks many important issues, it does stress the rôle of custom or habit in determining the paths of our idiosyncratic associations. "This strong combination of 'ideas', not allied by nature, the mind takes in itself either voluntarily or by chance; and hence it comes in different men to be very different, according to their different inclinations, educations, interests, etc. Custom settles habits of thinking in the understanding . . . which seem to be but trains of motion in the animal spirits, which, once set a-going, continue in the same steps they have been used to." Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter XXXIII, Section 6.

some other things unavoidably popped into her head—& vice versa—which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious Locke, who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever.¹

Remembering the Shandy's habitual conjunction of "Sunday" with certain "family concernments", the reader can infer the associations in the minds of Mr. and Mrs. Shandy in Volume IX, Chapter 11:

Amen: said my mother again—but with such a sighing cadence of personal pity at the end of it, as discomfited every fibre about my father—he instantly took out his almanac; but before he could untie it, Yorick's congregation coming out of church, became a full answer to one half of his business with it—and my mother telling him it was a sacrament day—left him as little in doubt, as to the other part—He put his almanac into his pocket.²

By introducing the reader to the habitual idea-associations of his characters, Sterne advances our understanding of how the characters will think and react later in the novel.

In this way Tristram reveals that Walter's idea-associations frequently jump idiosyncratically because of his vast hoard of eccentric opinions. Resorting again to the corporeal/incorporeal metaphor, Tristram writes of his father:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 39.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 11, p. 585.

—He picked up an opinion, Sir, as a man in a state of nature picks up an apple.—It becomes his own,—and if he is a man of spirit, he would lose his life rather than give it up.¹

Walter has "a thousand little sceptic notions . . . to defend", and these tend to dominate his thought-patterns.² Also ruled hobby-horsically are Uncle Toby's mental associations, which are equally as idiosyncratic as Walter's. Any idea in Toby's mind can pass quickly into a military association. These thought-patterns of Walter and Toby, as revealed to us through Tristram's words, are customarily designated by critics (and rightly so) as examples of Sterne's use of the association of idea principle, although of course the obsessions of both characters bear a strong affinity to Cervantic quixotry and Jonsonian humour-psychology.

Walter's preoccupation with philosophical lore often clashes comically with Toby's military hobby-horse. A clash of this kind occurs in the following passage, made all the more humorous because the subject under discussion is the succession of ideas:

Now, whether we observe it or no, continued my father, in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 34, p. 228.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 19, p. 79.

or other, which follow each other in train just like—A train of artillery? said my uncle Toby.—A train of a fiddle-stick!—quoth my father,—which follow and succeed one another in our minds at certain distances, just like the images in the inside of a lanthorn turned round by the heat of a candle.¹

Uncle Toby's obsession with things military is so strong that sometimes we are utterly unable to deduce what previous idea might have put the present military idea into his head. Take for example the comic sequence that begins Chapter 18 of Volume II and then skips to the first chapter of the next volume:

—Sir, replied Dr Slop, it would astonish you to know what Improvements we have made of late years in all branches of obstetrical knowledge, but particularly in that one single point of the safe and expeditious extraction of the foetus,—which has received such lights, that, for my part (holding up his hands) I declare I wonder how the world has—I wish, quoth my uncle Toby, you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders.²

* * *

—'I WISH, Dr Slop,' quoth my uncle Toby, (repeating his wish for Dr Slop a second time, and with a degree of more zeal and earnestness in his manner of wishing, than he had wished at first)—'I wish, Dr Slop,' quoth my uncle Toby, 'you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders.'

My uncle Toby's wish did Dr Slop a disservice which his heart never intended any

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 18, pp. 200-201.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 18, p. 159.

man,—Sir, it confounded him—and thereby putting his ideas first into confusion, and then to flight, he could not rally them again for the soul of him.

In all disputes,—male or female,—whether for honour, for profit, or for love,—it makes no difference in the case;—nothing is more dangerous, Madam, than a wish coming sideways in this unexpected manner upon a man . . . ¹

Sterne sometimes makes merry with the habitual idea-associations of his minor characters. For example, Tristram was christened by Yorick's curate, whose name was also "Tristram".² The curate, receiving what he considered to be a garbled version of the name Walter had selected for the infant, associates the "Tris" with his own name, and accordingly fails to name the child Trismegistus, as Walter had intended.

Susannah's associational patterns are also determined, harmlessly enough, by self-interest. Her feminine vanity leads her to associate the phrase, the "finest face that ever man looked at", with her own countenance.³ Similarly, the thought of Master Bobby's death brings to Susannah's mind "a green satin night-gown" of Mrs. Shandy's:

——My young master in London is dead!
said Obadiah.—

——A green satin night-gown of my mother's
which had been twice scoured, was the first

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 1, p. 171.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 14, p. 288.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 9, p. 359.

idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head.—Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words.—Then, quoth Susannah, we must all go into mourning.—But note a second time: the word 'mourning', notwithstanding Susannah made use of it herself—failed also of doing its office; it excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black,—all was green.—The green satin night-gown hung still there.

—O! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress, cried Susannah.—My mother's whole wardrobe followed.—What a procession! her red damask,—her orange tawney,—her white and yellow lute-strings,—her brown taffeta,—her bone-laced caps, her bed-gowns, and comfortable under-petticoats.—Not a rag was left behind.—'No,—she will never look up again,' said Susannah.¹

Once again, Sterne delights in the peculiarity of speaking of ideas as if they were material. But he has packed a great deal more into this passage. He shows us (1.) how seemingly unpredictable idea-associations may actually be generated by habitual channels of thought, (2.) how the imagination then takes over to extend the sequence of ideas, and (3.) how words need not mirror one's ideas. This last suggestion, i.e., that a person can be thinking one thing while saying another (even without any real intent to deceive), again emphasizes the difficulty of ever coming to know with certainty what another person has in mind.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 7, pp. 354-355.

By engaging two or more characters in dialogue, Sterne often succeeds in extracting the maximum humour from the clash between the idiosyncratic idea-associations of one character and those of another. In Volume III, Chapter 40, Walter Shandy lectures Toby on the natural "medius terminus" which connects two ideas and enables one person to understand another, once those ideas are put into words.¹ Writing on the same subject, Locke had noted:

Words, by long and familiar use, as has been said, come to excite in men certain 'ideas', so constantly and readily that they are apt to suppose a natural connection between them. But that they signify only men's peculiar ideas, and that by a perfectly arbitrary imposition, is evident in that they often fail to excite in others (even that use the same language) the same 'ideas' we take them to be the signs of; and every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for what ideas he pleases that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same words that he does.²

Apropos to Locke's remarks, let us examine the chapter following Walter's mention of a "medius terminus" between associated ideas. Tristram is quoting Walter:

'tis a pity, cried my father, putting my mother's thread-paper into the book for a mark, as he spoke—that truth, brother Toby, should shut herself up in such an

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 40, p. 242.
 2. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter II, Section 8.

impregnable fastness, and be so obstinate as not to surrender herself sometimes upon the closest siege.¹

Immediately, Walter fears that the word "siege" may set off a chain of unwanted associations (unwanted by Walter) in Toby's mind. By "dropping the metaphor of the siege", Walter hopes "to keep clear of some dangers . . . "² Clearly, Sterne is once again comically exploiting Locke's position that:

Unless a man's words excite the same 'ideas' in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly.³

Carefully rephrasing himself to exclude military connotations, Walter repeats the gist of his earlier comment:

'Tis a pity, said my father, that truth can only be on one side, brother Toby—considering what ingenuity these learned men have all shown in their solutions of noses.—Can noses be dissolved? replied my uncle Toby.⁴

Walter had retracted the word "siege", but he is still frustrated in his effort to communicate. By anticipating and trying to prevent his words from stirring idiosyncratic idea-associations in Toby, Walter himself has

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 41, p. 243.

2. Ibid.

3. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book III, Chapter II, Section 8.

4. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 41, p. 243.

lapsed into an idiosyncratic combination of words. Walter the inveterate 'solution-seeker', knows what he means by "solutions of noses", but his private meaning is unknown to Toby.¹ Here, then, it is not Toby's, but Walter's peculiar idea-associations that ultimately cause the failure of thought-transference.

The examples I have offered thus far illustrate Sterne's humorous application of idea-association to characters other than Tristram. Examples of this sort support the view that Sterne created characters whose idea-associations sometimes can be seen to function in accord either with a natural connexion between ideas, or by virtue of some idiosyncratic principle. Many other examples can be located in Tristram Shandy. Yet it would be wrong to claim that the reader, basing his evidence on the text alone, can always predict with certainty (or even come to understand) a character's association of one idea with the next, or that the reader can always recognize the nexus between a character's antecedent idea and his subsequent idea. Indeed, as Tristram never ceases to tell us, much is left

1. Walter later explains what he means by "solutions of noses": "I meant, as you might have known, had you favoured me with one grain of attention, the various accounts which learned men of different kinds of knowledge have given the world of short and long noses." Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 41, p. 245.

for the reader's imagination, and the reader himself is drawn into the puzzle of idea-association.

But what about the idea-associations supposedly governing the thought-flow of Sterne's author-persona?

Although many commentators unhesitatingly repeat the critical commonplace that Tristram Shandy proceeds according to the idea-associations of Sterne or of his author-persona, it would certainly be impossible to demonstrate that every idea on the printed page follows by association - either natural or idiosyncratic - from the preceding idea.

How would one set about such a demonstration? Would an idea such as 'love' which, as I have shown, is examined, off and on, through four volumes be considered one idea in the mind of the narrator? Or, alternatively, would we have to analyse each word and each sentence, consecutively, from the beginning to the end of the book? In those places where connexions are obviously missing would we be forced to infer that they did exist in Sterne's mind, but were too idiosyncratic for us to trace?

Sterne's dramatization of an author's consciousness reveals an inner-complexity of thought that allows many ideas to be present or potentially present at a single instant. For nearly half the book, 'love' is continuously present, sometimes explicitly sometimes implicitly, in the

author-persona's mind, though it isn't always the main idea before him. Such inner-complexity makes the temporal association-of-ideas theory seem psychologically oversimplified.

There is no doubt, however, that some of Tristram's thoughts (like some of the thoughts of his characters) can be shown to proceed by idea-association. One can notice, for instance, that the idea of drawing his first breath as a baby suggests to Tristram his present asthmatic condition:

—for I can truly say, that from the first hour I drew breath in it [the world], to this, that I can now scarce draw it at all, for an asthma I got in skating against the wind in Flanders . . .¹

Obviously, this passage is trivial and unimportant in the overall context of the novel. Yet trivial passages are especially instructive when our aim is to examine Sterne's associational processes or techniques, rather than the content of the individual ideas.

Consider another of these trivial, yet instructive, examples of Tristram's idea-association at work. This sequence begins in Chapter 5, Volume III, with the intrusion of an apparently random idea, "water-drinking", into Tristram's mind. It is random, for Tristram remarks that there

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 5, p. 40.

is not at first sight "any consequence or show of logic in it."¹

If Tristram himself feels unsure about the idea that preceded "water-drinking", then any attempt to determine his earlier idea must hinge on the reader's inferring what was in Tristram's mind antecedently. But who can have better knowledge of Tristram's thoughts than Tristram himself?

Regardless of its antecedent, once the idea of water-drinking enters Tristram's mind, it quickly generates a series of understandable, aqueous associations: "floor-gates of the brain", "swims", "centre of the current", "stream", "straws and bulrushes", "masts and bowsprits", "mill-wheel".²

Early in the next chapter Tristram wishes that Uncle Toby "had been a water-drinker", but then Tristram reverts to the thought he had before "water-drinking" (and its string of associations) popped into his mind.³ Tristram's idea of "a pined leg" (in Chapter 5) connects with Tristram's idea (Chapter 6) of "uncle Toby's leg", and the water-drinking sequence drops from the present chain of ideas.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 5, p. 518.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 5, pp. 518-519.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 6, p. 519.

One needn't continue with examples of this kind. Obviously there is a sense in which Tristram Shandy is structured in part by Sterne's recognizable use of the association of ideas principle. The principle becomes evident here and there throughout the novel, both in Tristram's thoughts (as reflected through his words) and in the thoughts of the other characters (again of course as reflected through Tristram's words). But as far as can be determined from the text, Sterne's associational structuring is fragmented and inconsistent.

More important, certainly, than the existence of an associational structure is the comic use Sterne makes of associations. A great deal of the peculiarly Shandean humour derives from the clash of one character's idea-chain with that of another character, or from the reader's surprise at learning that what he expects to be Tristram's or Toby's next idea is not his next idea.

The philosophical themes of Tristram Shandy are reinforced by Sterne's structural device, Tristram, who, as discussed in my first chapter, persistently engages the reader in mock dialogue. This dialogue artfully involves the reader in the philosophical problems of 'the insufficiency of language', 'the knowledge of other minds', and 'the association of ideas'. We can see this most clearly, perhaps, at the level of sexual innuendo. There Sterne's

author-persona leads us on suggestively, but later accuses us of misinterpreting his words, of wrongly inferring his thoughts, and of following our own habitual channels of thought. The reader is, Sterne implies, much more than a passive receptor of ideas. The reader, too, is a creator.

3. The Unity of the Philosophical Themes

Having illustrated Sterne's amusement with metaphysical systems and having traced the interlocking philosophical problems of Tristram Shandy, I shall conclude this chapter (1.) by attempting to show the unity between Sterne's treatment of philosophical systems on the one hand and philosophical problems on the other, and (2.) by placing the Shandean philosophy in perspective and interpreting it.

Although it was Sterne's intention to write a seemingly disorganized book (as befitted his disorganized author-persona) and although the philosophical themes partake in the general disorder, Sterne's treatment of philosophy is clearly consistent. It is of course consistently humorous; but more than this, it is consistently and uniformly satirical.

Scholasticism and Neoplatonism typified the mass of speculative dogma that Bacon had disparaged as springing from, and being dedicated to, false idols. In his own way, too, Sterne was burlesquing these philosophical systems

(and philosophical system-making) as Rabelais and Swift had done before him. Yet Tristram Shandy also ridicules Empiricism and the utopian potential of the Baconian and Newtonian "New Science". A satire of the old 'a priori' thinking at the one extreme, and the new 'a posteriori' method at the other, would seem to leave scepticism as the only alternative. While it is true that Tristram Shandy contains no satire of scepticism itself, it is also true that Sterne sets apart the logic of the intellect (which leads philosophers to scepticism) from the human capacities to feel, sympathize, and imagine. Through these capacities men can communicate; they can 'know'. I have suggested this in my first chapter and earlier in this chapter. I shall reconsider it in a moment.

There is no difficulty, then, in recognizing that Sterne's treatment of philosophical systems is indeed satirical. Nor, I think, can there be any doubt that in a general sense Sterne was ridiculing certain set-pieces of philosophical polemic. Many of these banal puzzles had been burlesqued only nineteen years previously in the Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus. Arbuthnot and Pope wrote of their hero's absurd birth, of the father who worshipped the Ancients, of the position of the soul in the body, and of one character who distrusted words while his partner dealt only in words.¹

1. Martinus Scriblerus, Chapters I, XI, XII, XV, and VII, respectively.

But what deeper implications can be drawn from Sterne's satire of philosophical problems? What in fact is implied by calling Sterne's treatment of philosophical problems "satirical"?

To answer these questions we must reconsider each of the four philosophical problems: the relation of the corporeal to the incorporeal, the problem of knowledge of other minds, the insufficiency of language, and the association of ideas. Such a reconsideration shows that with each problem the satire emerges when the reader matches Sterne's implicit suggestions as to what would constitute an ideal solution, against Sterne's explicit delineations of what really is the case. The technique of matching the ideal against the real was most frequently employed by eighteenth-century writers to satirize manners, morals, and politics, but Sterne brought the technique to bear on philosophical problems.

Consider the problem of the interaction between the corporeal and the incorporeal. This problem is never resolved in Tristram Shandy. Are the body and soul "joint sharers in everything"?¹ Or must a man get "out of the body in order to think well"?² Sterne plays as much with the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 13, p. 587.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 13, p. 472.

possible identity of the two as he does with the chasm between them. He juxtaposes the material and the immaterial for comic effect, but offers no serious hypothesis to explain their interaction. Ideally, of course, we should be able to explain and demonstrate, for instance, the relationship between the brain and the mind. Yet Sterne hints at the practical and conceptual impossibility of such a demonstration. By rehearsing this insoluble philosophical problem in a comical light, Sterne satirized the problem itself.

The inability of one person to understand what another person has in mind accounts for much of the comic Shandean fumbling. The source of such burlesque is the problem of 'knowledge of other minds'. In the stories he relates and in his running commentary Sterne's author-persona illustrates man's lack of sufficient criteria for making logically conclusive inferences about the true thoughts of others. It is by matching what should ideally be the case (i.e., ideally we should be able to make necessary inferences and draw valid conclusions concerning the thoughts of others) against what really is the case, that Sterne's satire emerges.

Common enough in farce and comedy were situations wherein one character misundertood the words of another. Yet Sterne exploited not only the comic potential of such misunderstandings, but also the linguistic inadequacies

that occasion the misunderstandings. Furthermore, he not only presented 'misunderstanding' as a theme in his novel, but also structured the novel so that the author-persona device seduces the reader into an involvement in the problems of understanding and misunderstanding.

Tristram Shandy illustrates (1.) that words can be overly subtle, or, conversely, too general to have a clear meaning, (2.) that words cannot always signify precise things or states of affairs (e.g., "love", "modesty") (3.) that words often carry several levels of meaning and do not contain within themselves the criteria for distinguishing which level is meant (e.g., the sexual meta-language). Moreover, Tristram Shandy casts suspicion on the efficacy of both the written and the spoken word. Whereas ideally a person should be able to say, "Yes. I understand from your words what you mean," he cannot always do so. Again Sterne's satire derives from contrasting the ideal with the reality of the situation.

The 'mad' consequences of unpredictable idea-association worried Locke, but they amused Sterne and provided him with a limitless source for fumbling Shandean humour.¹ At one level, for example, Walter's presuppositions concerning Toby's next idea are quizzically confounded.

1. Irregular idea-associations lead to a kind of "madness", according to Locke. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter 33, Section 4.

At another level Tristram comments upon and illustrates how presumptuous it is for the reader to predict Walter's next thought from his present one. And finally, the author-persona's idiosyncratically connected ideas jar and surprise the reader by virtue of their disparity. For ideal communication all ideas should flow from a "natural correspondence and connexion one with another."¹ They should be regular, consistent, and predictable. We could then successfully infer the next idea due to enter another person's mind. But this is far from the case, and, although Sterne clearly enjoys the fallibilities of communication, once again he satirically reveals the gulf between reality and the ideal desideratum.

Each of the four philosophical problems discussed in this chapter has close ties with the other three. Sterne deploys his philosophical puzzles in various conjunctions to illustrate the bemusement of his characters and so, amuse the reader. Pre-eminently comic, Sterne's treatment of these problems is also, as we have seen, satirical. Moreover, the four problems bear yet another resemblance to one another. All can ultimately be subsumed under the bed-rock epistemic question: "What is possible for man to know and what is impossible for him to know?"

1. Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book II, Chapter 33, Section 5.

This is perhaps the question of the Renaissance.

Pascal, Montaigne, Burton, and Browne had posed it.

Descartes sought to establish one certain truth upon which to build other truths. Over-optimistically, some empiricists thought they saw light at the end of the tunnel. But in fact the problem lived on in theological and philosophical debate throughout the eighteenth century. It was central, for example, to the thought of Bishop Butler and David Hume. But in regard to the question, "What can man know?" Sterne's answer closely resembled Montaigne's.

The only lesson which can be drawn from the Shandean satire of philosophical problems and systems would appear to be something resembling Montaigne's scepticism. Montaigne's position (that man can inquire, but never know for certain what is true) is implicit in the Shandean satire of the mind/matter relationship, knowledge of other minds, the insufficiency of language, and the association of ideas. Additionally, Sterne's critique of both 'a priori' and 'a posteriori' reasoning (i.e., of Scholasticism, Neoplatonism, Empiricism, Materialism, etc.) leaves scepticism as the only alternative.

Certainly, scepticism pervades the Shandean world. In its largest dimension the Shandean uncertainty reveals itself in the battle between free will and determinism. I shall discuss this conflict first, before narrowing the

scope to study the limitations of Shandean scepticism. Close analysis is merited, for it would be a gross distortion to attribute unqualified scepticism to Sterne's novel. If the philosophy behind Sterne's comedy is to be called "sceptical", care must be taken to specify exactly what is meant. As we shall see, there is a limit to Sterne's scepticism. It is a moderate scepticism, like Hume's, which questions man's prowess at reasoning, while not doubting man's powers of imagination, intuition, and feeling.

In the widest sense the Shandean scepticism is characterized by a pervasive uncertainty: Is man's very life pre-ordained? Often Sterne touched upon this ultimate cosmological question in his sermons. In "Time and Chance", for instance, Sterne indicated that the answer to the question of determinism lay beyond man's reasoning power. "You must," Sterne wrote, "call in the deity to untye this knot."¹

Sterne develops the serious cosmological problem along comical lines in Tristram Shandy. From Volume I to Volume IX Tristram keeps observing peculiar sequences of events in the lives of the Shandy family. One event seems irrevocably tied to another in a vast network of causes and effects. Often the tenuous ties cross the gap between corporeal and incorporeal, between physical causes and human will-power.

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 8.

Each disruption of Walter's plans for Bob and Tristram reinforces the emphasis on the conflict of free will and determinism. The "lottery in this life"¹ wreaks havoc upon the carefully laid schemes of that master-schemer, Walter. Tristram's birth, christening, and education are all the more comic because the indignant Walter finds his intricate plans thwarted by Fate.

Is the sequence of events that constitutes a person's life necessary?² Must all these things have happened exactly as they did? Sterne poses these questions with amused detachment, dramatizing the doubt of his author-persona and pointing continually to the limitations of human reason. To formulate an answer to questions of pre-ordination, a man would somehow have to stand outside his own life - outside the sequence of events that constitutes his life. Naturally, this is impossible. Moreover, Sterne's narrative-device is not omniscient. Tristram is supposedly a real person, living while he writes, and therefore uncertain about the necessity of things which have happened, are happening, and will happen.

We have already reviewed Sterne's interest in the most chaotic aspects of Locke's association principle. But

1. Ibid.

2. This question is asked repeatedly, for example, in the first nineteen chapters of Volume IV.

consider the association of ideas from another viewpoint: to acknowledge the possibility of random ideas is to say either that man is not 'determined' or that he is determined in ways which are not always comprehensible. Hence, belief in idiosyncratic idea-association has intimate connexions with the 'free will versus Fate' dilemma, while leaving the dilemma unresolved.

Although Locke is most frequently cited for his remarks about 'what' and 'how' man can understand, it should not be forgotten that he, too, though clearly no sceptic, drew limits to what man can know. Sterne seized upon this weak point of Empiricism, the better to further his own aims. He seized on this, just as he had seized upon Locke's admission that there could be idiosyncratically-associated ideas, to advance at one and the same time the humour and the scepticism of his novel.

In Volume IV, Chapter 17, Sterne exploits Locke's words in the cause of scepticism. At that point in the novel Tristram comments about Walter's reactions to the seemingly pre-ordained series of "misfortunes" in Tristram's youth. The author-persona recalls first the "misfortune" of his nose, and then relates the new "misfortune" of his name. He recalls Walter's grotesque physical collapse under the weight of the first disappointment, and notices that Nature:

determines us to a sally of this of that member—or else she thrusts us into this or that place, or posture of body, we know not why.¹

There follows a passage cribbed in part from Locke's Essay, though, as far as I have been able to determine, this particular cribbing has hitherto escaped notice. In this passage Locke's acknowledgment of the limits of rationality is used by Sterne as a statement of scepticism regarding the truth or falsity of pre-ordination:

—But mark, Madam, we live amongst riddles and mysteries—the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; 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: so that this, like a thousand other things, falls out for us in a way, which though we cannot reason upon it,—yet we find the good of it, may it please your reverences and your worships—and that's enough for us.²

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 17, p. 292.
 2. Ibid.; cf. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Book IV, Chapter 3, Section 22. "The meanest and most obvious things that come in our way have dark sides that the quickest sight cannot penetrate into. The clearest and most enlarged understandings of thinking men find themselves puzzled and at a loss in every particle of matter." Sterne uses a similar passage in his Sermons, Volume III, Sermon 19, "Felix's Behaviour towards Paul, Examined": "That in many dark and abstracted questions of mere speculation, we should err—is not strange: we live amongst mysteries and riddles, and almost every thing which comes in our way, in one light or another, may be said to baffle our understandings . . . " See also, Sermons, Volume VII, Sermon 44, "The Ways of Providence, Justified to Man": "Nay, have

Thus Sterne uses Locke comically to further the extent of the Shandean scepticism. In regard to the necessity of anything that happens to us, says Sterne, we would need to know God's mind. But the human situation precludes this just as surely as it precludes certain knowledge of the minds of our fellow men.

Bearing in mind the sweeping scope of Shandean scepticism, let us now consider its limitations. We have seen clearly enough that the scepticism demolishes the efficacy of speculative ratiocination as well as the efficacy of ratiocination based upon sense-perception. Yet in the Shandean world there is no uncertainty about the potential of man's visionary powers, Sterne seems to be drawing a distinction. Although purely rational understanding between men is beset by incertitude. Sterne's author-persona leaves no doubt that men can communicate through their imaginative faculties.

Communication between men at a level other than intellectual can occur, Tristram indicates, through a meeting of their imaginations. This is illustrated through the approach of Sterne's author-persona to his writing, and through the rendering of the other characters in the novel.

not the most obvious things that come in our way dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and do not the clearest and most exalted understandings find themselves puzzled, and at a loss in every particle of matter?"

At the close of my first chapter I quoted several of Tristram's remarks to show how he sought to establish a rapprochement on an imaginative level between himself and his readers. Closely aligned with this request for imaginative cooperation is Sterne's technique of character presentation.

The reader becomes familiar with the Shandean characters not through Tristram's physical descriptions (there are few), but by Tristram's accounts of the feelings, thoughts, wishes, and purposes of his characters. Hence, the reader meets the mental life of the Shandean household. When introducing Toby, for example, Tristram remarks that since "our minds shine not through the body" he will "draw . . . uncle Toby's character from his Hobby-Horse."¹ Without more ado, the reader encounters the mental phenomena of Toby's imagination.

The scenes of greatest rapport between Sterne's characters seem always to occur when minds meet at an imaginative level. Recall, for instance, Corporal Trim's original visionary idea of the mock-fortifications. Trim's imaginative suggestion is grasped by Toby's imagination. The harmonious convergence of imaginations sends Toby "leaping up upon one leg, quite overcome with rapture":

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 23, pp. 97-98.

As Trim uttered the words, 'a rood and a half of ground to do what they would with:—this identical bowling-green instantly presented itself, and became curiously painted, all at once, upon the retina of my uncle Toby's fancy;—¹

* * *

Corporal Trim's description had fired his imagination,—my uncle Toby could not shut his eyes,—The more he considered it, the more bewitching the scene appeared to him. . . .²

Some years later, when "Fate" intervened and "basely patched up the peace of Utrecht",³ Tristram described that treaty in terms of its effect in diminishing the phantasms of Toby's imagination:

A DELUSIVE, delicious consultation or two of this kind, betwixt my uncle Toby and Trim, upon the demolition of Dunkirk,—for a moment rallied back the ideas of those pleasures, which were slipping from under him:—still—still all went on heavily—the magic left the mind weaker—STILLNESS, with SILENCE at her back, entered the solitary parlour, and drew their gauzy mantle over my uncle Toby's head;—and LISTLESSNESS, with her lax fibre and undirected eye, sat quietly down beside him in his arm-chair.—No longer Amberg and Rhinberg, and Limbourg, and Huy, and Bonn, in one year,—and the prospect of Landen, and Trerebach, and Drusen, and Dendermond, the next,—hurried on the blood:—No longer did palisadoes, keep out this fair enemy of man's repose:—No more could my uncle Toby, after passing the French lines, as he ate his egg at supper, from thence break into the heart of France,—cross over the Oyes, and with

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 5, p. 118.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 5, p. 117.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 30, p. 440.

all Picardie open behind him, march up to the gates of Paris, and fall asleep with nothing but ideas of glory:—No more was he to dream, he had fixed the royal standard upon the tower of the Bastile, and awake with it streaming in his head.

—Softer visions,—gentler vibrations stole sweetly in upon his slumbers . . . 1

Toby's imaginary world - the world in which jack-boots are artillery-pieces - fades. So ends Toby's cherished day-dream in which external objects become what he intends (imagines) them to be.

The interior vision that can turn jack-boots into mortars is reminiscent of the Quixotic aberration that can convert an ordinary tavern into a castle, a hog-caller into a courtly singer, and so forth. Like Cervantes, Sterne was amused by the ability of man's imagination to influence his perception of the external world. Like Cervantes, Sterne viewed man's imaginative potential as whimsically noble, yet ludicrous, too - sublime and ridiculous at the same time.

Many of the Shandean characters display, occasionally at least, 'mind over matter' propensities. Walter, for example, views things subjectively, "in a light very different from all mankind."² He displays the "Quixotic trouble" that Richard Graves in The Spiritual Quixote (1770)

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 35, p. 447.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 12, p. 194.

called simply "absurd imagination".¹ Tristram tells us that Walter's road:

lay so very far on one side, from that wherein most men travelled,—that every object before him presented a face and section of itself to his eye, altogether different from the plan and elevation of it seen by the rest of mankind.—In other words, 'twas a different object. . .²

Immediately following the affair of the jack-boots, Walter vents his annoyance at Toby's expenditure on the mock-fortifications. Walter attempts to reason with Toby:

You care not what money you dissipate and throw away. . .³

But in regard to his imaginary world - the world of his hobby-horse - Uncle Toby cannot be reasonable. Walter begins to anger at Toby's apparent lack of common sense. Yet, suddenly and instinctively, Walter sees beyond the mere rationality of the situation. He meets Toby's imagination with his own imaginative grasp of Toby's caprice, and a heart-felt rapprochement is achieved. As the scene unfolds, Walter is speaking:

—and take my word,—dear Toby, they will in the end quite ruin your fortune and make a beggar of you—What signifies it if they do, brother, replied my uncle Toby, so long as we know 'tis for the good of the nation?—

1. The Spiritual Quixote, (Oxford, 1967), p. 39.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 24, p. 375.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 22, p. 214.

My father could not help smiling for his soul;—his anger at the worst was never more than a spark,—and the generous (though hobby-horsical) gallantry of my uncle Toby, brought him into perfect good-humour with them in an instant.

Generous souls!—God prosper you both, and your mortar-pieces too, quoth my father to himself.¹

In contrast to Locke, therefore, Sterne values man's imaginative reveries. Moreover, he values the imagination as a means of communication. He believes a tenuous, but real, empathy can be established between men of imagination. This supra-rational empathy accounts of course for much of the whimsicality of Sterne's novel, just as the rationally-grounded epistemic difficulties occasion much of the perplexed, farcical fumbling.

There can be, claims Sterne, a meeting of minds at the level of imagination. Occasionally, he goes even farther. He extends the power of man's imagination, treating it as a sympathetic, intuitive faculty, not unlike the "moral sense" postulated by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Reid, Hume, and Adam Smith. He claims more for the 'imagination' than did Akenside, for instance:

There are certain powers in human nature which seem to hold a middle place between the organs of bodily sense and the

1. Ibid.

faculties of moral perception; they have been called by a very general name, the Powers of Imagination.¹

Sterne, I believe, saw the imagination as the 'sine qua non' for feeling compassion or benevolence towards others. To 'feel' for another person we must first forget our own interests (Bishop Butler would have said, "Banish self-love!"), then re-create in ourselves the feelings of the other person by putting ourselves imaginatively into his situation. But eighteenth-century moralists were careful not to present the benevolent act in so calculated a fashion. Always, it should be spontaneous, impulsive, and natural.

Montaigne was one of the first Renaissance thinkers to link man's imaginative power to his sympathy:

The very sight of another's pain materially pains me, and I often usurp the sensations of another person.²

More formally, Shaftesbury postulated a "moral sense" which enables us to be "spectators or auditors" of the sentiments of others.³ Adam Smith, whose Theory of

1. The Pleasures of Imagination, (1744), prose introduction entitled, "The Design".

2. "Of the Force of Imagination", Essays of Michel de Montaigne, English trans. C. Cotten, (New York, 1947), p. 403.

3. Characteristicks, Treatise IV, "An Inquiry Concerning Virtue", Part 2, Section 3.

Moral Sentiments was being well-received while Sterne was writing Tristram Shandy, put it this way:

By the imagination we place ourselves in his [our neighbor's] situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body, and become in some measure the same person with him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them.¹

The notion of imaginative sympathy was frequently dramatized in eighteenth-century fiction. Richardson's novels clearly deplored egoists such as Mr. B. and Lovelace, whose imaginations functioned only in self-interested ways to conjure up visions of themselves possessing the women they desired. Again and again, for instance, Clarissa urges her pursuer to put himself in her position and feel as she feels. Fielding dealt with the same subject; Tom Jones, unlike Mr. B. or Lovelace, but like most of Sterne's characters, was:

never an indifferent spectator of the misery or happiness of anyone; and he felt either the one or the other in greater proportion as he himself contributed to either.²

Sterne himself in his Sermons often touched upon:

that something in our nature which engages us to take part in every accident to which man is subject.³

1. The Theory of Moral Sentiments, Part I, Section 1, Chapter 1.

2. Tom Jones, Volume XV, Chapter 8.

3. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, Sermon 3, "Philanthropy Recommended".

By allotting a moral function to man's imagination, Sterne circumvented the logical impasse of epistemic incertitude that pervades Tristram Shandy. The scepticism about man's ability to communicate with his fellow man can be overcome, Sterne indicates, supra-rationally. Man can imagine and feel. This 'bridge over scepticism' comes close to Hume's position:

The determining factor of Hume's philosophy is the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct.¹

Sterne evinced his belief that the imperfections of human reason can be transcended by more important aspects of man's humanity. Sterne would put the sceptic in the same defensive position that Shaftesbury had, by asking:

whether he [the sceptic] makes no more distinction between sincerity and insincerity in actions, than between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, in arguments.²

Although human reason fails to breach the epistemic gap between men's minds, a sympathetically imaginative reaction from the heart can, in Sterne's view, establish communicative rapport - not an intellectual rapport based upon a

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1. J. Wilbanks, Hume's Theory of Imagination, (The Hague, 1968), p. 46. Wilbanks is citing the conclusions of two well-known commentators on Hume, viz., Norman Kemp and Harold Taylor.
 2. Characteristicks, Treatise V, "The Moralist", Part I, Section I.

logically certain understanding of one another, but a rapport of human feeling.¹

Of course Tristram Shandy is far from being a moralistic or religious treatise. Sterne's novel does not doubt the powers of man's reason, the better to stress the faith than man must have in God. Nor does Tristram Shandy concentrate upon man's virtuous sympathetic capacities in order to illustrate the wisdom and goodness of the Creator, though as Leslie Stephen has shown:

Round this point raged the most active controversies of the period.²

Sterne chose, however, to develop the psychological aspects of the imaginative sense, rather than make theological inferences from the supposed existence of such a sense. He seems particularly to have been interested in a connexion which Shaftesbury had suggested and Hutcheson had formulated - a connexion that saw the imagination as a link between aesthetics and morals.³ The link was this:

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1. This theory of imaginative sympathy is of course open to the same philosophical difficulties as the 'knowledge of other minds' dilemma. For instance, we might see someone crying and instinctively feel pity for that person - only to find out that he was crying for joy. Sterne takes up questions of false sentiment at greater length in A Sentimental Journey; see my final chapter.
 2. History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1902), Volume II, p. 16. The "period" Stephen speaks of is 1700-1750.
 3. Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1902), Volume II, p. 58.

both our ability to appreciate literature and our ability to 'feel' for other people hinge upon our imaginative capacities. Just as we must imaginatively surrender ourselves into an author's hands, so, too, must we surrender ourselves and imagine the feelings of another in order truly to communicate with him.

In Tristram Shandy - a self-dramatization of an author writing a book - Sterne was understandably more concerned with the imaginative meeting of minds at an aesthetic level than he was with the moral workings of the imagination. In A Sentimental Journey, however, he shifted his emphasis from the aesthetic to the moral, and dwelt almost entirely upon questions of true and false intuitional sentiment. I shall return to this point in my sixth chapter. Here I only wish to point out that in both of his novels, though in varying degrees, Sterne illustrated the performance of what Hutcheson had called man's "finer senses", his "internal senses", i.e., our imaginative intuitions beyond the five physical senses.¹

In Tristram Shandy Uncle Toby is the paradigm of the simple-minded but instinctively good person. His

1. In his Enquiry Concerning Beauty & Virtue, Francis Hutcheson developed an elaborate system of these "finer senses". See L. Stephens, op. cit. For "internal senses" see Hutcheson's An Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections, Section 1, British Moralists, ed. D. D. Raphael, (Oxford paperback, 1969), p. 301.

immediate and uncalculated benevolence towards Le Fever and Le Fever's son affords a prime example of the imaginative moral sense. The adjective "imaginative" is not lightly chosen, for Toby actually wishes Le Fever well:

—In a fortnight or three weeks, added my uncle Toby, smiling,—he might march.—He will never march, an' please your honour, in this world, said the corporal:—He will march; said my uncle Toby, rising up from the side of the bed, with one shoe off:—An' please your honour, said the corporal he will never march, but to his grave:—He shall march, cried my uncle Toby, marching the foot which had a shoe on, though without advancing an inch,—he shall march to his regiment.—He cannot stand it, said the corporal;—He shall be supported, said my uncle Toby;—He'll drop at last, said the corporal, and what will become of his boy?—He shall not drop, said my uncle Toby, firmly.—A-well-o'-day,—do what we can for him, said Trim, maintaining his point,—the poor soul will die:—He shall not die, by G—d, cried my uncle Toby.¹

The clash of Toby's optations with Trim's common sense reveals the extent to which Toby relies upon his imaginative faculty. Of course the effect here is whimsical, even slightly ludicrous. Yet Sterne seems to applaud this child-like quality of make-believe as a prerequisite for appreciating the distresses of another person and responding with warmth. "Simplicity", Sterne wrote in one of his sermons, "is the great friend to nature. . ."² Gravity and

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 8, p. 411.

2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume IV, Sermon 24, "Pride".

prudent self-interest are products of calculated thought, and can never give rise to the virtuous feeling that springs spontaneously from the heart.

Tristram's famous apotheosis to his Uncle Toby illustrates several aspects of the imaginative moral sense:

Here,—but why here,—rather than in any other part of my story,—I am not able to tell;—but here it is,—my heart stops me to pay to thee, my dear uncle Toby, once for all, the tribute I owe thy goodness.—Here let me thrust my chair aside, and kneel down upon the ground, whilst I am pouring forth the warmest sentiment of love for thee, and veneration for the excellency of thy character, that ever virtue and nature kindled in a nephew's bosom—Peace and comfort rest for evermore upon thy head!—Thou enviest no man's comforts,—insultedst no man's opinions.—Thou blackenedst no man's character,—devouredst no man's bread: gently, with faithful Trim behind thee, didst thou amble round the little circle of thy pleasures, jostling no creature in thy way;—for each one's sorrows, thou hadst a shilling.

Whilst I am worth one, to pay a weeder,—thy path from thy door to thy bowling-green shall never be grown up.—Whilst there is a rood and a half of land in the Shandy family, thy fortifications, my dear uncle Toby, shall never be demolished.¹

Notice first, that even Tristram's praise is impulsive and uncalculated, mirroring the functioning of Toby's generosity. Notice secondly, Tristram's benevolence towards Toby, which mirrors Toby's own benevolence. Notice finally, the connexion between the spontaneous, heart-felt

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 34, p. 230.

feelings and the world of the imagination - for it is precisely in Tristram's imagination that Toby's fortifications "shall never be demolished."

The movement from self-interest to imaginative and sympathetic interest in others is symbolized by Tristram's escape from Death in Volume VII. As we have already seen, Tristram's escape from self-centredness culminates in his imaginatively turning the "plain into a city" and joining in the dance of joyful union with humanity.

On a less grandiose scale than apotheosis and symbolism, Sterne still managed to bring home his faith in the sympathetic imagination as a way of moving the human heart. For example, when Obadiah announces Bob Shandy's death, the household servants react in a variety of ways. Susannah's thoughts fly to her mistress' wardrobe. Ultimately, however, Susannah dissolves "into a flood of tears" as Trim makes her feel, imaginatively, the finality of death. Susannah's self-interest was harmless enough and is readily converted into sympathy. But the self-interest of the scullion is another matter:

We had a fat, foolish scullion—my father, I think, kept her for simplicity;—she had been all autumn struggling with a dropsy.—He is dead! said Obadiah.—he is certainly dead!—So am not I, said the foolish scullion.¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 7, p. 355.

The passage illustrates the association of opposite ideas (death suggests life to the scullion), while showing the scullion's unmitigated concern for her own welfare. A moment later she reaffirms her self-interest:

—Oh! he's dead, said Susannah.—As sure, said the scullion, as I'm alive.¹

But Trim's dramatic presentation of the universality and the finality of death eventually captures the imagination even of the scullion:

—What is Whitsuntide, Jonathan, (for that was the coachman's name), or Shrovetide, or any tide or time past, to this? Are we not here now, continued the corporal, (striking the end of his stick perpendicularly upon the floor, so as to give an idea of health and stability)—and are we not—(dropping his hat upon the ground) gone! in a moment!—'Twas infinitely striking! Susannah burst into a flood of tears.—We are not stocks and stones.—Jonathan, Obadiah, the cook-maid, all melted.—The foolish fat scullion herself, who was scouring a fish-kettle upon her knees, was roused with it.—²

In delineating man's imaginative potential and his moral sense, Sterne sometimes made too much of a good thing. For instance, Tristram ludicrously magnifies Toby's mercy towards a fly into a "lesson of universal good-will":

I was but ten years old when this happened; but whether it was, that the action itself was more in unison to my nerves

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 7, p. 355.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 7, pp. 355-356.

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 magic,—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 goodwill then taught and imprinted by my uncle Toby, has never since been worn out of my mind: And though 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 half of my philanthropy to that one accidental impression.¹

More than any other passage in Tristram Shandy, this resounds with the views and jargon of the "sympathetic sense" moralists. One hears distinct echoes of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson - even of Hartley, who cannot really be called a "sympathetic sense moralist" because he postulated a moral sense on the basis of actual physical sensations and impressions.² The impact of Tristram's original experience rests upon his approbative feeling of benevolence in action. The feeling stems from the belief that benevolence puts one in tune with God's harmonious universe: a common belief of many eighteenth-century moralists. The harmony is felt by the heart, mysteriously, and is somehow akin to hearing with

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 12, p. 131.

2. Observations on Man, Volume I, Chapter IV, Section 6.

some inner-ear, some "finer sense". But, while we may accept the impact of the experience upon the impressionable Tristram, it is reasonable to ask whether or not Toby's act of freeing the fly really counts as a benevolent act. Eighteenth-century moralists usually called for a 'rational agent' to be a recipient of true benevolence.

Similarly, Tristram's moral empathy works overtime when he falls "into conversation" with an ass, and finds his "imagination so busy . . . in framing his responses . . ." Tristram's sympathy flies "from my own heart into his . . ." ¹ Clearly, Sterne can be amused by distortions of the sympathetic imagination. ²

For the most part, however, Tristram Shandy affirms man's empathetic potential and postulates an imaginative sense - a sense which circumvents the intellect and operates through intuitive sympathy - as a fortuitous means of human communication in a world otherwise beset by epistemic incertitude. Sterne, then, is pointing towards what William Empson called "the fundamental commonplace of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 32, p. 498.

2. Some eighteenth-century writers meant to treat animals as if they had human feelings, and for this reason it is difficult to deduce Sterne's exact intention. For a discussion of "animalitarianism" see M. Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau, This Long Disease, My Life, (Princeton, 1968), pp. 93-109.

poetry", namely, "a statement of the limitations of the human situation."¹

Major metaphysical systems are satirized in Tristram Shandy as are major philosophical problems. In its largest dimension the scepticism extends to the cosmological problem of free will versus fate. Less abstractly, Sterne shows the inadequacy of the intellect when necessary inferences are to be made concerning the thoughts of others. But the logic of philosophy can take man only so far. The imagination, Sterne indicates, moves in higher realms. Intuitive and imaginative human insight can overcome the uncertainty of other methods of communication. Although it is impossible in the Shandean world to say with certainty, "I understand what you mean," it is possible to say, "I can see what you envisage," "I can imagine what you feel," or finally, "I can feel what you feel."

Hence, the themes of Tristram Shandy involve the reader in philosophical puzzles and provide an ultimate supra-rational solution, while, simultaneously, Sterne's structural device (author-persona, Tristram) challenges the reader at the logical level of understanding, but communicates at the higher level of imagination, feeling, and wit.

1. Seven Types of Ambiguity, (Peregrine paperback, 1965), p. 73.

The reader comes to know Tristram and the Shandean world despite the insufficiency of language and the impossibility of being certain what Tristram 'has in mind'.

CHAPTER III

THE SPIRIT OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

My first chapter dealt with the central structural device of Tristram Shandy (i.e., the 'dirigent force', Tristram) and the mock-dialogue between Tristram and the reader. My second chapter considered the philosophical themes and showed how they are dramatized through Sterne's structural device, so as to involve the reader in the satire of philosophy.

In this chapter I wish to clarify another dimension of the involvement between the reader and the author-persona, namely, the Shandean spirit. I shall suggest that the spirit of Tristram Shandy well suits both the central structural device and the philosophical themes because the spirit, like the structure and the themes, also satirizes what Sterne saw as the fatuousity and the pontificating solemnity of philosophy.

The spirit of Tristram Shandy is a peculiarly Sternean synthesis of the festive techniques of Rabelais and the idea of the 'fool' as delineated by Erasmus, Rabelais, Cervantes, and Shakespeare. First, I shall consider the similarities between Sterne's techniques and those of Rabelais, insofar as both provide a background for what I shall call the "festive" or "carnavalesque" spirit of the narrator.

1. The Carnavalesque Background

There are certain general resemblances between Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy: the exuberantly innovative style, the freedom of the persona to make merry with the reader, the overall ribaldry - though Sterne's is more often couched in innuendo. Moreover, it has always been clear that Tristram Shandy, like its more immediate predecessor Martinus Scriblerus, came from the Rabelaisian heritage of grotesque subject matter and distorted form. But critics have been all too prone to speak in loose generalizations about the resemblance between Sterne and Rabelais.¹

John Ferriar was first to attempt to name specific resemblances between Gargantua and Pantagruel, Martinus

1. Some connexions between Rabelais and Sterne are of course generally agreed upon. J. A. Work in his edition of Tristram Shandy (Odyssey Press, New York, 1940) has meticulously footnoted the dozen or so references to Gargantua and Pantagruel within the text of Tristram Shandy. As literary evidence of Rabelais' influence on Sterne (external to the text of Tristram Shandy) we have a Shandean fragment that is very much in accord with the style, content, and spirit of Rabelais, viz., The Fragment, Showing Two Things, First, What a Rabelaisic Fellow Longinus Rabelaisus Is; and Secondly, How Cavalierly He Begins His Book. Sterne probably first became acquainted with Rabelais' work either at Cambridge or at Hall-Stevenson's library in Skelton Castle near Scarborough. Sterne was undoubtedly a member of Hall-Stevenson's "Demoniacs", a club founded in imitation of the infamous Rabelaisian 'monks' of Medmenham Abbey. Supposedly, Sterne contributed "My Cousin's Tale" to Hall-Stevenson's Rabelaisian verse-book, Crazy Tales.

Scriblerus, and Tristram Shandy. Ferriar saw Rabelais as linking "writers of romance and those of simple merriment."¹

He related Sterne to Lucian and Rabelais, noting:

wild digressions, the abruptness of narratives and digressions, and the perpetual recurrence to obsolete notions in philosophy.²

A more recent critic has compared Rabelais' satirical reaction against Scholasticism with Sterne's similar reaction against Lockean philosophy.³ While partially valid, such a comparison overlooks the fact that Rabelais satirized Neoplatonism as well as Scholasticism, and Sterne, as we saw in my last chapter, satirized not only Empiricism but also the two older philosophical systems.

The stylistic and thematic similarities between Sterne and Rabelais are, I believe, surface manifestations of a deeper similarity of tone and spirit. I shall suggest that the Shandean spirit closely resembles that of Rabelais because the rationale behind the merriment of both authors is fundamentally the same. Insofar as this is true, it indicates a way in which the reader can better understand Sterne's use of a peculiarly pranksome narrator.

1. Illustrations of Sterne, (London, 1798), p. 10.

2. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

3. E. Tuveson, "Locke and Sterne", English Literature and British Philosophy, ed. S. P. Rosenbaum, (Chicago, 1971), p. 96.

Mikhail Bakhtin observed that the humour of Gargantua and Pantagruel is festive.¹ By "festive" he meant that Rabelais' book was conceived in the spirit of revellers at carnival time. Of course no one would dispute that the carnival had traditionally provided a laughable release from the tension and seriousness of everyday life in something of the same way that Gargantua and Pantagruel does. But Bakhtin went further. He noted that festive laughter is not totally nonsensical - that it has an underlying rationale. Festive humour stems from mankind's recognition and enjoyment of the comically absurd.

On the one hand, carnivalesque or festive humour depends upon gross exaggeration in the size of trivial things like noses and sausages; on the other, it depends upon deflation of crucial real-life issues such as injury and death. Hence, the comic masks and distorted effigies are an integral part, and the knock-about buffoonery another integral part, of the same festive pattern.

At carnival time men drop their usual routines, temporarily forget the pretensions of day to day existence, abandon inhibitions, and indulge fantasies. Reality gives way to the fiction of an inverted world-order. Hierarchical distinctions are swept aside. Smollett touched briefly

1. Rabelais and His World, English trans. H. Iswolsky, (M.I.T., 1968). See also E. Welford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History, (London, 1935).

upon the notion of festive inversion when he described the errand-boys' party at which social classes were mingled:

as the slaves and masters were in the time
of the Saturnalia in Rome.¹

With the invoking of the festive spirit a comic metamorphoses takes place, as the revellers invert the officialdom of everyday society. During the carnival, the fool reigns supreme - King Carnival - and the legendary eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt have a good time!" takes precedence over all and for all. The only regulation is the anti-regulation of the Abbey of Thélème: "Do what you will!" It is precisely this spirit of tomfoolery that Rabelais, and later Sterne, captured on paper.

Personifying the festive spirit, Tristram is the hair-brained, frolicsome, dirigent force of Sterne's novel. He writes to no "man's rules that ever lived."² Acting as Master of Revels, Tristram dons his cap and bells a bit more self-consciously than the narrator of Gargantua and Pantagruel, but the positions of the two narrators as 'fool rulers' of their literary carnivals set the comic tone of both books.

1. The Expedition of Humphry Clinker, (Penguin paperback, 1967), p. 264.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 38.

Besides referring frequently to the fool's costume he symbolically wears,¹ Tristram dedicates his first volume in part to the mad moon who:

of all Patrons or Matrons I can think of, has most power to set my book agoing, and make the world run mad after it.²

Later, Tristram points to the predominance of festive humour in his book by accusing his hobby-horsical humours of:

mounting me upon a long stick, and playing the fool with me nineteen hours out of the twenty-four.³

Although Locke's "way of ideas" probably influenced Sterne's structuring of Tristram's consciousness, it was the 'mad' idea-associations - not the natural or predictable ones - which Sterne exploited. One of Sterne's earliest reviewers, Ralph Griffiths, concluded that Tristram's real forerunner was Harlequin.⁴ Certainly, Tristram's desultory idea-association bears an undeniable resemblance to Harlequin's, as described by Allardyce Nicoll:

1. For example: "Here—pray, Sir, take hold of my cap,—nay take the bell along with it, and my pantoufles, too . . . " Volume III, Chapter 18, p. 199; "—and I here put off my cap and lay it upon the table close to my inkhorn, on purpose to make my declaration to the world, concerning this one article, the more solemn—" Volume III, Chapter 39, p. 240; see also Volume I, Chapter 6, p. 41.
2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 9, p. 46.
3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 1, p. 459.
4. Monthly Review, XXXVI, (1767), pp. 93-102.

He gets an idea; it seems to him at the moment a good one; gaily he applies it, and, no matter what scrape it leads him into, he never gains from his experience; one minute later he will be merrily pursuing another thought, equally calculated to lead him into embarrassment.¹

Nor is this the only similarity between Harlequin's world and Tristram's. Sterne's contrived presentation of fantasy under the guise of uncontrived naturalism may stem from the Harlequinade tradition. So, too, may Sterne's masking of characters and fusing of identities (both Yorick and Tristram can be seen as masks for Sterne). Moreover, in Tristram Shandy as in the Harlequinesque form we find similar stock characters: the crusty head of the household (Walter), the loquacious doctor (Slop) who provides the comic foil for the head of the household, the captain (Toby) who lives in his grandiosely imaginative world and who is generally drawn into an amour.² Similar, too, is the action of the servants as ingenious go-betweens in the courtship of their masters.³ Not too fine a point can be put on these similarities, however. The extent of Sterne's indebtedness to the Harlequinade remains a conjectural matter, whereas his debt to Rabelais was acknowledged by Sterne and exhibits itself in the novel.

1. The World of Harlequin, (Cambridge, 1963), p. 70.

2. A. Nicoll, The World of Harlequin, (Cambridge, 1963). For masking and identity-fusion see p. 22, 42; for Pantalone (head of household) see pp. 44-51; for the Dottore see pp. 52-59; for the Capitano see pp. 98-103.

3. Op. cit., p. 112.

There are numerous resemblances between the festive paraphernalia of Rabelais and Sterne. The grotesque characters and the knock-about humour of the carnival are almost as rife in Tristram Shandy as in Gargantua and Pantagruel. It is true of course that techniques of caricature and slapstick had been absorbed into European comic writing generally. Eighteenth-century humourists often paid tribute to Cervantes and Rabelais even when they were not busily creating physically deformed characters and episodes of gay body-battering. Like many an author, Sterne paid perfunctory respects to his famous literary congeners. He delegated a Rocinante-like horse to Parson Yorick, swore "by the ashes of my dear Rabelais, and dearer Cervantes", quoted Sancho Panza, and lauded the laughter-inciting qualities of Rabelais, Scarron, and Cervantes.¹

There would seem, then, to be nothing singularly carnivalesque or Rabelaisian about Dr. Slop's collision with Obadiah or about Slop's bloody tussle with Susannah.² Both incidents could have been dealt with as broad slapstick (without reference to Rabelais) in books such as Joseph Andrews or Peregrine Pickle. Nor perhaps is there anything unusually Rabelaisian about Trim's lame knee or

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 10, p. 47; Volume III, Chapter 19, p. 201; Volume IV, Chapter 15, p. 289; Volume VIII, Chapter 34, p. 564.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 9, pp. 124-125; Volume VI, Chapter 3, pp. 399-400.

Uncle Toby's wounded groin, other than the preponderance of such injuries throughout Sterne's novel. But the crushing of Tristram's nose into a proboscidian ace of spades definitely recalls Rabelais, as does the carnival procession and ceremony of misrule at which Phutatorius falls victim to the hot chestnut.¹

The festive fool, whether an actor or an effigy, is frequently 'killed' and regenerated, just as Yorick (whose ancestry is traced to Shakespeare's jester) is 'killed' by Sterne early in the novel, only to be revived in Tristram's mind immediately thereafter.²

Similarly, Sterne followed the carnivalesque convention by treating Tristram's window-sash mutilation in an absurdly off-hand fashion. The circumcision is sheer Rabelaisian grotesquerie, remindful of Epistemon's comic be-heading and rejuvenative re-heading.³ Such accidents typify the carnivalesque (and Harlequinesque) theme of ritual death and merry resurrection. In any world but the carnivalesque, Tristram's mutilation would have been traumatic. Indeed such an impossible accident with such unrealistic consequences can hardly be imagined in any other type

1. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book IV, Chapter 9; Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapters 25-29.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 11, p. 53.

3. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book II, Chapter 30.

of writing but the festively absurd. The carnival atmosphere of Tristram Shandy, like that of Gargantua and Pantagruel, permits the transcendence of naturalistic verisimilitude in the cause of comedy.

The interpolated tall-tales and Schwenke within Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy are the vehicles of the fairground raconteur. The tales provide scope for the grotesque disguises and preposterous antics of the fair-ground. In his totally Rabelaisian "Slawkenbergius's Tale" Sterne takes a deformed nose and in festive fashion builds an absurd tale around the phallic symbol.¹ Queen Mab appears briefly in "Slawkenbergius's Tale" as do comic nuns, Popish logicians, quack doctors, and "a little bandy-legged drummer" straight out of the folk-humour tradition of Rabelais. All such devices are clear clues to Sterne's tone, and clues, also, to the spirit with which we should read his novel.

The mask of comedy prevails at the carnival; indeed, carnival is the traditional time of masquerade. Things are never quite what they seem, and in this respect of course the Shandean festive spirit clearly accords with the themes of epistemic incertitude and philosophical scepticism. How can one person know what lies behind the mask of another? - only by imagining. At carnival-time certitude is overwhelmed by imagination and fancy. Tristram

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, pp. 248-273.

Shandy, like Gargantua and Pantagruel, reflects the uncertainties and fantasies that are so essential to the carnivalesque pattern.

A central confusion between fiction and reality is perpetrated by the occasional conflation of the fictive Tristram with the real-life Sterne. Sometimes the mask of the persona slips. Sometimes the slippage seems to pose an intentional challenge to the reader to distinguish, if he can, between reality and fiction. Such ever-impending metamorphoses from fiction to reality, and vice versa, lend an atmosphere of ambivalence to Tristram Shandy as to the carnival.

By any standard the motivation of Sterne's characters is grotesquely abnormal. Shandean motives are often masked, leaving the reader little rational ground for inferring the true 'reasons why'. For example, a comic gap seems to exist between the urgency of situations and the action taken by the characters. Walter, Toby, and Dr. Slop carry on a lengthy, unconcerned, and largely irrelevant conversation downstairs while Mrs. Shandy lies in labour pain above. At another point in the novel the news of Bobby's death elicits rhetoric rather than sorrow from his father. Even Rabelais' monstrous characters sometimes behave more understandably than Sterne's "Age of Reason" figures. Panurge's comic attempt to dictate his last will and

testament during a storm at sea, for instance, is at least explicable in terms of fright, even if the circumstances render the action ludicrous.¹

Like the philosophical themes, the Shandean spirit draws the reader into active participation, for the masquerade atmosphere prompts questions from the reader and leaves him guessing. Is there not a contradiction between Tristram's claim to exhibit his complete freedom by writing whatever he chooses and his overall feeling that he is deterministically fated to be "the sport of small accidents"?² Who is the mysterious Jenny, appearing phantasmagorically throughout the novel and engaging Tristram in perturbed conversation? Is Jenny the "she" who in the final volume suddenly interjects a comment about the perplexing nature of mortal man?³ Is Tristram impotent or isn't he? And if this question is irrelevant, why does the narrator hint at it? Or has Tristram's hint merely driven our imaginations along the unclean route of our personal hobby-horse? How in fact can the bemused reader even decide on Tristram's potency or impotency if, as the novel implies, it is impossible to infer with certainty the ideas of another person from his words?

1. Pantagruel, Book IV, Chapter 21.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 8, p. 179.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 15, p. 589.

Some of the ambiguities seem explicable through reference to Sterne's tactical handling of his author-persona device. But such references are specious in their circularity. It begs the question, for instance, to say simply that Sterne's fusion of random flash-backs with present-tense improvisation is bound to create a chronological puzzle for the reader. Obviously, the disorder of Tristram Shandy mirrors Sterne's artful dramatization of the disorder of an author's mind. But if we go further and say that the spirit behind the disorder is one of carnivalesque chicanery, then the circularity is broken.

There are of course innumerable lesser puzzles. To consider just one: Why does Sterne intermix rhetorical characters such as Phutatorius, Gastripheres, and Didius with the supposedly realistic characters, Walter, Toby, and Trim? Here surely one must look to Rabelais and to the spirit of the carnival for an answer. The levelling spirit of festive humour aims to deflate "great wigs, grave faces, and other implements of deceit."¹ Sterne deflates officialdom by raising it to rhetorical stature and then making the officials act ludicrously. Sterne's low-burlesque technique is tantamount to the carnival travesty, the Court of Misrule.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, p. 210.

Carnival time traditionally affords an opportunity for playfully overturning the customary decorum and officiality of everyday life. In the cause of laughter, the carnival welcomes an inversion of the normal world order. This fair-ground principle was successfully conveyed to literature by Rabelais and Sterne. Employing burlesque inversion, both authors treated life's normally formal occasions indecorously, while writing of trivial and informal occurrences with absurd decorum.

In Tristram Shandy important real-life rituals such as christening and circumcision are treated absurdly - as accidents. Similarly, the normally sacred formality of delivering a sermon is profanely deflated by comic interruption. Consider on the other hand an event which a man seldom formally schedules in advance. I have in mind here the usual informality of sexual intercourse between husband and wife. In the comically inverted world of Sterne's novel, Mr. and Mrs. Shandy have a prescribed ritual for their familiarity. Walter "had made it a rule for many years of his life" to wind his "large house-clock" and then to fulfil "some other little family concernments" on the first Sunday of every month.¹

Sterne's use of trivia is not exactly akin to Defoe's or Pope's. Defoe's careful use of seemingly trivial

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 39.

details was always aimed at making his stories more believable; clearly Sterne's use of trivia doesn't serve this purpose, although the Shandean trivia does contribute to Sterne's realistic dramatization of an author's struggle to discriminate between what should and what should not be included in his book. Nor did Sterne use trivia as did Pope in The Rape of the Lock, i.e., to show a character's difficulties in distinguishing between the superficial and the truly valuable, although in this regard it is natural to think of Walter's pseudo-philosophizing in the face of important issues. Overall, however, the raising of trivia in importance contributes most to the festive comedy. Sterne was persuaded that the humour of Tristram Shandy arose from:

describing silly and trifling Events, with the Circumstantial Pomp of great Ones.¹

Festive humour deflates life's important issues while inflating life's trivia. Uncle Toby's battlefield grows gradually to become the outstanding side-show of Sterne's carnival. All kinds of trivia likewise assume a mysterious and untoward importance. Knots, creaky door-hinges, slits in petticoats, Trim's montero hat, Uncle Toby's thumb-print on the map of Bouchain: all are oddly stressed, while the things which Tristram might be expected to

1. Summer, 1759. To Robt. Dodsley, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), pp. 76-77.

remember, such as his childhood playmates or Toby's facial characteristics, go unmentioned.

Sometimes Sterne's distortions are sheer festive frolic, while at other times the distortion carries a Swiftian double-edge. For instance, Tristram's inflation of the tiny homunculus ("however low and ludicrous he may appear") into a "Being guarded and circumscribed with rights" and a potential "Lord Chancellor of England" is a simple example of burlesque distortion.¹ But it is something more as well. It is, as one critic has noted, a satire on:

the microscopic investigations and speculations of such respected biologists of the late seventeenth century as Harvey, Swannerdown, Malpighi, Leeuwenhock, de Graff, and others whose embryological views were accepted and disseminated in the eighteenth century.²

In the same spirit of high-burlesque Sterne habitually magnifies trivial gestures and bizarre physical posturing. These so abound in Tristram Shandy that one hardly knows where to begin giving examples. Perhaps the obvious link between Rabelaisian and Sternean gesturing is a suitable starting point. In Volume V, Tristram relates Yorick's account of the fantastic acrobatics and

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 2, p. 36.

2. L. A. Landa, "The Shandean Homunculus: The Background of Sterne's 'Little Gentleman'", Restoration and Eighteenth Century Literature, (Chicago, 1963), p. 51.

horsemanship of Gymnaste, much to the bewilderment of Uncle Toby.¹ Elsewhere, Tristram details Trim's exact posturing to read the sermon "On the Abuses of Conscience".² In Volume IV, Walter employs the finger gestures that traditionally accompanied dramatic oratory, and Sterne does not miss the opportunity of describing in ludicrous detail the exact position of each digit.³ In the final volume Tristram graphically reproduces the flourish of Trim's walking-stick, giving the action represented by the sketch a mysterious importance by comparing it to a conjuror's trick.⁴

Sterne's persistent and ridiculously lengthy magnification of trivial movements, postures, and gestures follows the festive spirit of inverted norms. The carnival-esque miming also serves to suggest through physical action the hidden mental states of the characters.

Instances of physical awkwardness, for example, often seem to betray feelings of frustration. News of Tristram's crushed nose precedes Walter's graceless collapse (carefully delineated by Sterne) onto his bed.⁵ Obviously,

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapters 28-29.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, pp. 138-139. It has often been claimed that this travestied a section of Hogarth's Analysis of Beauty.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapters 6-7.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 4, p. 576.
 5. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 29, p. 223.

Sterne has used a physical description to indicate Walter's mental despondency. Similarly, when one of Toby's random ideas disrupts the conversation, Walter awkwardly deploys his right hand to the rubbing of his head, and his left hand to reach into his right coat-pocket.¹ Walter's physical entanglement reflects his mental stultification over the unpredictability of Toby's thoughts. Elsewhere in the novel Mrs. Shandy reveals her "impulse" to eavesdrop on Toby and the Widow Wadman. Following Walter's sarcastic rebuke, Mrs. Shandy grows indignant, and a carefully delineated, puppet-like collision between husband and wife mirrors their mental discord.²

Besides being in the festive spirit, Sterne's emphasis on mime is, therefore, also related to the stage convention under which physical movements depict "an external image of an internal mind."³ Moreover, there are obvious connexions here with the philosophical problem of knowledge of other minds. Nearly all the over-stressed descriptions of external actions are employed to delineate gauche fumbling, a suitable accompaniment to the linguistic misunderstandings between Shandean characters.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 2, pp. 172-173.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 1, pp. 571-572.

3. B. L. Joseph, Elizabethan Acting, (Oxford, 1964), p. 9: citing Thomas Wright, The Passions of the Mind in General, (London, 1604), p. 179.

Both Rabelais and Sterne excelled at using language to depict mime. Both authors created Harlequin-like narrators. Both inverted the normal world-order: denigrating sombre authority and the important issues of everyday life, while extolling mock-authority and trivia. Both dealt in tall-tales and Schwenke.

Many fairground caricatures, processions, parodies, and travesties reappear imaginatively in the pages of Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy. The buffoonish cavalcade includes fantastically long or short-nosed men, fiddlers and ballad singers, dwarfs and cripples, asses, hobby-horses, comic mummers, and slap-stick comedians. I have already noted some of these curiosities and will mention more in the ensuing discussion. But for the moment let us consider in greater detail the nature of Sterne's festive narrator, Tristram.

2. The Festive Narrator

There is no disputing the fact that some of the tales of Sterne's author-persona (e.g., "The Slawkenbergius Tale") and some of the events in his life (e.g., his miraculous circumcision) are absurd. The question of the place of absurdity in fiction had been considered in the seminal work of prose narrative, Don Quixote. Cervantes built his book around a central character whose adventures stemmed from his aberration of mistaking hyperbole for

history. The opposing view often comes from the saner characters in the book. The canon, for example, claims:

The more it [prose fiction] resembles the truth the better the fiction, and the more probable and possible it is, the better it pleases.¹

A century later, the views of Cervantes' common-sense character were echoed by a host of writers in England. Literary critics such as Mary de la Rivière Manley, the Earl of Chesterfield (Philip Dormer Stanhope), and even Samuel Richardson, as well as their critical successors Goldsmith and Johnson, urged budding novelists to follow nature in their fictions - to write about the 'possible' if not always the 'probable'.² Such advice, however, was directed initially not against the exaggerations of comic writing, but against the over-idealization and fairy-tale impossibilities of the 'old romances' - the genre from which in great part the 'novel' sprung.

The question, "How close to nature - how probable - must a comic novel be?" arose rather self-consciously with Henry Fielding. Answering conservatively, Fielding agreed in principle, if not always in practice, that nothing

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1. Don Quixote, Book I, Chapter 48, English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1968), p. 425.
 2. See Manley's The Secret History of Queen Zarah, "Preface", (1705), reprinted in part in Novel and Romance, ed. I. Williams, (London, 1970), pp. 33-39; Chesterfield, Letters, written c. 1740, pub. 1774, reprinted in Novel and Romance, op. cit., pp. 100-101; Richardson, "Post-script" to Clarissa, (1748); Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World, June 30, 1760; Dr. Johnson, Rambler, Nbr. 4, March 31, 1750.

unnatural or even improbable should enter a comic novel.¹ He thought that Aristophanes and Rabelais had gone too far with their satirical exaggerations.² Fielding's view seems to have gained some acceptance by the middle of the century, and critics who accepted Fielding's norms were bound to react adversely to a novel as Rabelaisian as Tristram Shandy.³

But literary canons and norms apart, Tristram Shandy proved immediately successful. Sterne's novel carried many levels of appeal - all somehow based upon the buoyantly imaginative flair of its author. Dr. Johnson's famous condemnation of Tristram Shandy ("Nothing odd will do long")⁴ has proven incorrect. The early volumes sold well and the book has worn well, even though Sterne flouted the realistic

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1. "A comic writer should of all others be the least excused for deviating from nature" Fielding, Joseph Andrews, "Preface", Book III, Chapter 1. Also, Tom Jones: "I think it may very reasonably be required of every writer that he keeps within the bounds of possibility; and still remembers that what is not possible for man to perform, it is scarcely possible for man to believe that he did perform." Book VIII, Chapter 1. Also, "It becomes us not only to keep within the limits of possibility, but of probability, too." Ibid. Also, "Actions should be such as may . . . be within the compass of human agency, and which human agents may properly be supposed to do." Ibid.
 2. The Covent Garden Journal, Nbr. 10, February 4, 1752.
 3. For example: Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World, Letter 52; Owen Ruffhead's criticism of Tristram Shandy in his book review of Almorán and Hamlet, Monthly Review, XXIV, May 1761.
 4. Boswell, J., Life of Johnson, ed. G. B. Hill, (Oxford, 1934), Volume II, p. 449.

standards that were beginning to be set for the novel form. It is important, however, to consider the question of fantasy and verisimilitude raised by Sterne.

There is, naturally, a sense in which whatever an author chooses to recount in his fiction (the events, characters, etc.) becomes, by virtue of the existence of the fictional book, true of that work of fiction. Hence, it is true that Tristram was born during the first weekend of March, 1718. It is true that Uncle Toby and the Widow Wadman never marry. But this is not the sense in which it was customary for writers of fiction to claim "truth" for their writing.

By definition the content of any work of fiction is not true. The things that happen in a fiction did not happen in the real world. Realizing this, however, the reader typically suspends his disbelief and reads on 'as if' the events and characters were real. Authorial claims for the 'truth' of a work of fiction are simply inducements, to the reader to 'believe', which in this context means to imagine 'as if' they had really happened.

Yet even when he has suspended his disbelief, the reader often finds himself matching the fictional happenings against his knowledge of how things happen in the real world. Judgments follow, such as: "Yes, this is just how a real person in that character's position would have acted," or "No, this event could never have occurred in real life."

Naturalistic fiction might be said to require little imaginative effort on the reader's part, or at any rate less imagination than exaggerated fiction. Highly exaggerated fiction (myths, fairy tales, romances) stands out as preposterous. Each fantastic incident reminds the reader of the improbability or impossibility of its occurrence in real life. Therefore, to judge a romance or a fairy tale by standards of verisimilitude would be to misunderstand the nature of romances and fairy tales.

To put it another way: the presuppositions behind both the writing and the reading of a naturalistic work of fiction differ from those behind the writing and reading of a romance or fairy tale. Consequently, the reader's comment, "No real person in that character's position would have acted in that fashion," or, "This event could never have happened in real life," if made of Clarissa or Tom Jones might be pejorative; but if made of Gargantua and Pantagruel it is simply descriptive. To call a section of a naturalistic work of fiction "true to life" is to praise it; to call a section of a fairy tale "true to life" may be to disparage it.

Authorial assurances of the truthfulness of fictional events can be found in many novels. Don Quixote, for example, is full of such assurances. Sterne's author-persona, like Cervantes' and Rabelais' as well, refers to

himself as an historian and biographer.¹ Yet most of Rabelais' book and parts of Sterne's are preposterous, so that the claims of truthfulness made by these works must be intended to clash with the reader's better judgment. The effect is ludicrous. Moreover, by calling attention to the relationship between fiction and reality, authors such as Rabelais and Sterne celebrate their power to create whatever they wish, while simultaneously revealing the necessarily artificial nature of all fiction.

Like Rabelais, Sterne fashioned a narrator who, by interrupting bumptiously with purported frankness and demanding the reader's belief, actually accentuates the fact that much of what he writes is not to be taken at face value:

Now you are laughing at me, my jolly boozers. You do not believe that what I tell you is really true. I don't know what to do about you. Believe me if you like; and if you don't, go and see for yourselves. But I know well enough what I saw.²

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Had this volume been a farce, which unless every one's life and opinions are to be looked upon as a farce as well as mine, I see no reason

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1. For example: Don Quixote, Volume II, Chapter 50; Pantagruel, Book II, "Author's Preface"; Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 13, p. 286; Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 318.
 2. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book IV, Chapter 38, English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1970), p. 531.

to suppose—the last chapter, Sir, had finished the first act of it, and then this chapter must have set off thus.¹

Clearly, the absurdity of some of Tristram's stories belies his claim for truthfulness. In my next chapter I shall consider what sense can be made of Tristram Shandy if we do approach it as a truthfully realistic biography. Here, however, I want to suggest how Tristram's contradictory words (his absurd stories versus his claims for truthfulness) can be understood as part of the festive spirit of Sterne's novel.

Tristram Shandy, like Gargantua and Pantagruel relies upon the author's implicit analogy between the fair-ground carnival and the literary carnival. At the fairground we may amble from booth to stall to side-show, enjoying the antics of the mountebanks, pitch-men, and other comic performers. We may laugh at the verbal and physical abuse of the puppet shows. We may laugh at various extravagances: the fattest woman in the world, the bull with five legs, the flea circus, and so forth. Of course the laughter occasioned by these activities may seem a far cry from the interior laughter generated by a humorous novel. The circumstances surrounding the two types of laughter differ widely. The solitary reader meets his author intellectually through the medium of the printed page, whereas the fairground visitor

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 15, p. 365.

becomes totally absorbed in the clownish proceedings. Nevertheless, the analogy between fairground laughter and the festive laughter of Rabelais and Sterne yields interesting results when carried a step further.

In theory our hypothetical visitor to the festival grounds becomes a part of the festive proceedings in a way that a reader can never become part of a book. The fairground visitor cannot sequester himself from the welter of activity in the way a reader can. Once the visitor enters the grounds he becomes not only an observer of the tomfoolery, but also a potential participant. He becomes fair game for the pranks of the other revellers. The pitch-men, the vendors and hucksters 'set bait', as it were, to catch the spectators, and the spectators are willing victims.

"Step right up and buy your ticket!" cries the carnival pitch-man; the further implication, "And suffer yourselves to be fooled!" is so universally understood that it goes without saying. In this spirit we do not request a refund after being lured into a tent marked "Naked Female Acrobats" only to discover a knot of cow-monkeys swinging by their tails. It is part of the carnival spirit that we expect to be comically deceived, and that we laugh when we are so deceived.

The carnival pitch-man is a mountebank - a curious mixture: half entertainer, half salesman. As entertainer

he makes himself an object for laughter; as salesman he capitalizes on his own ridiculousness, the better to seduce his audience. The duplicity is essential, and its aims can be understood equally by the audience and the mountebank. Such is the recognized convention of the fairground.

The recognized convention between a writer of fiction and his reader is that the reader should suspend disbelief and read the fiction 'as if' it were true. For this reason, all writers of fiction are somewhat - though not totally - analogous to the fairground mountebank. Any writer of fiction tries to convince his audience in the manner of a mountebank. This can be done in a number of ways. To encourage the suspension of disbelief the author may, for instance, provide one or more narrators who befriend the reader, taking him into confidence. But the relationship between the narrators of Gargantua and Pantagruel or Tristram Shandy and the reader is not one of simple confidence. The narrator/reader relationship in these novels is, I believe, almost totally analogous to that between the carnival pitch-man and his mesmerized audience.

Using the festival as a model, Rabelais and Sterne fashioned their narrators as disingenuous tricksters who bear the same relation to their readers as the pitch-man bears to his fairground crowd. In their gag-a-minute patter, these literary mountebanks address the reader directly, engaging

him in mock repartee.¹ They attest to the truth of tales, both believable and unbelievable. They indulge in exaggerations, riddles, and verbal mystification. Additionally, Sterne's impresario is especially addicted to making promises he never fulfils.

Like a spectator captivated by the harangues of a fairground huckster, the reader of Tristram Shandy finds himself fascinated by Sterne's comically deceptive rhetor. Tristram, the cynosure and dirigent force of 'his' book, aims to provide entertainment, while simultaneously entertaining himself by hoodwinking his readers. What is more, the reader realizes the reciprocal merriment, for Tristram's duplicity is celebrated rather than concealed.

Tristram's artful improvisation, like that of the festive mountebank, is sheer humbug. In passing it might be mentioned that one of the earliest uses of the word 'humbug' was to describe the activity of Sterne's author-persona. After reading the first two volumes of Shandy, Horace Mann wrote from Italy to Horace Walpole:

You will laugh at me, I suppose, when I say I don't understand Tristram Shandy, because it

1. One can hardly help recalling the well-known picture of Sterne and his friend, Thomas Bridges, dressed as mountebanks on a stage in the market at York. The engraving has often been reproduced in books about Sterne. See for example, The Winged Skull, ed. A. H. Cash and J. M. Stedmond, (London, 1971), p. 189, p. 288. Also, in a memorandum Sterne mentioned two oils he himself painted of "the Mountebank and his Macaroni". Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), pp. 147-148.

was probably the intention of the author that nobody should. It seems to me 'humbugging', if I have the right notion of an art of talking or writing that has been invented since I left England.¹

Since the humbugging Tristram, like the festive mountebank, openly flaunts his deceptive techniques (occasionally, at least), it seems correct to speak of Sterne's "alienation technique". But, like the crowd at the fair, the readers of Shandy become accomplices in their own deception. Simply by reading on, Sterne's reader displays his willingness to be duped. Our laughter, therefore, is partly at what Tristram writes (in what we know of course to be a work of fiction) and partly at ourselves for being taken in by such a con-man. Hence, a technique that seems at first to be one of alienation becomes, paradoxically, a technique for subtle seduction.

The image of Tristram-as-Fool (discussed earlier in this chapter) fits exceptionally well with Tristram's rôle as a festive con-man, for it is of course the business of the Fool to make fools of others.

1. Horace Walpole's Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann, ed. W. S. Lewis, W. H. Smith, G. L. Lam, (London, 1960), Volume V, p. 446, letter dated Nov. 1, 1760. "Humbug" was absent from Dr. Johnson's Dictionary. It seems to have come into use in the mid-1750's. E. Edwards, Words, Facts, and Phrases (Philadelphia, 1912), cites Horace Mann for his early use of the word.

The narrators of Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy address us familiarly, deceive us at times, pull our noses with their literary antics, promise much but often deliver something quite different from what we had expected. Like carnival hawkers, they alienate only to seduce. Listen to Tristram introducing himself in a typical passage, and think of the carnival pitch-man artfully gulling the crowd.

In the beginnings of the last chapter, I informed you exactly 'when' I was born;—but I did not inform you 'how'. Now that particular was reserved entirely for a chapter by itself;—besides, Sir, as you and I are in a manner perfect strangers to each other, it would not have been proper to have let you into too many circumstances relating to myself all at once.—You must have a little patience. I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of a mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship.—O 'diem praeclarum!'—then nothing which has touched me will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling. Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out,—bear with me,—and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—or, if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along,—don't fly off,—but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside;—and as we jog on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short do any thing,—only keep your temper.¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 6, p. 41.

Tristram always appears a bit ingenuous. Yet, his frankness parodies real frankness. His asides are perplexing. His intimate revelations, often interjected haphazardly, obscure rather than clarify what is happening in his book. Frequently, the reader encounters such artful bewilderment as:

I believe I have not told you—but I don't know—possibly I have.¹

* * *

My reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing.²

To talk on the one hand with purported frankness, and on the other with obvious deceptivity is to employ the ambiguity of the fairground mountebank.

The resemblance between Sterne's narrator and Rabelais' is best illustrated when both are trying like crafty pitch-men at a festival to unload their goods and future services. Compare Tristram's address at the close of Volume IV with that of Alcofribas (Rabelais' narrator) at the end of Pantagruel, Book II.

And now that you have just got to the end of these four volumes—the thing I have to 'ask' is, how you feel your heads? my own akes dismally—as for your healths, I know, they are much better—True Shandeism, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 16, p. 529.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 25, p. 101.

all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely through its channels, and makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round.

Was I left, like Sancho Pança, to choose my kingdom, it should not be a maritime—or a kingdom of blacks to make a penny of it—no, it should be a kingdom of hearty laughing subjects: And as the bilious and more saturnine passions, by creating disorders in the blood and humours, have as bad an influence, I see, upon the body politic as body natural—and as nothing but a habit of virtue can fully govern those passions, and subject them to reason—I should add to my prayer—that God would give my subjects grace to be as WISE as they were MERRY; and then should I be the happiest monarch, and they the happiest people under heaven—

And so, with this moral for the present, may it please your worships and your reverences, I take leave of you till this time twelve-month, when (unless this vile cough kills me in the mean time) I'll have another pluck at your beards, and lay open a story to the world you little dream of.¹

Alcofribas harangues his reader similarly:

Now, gentlemen, you have heard a beginning of the horrific history of my lord and master, Pantagrue, and here I will make an end of this present book. For I have a slight headache, and I clearly see that the registers of my brain are somewhat confused by this new September wine. You will have the rest of the story at the very next Frankfort book-fair, when you will learn how Panurge was married; and cuckolded within a month of his wedding; how Pantagrue found the Philosopher's Stone . . . [here follows a list of what the reader can expect in ensuing volumes] together with a thousand other little jests, all of them true. 'Perdonate mi', and do not dwell so much on my faults as not to give good thought to your own.²

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 333.

2. Pantagrue, Book II, Chapter 34, English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1970), p. 277.

The analogy between the spirit of the carnival and the spirit of Tristram Shandy also explains other peculiarities of Sterne's author-persona. I have already suggested that true carnivalesque humour is all-engrossing - that a visitor to the carnival grounds becomes a participant insofar as he laughs while knowing he is being laughed at. The same holds true of course for the myriad hucksters, chapmen, and clowns in the carnival troupe. All these carnival folk are objects for, as well as perpetrators of, the humour. The pitch-man, for example, presents himself as a comic haranguer, yet he has his laugh on the spectator who allows himself to be taken in. The object for the laughter and the subject who laughs become, as it were, interchangeable. This spirit of reciprocal laughter was pinpointed succinctly by Fielding in the concluding line of his "Prologue" to The Author's Farce: "And kindly laugh at him, who laughs at you."

In Tristram Shandy, therefore, it is no surprise to find that the Tristram who comically goads and teases his reader also receives comic buffetings of his own. His animal spirits are dispersed at conception. His nose is crushed at birth. He gets wrongly christened. He receives an ignominious circumcision.

Like the fairground mountebank, Tristram draws attention to his plight so that others can laugh. Merriment

of this kind has no English word to define it, but the Germans call it "~~S~~hadenfreude" - a pleasure in the discomfort of others. We laugh perversely when Tristram calls himself "Sport of small accidents"¹ or when he notes wryly that Fortune has incessantly pelted him "with so many small evils."² Tristram's first complaint about his own predicament comes early in Volume I:

—I have been the continual sport of what the world calls fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil;—yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, that in every stage of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small HERO sustained.³

Tristram is both recipient and perpetrator of comic abuse. While Tristram laughingly challenges the reader to penetrate the meaning of his book, Fate challenges Tristram to penetrate the meaning of his accident-prone existence. Hence the question of pre-ordination, which I discussed in my second chapter, suits the carnival analogy as well as the amused philosophical scepticism of the novel.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 8, p. 179.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 29, p. 494.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 5, p. 40.

Fate makes merry with Tristram, and Tristram makes merry with his readers. But what of the more sombre members of the human race who can laugh at the expense of others, but not at jokes on themselves? It is precisely this type of humourless person (Sterne like Rabelais called him an "agelast") whose vengeance drove Parson Yorick, the practical joker of Tristram's story, to an early grave. Eugenius lectured Yorick upon discretion:

Trust me, dear Yorick, this unwary pleasantry of thine will sooner or later bring thee into scrapes and difficulties, which no after-wit can extricate thee out of.—In these sallies, too oft, I see, it happens, that a person laughed at, considers himself in the light of a person injured, with all the rights of such a situation belonging to him.¹

Ill-spirited gravity, whether it be that of the philosophers or simply that of an agelast, is as much an enemy of Shandeism as it is of the whole spirit of festive humour. If we can't enjoy jokes on ourselves we should not go to the carnival - nor to Tristram Shandy. Indeed, to read Tristram Shandy without being a willing accomplice in the narrator's give-and-take tomfoolery is to miss the point.

Oliver Goldsmith read Sterne's first two volumes in precisely this anti-festive mood, and his ill-tempered sarcasm shows how he missed the point:

As in common conversation, the best way to make the audience laugh, is first by laughing

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 12, p. 57.

at yourself; so in writing, the properest manner is to shew an attempt at humour, which will pass upon most for humour in reality. To effect this, readers must be treated with the most perfect familiarity: in one page the author is to make them a low bow, and in the next to pull them by the nose: he must talk in riddles, and then send them to bed in order to dream for a solution. He must speak of himself and his chapters, and his manner, and what he would be at, and his own importance, and his mother's importance with the most un pitying prolixity, now and then testifying his contempt for all but himself, smiling without a jest, and without possessing vivacity.¹

Objecting to the undue intimacy and comic deception of Sterne's narrator, Goldsmith seems to have aimed at avoiding such 'faults' in his own fiction. But in the last analysis the organized, self-satisfied, and plodding Dr. Primrose, Vicar of Wakefield, is somewhat less human and considerably less vivacious (Goldsmith's remark notwithstanding) than the crack-brained Tristram.

The intimacy and deception which raised Goldsmith's ire are necessary attributes of a narrator who delivers fair-ground repartee. Likewise, as Shaftesbury had noted, the memoir form, as such, was prone to intimacy and liable to deception. Yet deceptive intimacy - literary deceptive intimacy - on the scale of Tristram's occurred more frequently in stage farces and burlesques than in memoirs. It was the deceptive intimacy in a purported memoir that angered Goldsmith. And, clearly, Goldsmith was right in pointing to

1. The Citizen of the World, Nbr. 53, June 30, 1760.

Tristram's deceptive intimacy, however much we may differ from Goldsmith in his evaluation of Sterne's techniques.

The laughter which Sterne's narrator both evinces and evokes has no practical aims of redressing, abolishing, or reforming injustices, as had most satirical works of the eighteenth century. Although church solemnity and philosophical gravity are turned on their heads, Sterne's humour is, as he claimed, "general" and not directed toward individuals.¹ Rabelais, Sterne, and a whole tradition of folk-humour paid tribute to the theory that by laughing at man-made follies and at ourselves we purge our pretensions:

You are well aware, most illustrious Prince, how many great personages have been, and daily are pressing me for a continuation of the Pantagrueline fictions. They tell me that many dispirited, sick, and otherwise moping and sadly persons have escaped from their troubles for a cheerful hour or two, regained their spirits and taken fresh consolation by reading them; that my sole aim and purpose in writing them down was to give such little relief as I could to the sick and unhappy, in my absence, as I gladly do when with them in their moments of need, and when my art and services are requested.²

Sterne pursues the same topic:

If 'tis [Tristram Shandy] wrote against any thing,—'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen; in order, by a more frequent and a more convulsive elevation and depression

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1. To Robert Dodsley, October, 1759, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 81.
 2. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book IV, "Introductory Letter", English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1970), p. 435.

of the diaphragm, and the succussions of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the 'gall' and other 'bitter juices' from the gall-bladder, liver, and sweet-bread of his majesty's subjects, with all the inimicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenum.¹

It is characteristic of Sterne that even on the subject of Shandean humour he writes humourously. Despite Sterne's ludicrous account, however, there clearly is a sense in which festive humour, like Sterne's and Rabelais', does dispel melancholy.² If we can laugh at ourselves, melancholy (for the moment at least) must disappear.

The ability to laugh at oneself had been questioned by Hobbes, who saw one man's laughter as a victory over another person.³ But eighteenth-century theorists gradually returned to the older folk-humour theory and added to it an

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 22, p. 299.

2. Recognition of the allopathic value of laughter is probably as old as mankind itself. It may have been mentioned by Aristotle in his discussion of comedy; see W. K. Wimsatt and C. Brooks, Literary Criticism, Volume I, (London, 1970), pp. 46-47. Robert Burton, from whom Sterne borrowed on more than one occasion, recognized the regenerative power of laughter. Addison repeated the cliché that "Laughter is indeed a very good counterpoise to the spleen." Spectator, Nbr. 249. Henry Fielding in Joseph Andrews, "Author's Preface", remarked that mirth and laughter "are probably more wholesome physics for the mind, and conduce better to purge away spleen, melancholy, and ill affections, than is generally imagined."

3. On Human Nature, (1650), Chapter IX.

air of gentility. Addison, for example, considered Hobbes' view, but then cautiously offered an opposing position:

I am afraid I shall appear too abstracted in my speculations, if I show that when a man of wit makes us laugh, it is by betraying some oddness or infirmity in his own character, or in the representation which he makes of others . . . ¹

In the same paper Addison continued:

The truth of it is, a man is not qualified for a 'butt' [i.e., 'butt' of a joke], who has not a good deal of wit and vivacity, even in the ridiculous side of his character. A stupid 'butt' is only fit for the conversation of ordinary people; men of wit require one that will give them play, and bestir himself in the absurd part of his behaviour. A 'butt' with these accomplishments frequently gets the laugh on his side, and turns the ridicule upon him that attacks him. Sir John Falstaff was an hero of this species, and gives a good description of himself in his capacity of a 'butt', after the following manner: "Men of all sorts," says that merry knight, "take a pride to gird at me. The brain of man is not able to invent anything that tends to laughter more than I invent, or is invented on me. I am not only witty in myself, but the cause of that wit is in other men."²

Finding acerbic ridicule 'unsocial', theorists of the Enlightenment began (in principle at least) to value the reciprocity of laughter. Francis Hutcheson saw wholesome laughter as an "easy and agreeable state", "very contagious",

1. The Spectator, Nbr. 47, April 24, 1711.

2. Ibid.

capable of "spreading pleasantry": in short, a bond of "common friendship".¹

Fielding's moral paragon, Amelia, believed that the light-hearted and imaginative person tends also to have unselfish feelings for others:

I have known several who, in some parts of their characters, have been extremely ridiculous, in others have been altogether as amiable. For instance . . . here is the major who tells us of many things which he has never seen, and of others which he hath never done, and both in the most extravagant excess; and yet how amiable is his behaviour to his poor sister, whom he hath not only brought over hither for her health, at his own expense, but is come to bear her company.²

Sterne's recourse to festive humour was, therefore, not totally out of keeping with an eighteenth-century theory that valued the social and communicative powers of wit and imagination. Through 'wit' as through his imaginative faculties, man could communicate, even though, as we saw in my second chapter, Sterne dramatizes the fact that solemn philosophy precludes the possibility of ever knowing with certainty what another person means.

All that has been said thus far in this chapter can best be summarized with a passage from Tristram Shandy.

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1. Reflections upon Laughter, (1725), Essay III, reprinted in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy, ed. S. McMillin, (Norton paperback, 1973), pp. 381-385.
 2. Amelia, Book III, Chapter 8.

"The Author's Preface", inserted in the middle of Volume III, contains many characteristic features of extended, undeviating Rabelaisianism. In this "Preface" Tristram's imagination runs wild at the thought that all mankind might be granted miraculous insight into the nature of wit and judgment, i.e., that all men might hold identical ideas as to what wit and judgment really are.

The entire "Preface" is Rabelaisian, but the excerpt quoted below is especially crammed with Rabelais' devices: the glorification of spontaneity, the image of the world turned upside-down, grotesque verbal and physical abuse, the comic degradation of officialdom, the mockery of gravity - all of which are delivered in an haranguing fashion analogous to that of the fairground huckster. Reality is travestied in Tristram's phantasmagoria in the same way it is travestied at the carnival ground.

Your reverences and worships [will] now find out, nor is it a moment longer in my power to conceal it from you, That the fervent wish in your behalf with which I set out, was no more than the first insinuating 'How d'ye' of a caressing prefacer stifling his reader, as a lover sometimes does a coy mistress, into silence. For alas! could this effusion of light have been as easily procured, as the exordium wished it—I tremble to think how many thousands for it, of benighted travellers (in the learned sciences at least) must have groped and blundered on in the dark, all the nights of their lives,—running their heads against posts, and knocking out their brains without ever getting to their journies' end;—some falling with their noses perpendicularly into sinks,—others horizontally with their tails into kennels. Here one half of

a learned profession tilting full butt against the other half of it, and then tumbling and rolling one over the other in the dirt like hogs.—Here the brethern of another profession, who should have run in opposition to each other, flying on contrary like a flock of wild geese, all in a row the same way.—What confusion!—what mistakes!—fiddlers and painters judging by their eyes and ears,—admirable!—trusting to the passions excited in an air sung, or a story painted to the heart,—instead of measuring them by a quadrant.

In the foreground of this picture, a 'statesman' turning the political wheel, like a brute, the wrong way round—'against' the stream of corruption,—by heaven!—instead of 'with' it.

In this corner, a son of the divine Esculapius, writing a book against predestination; perhaps worse,—feeling his patient's pulse, instead of his apothecary's—a brother of the faculty in the background upon his knees in tears,—drawing the curtains of a mangled victim to beg his forgiveness;—offering a fee,—instead of taking one.¹

This imaginative picture of a topsy-turvy world runs on for two more paragraphs before Tristram gradually comes down to earth. In fact the whole ingenious "Preface" consists in talking about "wit and judgment" alternatively in a witty and then a judicial manner, and of course the overall effect is witty. As always in Tristram Shandy there are many things going on at once, but the spirit behind all the activity is Rabelaisian, festive, and aimed at communicating through wit.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 20, pp. 206-207.

3. Philosophy as Folly, Folly as Philosophy

In the remainder of this chapter, I wish to show (1.) how Sterne synthesized philosophical themes and festive spirit, (2.) how he expanded his narrator-device to make Tristram into more than simply a Rabelaisian Fool, and finally (3.) how the festive spirit and the 'fool narrator', when taken together, constitute an attack on philosophy - an attack on an age of reason.

It is tempting to describe the episode of Phutatorius's chestnut, or "The Slawkenbergius Tale", or "The Fragment upon Whiskers" simply as examples of Rabelaisian festive humour. Clearly, all three tales follow Rabelais in being absurdly unnaturalistic, in making merry with the human body, in stressing sexual organs, and in mocking officialdom. But merely classifying these Schwenken as "Rabelaisian" overlooks Sterne's subtlety. The tales are indeed in the Rabelaisian spirit, but Sterne ingeniously fashioned them as hyperbolic presentations of the philosophic problems that permeate the entire novel: the relation between the corporeal and the incorporeal, the dilemma over knowledge of other minds, the ambiguity of language, and the uncertain association of ideas.

The Phutatorius incident takes place within the five chapters devoted to Sterne's low-burlesque of church

hierarchy at York.¹ In true festive fashion Sterne humbles authority of all sorts. Some of the dignitaries have Rabelaisian names (Homenas, Gastripheres, Agelastes, Triptolemus); others are given high-sounding but basely-connotative names (Dr. Kysarcus, Didius, Phutatorius). The grave and haughty Phutatorius is made to suffer the dual embarrassment of a private burn and a public swear. The written word is degraded by lighting pipes with the shreds of Yorick's sermon, and by the suggestion that a page from Phutatorius' scholarly book be employed to assuage the pain in his cod-piece. The ritual wording of the Baptisimal ceremony and the logic of the law regarding next of kin undergo festive ridicule. At the height of the mummery, the debate concludes by reducing to absurdity and obscenity the implications of the question, "Whether the mother be of kin to her child."²

All the while, however, this same Rabelaisian episode deals quizzically with philosophy. Chapter 26 illustrates the Shandean belief in an intuitive meeting of minds as a means of circumventing the epistemic impasse. In that chapter Yorick judges against his intellectually "tinseled" sermon, preferring instead the truth of an imaginative

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapters 25-29.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 29, p. 324.

"five words point blank to the heart."¹ The following chapter reveals Tristram's ideas as being associated from effect to cause. He recounts first the oath "Zounds", next the material cause (the hot chestnut), and finally the immaterial cause (the "sallies" of Phutatorius' "imagination" in presuming that he might have been bitten rather than burned).²

Phutatorius' cry "Zounds!" produces a wide range of incorrect inferences in the minds of those present, thereby illustrating the ambiguity of words and the difficulty of knowing what another person has in mind. The same point is underlined when Phutatorius misjudges Yorick's act of retrieving the fallen chestnut:

He considered this act of Yorick's in getting off his chair and picking up the chestnut, as a plain acknowledgment in him, that the chestnut was originally his . . . ³

The misunderstanding functions symmetrically. The entire group had misjudged Phutatorius' cry, and now Phutatorius himself misjudges a member of the group, Yorick, believing him to have perpetrated the prank. In fact the event was an accident - or was it? Sterne's author-persona devotes a comic paragraph to the possibility of Providential

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 26, pp. 314-315.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, pp. 315-321.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, p. 320.

intervention in this 'accident' of Phutatorius', thus burlesquing again the philosophical problem of free will/determinism.¹

Sterne's treatment of "Slawkenbergius's Tale" makes similar use of Rabelaisian devices while simultaneously developing an amusing philosophical perplexity. The sequence begins in advance of the tale itself.

With a view towards preparing the reader, Sterne concludes his preceding volume with chapters dwelling on the subject of noses. In a sense "noses" are the connecting idea between Chapters 30 and 40 of Volume III and the "Slawkenbergius' Tale" at the beginning of Volume IV.

In those earlier chapters Tristram relates his great-grandmother's interest in noses,² his father's interest in noses,³ and his father's dismay at Tristram's crushed nose.⁴ As 'author', however, Tristram disclaims responsibility for any sexual denotation that might be read into his employment of the word "nose":

Now before I venture to make use of the word 'Nose' a second time,—to avoid all confusion in what will be said upon it, in this interesting

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 27, pp. 317-318.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 31, p. 224, Chapter 32-33, pp. 226-228.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapters 30-34.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 30, pp. 223-224.

part of my story, it may not be amiss to explain my own meaning, and define, with all possible exactness and precision, what I would willingly be understood to mean by the term . . . ¹

But Tristram then digresses somewhat and writes of "two senses" of words, like "two roads . . . a dirty and a clean one."² Sterne is, as we have seen before, amused by the meta-language of sex. Tristram continues:

I define a nose as follows—entreating only beforehand, and beseeching my readers, both male and female, of what age, complexion, and condition soever, for the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my own definition.—For by the word 'Nose', throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word 'Nose' occurs,—I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less.³

Sterne uses the festive device of the 'nose' to bring to the forefront the epistemological question, "How can anyone know what is in the mind of another?" What does Tristram really have in mind when he uses the word "nose"? What should the reader take him to mean? An author has every right to define a word prior to using it, but he must justify his definition thereafter by using the word only in the sense he has defined it. But the wink of the eye, the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 31, p. 224.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 31, p. 225.

3. Ibid.

tongue-in-cheek, is implicit in Tristram's definition. Can Tristram's statement, equivocal in itself, assure the reader that by a "nose" he means only the facial nose? Clearly, Tristram does not expect his reader to interpret "nose" in this unequivocal way, for shortly thereafter he writes:

——Fair and softly, gentle reader!——Where is thy fancy carrying thee?—If there is truth in man, by my great-grandfather's nose, I mean the external organ of smelling, or that part of man which stands prominent in his face,—and which painters say, in jolly good noses and well-proportioned faces, should comprehend a full third,—that is, measuring downwards from the setting on of the hair.—

—What a life of it has an author, at this pass!¹

Despite Tristram's abjurement of the ambivalence of the word "nose", as he uses it, one thing is certain: if the reader were always to interpret "nose" as "the external organ of smelling" the humour of "Slawkenbergius's Tale" and other parts of the novel would promptly vanish.

By giving a Pinocchion nose to a character as a physical characteristic, Sterne plays not only with the denotation and connotation of words, but also with the supposed dichotomy between words and things. In "Slawkenbergius's Tale" the nose is more than a word. It is a thing. It exists as the nose of the long-nosed folk-hero. Some people actually see the great nose. Yet despite the physical presence of the thing denoted by the word "nose", the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 33, p. 228.

characters in the tale seem equally divided over what the word "nose" means. Sense-perceptions, Sterne indicates, can be distorted by the predisposition of one's imagination.

This tale does not conclude the punning with noses. Three volumes later the dual meaning of the word comes to light in a situation that links the two meanings. Dr. Slop, it will be recalled, had crushed Tristram's nose at birth. Later, Susannah had been responsible for the circumcision or mutilation. During a struggle to affix a cataplasm on Tristram's injured part, the following dialogue ensues:

—you impudent whore! cried Slop, getting upright, with the cataplasm in his hand;—I never was the destruction of any body's nose, said Susannah,—which is more than you can say:—Is it? cried Slop . . . ¹

In "Slawkenbergius's Tale" Sterne was reiterating his amusement with basic epistemic and linguistic puzzles as well as making merry with the human body in true Rabelaisian fashion. The same dual purpose can be traced in the "Fragment upon Whiskers". Before commencing with this fragment, Tristram observes:

As surely as noses are noses . . . whiskers are whiskers.²

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 3, p. 400.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, p. 340.

But the word "whiskers" turns out to be equally equivocal. The "Fragment" leads the reader to believe that a tone of voice or an accompanying facial expression suffices to make a word equivocal:

The truth was, La Fosseuse had pronounced the word [whiskers], not only before the queen, but upon sundry other occasions at court, with an accent which always implied something of a mystery—¹

* * *

There are some trains of certain ideas which leave prints of themselves about our eyes and eye-brows; and there is a consciousness of it, somewhere about the heart, which serves but to make these etchings the stronger—we see, spell, and put them together without a dictionary.²

The characters in the "Fragment" have different meanings for the word "whiskers" just as the characters in "Slawkenbergius's Tale" each understand "nose" differently. Consequently, the original "wound" which La Fosseuse inflicted upon the word "whiskers" caused that word to become "indecent, and (after a few efforts) absolutely unfit for use."³ The same oblivion awaits all words which have what we today would call "Freudian connotations":

Does not all the world know, said the curate d'Estella at the conclusion of his work, that Noses ran the same fate some centuries ago in most parts of Europe, which Whiskers have now

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, p. 341.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, p. 343.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, p. 344.

done in the kingdom of Navarre?—The evil indeed spread no farther then,—but have not beds and bolsters, and nightcaps and chamber-pots stood upon the brink of destruction ever since? Are not trouse, and placket-holes, and pump-handles—and spigots and faucets, in danger still, from the same association?—Chastity, by nature, the gentlest of all affections—give it but its head—'tis like a ramping and a roaring lion.¹

Even when we are apparently communicating successfully, the "dangers of accessory ideas"² preclude exact communication. The immediate consequence of the fact that one person cannot infer with certainty what is in the mind of a second person (from the words of that second person) is that the equivocal words drop from use. The ultimate consequence of the inaccessibility of other minds is that ordinary meaning and sexual meaning become inseparable, and all words mature towards ambiguity. The meta-language of sex encroaches continually upon ordinary language, and in Sterne's festive inversion it is the "chaste" not the dissolute who are most susceptible to innuendo.

Sterne continually satirized the philosophers' quest for perfect definition, for perfect reference of a word with a thing, and for perfect communication of meaning. He did so by noting that the meaning of a word changes over periods of time, by showing that any given word may have a

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 1, p. 344.

2. Ibid.

rich variety of meanings, by exploring the subjectivity of interpretation, and by suggesting that the situational context in which a word is used may colour its meaning. Subtle inflexions of speech, seemingly insignificant gestures, pregnant pauses: all convey meaning, but they do so imaginatively, rather than rationally as a philosopher would desire. In Tristram Shandy Sterne drives home the linguistic points, festively, by employing a mountebank-narrator whose mock-dialogue with the reader is beset with rational incertitude, though communication takes place through imagination and wit.

The interpolated tale of "The Abbess of Andoüilletts" takes its title and spirit from Rabelais, but lends itself also to Sterne's philosophical satire. In France there are "two certain words" which will:

force any horse, or ass, or mule to go up a hill
whether he will or no.¹

They are "words sinful": bouger and foutre. But when used to encourage an animal, and moreover when split into syllables spoken by different people, the words can hardly be meant to carry sexual overtones. Or can they? How can one be sure what the Abbess and the Novice really have in mind?

All sins whatever, quoth the abbess, turning casuist in the distress they were under, are held by the confessor of our convent to be either mortal or venial: there is no further

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 24, p. 485.

division. Now a venial sin being the slightest and least of all sins,—being halved—by taking, either only the half of it, and leaving the rest—or, by taking it all, and amicably halving it betwixt yourself and another person—in course becomes diluted into no sin at all.

Now I see no sin in saying, 'bou, bou, bou, bou, bou,' a hundred times together; nor is there any turpitude in pronouncing the syllable 'ger, ger, ger, ger, ger,' were it from our matins to our vespers: Therefore, my dear daughter, continued the abbess of Andoüilletts—I will say 'bou', and thou shalt say 'ger'; and then alternately, as there is no more sin in 'fou' than in 'bou'—Thou shalt say 'fou'—¹

Tristram's persistent manner of speaking about the immaterial as if it were material leads to the seeking for the realation between 'meaning' on the one hand, and the word which stands for the meaning on the other. The same peculiarity is manifest in the words of the Abbess when she speaks of sin (immaterial) as if it could be halved and diluted, like a material object. The Abbess' comic attempt to disavow the meaning of a word by mutilating it recalls Walter's earlier attempt to do just the opposite by the same means. Walter had wielded his knife in an effort to scratch meaning into a word from the pen of Erasmus.

Occasionally, Sterne tries almost too hard to force Rabelaisian humour from situations of verbal misunderstanding. The ass, that traditional symbol of festive humour, appears here and there in Tristram Shandy, but nowhere is the ass more overworked than in Volume VIII,

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 25, p. 486.

where the word "ass" is employed to mean several things other than a donkey.

An overly close consideration of the ass-sequence tends to destroy the spontaneity of Sterne's humour. Nevertheless, the ass-sequence merits consideration as an example, first of Sterne's tactical cunning, and secondly of his assiduity in adopting the festive ass to a scene of typical Shandean fumbling and incertitude.

The ass-sequence begins in Chapters 26, 27, and 31 of Volume VIII. There the groundwork is laid for a joke that is sprung in Chapter 32. Sterne contrived his twenty-sixth chapter to inform the reader that Uncle Toby, while riding in a wood near his house, developed a blister:

the first shootings of which (as my uncle Toby had no experience of love) he had taken for a part of the passion—till the blister breaking in one case—and the other remaining—my uncle Toby was presently convinced, that his wound was not a skin-deep wound—but that it had gone to his heart.¹

As we have seen repeatedly, such peculiar hints that mental states may be identical with bodily conditions are common throughout Tristram Shandy. With "love" of course Sterne is considering one of the most complex corporeal-yet-incorporeal concepts of man. Humorously, Sterne twists the cliché, "Love is only skin-deep", to ask

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 26, p. 554.

whether a penetration of the skin (corporeal) can lead to the heart. And 'heart' can be taken either corporeally or incorporeally. The reader may smile, also, at the contiguity between the place of the blister and the seat of Toby's love-making potential - a sexual potential which the Widow Wadman later questions. But this particular passage serves, moreover, as a capsule summary to foreshadow the contrived joke that is to follow in Chapter 32.

A further build-up for the joke comes in Chapter 31. There we learn that Walter's private word for the body or for bodily passion is "ass". The groundwork has now been laid for the quizzical scene of misunderstanding in Chapter 32:

Well! dear brother Toby, said my father upon his first seeing him after he fell in love—and how goes it with your ASS?

Now my uncle Toby thinking more of the 'part' where he had had the blister, than of Hilarion's metaphor—and our preconceptions having (you know) as great a power over the sounds of words as the shapes of things, he had imagined, that my father, who was not very ceremonious in his choice of words, had enquired after the part by its proper name; so notwithstanding my mother, doctor Slop, and Mr Yorick, were sitting in the parlour, he thought it rather civil to conform to the term my father had made use of than not. When a man is hemmed in by two indecorums, and must commit one of 'em—I always observe—let him choose which he will, the world will blame him—so I should not be astonished if it blames my uncle Toby.

My A--e, quoth my uncle Toby, is much better—brother Shandy—My father had formed great expectations from his Ass in this onset; and would have brought him on again; but doctor Slop setting up an intemperate laugh—and my mother crying out L--bless us!—it drove my

father's Ass off the field—and the laugh then becoming general—there was no bringing him back again to the charge, for some time—

And so the discourse went on without him.

Every body, said my mother, says you are in love, brother Toby—and we hope it is true.

I am as much in love, sister, I believe, replied my uncle, as any man usually is—Humph! said my father—and when did you know it? quoth my mother—

—When the blister broke; replied my uncle Toby.¹

This final remark of Toby's becomes the punch-line for Sterne's carefully contrived joke that has spanned four chapters. The punch-line brings the reader up sharply and thrusts his mind back to the previous account of the 'horse-riding' blister in order to make an idea-association that will explain the meaning of the idea-associations of the characters. Hence, Sterne draws the reader, festively, into questions of the corporeal and incorporeal, the knowledge of other minds, the insufficiency of language, and the association of ideas.

Since this scene consolidates the festive spirit, the epistemic bemusement, and the reader-involvement, it deserves further analysis. In précis, here are the events as Tristram relates them: First, Toby took Walter's "ass" to mean "arse", though the choice of meanings crossed his mind. Toby's response ("My A--e is much better") indicates that he chose the wrong reference for what Walter meant by his word "Ass". Toby's answer raises a laugh from Dr. Slop.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 32, pp. 558-559.

Then Mrs. Shandy (not knowing Toby had originally seen two possible references for "Ass") speaks about "love" in an effort to lead Toby back to the right topic, to save Toby from embarrassment, and to bring propriety to the conversation.

Toby's reply ("I am as much in love . . . as any man usually is") indicates to the others that he has now grasped the topic under discussion and aligned his thought-associations accordingly. But when asked, "When did you know it?" Toby's response ("When the blister broke") baffles the characters and the reader, too, for a moment, since it sounds as though (1.) Toby still hasn't inferred the actual subject of the conversation, or (2.) Toby is joking.

Either of these explanations leaves the reader puzzled, but if we recall that six chapters earlier¹ Tristram had noted Toby's idea-connexion between his blister and love (the connecting idea is 'arse') then we see that Toby's answer is literally true. Thus Sterne fashioned a punch-line that sounds ridiculous, but, coming from Toby, is blandly apropos.

Sterne's punch-line, i.e., Toby's naïve connexion of the corporeal and the incorporeal sides of love, is further developed in the next chapter. There is, as Yorick says:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 26, p. 554.

a great deal of reason and plain sense in Captain Shandy's opinion of love.¹

Although of course the connexion between Toby's blister and his 'warm feeling' for the Widow Wadman is farcical, love is a state in which the physical and the spiritual are not to be separated. Love needn't be either totally Platonic or totally physical, in the way that Walter, the pseudo-philosopher, poses the either/or choice. But love does depend upon confidence and communication between both parties. It is the Widow Wadman's scepticism about Toby's potency that ultimately offends Toby's modesty and destroys any real love that might have been fostered at the supra-rational level of empathy. Like Fielding in Tom Jones, Sterne dealt with love comically, yet made serious points all the while. As I showed in my second chapter, Sterne was investigating the manifold meanings of love through the last four volumes of Shandy.²

Although there are many resemblances between Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy, it would be wrong to press the parallels too rigorously. Clearly, there are many differences, some of which are too obvious to require mentioning. But there are differences that bear mention because they further our understanding of Tristram Shandy.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 33, p. 560.

2. Chapter II, Part 2, Section iii.

In the first place the Shandean characters are small heroes, not Rabelaisian giants. Toby, Walter, and Trim are firmly placed within the English social structure of the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Although some characters are purely rhetorical (e.g., Didius, Phutatorius) in the Rabelaisian fashion, the contemporary swing away from exaggerated romance and toward naturalistic verisimilitude - away from the impossible and toward the possible, if not always the probable - in novel-writing prohibited the indiscriminate use of giants and fantastic metamorphoses. Sterne's answer was to substitute comic fumbling for Rabelaisian extravagance.

I deny I have gone as far as Swift—He keeps a due distance from Rabelais—and I keep a due distance from him.¹

These words of Sterne, addressed to his publisher, probably referred to the absence in Tristram Shandy of the monsters that inhabited Gulliver's Travels and Gargantua and Pantagruel. While the rationale behind Sterne's humour resembles that behind Rabelais', Sterne had to generate laughter through characters who, despite their eccentricities, were rendered believable as human beings.

In Tristram Shandy Sterne made little use of the customary organizational format for prose fiction. Abandoning

1. Summer, 1759. To Robt. Dodsley, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L. P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 76.

the linear chronography that most authors, including Rabelais, had traditionally followed, Sterne treated the usual narrative scheme with disdain. Shandean events seldom follow one another in chronological order.¹ At one point in Tristram Shandy there is a jest about the type of memory that functions by rote, i.e., in chronological order. Trim has just this type of memory. He must rehearse the first four commandments before he can recollect the fifth.² Unlike Trim, however, Tristram can recall some things at will, while other memories spring to his mind spontaneously, in chronological disarray.

Sterne's psychological portrayal of Tristram seems realistic, for, given Sterne's premiss that every word on the page had come directly from Tristram's memory onto paper, the chronological jumble makes sense. In order to remember what happened, say, this afternoon it is not usually necessary to rehearse, like Trim, all the events of the morning as a preliminary. Commentators are correct, therefore, in calling Tristram Shandy realistic, and, insofar as Tristram is psychologically realistic, Sterne's book differs from Rabelais'.

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1. The second section of my fifth chapter considers Sterne's innovative rendering of time in the novel form.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 32, p. 384.

With the exception of Volume VII, Tristram's main concern lies in remembering and recording events long passed. Seen in this retrospective light, the characters seem to be deterministically fated. Their destinies are set. They are long dead, existing now only in Tristram's memory. Therefore, when Tristram writes about them they appear to be 'acted upon', and they do not carry forward the action with the voluntary gusto of Rabelais' characters. Tristram underlines this feeling of foreordination with occasional whimsical comments:

The Fates, who certainly all foreknew of these amours of widow Wadman and my uncle Toby, had, from the first creation of matter and motion (and with more courtesy than they usually do things of this kind) established such a chain of causes and effects hanging so fast to one another, that it was scarce possible for my uncle Toby to have dwelt in any other house in the world, or to have occupied any other garden in Christendom, but the very house and garden which joined and laid parallel to Mrs. Wadman's.¹

Yet there is a sense in which Tristram as 'author' and dirigent force - Tristram himself - does carry forward the action. His frequent interjections and direct address to the reader remind us that he is writing a novel now. His very act of writing 'now' (even though his remarks 'now' often record the events of long ago) gives an impetus to the book that no orderly transcribed recollection ever could.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 14, p. 527.

Another difference between Tristram Shandy and Gargantua and Pantagruel can be located in their differing treatment of philosophical themes. Sterne's exploitation of philosophical riddles and his amused concern over language are more deep-seated than Rabelais'. For instance, Gargantua and Pantagruel ridicules (as Praise of Folly had, too) the speculations of Duns Scotus and the absurdities of Hermeticism without, however, going to the root of the philosophical difficulties, as Sterne did by satirizing the problem of 'knowledge of other minds'.

Of course Rabelais' Epistemon, like Sterne's Walter Shandy, was interested in "prophecy by names".¹ But while language undoubtedly amused both authors, Rabelais pursued the theory of magical names less assiduously than Sterne. Rabelais leaves the implications undeveloped, whereas Sterne becomes engrossed in the relation of names to the objects they signify, to the word/thing and the corporeal/incorporeal dichotomies.

Sterne also refined Rabelais' prevailing image of the wine-drinker by substituting the hobby-horse as his extended symbol of the festive humour. The carnivalesque spirit of Tristram Shandy is the madness of pure imaginative obsession, rather than the pot-valiant efforescence of Gargantua and Pantagruel.

1. Gargantua and Pantagruel, Book IV, Chapter 37.

In the same vein, Sterne toned down Rabelais' notorious coarseness. Sterne's sophisticated innuendo and almost prurient double entendre are an eighteenth-century refinement of Rabelais' open scatology. Tristram pretends to leave the interpretation of puns to the imagination of the reader. If the reader finds sexual meaning, the sex is in the mind of the reader. If the reader attempts to infer (from Tristram's words) that the thoughts in Tristram's mind are sexual, the reader faces the very same epistemic uncertainty that persistently perplexes the characters within the novel.

Major differences between Gargantua and Pantagruel and Tristram Shandy are to be found, therefore, in the characterization, in the movement of the narrative, in the action, in the treatment of philosophical problems, and in the symbolism which accompanies the festive spirit.

Not to minimize these differences I have, however, suggested that both authors held similar views about the nature of a particular kind of humour. I have attempted to sketch a background for this humour, using illustrations from Gargantua and Pantagruel, as well as an analogy between the fairground festival and festive literature.

In the widest sense Sterne's tone (exhibited through Tristram's attitude toward his readers and his mock-interlocution with them) and many of his devices act to

create the comical flavor that Bakhtin has called "Rabelais' festive humour."¹ Both authors claim a therapeutically regenerative capacity for the laughter they invoke. Both use language to depict mime. Both deal in knock-about buffoonery and make merry with the human body. And finally, the carnivalesque inversion of formal and informal, of officialdom and mock-officialdom, of the important and the unimportant, is as essential to the festive background of Tristram Shandy as it is to Gargantua and Pantagruel.

Considering Tristram himself - rather than his festive background - we find that he, too, incarnates the festive spirit. A view of Sterne's novel which locates Shandean humour in the persiflage of the carnival goes a long way towards explaining (among other things) Sterne's central device of the comically unreliable narrator. By thinking of Tristram as a fairground mountebank - as an entertainer who combines ostensive frankness with real deception - we can better understand the rationale behind his incorrigible duplicity. Like the mountebank, Tristram displays himself as a subject for laughter, while simultaneously having a laugh at the expense of his audience. The ambiguity of purpose behind Tristram's words expresses itself in a technique that is at once alienative and

1. Rabelais and His World, English trans. H. Iswolsky, (M.I.T., 1968).

seductive. Sterne's reader, like the victim of the carnival con-man, knows he is being duped, yet acquiesces happily. Since Sterne's novel is constructed so that everything put onto paper has first filtered through Tristram's mind, a realization of the carnivalesque guise of the narrator serves to clarify the entire novel.

If Sterne had not imbued his narrator with a festive spirit - if Tristram had been unreliably deceptive, but not comically so - then epistemic and linguistic scepticism would have enshrouded the novel. Lacking the festive spirit, Tristram would still have puzzled his reader, but the effect could have been sinister. The inaccessability of other minds and the insufficiency of language would have indicated real despair. In fact, of course, there is no oppressive despair in the Shandean world: partly because Sterne allows for supra-rational, imaginative and intuitive rapport between men, and partly because the book is in a festive, rather than a depressing mood. What we can laugh at we fear the less.

Although I have argued that an analogy exists between the festive spirit of the carnival and the festive spirit of Tristram Shandy, I have attempted to make my statements about Shandean humour independent of the viability of the analogy. My analysis of the duplicity of Sterne's narrator, for instance, does not suffer simply because the

analogy with the mountebank may seem unconvincing. Naturally, one need not believe that Sterne worked from any analogical pattern. It is conceivable that Sterne took his cue from Rabelais, and Rabelais, perhaps, fashioned his writing to capture in literature the spirit of the fairground. Or, perhaps, Sterne simply had a natural understanding of the rationale behind festive humour.

The analogy, then, is hypothetical. Its value depends upon its usefulness in explaining certain otherwise-puzzling aspects of Sterne's novel. The pinpointing and exegesis of Tristram's festive spirit (and of all the festive spirit entails) serves its purpose by illuminating the tone in which Sterne treated deeper philosophical problems. It provides a guide, suggesting how the reader should take Tristram Shandy. But however valuable the analogy may be in these respects, it should not be pushed too far. On its own, an analogy between the festive spirit of Tristram Shandy and the festive spirit of the fairground gives too impressionistic a view of Sterne's novel. More importantly, the analogy fails to explain the many sides of Tristram's character.

Although there are numerous similarities between Gargantua and Pantagruel, and Tristram Shandy, Sterne was too syncretic an author to follow Rabelais blindly. Sterne also worked a rich vein of festive foolishness that Erasmus, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and even Fielding had worked before him.

Traditionally, fools and madmen were considered to be outside normal society - out of touch with, or heedless of, the external world. Like Don Quixote, they didn't perceive reality the way the ordinary person does; they imposed their own visionary organization upon the world, rather than extrapolating organizational patterns inductively from their observations of the external world. They were credited with an intuitive insight of the kind which makes Don Quixote whimsical, appealing, and, yes, even noble, despite the fact that his mind was unhinged.

Shakespeare called Fools "motley-minded",¹ and indeed the Fool's wit springs from those seemingly "mad" idea-associations which Locke and the Age of Reason were later to deplore. When Erasmus chose Folly as his voice, he, like Sterne, artfully made his persona appear to say "whatever was on the tip of the tongue", rather than what was carefully weighed and judged.² Tristram's symbolic rôle as Fool has, therefore, a distinct bearing on the lengthy wit/judgment debate in Volume III, Chapter 20. Whatever the appeal for proper proportioning between wit and judgment, Sterne's choice of a Fool-narrator loads Tristram Shandy in favour of wit.

1. As You Like It, Act V, Scene IV.

2. Praise of Folly, English trans. B. Radice, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 66.

Despite his seemingly disordered mind, his disregard of logic, and his lack of touch with accepted external norms, the Fool was considered to have an inner-force, a poetic inspiration towards wit.¹ The Fool was creative. He captivated an audience imaginatively rather than rationally, logically, or philosophically. Sterne, therefore, appropriately cast Tristram as a Fool - as a creative artist who can communicate supra-rationally in a world, as Sterne shows us, that is otherwise non-plussed by uncertainty.

"The wise man," Erasmus emphasized, "is a bore."² Sterne concurred, preaching that overly "studious" men with their heads in the "clouds" were often full of false vanity.³ In the same sermon Sterne cited St. Paul:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.⁴

This link between worldly wisdom and real foolishness was developed by writers of the festive spirit. Erasmus, Rabelais, and Sterne continually satirized the bearded and

1. "This fellow is wise enough to play the fool,/And to do that well craves a kind of wit." Twelfth Night, Act III, Scene I.
2. Praise of Folly, English trans. B. Radice, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 107.
3. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume IV, Sermon 26, "Advantages of Christianity to the World".
4. Romans, 1:22.

grave philosophers whom the world thought to be wise. The satire was more barbed, coming as it did from the antithesis of the philosopher: the Fool. Erasmus, Rabelais, and Sterne believed, with Shakespeare, that the Fool:

uses his folly like a stalking-horse and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit.¹

As we have already noted, festive humour inverts reality; the man whom society believes to be a fool becomes, in the festive spirit, wise. Hence, the simple-minded Sancho Panza, once he finally gets his 'island', governs so soundly that he leaves the actual governors:

unable to decide whether to write him down a wise man or a fool.²

The festive inversion works the other way as well: the man whom society believes to be wise becomes, in the festive spirit, the fool:

The fool doth think he is wise, but the wise man knows himself to be the fool.³

This paradox has connexions with the Socratic belief that the world we see is not the real world. It has literary connexions with the court-fool, as portrayed by Shakespeare. The Shakespearian Fool appears foolish, but

1. As You Like It, Act V, Scene IV.

2. Don Quixote, Part II, Chapter 45, English trans. J.M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1968), p. 758.

3. As You Like It, Act V, Scene 1.

is actually wiser than those who laugh at him. The paradox also answers the Renaissance question, "What can man know?" in a way ("only that I cannot know") that mocks the self-assurance of know-it-all philosophers. Moreover, in Sterne's day the paradox had obvious connexions with the eighteenth-century belief that moral health begins when real self-knowledge and spiritual openness defeat pretence, self-love, spleen, and cynicism.

In Tristram Shandy Sterne praises the Fool, for he is the one who can 'know'. He 'knows' not in the philosophical sense, but he makes himself known and he intuits the thoughts of others. The Fool communicates. Only the Fool is able to circumvent the epistemic impasse (the barrier to knowledge of other minds) and achieve rapport with others, and he does so through wit, imagination, and feeling. Parson Yorick and Toby, for instance, are 'foolish' insofar as they eschew worldly prudence and philosophy, but Yorick's capacity for wit and Toby's for affection make them wiser than the 'worldly wise'.

Yorick and Toby are clearly variations on the same Fool-motif as Tristram. Both Parson Yorick and Uncle Toby are, in different senses, 'wise fools'. Yorick has the ability to see truth intuitively. He also has the outspokenness of the court-fool but, alas, not the privilege of immunity from persecution that his ancestors at court had.

Always, Sterne writes of Yorick as a Cervantic figure. Like Don Quixote, Yorick travels through this life aiming to redress wrongs. Like Don Quixote, Yorick assumes, wrongly, that others have the same chivalric code as he. Like Don Quixote, Yorick never complains of his injuries at the hands of the Philistines. Like the Don, too, Yorick is loved by his friends and relatives - by those who really understand him and can see something noble in what the rest of the world calls foolish. When Yorick dies, as when Don Quixote dies, we feel the loss of a man of feeling and imagination, the loss of one whose heart was in the right place despite (or perhaps 'because of') his disregard of worldly conventions. Both characters are ultimately sad jesters, although Yorick, unlike the Don, never surrenders his imaginative vision of the way the world should be.

Toby, too, is a Cervantic figure. His books on projectiles and military architecture rival those that "Don Quixote was found to have on chivalry."¹ Toby's modesty, too, resembles the Don's, as does his highly-principled code of military honour. Like the Knight-errant, Toby places his lady upon a pedestal. Toby sees the Widow Wadman the same way Don Quixote sees his Dulcinea:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 3, p. 110.

in my imagination I draw her as I would have
her be . . . 1

But Toby's idealization of the Widow Wadman is as unrealistic as the Don's idealization of Dulcinea. Toby finds that his vision of Mrs. Wadman's "humanity" is misconceived, and he admits that he "never rightly understood the meaning" of the word "woman".²

The Peace of Utrecht stifled Toby's imaginative world on the bowling green as surely as the Priest and Bachelor Sampson (symbols of learning and rationality) stifled the Don's. And Sterne as well as Cervantes treats the smothering of such fancies with sadness - as a loss. For the most part, however, Toby, like the Don, lives in the world of his imagination. But when faced with pitiable cases such as Le Fever's, Toby can step into the real world to do good.

Toby is a Fool, partially, because like the protagonist of Henry Brooke's The Fool of Quality (c. 1760), he is imprudently charitable to those in need. Brooke compared his philanthropic 'Fool' with Don Quixote, and the comparison holds true for Uncle Toby, as well:

If events did not answer to the enterprizes of
his heart, it is not to be imputed to the man

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1. Don Quixote, Part I, Chapter 25, English trans. J. M. Cohen, (Penguin paperback, 1968), p. 210.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 3, p. 611; Volume II, Chapter 7, p. 122.

but to the malady; for, had his power and success been as extensive as his benevolence, all things awry, upon earth, would instantly have been set as straight as cedar.¹

Toby also resembles Fielding's 'Christian Fool', Parson Abraham Adams.² Both Adams and Toby naturally have a humble simplicity and sincerity. Both are charitable, but impractical: the combination of which makes them appear naïve, a little foolish, but somewhat saintly at the same time. Toby, like Adams, is a good and lovable character, one on whom we look kindly, despite the indignities he suffers for refusing to compromise his innate goodness and his principles of Latitudinarian Christian fortitude.

My uncle Toby was a man of patient injuries;—not from want of courage,—I have told you in the fifth chapter of this second book, 'That he was a man of courage':—And will add here, that when just occasions presented, or called it forth,—I know no man under whose arm I would sooner have taken shelter . . . he was of a peaceful, placid nature,—no jarring element in it,—all was mixed up so kindly within him.³

Both Fielding's and Sterne's 'Christian Fool' epitomize the virtues of physical and moral courage, charity, good nature, and that true benevolence which freely translates itself into action; both likewise connect vice with

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1. The Fool of Quality, Volume I, Chapter 4, (London, 1777), p. 144.
 2. Joseph Andrews, (1742).
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 12, pp. 130-131.

self-interest and lack of regard for others. By practising these virtues and eschewing the vices, eighteenth-century 'men of feeling' strove to become fully social beings and to create a benevolent and harmonious society. In the "Preface" to his Sermons Sterne wrote:

upon philanthropy, and those kindred virtues to
it . . . hang all the law and the prophets . . . ¹

Like the traditional Fool, Toby has no time for philosophy. When a syllogistic argument grows ridiculously abstract or when a philosophical impasse is reached, Toby answers it with a whistle. Reason can go only so far; we communicate, Sterne insists, through feeling and imagination.

Toby illustrates this point when he undertakes the education of Le Fever's son. Toby's educational "foundation" consists in teaching the lad to "inscribe a regular polygon in a circle."² This symbol, taken from Nicolas of Cusa's treatise On Learned Ignorance, depicts the unity of all Being as well as the limits of man's knowledge.³ Toby would translate 'unity of Being' into love of humanity, and 'the limits of knowledge' into a plea for humility in the face of what

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, (London, 1760), p. viii.
2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 12, p. 416.
3. De docta ignorantia; for commentary on Nicolas of Cusa see: E. Gilson, History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages, (New York, 1955), pp. 534-540; P. O. Kristeller, Renaissance Thought, I: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains, (Harper paperback, 1961), p. 58.

must always remain unknown to man. We are back again at the fundamental question of the Renaissance ("What can I know?") and the wise fool's answer ("I know only that I do not know"). So much for knowing with certainty, so much for knowing as the philosopher wants to know. Sterne gives us a world in which people do understand and 'know' one another. He delineates a world in which men communicate sympathetically and imaginatively, rather than rationally.

Drawing upon the festive devices of Rabelais and the characteristics of the traditional Fool, Sterne syncretized and advanced his characters in new directions. Hence, Rabelais' vicious, bawdy mountebank is tempered by Sterne into a whimsically creative artist. Influenced by Cervantes and Fielding, Sterne's mountebank becomes not only an imaginative performer, but also a man capable of inspiring others - a man who uses his wit not simply to evince and evoke laughter, but also to achieve sympathetic rapport with his audience. Moreover, by making others laugh, the 'fool writer' is actually doing society a service by returning man to his proper, truly human state of sociability.

Eighteenth-century writers had begun to distinguish wit from ridicule, and to view wit as a contribution to the mutual happiness of all men:

The great use and advantage of wit is to render the owner agreeable by making him instrumental to the happiness of others.¹

1. The Weekly Register, July 22, 1732. Anonymously written article, reprinted in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Comedy, ed. S. McMillin, (Norton paperback, 1973), p. 386.

Imagination and wit became social attributes with potential moral overtones as well, for they purged the vanity and self-concern of rationalistic scholars and philosophers:

Wit, that volatile meteor of the Imagination . . . in many cases becomes exceedingly serviceable, when all other means prove ineffectual: There are several tempers that had rather be laugh'd, than persuaded out of their vices; and would sooner be enamour'd with virtue, when cloath'd in the garb of Imagination, than that of Reason.¹

Sterne's eighteenth-century refinement of the witty mountebank has his heart in the right place and aims to perform for the good of society. Sterne's warm-hearted mountebank is involved in what Goldsmith called "the characteristic of the present age", viz., charity.² Sterne's pen, like Fielding's, turns the Fool into a kind of Christian Hero:

fram'd for mutual kindness, good will, and service.³

Tristram Shandy exalts the life-giving qualities of love, imagination, wit, laughter, good nature, and benevolence, over the deathly qualities of gravity, spleen,

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1. J. Jones, M.A., (Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford), A Sermon Preached at the Annual-Feast of the Gentlemen Educated at Tiverton School, Sept. 5, 1728, (London, 1728), p. 19.
 2. The Life of Richard Nash, Esq., (1762), Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. A. Friedman, (Oxford, 1966), Vol. II, p. 338.
 3. The Christian Hero, (1701), Tracts and Pamphlets by Richard Steele, ed. R. Blanchard, (New York, 1967), p. 55.

cynicism, and scepticism. The life-giving qualities enable man to communicate with his fellow man, to achieve rapport and social harmony; the deathly qualities drive man into himself. This is the message of Sterne's 'wise fool'. This is the particular message of Volume VII (Tristram's symbolic flight from death), a volume that is usually taken to be digressive, but which Sterne claimed was "the thing itself".¹ It is the message, too, of many of Sterne's sermons. For example:

'It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting'

That I deny—but let us hear the wise man's reasoning upon it—'for' that 'is the end of all men, and the living' will 'lay it to his heart: sorrow is better than' laughter—for a crack-brain'd order of Carthusian monks, I grant, but not for men of the world: For what purpose do you imagine, has God made us? for the social sweets of the well watered valleys where he has planted us, or for the dry and dismal deserts of a Sierra Morena?²

* * *

Let the torpid Monk seek heaven comfortless and alone—God speed him! For my own part, I fear, I should never find the way: let me be wise and religious—but let me be MAN: wherever thy Providence places me, or whatever be the road I take to get to thee—give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, How our shadows lengthen as the sun goes down;—to whom I may say, How fresh is the

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, title page, p. 457.
 2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, Sermon 2, "The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning, Described".

face of nature! How sweet the flowers of the field! How delicious are these fruits!¹

* * *

I pity the men whose natural pleasures are burthens, and who fly from joy, (as these splenetic and morose souls do) as if it was really an evil in itself.

If there is an evil in this world, 'tis sorrow and heaviness of heart.——The loss of goods,—of health,—of coronets and mitres, are only evil, as they occasion sorrow;—take that out—the rest is fancy and dwelleth only in the head of man.²

In Tristram Shandy Sterne's author-persona represents the voice of Folly. But like Erasmus' Praise of Folly, Sterne's "has not been altogether foolish."³ The mask of comedy may conceal truth.

Through his author-persona, Sterne reveals his notion of the life-giving and the death-dealing qualities inherent in man. Gravity, spleen, and proud philosophy are the enemies of the Shandean cosmos. The first two are based upon pomposity and self-interest - two human tendencies that Sterne repeatedly deplored.

Philosophy, Sterne indicates, is equally soul-destroying. Deductive philosophy spins useless metaphysical

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1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume III, Sermon 18, "The Levite and his Concubine".
 2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume IV, Sermon 22, "The History of Jacob, Considered".
 3. Praise of Folly, (1511), English trans. B. Radice, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 59.

webs, while Empiricism and the "New Science" continually generate new doubts. Moreover, "The mere refinements of philosophy," Sterne believed, administer "so 'little' solid comfort" to a man in distress.¹ The philosopher - the man who thinks he knows all the answers or demands to know all the answers, logically and with certitude - will find, eventually, that he knows only that he does not know: at which point the philosopher (if willing to surrender pomp and pretence) is converted to a 'wise fool'.

By elevating the Fool for his joy in living, his imagination, his communicative abilities, and his benevolence, Sterne mounted an attack on the Age of Reason, and helped to consolidate an Age of Sentiment.

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 15, "Job's Expostulation with his Wife".

CHAPTER IV

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

My overall aim in this study has been to get to the illusive core of Tristram Shandy by probing with the techniques of both a literary critic and a philosopher. I argued in my first chapter that Sterne's central structural device must be the starting point, since everything comes through Tristram's consciousness. Hence, the largely philosophical thematic material, discussed in my second chapter, is presented to us by Sterne's author-persona. But how are the themes otherwise related to the author-persona? I suggested an answer in my last chapter, namely, that the festive spirit behind Tristram mocks the solemnity of philosophy.

Each successive chapter of this paper has, therefore, further developed and clarified the character of Sterne's author-persona. I want to continue this process by illuminating yet another dimension of Sterne's central structural device.

One link between each of the three preceding chapters is Sterne's interest in man's imaginative powers. We saw at the outset that Sterne, like many of his fellow writers, explicitly demanded imaginative cooperation from his readers. We saw next that the incertitude of the Shandean world necessitates supra-rational, imaginative communication between men. Finally, in the previous chapter

I suggested (1.) that in order to appreciate the festive spirit of Tristram Shandy the reader himself must be imaginatively disposed towards the festive spirit, and (2.) that Sterne connects the imagination with other, crucial life-giving properties.

The present chapter, dealing as it does with the psychology of Sterne's author-persona, leads inevitably to yet another consideration of 'imagination': this time the creative imagination of an author. But I anticipate my conclusions.

1. The Consistency of Tristram's Remarks

It is possible to read Tristram Shandy for the sheer enjoyment, paying little attention to the consistency of Tristram's remarks. Part of the reader's enjoyment may even spring from finding himself at the mercy of a zany, wise-cracking, unreliable narrator. There is no doubt that Tristram Shandy can be read in this casual way, nor is there doubt that Sterne tried to seduce the reader into the fumbling Shandean incertitude. The reader may actually enjoy snickering at what he thinks is going on, without bothering to analyse what really is going on.

Clearly, however, it is uncritical to throw up our hands helplessly and say simply that Tristram's words must always be taken 'cum grano salis'. At the other extreme, though, it may seem overly critical to analyse Tristram's

remarks to determine when he is in earnest or when he is joking in any of his opinions, stories, or biographical details. This approach may seem out of keeping with the festive spirit that mocks such rationality. Yet a rigorous linguistic analysis of Tristram's statements - an analysis aimed at separating the possible from the impossible and the consistent from the inconsistent - proves valuable in revealing the psychology behind Sterne's author-persona.

As always when examining Tristram Shandy, it is best to begin by recalling the keystone position of the narrator. Every thought on the printed page has, supposedly, come first through Tristram's mind.

Picture Tristram seated in 'his' study, writing 'his' book. Sterne presents this Tristram first and foremost as the imaginative author, pen in hand, searching now for the next witty line. This is "Tristram-as-author", rather than Tristram as a participant in the events of his past. This is the nervous Tristram under current pressure, who writes that:

Not half an hour ago, when (in the great hurry and precipitation of a poor devil's writing for daily bread) I threw a fair sheet, which I had just finished, and carefully wrote out, slap into the fire, instead of the foul one.¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 17, p. 291.

Like Richardson's correspondents with their "lively 'present-tense' manner",¹ Sterne's Tristram often comments upon the present situation as he writes:

—that observation is my own;—and was struck out by me this very rainy day, March 26, 1759, and betwixt the hours of nine and ten in the morning.²

* * *

And here I am sitting, this 12th day of August, 1766, in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, without either wig or cap on . . .³

The "Tristram" I am attempting to pinpoint here - the Tristram who is always writing at the present moment - represents an aspect of Sterne's novel that is difficult to name. For convenience I shall call it the sense of Tristram writing "now". It is within his rôle of instantaneous author, writing "now", that Tristram conducts his frequent mock-dialogues with the reader. Aesthetically, Tristram and his reader are able to meet for these dialogues because Tristram is writing "now" and the reader is reading "now".

But aside from creating a sense of personal immediacy with the reader, Sterne's technique of depicting Tristram as writing "now" has a twofold result in the overall context of the novel. First, portions of Tristram Shandy are

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1. Clarissa, (Shakespeare Head ed., London, 1931), Lovelace to Belford, Volume V, Letter 31, p. 312.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 88.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 1, p. 572.

concerned with nothing more than Tristram's present search for (or choice of) his next word, sentence, or chapter.¹ Secondly, everything in Tristram Shandy, even the accounts of events that took place years earlier, is depicted as being put to paper by Tristram "now" - in the present.

Sterne's pretence, therefore, is that his author-persona is writing "now". Further analysis of Tristram's writing reveals that his remarks can be temporally subdivided:

1. As just indicated, some of Tristram's remarks concern the very words he is writing at the moment, or his present mental or physical state.
2. Some of Tristram's statements made "now" concern what he plans to write.
3. Most of Tristram's statements "now" recall past events which occurred, supposedly, long before Tristram began his book - indeed long before he was born.

Not all of Tristram Shandy neatly fits one or another of these categories. There is overlap. Yet singularly or in combination, all of Tristram's remarks can be subsumed within this threefold division. Moreover, such a division is a step towards the goal of understanding his unreliable statements, for the way in which a person can be mistaken about the past differs in some respects from the way

1. For example: "It shall be solved,--but not in the next chapter." Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 10, p. 127. "Is it not a shame to make two chapters of what passed in going down one pair of stairs?" Op. cit., Volume IV, Chapter 10, p. 282. See also Volume IX, Chapters 12-15.

he can be mistaken about the present, and both in turn differ from the way he could be mistaken about his future activities. For example, in recollecting and stating a past event, one way Tristram could go wrong is by his having forgotten certain details of the original event. In writing of his present sense-perceptions, Tristram could be reporting hallucinations. In telling his future plans, Tristram could be writing of aims and expectations which for some reason he never does fulfil.

Looking first at Tristram's remarks about the present and future, we can see immediately that they are predominantly concerned with his plans for the very novel he is writing. Tristram recounts his present ideas about his book and about the future of his book. Seldom does he record sense-perceptions of the room in which he writes. The reader, therefore, encounters Tristram's present thoughts, rather than his present sense-perceptions.

Within the sum-total of Tristram's comments about his present thoughts are a number of claims about the nature of his writing. By matching these claims against the actual content of Tristram Shandy it is possible to determine when Tristram has spoken reliably about the nature of his art. When, for instance, Tristram claims not to have confined himself "to any man's rules that ever lived"¹ and when he states that his method "is ever to point out the curious, different

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 38.

tracts of investigation",¹ Tristram writes reliably. Statements of this sort correspond to Tristram's actual performance in 'his' book. They are reliable because they agree with what the reader finds within Tristram Shandy.

But there is a difficulty. Although it seems right to argue that Tristram speaks consistently (and therefore reliably) whenever his statements correspond to what he actually does in the novel (i.e., corresponds to his written performance), it cannot be strictly held that Tristram speaks 'truthfully' if and only if his statement at any given time is verifiable by his actual performance as 'author' of 'his' book.

Several examples may clarify this point. Take the case of the mysterious Jenny. Early in the novel the reader is told that Jenny is not Tristram's "kept mistress", that she may or may not be Tristram's wife, and that it is an "utter impossibility for some volumes" that the reader could come to know Jenny's precise relation to Tristram.² Three

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 21, p. 89.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 18, p. 76. Sterne's biographers have repeatedly asserted that the fictional Jenny was the real-life Catherine Fourmantelle, a professional singer and friend of Sterne's. This is in keeping with the tendency to identify other Shandean characters with real people (e.g., Didius = Dr. Topham, Slop = Dr. Burton, Eugenius = Hall-Stevenson), but as M.R.B. Shaw pointed out: "Since Tristram Shandy was already in the hands of the publishers before Sterne's friendship with the young singer had had time to develop, this theory can only be accepted on the supposition that the references to Jenny were interpolated when the book was on the point

volumes later Tristram promises to reveal Jenny's identity:

in the next chapter but one, to my chapter
of Button-Holes,—and not one chapter before.¹

In Volume V, Tristram begs to be excused from his promise to write about button-holes, which by implication also excludes the section on Jenny's identity.² In the final volume Tristram reconsiders writing the button-hole chapter, only to postpone it once again.³ In fact neither of these chapters ever appears in Tristram Shandy.

Unfulfilled expectations of a similar nature (or "book-debts" as Tristram calls them) are raised elsewhere in the novel. In Volume I, Chapter 11, Tristram remarks upon his journey through Denmark in 1741, and promises to provide "a most delectable narrative" further on in his book.⁴ In Volume III, Chapter 10, Tristram announces that he will later

of being published. This, I grant, is not wholly impossible. But I think it more probable that Jenny had her place in the original manuscript; that she is, in fact, no real woman, but a Dulcinea of Sterne's imagination . . ."
Laurence Sterne: The Making of a Humorist, 1713-1762, (London, 1957), p. 195. Despite the sense of this observation, even Sterne's most recent biographer, D. Thomson, continues the traditional identification of Jenny with Catherine. Wild Excursions, (London, 1972), p. 164 ff.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 313.
2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 8, p. 358.
3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 14, p. 588.
4. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 11, p. 54.

relate "the catastrophe" of his "great uncle Mr. Hammond Shandy."¹ Neither the trip to Denmark nor Hammond's catastrophe ever appear in Tristram Shandy. Therefore, insofar as Tristram's statements are inconsistent with his performance they can be called "unreliable". Yet, Tristram is not necessarily 'lying', and this for two reasons.

First, the complexity of Sterne's narrator-device makes it impossible to hold Tristram guilty of lying in regard to his promises "now" about the future of his book, even when those promises turn out to be unfulfilled. Since everything on the printed page has first, supposedly, come through Tristram's mind, Tristram must be treated as if he were a real person. Clearly, of course, he is not an omniscient-author device. Because Sterne created a self-aware, but confused and changeable author-persona, it must be allowed that Tristram could have been sincere at the time he made his promises; but we must also allow that Tristram might later have changed his mind or, alternatively, forgotten his original promises.

There remains a second reason - a structural reason - for not being able to infer with certainty that Tristram intends to mislead when he seems to renege on his earlier promises. Since Tristram does not speak of Volume IX as the concluding volume of 'his' novel and since no closure

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 10, p. 180.

procedure is implicit, the reader is free to consider Tristram Shandy as an unfinished, open-ended work.¹ If this attitude is taken, then, once again, there can be no conclusive reason to doubt the 'sincerity' of Tristram's earlier promises to write of his trip through Denmark, to tell of Hammond's catastrophe, or to reveal Jenny's identity in some later volume. Although Sterne may have been encouraging his readers to expect things he never meant to provide, he has constructed a narrator who in these examples cannot be convicted of intentional deception, even though some of his promises go unfulfilled.

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1. The controversial question, "Did Sterne finish Tristram Shandy?" has a critical history of its own which I do not propose to enter into here. The text of the first nine volumes of Shandy presents no reason why Sterne could not have written a tenth volume or gone on indefinitely. Sterne's letters reveal that he planned a tenth volume: "At present I am in my peaceful retreat, writing the ninth volume of Tristram—I shall publish but one this year, and the next I shall begin a new work of four volumes, which when finish'd, I shall continue Tristram with fresh spirit." [to Edward Stanley, July 23, 1766, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L.P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 284] "I shall publish the 9th and 10th of Shandy next winter . . ." [to Thomas Becket, August 30, 1766, Op. cit., pp. 287-288] Six months later Sterne wrote, "I miscarried on my tenth Volume by the violence of a fever, I have just got thro'—I have however gone on to my reckoning with the ninth, of w^{ch} I am all this week in Labour pains." [to Wm. Coombe? January 7-9, 1767, Op. cit., pp. 293-294] Ten months thereafter Sterne spoke of Tristram Shandy in the past tense, so perhaps he may have abandoned his plans to carry on with future volumes: "—The world has imagined, because I wrote Tristram Shandy that . . ." [to the Earl of ---, November 28, 1767, Op. cit., pp. 402-403] Whatever Sterne's intentions (and he may of course have intended to write many more volumes, the last of which could have ended as inconclusively and been as inconclusively a final

To summarize: in the statements which Tristram makes "now" about the nature of 'his' book, a correspondence between what Tristram says about 'his' book and what actually happens verifies the consistency of his remarks. However, when Tristram writes that he intends to do something and then omits doing it, we cannot say with certainty that he is being "insincere" or "intentionally misleading"; we can only say that his promises are unreliable insofar as they are not fulfilled within the nine volumes of Tristram Shandy.

So much for fulfilled or unfulfilled promises, but what about Tristram's mis-fulfilled promises? The best example of such equivocation can be found in Toby's amour with Widow Wadman.

In Volume III Tristram first announces his intention to recount "the anecdotes of my uncle Toby's amours with widow Wadman."¹ In the next volume Tristram professes that when he comes to write of Uncle Toby's amours (the "choicest morsel of my whole story") he "shall not be at all nice" in

volume as Volume IX), I have in this chapter accepted the illusion of Tristram-as-author. Given this premiss, we must allow that the novel could be unfinished, for neither Tristram's remarks nor the overall construction of Tristram Shandy precludes the possibility of ensuing volumes.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 23, p. 215.

choosing his words.¹ The dilatory and promissory tactics continue in Volume VI. There the reader is assured that Toby's amour will be:

One of the most complete systems, both of the elementary and practical part of love and love-making, that ever was addressed to the world.²

In the last two volumes, however, when we finally do read of Toby's affair with Mrs. Wadman, we find that, contrary to Tristram's foreshadowing, the words are discretely chosen, and, more unexpectedly, the words describe an abortive rather than a "complete" love affair. Tristram is far from supplying the titillating and exhaustive study he promised.

Sterne, of course, probably had the anti-climax in mind all along. But for the moment let us continue to treat Tristram as if he were a real author, stating his purposes. What can be said of his misfulfilled promises?

Since the Wadman affair occurred years before Tristram set pen to paper, Tristram's knowledge of the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 333. The promise here and in the preceding volume shows that Sterne had planned to relate Toby's amours later in the novel. This textual evidence, therefore, stands opposed to R. Putney's claim that Sterne had an original plan to deal mainly with Tristram's life, but then widened this plan after "the middle of Volume VI" to include Toby's amour among other things. "Laurence Sterne, Apostle of Laughter", The Age of Johnson, (Yale, 1949), pp, 159-170.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 36, p. 448.

amorous affair (however he came by it) should have been nearly as clear when he wrote Volume III as when he wrote Volume IX. Nor does Tristram claim that his memory grew dimmer in the interval.

In his early promise to be not "at all nice" it would seem that Tristram was preparing the way for an anti-climax, a last laugh at the reader's expense. But can we say with certainty that Tristram's inconsistency is really an intentional deception of 'his' reader? No. Tristram makes a final caveat.

When in Volume IX Tristram finally decides to write about the amour, he suddenly remembers his earlier promise not to be "at all nice". Blaming his inability to convey through words what he has in mind, Tristram begs to be excused from his earlier promise to the reader:

Though I have all along been hastening towards this part of it, with so much earnest desire, as well knowing it to be the choicest morsel of what I had to offer to the world, yet now that I am got to it, any one is welcome to take my pen, and go on with the story for me that will—I see the difficulties of the descriptions I'm going to give—and feel my want of powers.¹

In this passage Sterne employs aposiopesis, a rhetorical figure wherein the speaker suddenly halts, as if unable or unwilling to proceed. Furthermore, Tristram's

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, p. 598.

plea of temporary creative impotency had often been tactically employed in prose fiction. Fielding's narrator in Tom Jones, for example, found this very same subject of love beyond his descriptive powers:

To paint the looks or thoughts of either of these lovers is beyond my power. As their sensations, from their mutual silence, may be judged to have been too big for their own utterance, it cannot be supposed, that I should be able to express them . . .¹

But the trustworthy narrator of Tom Jones, unlike Sterne's author-persona, had not raised advance expectations that he would treat the topic of love and that the reader would savour the treatment. The mute and non-communicative fumbling between Toby and Mrs. Wadman is the opposite of the harmoniously silent communication which customarily binds lovers like Tom and Sophia at a level too sweet for words.

The communication failure between Toby and Mrs. Wadman, while in keeping with the Shandean dilemma of the inaccessibility of other minds, constitutes, nevertheless, an inconsistency on Tristram's part. His earlier promises of amorous titillation fail to correspond with his written performance. Yet Tristram cannot be convicted of deceiving the reader, because at the time of recounting the amatory escapades he pleads his "want of powers". Again, the life-like quality of Sterne's narrator saves him from being seen

1. Tom Jones, Book XIII, Chapter 11.

merely as a deceptive rhetorical device.

Tristram's habit of not fulfilling or of mis-fulfilling some of his promises seems to be part of Sterne's overall strategy of keeping the reader humorously off balance. Laughing first at Tristram's droll intentions to organize 'his' material and plan 'his' novel, the reader is forced later to laugh at himself for taking Tristram's promises at face value. The analogy between Tristram and the festive con-man is obvious once again.

The continual guessing game between Tristram and his reader also illustrates a variation of the problem of 'knowledge of other minds'. Namely: the reader can never have truly sufficient grounds for inferring that Tristram will act in a certain way just because he says he plans to act in that way. To emphasize this point, Sterne's author-persona concludes each of his first two volumes by thumbing his nose at the reader. Volume One ends with a challenge:

What these perplexities of my uncle Toby were, —'tis impossible for you to guess;—if you could,—I should blush; not as a relation,—not as a man,—nor even as a woman,—but I should blush as an author; inasmuch as I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing. And in this, Sir, I am of so nice and singular a humour, that if I thought you was able to form the least judgment or probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page,—I would tear it out of my book.¹

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 25, p. 101.

Volume II concludes in similar fashion by challenging the reader to "conjecture" upon the events of the next volume, to attempt to "discover" what will happen, to try "to solve" and predict the future moves of the author-persona.¹ Wryly, however, Tristram tells us that all such endeavours "will be in vain", for a completely unexpected "series of things" will confront the reader of Volume III.

Tristram glories in the privacy of his own mind, and his boasts of secret intentions (intentions inaccessible to the reader) point towards a possible scheme or hidden plan behind the book. Reinforcing this supposition are remarks such as:

Writers had need look before them to keep
up the spirit and connection of what they
have in mind.²

* * *

Give me credit for a little more wisdom
than appears upon my outside . . .³

It could hardly be argued that Sterne lacked a plan for his novel, but was it part of Sterne's plan to make Tristram appear to be planning? From the passages just

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, pp. 167-168.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 19, p. 159.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 6, p. 41.

quoted it would seem so, yet, as illustrated in my first chapter, Sterne went to great lengths to make Tristram's remarks appear improvisational, spontaneous, and unplanned.

This ambiguity is central to Tristram Shandy. It results from the idea-associations which supposedly govern Tristram's mind as he records any particular thought. When Tristram boasts of his planned intentions, Sterne is presenting his author-persona as if he were in wilful control of his idea-associations, now and in the future. On the other hand, when Tristram appears most spontaneous, the idea-sequences race ahead, unguided:

But where am I going? These reflections crowd in upon me ten pages at least too soon, and take up that time, which I ought to bestow upon facts.¹

When in control of his ideas, Tristram sees his course clearly ahead, while at less far-sighted times he relies on buoyant rhetoric, sheer random nonsense, or the inspiration of a momentary idea to sweep him along. Such tension continually reinforces the dilemma over free-will and determinism, which also pervades the book.

In a less abstract way, Sterne is also illuminating the perennial dilemma of an author. Tristram is writing a book about writing a book; therefore, like any author he experiences periods of creative confidence as well as periods

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 29, p. 439.

of creative failure. What looks like an inconsistency in Tristram's remarks may have been conceived by Sterne to reflect the ambivalence of creativity itself: Is the creative act voluntary or involuntary? Sterne employs Tristram not so much as an unreliable commentator on Tristram's own writing, as a commentator whose sincere (albeit conflicting) statements record the unreliability of personal creativity.

The tension between Tristram's advance planning and his undisciplined improvisation becomes even more life-like when Tristram describes the chaos out of which an author must fashion some sort of linguistic order. This tension emphasizes the distinction between Tristram's supposed knowledge of his past and his less clear plan for relating his past. He knows what events he wants to relate; he has the intention of relating them. But the events of his 'history' sometimes flash through his mind faster than he can order and record them. He laments the delays in 'his' book, attributing them to the fact "that things have crowded in so thick upon me."¹ In the confusion he asks, "—but where am I? and into what a delicious riot of things am I rushing?"² In a calmer mood he comments ironically upon his own writing:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 32, p. 332.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 14, p. 473.

In good truth, when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together, in the reader's fancy—which, for my own part, if I did not take heed to do more than at first, there is so much unfixed and equivocal matter starting up, with so many breaks and gaps in it . . .¹

Sterne's author-persona functions with substantial psychological credibility, therefore, when he records his present thoughts and his plans for the future. He is reliable and unreliable in ways consistent with those of a real person. Just as we must use our imaginations to infer why a real person fails to fulfil any particular promise, so too is Sterne's reader forced to apply the same imaginative technique in understanding Tristram's statements "now" about his future writing. No omniscient narrator could embody this degree of psychological verisimilitude.

But Tristram's statements about the present and future are infrequent when compared with his many statements about the past. Tristram's thoughts are primarily concentrated upon the supposed past events of his family, and this brings me to the third category of statements in Tristram Shandy, namely, those which recall past events. Such statements are of two kinds: (1.) Tristram's claims about what he wrote earlier in Tristram Shandy, and (2.) Tristram's statements about the history of the Shandy family and the past events of his own life.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 33, p. 444.

Obviously, the criteria for judging the reliability of these two categories will differ. When Tristram claims "now" to have written certain things previously, his claims can be verified by checking them against his previous remarks. When on the other hand we attempt to judge the 'truthfulness' of particular episodes from Tristram's past (e.g., his crushed nose at birth, his mis-christening), it behooves us to ask questions such as "How could Tristram know the details? Is the episode possible? probable?"

Consider first the reliability of Tristram's claims about what he wrote earlier in the novel. These are easily verifiable. It is clear that when Tristram claims to have written x at some past stage in his book, then if in fact x can be found previously in Tristram Shandy, Tristram's claim is consistent with his past performance. For example, the two claims below are reliable: the first, because it is confirmed by Volume II, Chapter 4; the second, because it is confirmed by Volume VI, Chapter 31.

I told the reader, this time two years, that my uncle Toby was not eloquent; and in the very same page gave an instance to the contrary . . .¹

* * *

I told the Christian reader in the beginning of the chapter which preceded my uncle Toby's apologetical oration,—though in a different

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 31, p. 441.

trope from what I should make use of now, that the peace of Utrecht was within an ace of creating the same shyness betwixt my uncle Toby and his hobby-horse, as it did betwixt the queen and the rest of the confederating powers.¹

On the whole, Tristram is considerably more accurate regarding his past writing than he is concerning his future writing. One finds few inconsistencies between what Tristram claims to have written previously and his actual past performance. Yet in giving his author-persona a self-aware grasp "now" of what he has previously written, Sterne nonetheless permits occasional memory lapses, the better to render Tristram psychologically life-like.

I humbly beg I may recommend poor Le Fever's son to you;—a tear of joy of the first water sparkled in my uncle Toby's eye, and another, the fellow to it, in the corporal's, as the proposition was made;—you will see why when you read Le Fever's story:—fool that I was! nor can I recollect, (nor perhaps you) without turning back to the place, what it was that hindered me from letting the corporal tell it in his own words;—but the occasion is lost, —I must tell it now in my own.²

Tristram, like anyone else, sometimes cannot "recollect". This human failing rings true, psychologically. But in contrast to his recollections of what he has previously written, how 'possible' or 'probable' (as verisimilar

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 34, p. 445.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 5, p. 402.

representations) are his recollections of the bygone days he describes in his book? These family hand-me-downs and supposedly autobiographical stories comprise the bulk of Tristram Shandy, and they cannot be checked in the way that Tristram's other statements can be checked for consistency.

To talk of Tristram's reliability or unreliability in regard to the past events he describes is to talk of the possibility or the impossibility (rather than the consistency or inconsistency) of the events he recounts. How do the events in Tristram Shandy correspond to the possibilities of the real world?

Of course the simple answer is that some of Tristram's 'historical' accounts are preposterous. Neither the circumcision nor the ecclesiastical council at York, for example, could have happened as Tristram describes them.

For purposes of analysis, however, let us play Sterne's game. Let us overlook the fact that we know, a fortiori, that Tristram is telling tall tales. If we pretend that Tristram seriously thinks he is really being a family historian, then we must look to the mimetic personality of Sterne's author-persona in order to explain his non-mimetic accounts of past events.

In recounting the events of the past Tristram poses as both an historian and a biographer.¹ Yet he differs

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 8. Volume IV, Chapter 13. Volume IV, Chapter 27. Volume V, Chapter 15.

in several ways from a narrator such as Lemuel Gulliver who, like Tristram, also relates many fantastic incidents. In the first place Sterne's author-persona advertises his zany unreliability right from the start, despite his claims for historicity. Secondly, Tristram did not have (as Gulliver supposedly did) personal, first-hand experience of most of the events he relates. The question therefore arises, "How could Tristram have come to know the events he relates?"

In the initial volumes of Tristram Shandy Sterne carefully provided tongue-in-cheek supporting evidence for Tristram's accounts of past events. Using a well-worn literary technique, Sterne makes his author-persona display the sources of stories. Tristram stands "indebted for the preceeding anecdote" to Uncle Toby.¹ Tristram still possesses his father's pocket-book with its memorandums.² A "most ancient account of the family, wrote upon strong vellum, and now in perfect preservation" remains as source-material for Tristram.³ Walter's Dissertation upon Tristram (1716) is presumably still available.⁴ In short:

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 3, p. 37.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 39.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 11, pp. 52-53.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 19, p. 81.

There are archives at every stage to be looked into, and rolls, records, documents, and endless genealogies . . .¹

Through eight subsequent volumes the reader discovers that "there are now in the possession of the Shandy family, as many [of Parson Yorick's sermons] as will make a handsome volume,"² that Toby's library of military architecture and Walter's collection of proboscidian tracts (including Slawkenbergius's Decads) probably remain in Tristram's hands,³ that Walter's Tristra-paedia may be a direct source for some of Tristram Shandy,⁴ that Toby's "Apologetical Oration" remains "amongst my father's papers,"⁵ that Tristram cherishes a map of Bouchain in perfect condition "with the marks of a snuffy finger" still apparent,⁶ that Tristram managed to salvage his travel notes for Volume VII,⁷ and that Walter's letter of instruction to the love-sick Toby is probably quoted verbatim.⁸

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 14, p. 65.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, p. 158.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapters 34, 42.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 26, p. 376.
 5. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 31, p. 441.
 6. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 17, p. 531.
 7. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapters 36, 37.
 8. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 34, pp. 563-565.

Sterne's pretence, therefore, seems to be that Tristram reinforced 'his' memories and fashioned 'his' novel from these disparate sources. The problem of how a narrator could remember all the stories and dialogues of the past had troubled those eighteenth-century novelists who were concerned with realistic narration. If a narrator was to be more than an omniscient device, then he must not have a superhuman memory. Richardson dealt with this technical difficulty in Clarissa. He abjured the device which seemed to transpose a narrator into a mnemonic genius. By writing "to the moment" (i.e., by having characters record an event immediately after its occurrence) he circumvented the necessity for "a strength of memory beyond all example and probability" in his correspondents.¹ A much clumsier approach was adopted by Thomas Amory in The Life and Opinions of John Buncle, Esquire (1757). Amory's precocious narrator tells the reader bluntly:

My memory from my childhood has been very extraordinary. The greatest part of what I read and hear, remains with me, as if the book was still before me, or the speaker going on.²

Of course the documents which supposedly add an aura of credibility to Tristram's 'history' are ridiculous in

1. Clarissa, "Preface" and "Postscript".

2. The Life and Opinions of John Buncle, Esquire, (London, 1902), p. 110.

themselves. They are no more credible than the egregious memory of Amory's narrator. Yet, avoiding this judgment for the moment, let us continue analysing the 'basis' of Tristram's knowledge of the past.

Aside from the family archives, Tristram drew also upon his memories of the stories told him by his relatives. In one place he acknowledges his debt to Uncle Toby "for the preceding anecdote."¹ In addition to the archives and anecdotes, Tristram drew furthermore upon his personal experiences for his accounts of past events. Thus, Uncle Toby's mercy to the fly occurred in Tristram's presence at a time when the youth was old enough to have impressions "imprinted" on his memory.²

The reader, therefore, is led to believe that Tristram sometimes relied upon historical documents, sometimes upon his memory of testimony, and sometimes upon his memory of direct-acquaintance experience. Tristram's statements about the past are supposedly founded upon the "rolls, records, documents" at his elbow as he writes, or upon his memory of hearing one of his family relate a past event, or upon his personal memory of a past event.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 3, p. 37.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 12, p. 131.

If, as Tristram states, he really were trying to relate the true history of the Shandy family and the true biography of himself, then from what I have just said it follows that he could be mistaken or unreliable in several ways:¹ (1.) The interpretation he puts upon the family documents could be misconstrued, or (2.) his memory, either of the testimony of other people or of his first-hand sense experiences, could be inaccurate. Obviously, the first point cannot be resolved from the text of Tristram Shandy. But the second is most important, for the subject of memories and diminishing memories lies at the very heart of Sterne's novel.

Any single memory-experience can be said to compound past and present, insofar as a perceptual experience of a past event (or of something learned in the past) is remembered at the present moment.² A time-gap exists between the present act of remembering and the original experience upon which the memory is based. So, if there are errors in

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1. There remains of course a third possibility, viz., that those who related the family history to Tristram embellished the actual events fancifully or were just plain inaccurate. Since this is not suggested in Tristram Shandy and since the text offers no way to judge this matter, I shall not pursue it.
 2. Most philosophers today consider it a fundamental mistake to think, as Hume did, that "remembering something" is a particular kind of mental experience that a person can differentiate from his other thoughts and call "a memory experience." Today a memory is spoken of only as knowledge of something from the past - knowledge which one has now because one has come to know it in the past.

Tristram's accounts of past events, these errors could stem either from an inaccurate original perception or from a dimming of retention in the interval between the original perception and the moment of re-cognition. The possibility of men erring in one or both of these ways was appreciated by Hobbes, Locke, and their empirical followers. In fact, I will not attempt to explain Tristram's exaggerated 'history' in terms of false original perceptions or faded memories. My reasons will be given in a moment. But for the present, this matter is best held in abeyance until the depth of Sterne's interest in man's power of remembrance has been illustrated.

Without doubt, Tristram's remarks show that Sterne was mindful of the compound of past and present inherent in any act of remembering. At the close of Chapter 8, Volume III, Tristram looks back quickly over his life, and comments that past experiences "in the course of thy life" are over, "all but the account of 'em."¹ The account depends, naturally, upon the present act of remembering.

The entire twenty-eighth chapter of the same volume records Tristram's emotions "now" as he commences a description of his remembrances. Likewise, Volume IX opens with Tristram using the word "moment" in two senses: first, as the present moment in which he is recollecting and writing;

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 8, p. 179.

secondly, as the moment he is writing about - the moment long ago when Mrs. Shandy was tempted to peep through the keyhole. Most peculiar, perhaps, is the permutation of time schemes in a single memory statement, e.g., "A cow broke in (tomorrow morning) to my uncle Toby's fortifications..."¹ Here there is not only a conflation of past and future in relation to a past event, but also the implication of the narrator's prerogative "now" to conflate the two.

In Volume VII, Tristram suddenly realizes his confusion of memories of an earlier grand tour to France with his memories of a later journey. The superimposition of a memory of one journey upon the memory of a second journey proves to Tristram that the mind can be two places at once - really three places, for Tristram speaks metaphorically of his journey "now" as he recalls and records the two previous journeys. The inner-complexity of thought, Sterne shows us, transcends categories of time and space.

—Now this is the most puzzled skein of all—
for in this last chapter, as far at least as it
has helped me through Auxerre, I have been
getting forwards in two different journeys
together, and with the same dash of the pen—
for I have got entirely out of Auxerre in this
journey which I am writing now, and I am got
half way out of Auxerre in that which I shall
write hereafter—There is but a certain degree
of perfection in every thing; and by pushing
at something beyond that, I have brought

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 38, p. 240.

myself into such a situation, as no traveller ever stood before me; for I am this moment walking across the market-place of Auxerre with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner—and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broke into a thousand pieces—and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the Garonne, which Mons. Sligniac has lent me, and where I now sit rhapsodizing all these affairs.

—Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey.¹

Here Sterne delineates several essential truths about memory in general and about the particular functioning of the memory of his author-persona. In the first place, Sterne shows these particular memories as picture-images, which some memories undoubtedly are. Eighteenth-century thinkers were in general agreement about this, but Sterne, was also making more subtle points.

Memory, Sterne shows us, functions irrationally. It transcends the conscious organization of our thoughts and is capable of violating, subjectively, the dictum of Scholastic logic and ontology that "the same thing cannot be and not be at the same time in the same place." As with dreams and reveries, our memories need not recur in ways which conform with the manner in which we originally apprehend and classify external objects and states of affairs. For instance, a past perception is not necessarily recalled in conjunction with the perception that originally preceded it or with the perception

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 28, p. 492.

that originally followed it. The past experience may be remembered by virtue of some association other than chronological and sequential.

Tristram's memories converge in Volume VII not because the two trips to Auxerre followed on the heels of one another (they did not), but because Tristram's memory statements (or perhaps just his memories) of his solo trip to Auxerre remind him, associationally, of the trip years earlier. "Auxerre" provides the connecting associational link between the two memories. Sterne is dealing with the relation between the world of 'fact' (Tristram's two trips to Auxerre) and the world of reverie (Tristram's memories of the two trips), and this of course is a variation on the corporeal/incorporeal theme as well as idea-associationism.

Sometimes when relating a past event, Tristram externalizes the memory in an hallucinative fashion, and inserts his present self into the original state of affairs from which the memory is drawn. He converses with, and suggests things to the people in his memory experiences as if they could hear him, abide by his advice, and so alter a course of events that is already irreversibly 'factual'. The effect is at once whimsical and weird. For example, Tristram advises Toby "now" to act cautiously with Mrs. Wadman at a time years prior to Tristram's birth:

—Dear uncle Toby! don't go into the sentry-box with the pipe,—there's no trusting a man's self with such a thing in such a corner.¹

* * *

—If thou lookest, uncle Toby, in search of this mote in Widow Wadman's eye one moment longer—thou art undone.²

In much the same way, Tristram 'intervenes' at his own birth to offer advice to Dr. Slop:

Truce!—truce, good Dr Slop!—stay thy obstetric hand;—return it safe into thy bosom to keep it warm.³

Sterne frequently blends past Shandean events with Tristram's present wishes regarding those past events, but the effect is never more disconcerting than in Tristram's mental encounters with Jenny. Although Tristram addresses his memory-image of Jenny on seven occasions, Jenny remains undefined, for Tristram never sets her firmly within the background from which he draws his memories.⁴ The reader infers that Jenny is a contemporary and a special friend of

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 28, p. 438.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 24, p. 551.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 11, p. 128.

4. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, 32; V, 24; VII, 13; VII, 29; IX, 8; twice in Volume I, Chapter 18.

Tristram's, at least from 1759 onward.¹ But Tristram conceals their relationship, and Jenny's appearances in Tristram's thoughts—though understandable to Tristram—remain mysterious to the reader. Here again Sterne seems to have been dabbling in the problems of private knowledge and knowledge of other minds, leaving much, perhaps too much, for the reader's imagination.

On the whole Sterne presented an interesting psychological account of the complex functions of memory and of those memories which tail off into imaginary reveries. It is an account which encompasses not only Tristram's stories of what actually could have happened (i.e., the possible), but also Tristram's flights of fancy. To the latter class belong the preposterous episodes and the projection of Tristram's present self into past adventures in which he had no part.

Sterne was not, therefore, simply revealing through his author-persona the empiricist's belief that inaccurate sense-perceptions and diminishing memory-images could lead to false statements about the past. There is more to Tristram's interior monologue than this. Sterne was showing how an author imaginatively supplements his supposedly factual stories. In this book about writing a book, Sterne illustrated the necessarily subjective nature of all

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 18, p. 72.

literature - necessarily subjective because any author is more than a passive recipient and reporter of sensations. An author is an active creator.

Seen in this light, Sterne's presentation of his author-persona accords with an eighteenth-century tendency towards acknowledging the importance of the individual consciousness. Such an acknowledgment ran counter to Augustan norms. To Swift, the belief in the power of man's mind to create truth (rather than simply re-present it) smacked of that old bugaboo, enthusiasm. He identified enthusiasm with the subjectivism of imagination, commenting ironically:

It is manifest what mighty advantages fiction has over truth; and the reason is just at our elbow, because imagination can build nobler scenes, and produce more wonderful revolutions, than fortune or nature will be at expense to furnish. Nor is mankind so much to blame in his choice thus determining him, if we consider that the debate merely lies between things past and things conceived: and so the question is only this; whether things that have place in the imagination may not as properly be said to exist as those that are seated in the memory.¹

But Swift, and later Johnson, were fighting a losing battle in their pleas for objectivity. Even before the middle of the century, Akenside's extremely popular poem, The Pleasures of the Imagination, hinted at the question, "Does an artist merely reflect reality and truth, or does he create

1. A Tale of a Tub, Section IX.

it?" but did not answer in customary Augustan fashion. It was not long before Hume and Gibbon conceded subjectivism to be inescapable even in historical writing.¹

Many scholars have noted this eighteenth-century swing away from objectivity and toward subjectivity.² M.H. Abrams commented perceptively:

What we now call the psychology of art has its origin when theorists in general began to think of the mind of the artist as interposed between the world of sense and the work of art, and to attribute the conspicuous differences between art and reality, not to the reflection of an external ideal, but to forces and operations within the mind itself.³

Certainly Sterne meant Tristram's subjective creativity to be "interposed between the world of sense and the work of art."⁴ However, thus far in my discussion I have simply asserted (not proven) that Sterne's reader encounters not only Tristram's memories but also his fantasies. Now I wish to suggest two reasons why this must be so.

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1. L. Kampf, "Gibbon and Hume", English Literature and British Philosophy, (Chicago, 1971), pp. 109-118.
 2. For example, L. Stephen, English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1902), Volume I, pp. 1-67; A.N. Whitehead, Science and the Modern World, (Cambridge, 1928), Chapters 4-5; E. Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace, (Los Angeles, 1960), p. 30.
 3. The Mirror and the Lamp, (Norton paperback, 1958), p. 156.
 4. Ibid.

In the first place it is absurd to hold that every event in Tristram Shandy could have happened in the real world. It is absurd because some of the events Tristram relates are simply impossible. It is absurd despite the fact that commentators often speak as if Tristram's remarks were recording events in the history of the Shandy family, i.e., as if Tristram's remarks were always supposed to be those of a biographer and an historian.

Secondly, all of Tristram Shandy supposedly comes through Tristram's consciousness. The text does not supply an objective account of a past event against which to match Tristram's memory of that event. Cervantes did something of this nature in Don Quixote by describing the reality of a situation together with the Don's distortedly subjective view of it. But Sterne does not. The text of Tristram Shandy does not state objectively, 'X happened'; provide the details of X; and later reveal Tristram's memory of X.

To search for error solely in Tristram's original perceptions and in his faded remembrances would be to ignore the preposterous nature of some of the Shandean events. Moreover, to explain the non-mimetic events in terms of inaccurate original perceptions or faded memories would do harm to the imaginative quality of the events as well as to the mimetic quality of Sterne's author-persona. What man could seriously believe, for instance, that he was circumcised in the way

Tristram describes his circumcision?

Sterne's heavy emphasis on documentation and his employment of the word "history" burlesque those novelists before him who had sought to make readers believe the 'truth' of what they read.¹ Tristram Shandy draws attention to the absurdity of passing-off as true what everyone recognizes as fiction.

Although Tristram sometimes calls himself an historian, his history is the subjective history of his mind as he writes. The past events described in Tristram Shandy are not always mimetic, but Tristram is. The fantasies of one's imagination, as Swift admitted, may "as properly be said to exist as those that are seated in memory."²

Sterne presents an author-persona who is reliable because he records his present thoughts: be they the product of memory or imagination, be they possible or impossible descriptions of past events. Tristram's subjective reliability cannot be questioned, although his descriptions of events such as the circumcision can be judged to be objectively impossible and must be attributed to his imagination.

1. In this connexion see Tom Jones, Book IX, Chapter 1.

2. A Tale of a Tub, Section IX.

2. Tristram's Blend of Memory and Imagination

Sterne created an author-persona who sometimes recounts his memories and sometimes his fancies. The entire subject of the relation between memory and imagination had a peculiar fascination for the eighteenth century. The views of Hume and Hartley on this subject were particularly disruptive to tidy divisions between reality and artistry, between truth and fiction. Like Hobbes, Hume thought of memories as faded sense-perceptions:

An idea of the memory, by losing its force and vivacity, may degenerate to such a degree,¹ as to be taken for an idea of the imagination.

Hume went further than Hobbes, however, for Hume also believed in the possibility of a reverse degeneration. While memories tend to decay into imaginary reveries, so reciprocally, according to Hume, an idea of the imagination:

may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory, and counterfeit its effects on the belief and judgment.²

In Hume's view, then, a person can lose his belief in what was a memory, while, contrariwise, coming to believe in things which were originally fictitious. Hartley concurred:

1. A Treatise of Human Nature (1739), Book I, Part III, Section 5.

2. Ibid.

All men are sometimes at a loss to know whether clusters of ideas that strike the fancy strongly, and succeed each other readily and immediately, be recollections, or mere reveries.¹

Sterne's presentation of a life-like author-persona who claims to be an historian, but who occasionally infuses absurd 'memories' into his 'history' could, therefore, be explained along Humean lines. Such a blurring of the border between the real (valid memories) and the imaginary (reveries) would be in keeping with the pervasive philosophical incertitude of Sterne's novel.

Sterne, of course, hinted at such a mixture of supposed truth and obvious fancy in his title, "The Life and Opinions . . ." "Opinions" for Sterne were fictions that the mind eventually comes to believe, even though they may have entered originally:

upon the footing of mere whims, and of a 'viva la Bagatelle'.²

It is the misconceived opinion of Yorick's enemies that eventually leads to his death.³ It is a fancifully inspired opinion that makes Mrs. Wadman sceptical about Toby's potency, and it is opinion, too, that casts a parallel doubt

1. Observations on Man (1749), Volume I, Chapter III, Section 4.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 19, p. 79.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapters 11-12.

upon the potency of Walter's bull.¹ Yet the "opinions" of the writer (i.e., his artistic deceptions), as Erasmus pointed out, keep the world merry.²

The eighteenth century, however, as we have seen, was concerned with the division between fact and opinion, and not as willing as Erasmus to accept a festive inversion. Akenside thought opinion to be the product of "Fancy's witchcraft upon the brain."³ Similarly, in Rasselas Dr. Johnson had spoken of the tendency of fancy to encroach upon reason:

In time some particular train of ideas fixes the attention; all other intellectual gratifications are rejected; the mind, in weariness of leisure, recurs constantly to the favourite conception, and feasts on the luscious falsehood whenever she is offended with the bitterness of truth. By degrees the reign of fancy is confirmed; she grows first imperious and in time despotic. Then fictions begin to operate as realities, false opinions fasten upon the mind,⁴ and life passes in dreams of rapture or anguish.

When discussing the nature of "opinion", Tristram comments, like Johnson's Imlac, upon the subtle way in which the mind can elevate fancies to the level of belief:

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapters 22, 33.
 2. Praise of Folly, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 135.
 3. The Pleasures of the Imagination, (1757 version), l. 484.
 4. Rasselas, (1759). Chapter XLV.

I mention this, not only as matter of hypothesis or conjecture upon the progress and establishment of my father's many odd opinions,—but as a warning to the learned reader against the indiscreet reception of such guests, who, after a free and undisturbed entrance, for some years, into our brains,—at length claim a kind of settlement there, —working sometimes like yeast;—but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,—but ending in downright earnest.¹

Tristram's fancies and opinions intermingle with the 'history' he relates. His statements about the past can be described in the cumbersome jargon of eighteenth-century philosophy as follows: Tristram's first-hand perceptions, including his perceptions of the testimony of his relatives, have left him with remembrances which recur, or which he can wilfully reproduce, in varying degrees of vividness.

To put it that way, however, is to anticipate Coleridge's doctrine of the fancy and the imagination. In fact Sterne made do with the psychological theory of his day. He particularly played with Hartley's theory of vibrations.²

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 19, pp. 79-80.

2. Observations on Man, Introduction; Chapter I, Sections 1-2. Hartley claimed that sensations were "internal feelings of the mind" arising from the impression of external objects upon our senses. The magnitude of a sensation could "be estimated from the vibrations which take place in the medullary substance of the brain." Hartley seriously hoped that his doctrine of corporeal vibrations would not be taken as a materialistic position. He tried to reconcile his seemingly materialistic psychology with the immateriality of the soul.

For example, the memory of Toby's benevolence toward the fly becomes "imprinted" on Tristram's mind, as a consequence of the original perception of the incident, which set his "whole frame into one vibration . . ."¹

But Tristram can also construct new images of objects, events, and states of affairs that were not originally apprehended in the order and circumstance in which they reappear in his mind's eye. As Tristram admits:

Every step that's taken, the judgment is surprised by the imagination.²

Tristram's imaginative flights and his memories occur with equal vivacity. Accounts of waking fantasies mix with memory statements, and the text provides no criteria for distinguishing between the two. This is the underlying psychological rationale of Sterne's author-persona, who relates both possible and impossible events, spontaneously, as they occur to him. Moreover, the mixture of memory and imagination can be seen as a variation of the corporeal/incorporeal theme, for memory statements supposedly report external reality as it once was, whereas reveries are concerned more directly with the mind of the day-dreamer.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 12, p. 131.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 1, p. 515.

When unrestrained, Tristram's imagination tends to externalize things which exist solely as mental phenomena. Sterne's tactics here resemble those of Richardson. In his letters to Belford, Lovelace sometimes gets so carried away with his day-dream seductions of Clarissa that he speaks to her as if she were present. Clarissa's own comment upon the emotional force of the imagination is also to the point:

I said, that whatever we strongly imagined, was in its effects at the time, more than imaginary, altho' to others it might not appear so.¹

Sterne's reader often finds Tristram lost in his private world of imagination. As we have seen, Tristram projects himself retrospectively into situations that occurred before his birth. He reports verbatim conversations and exact physical postures which his 'historical' sources could hardly have provided. He addresses people who are not physically present:

—stop! my dear uncle Toby, —stop!
—go not one foot further. . .²

* * *

Do, my dear Jenny, tell the world for me,
how I behaved. . .³

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1. Clarissa, (Shakespeare Head ed., London, 1931), Clarissa to Miss Howell, Volume II, Letter 32, p. 195.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 3, p. 110.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 29, p. 493.

Within the context of Tristram Shandy these imaginary externalizations are Tristram's written accounts of reveries. They are manifestations of a psychosis in which the imaginary is treated as if it were externally present.

Likewise, although Sterne's self-aware author-persona points openly to his deployment of characters (like Fielding's "Luckless" or Villiers' "Bayes"),¹ the rhetorical tactic also supports the psychological realism of Tristram-as-author. Tristram's imagination commandeers his memory as he reviews the past and 'dictates' the moves of people who now exist only as memories:

In this attitude I am determined to let her stand for five minutes. . .²

* * *

To explain this, I must leave him upon the bed for half an hour,—³

Similarly, Sterne externalizes and speaks to his imaginary reader "now", as he writes his book.⁴ Although supposedly writing in solitude, he imagines a series of

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1. Fielding, "The Pleasures of the Town", The Author's Farce; Villiers, The Rehearsal: both mentioned in my first chapter.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 5, p. 353.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 30, p. 224.
 4. For a discussion of the eighteenth-century notion of a 'reader' "invented by the author in order to make his fictional world work" see: J. Preston, The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction, (London, 1970).

confrontations and interlocutions between himself and his reader at the very moment of his writing. As noted previously, authors from Erasmus and Rabelais to Fielding had addressed their readers directly, but Sterne's apostrophies are more than a literary tactic. Tristram's conversations with his reader follow naturally from Sterne's premiss that Tristram Shandy is an immediate product of Tristram's mind, for Tristram imagines "now" the meeting between himself and his reader. Hence, the frequent addresses to imaginary auditors accord with the externalizing psychology of the author-persona.

The things which Tristram imagines, like the things he remembers, exist in subjective time-schemes, transcending the physically measurable chronology of the external world, while pointing to the labyrinthine inner-complexity of thought. All memories and images are "now" or potentially "now" to the person who recalls them or who can recall them.

Sterne's famous chapter on time comments amusingly, but perceptively, on the difference between clock-time and psychological time.¹ The latter depends upon "the succession of any ideas in our minds." Walter Shandy tells how "two hours and ten minutes" can seem "almost an age" to the imagination.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 18, pp. 198-201.

But Sterne does more than draw the distinction between physical time and subjective time.¹ He excelled not at theorizing about the dichotomy, but at presenting the different time-schemes through his rendering of Tristram's self-dramatization of his reveries and recollections. Consider again that surprising remark of Tristram's:

A cow broke in (to-morrow morning) to my uncle Toby's fortifications. . . .²

This anachronistic construction occurs in one of the several passages cataloguing the topics which Tristram hopes to treat in future pages. The remark itself reveals an amazing complexity of time-schemes. Tristram may be presumed to have a mental image of a past event (and another mental image regarding the day preceding the event) at a time that is "now" for him, with a view to recording this image some twenty-two chapters onward in his book.³

A similar, but less startling, conflation of chronology occurs at the close of Chapter 11, Volume III:

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1. Sterne's treatment of 'time' has been popular among commentators, e.g., T. Baird, "The Time Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source", PMLA, LI, (1936), pp. 803-820; J.C. Sallé, "A Source of Sterne's Conception of Time", RES, VI, (1955), pp. 180-182; A.H. Cash, "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy", ELH, XXII, (1955), pp. 125-135.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 38, p. 240.
 3. Finally recorded in Volume IV, Chapter 18.

Dr Slop drew up his mouth, and was just beginning to return my uncle Toby the compliment of his Whu—u—u—or interjectional whistle,—when the door opening hastily in the next chapter but one—put an end to the affair.¹

But does man's imagination really have freedom to fashion its own world? No, not complete freedom, according to Sterne. Man's corporeality imposes limits. As Tristram writes in his famous chapter on the relativity of time, he will perish before he could ever complete a comprehensive life-and-opinions autobiography. At the rate Tristram writes:

I should just live 364 times faster than I should write—It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—²

Although an author's mind flourishes simultaneously in sundry time-schemes at varying internal speeds, his written product - the objectification of his thought - cannot be so untrammelled. The work of art builds up, page after page, accruing its bulk day by day, week by week. The work of art progresses in physical time towards its final termination, though not necessarily its completion, for death may intervene before the work is complete.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 11, p. 191.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 13, p. 286.

Physical time, therefore, ultimately subjugates psychological time. While the mind jumps fancifully between past and future, the clock on the wall continues to tick. Sterne contrasts psychological time with physical time by presenting an author-persona whose writing mirrors the subjectivity of psychological time, but who, occasionally, by charting the calendar dates at which he is writing, acknowledges the irreversible forward movement of physical time. Adept as the mind may be in juxtaposing and re-organizing memories and images, heedless as it may be of physical time, the mind, nevertheless, remains powerless to restrain bodily decay. This poignant truth strikes Tristram in the closing passage of Chapter 8, Volume IX:

I will not argue the matter: Time wastes too fast: every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it, more precious, my dear Jenny! than the rubies about thy neck, are flying over our heads like light clouds of a windy day, never to return more—every thing presses on—whilst thou are twisting that lock,—see! it grows grey; and every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, and every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make.—

—Heaven have mercy upon us both!¹

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 8, p. 582. Sterne treats a similar theme in his sermon, "Job's Account of the Shortness and Troubles of Life, Considered", Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 10. "With how quick a succession, do days, months and years pass over our heads? —how truly like the shadow that departeth do they flee away insensibly, and scarce leave an impression with us? —when we endeavour to call them back by reflection, and consider in what manner they have gone, how unable are

Sterne excels here in making his author-persona acknowledge the irreversible direction of physical time, while simultaneously using his subjective powers to imagine the effect of physical time on Jenny and himself.

One final comment remains to be made about the complex interplay of psychological with physical time in Tristram Shandy. I want to suggest that it is not the irreversible finality of physical time that precludes Tristram from ever completing his book. I want to suggest this despite Tristram's acknowledgment that his life has a headstart on his written account of his life, and that it is problematical whether the latter could overtake the former. Granting this, and granting that Sterne modified and enjoyed transforming Zeno's Paradox into a biographer's paradox, more remains to be said.¹

the best of us to give a tolerable account?—and were it not for some of the more remarkable stages which have distinguished a few periods of this rapid progress—we should look back upon it all as Nebuchadnezzar did upon his dream when he awoke in the morning;—he was sensible many things had passed, and troubled him too;—but had passed so quickly, they had left no footsteps behind, by which he could be enabled to trace them back.—Melancholy account of the life of man! which generally runs on in such a manner, as scarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone."

1. Zeno of Elea (b. 490-485 B.C.) was famous for his paradoxes of time and space, which showed the absurd consequences of applying logic to our ordinary beliefs about the phenomenal world. The paradox referred to here is that of "Achilles and the tortoise", viz., let Achilles run as quickly as he can, yet if the tortoise has the start, Achilles can never overtake him; for by the time Achilles

The reason why Tristram cannot catch himself is not because his early years were so eventful that two years "now" are required to recount each single year of his past. Nor is it because his present external life is so eventful that a backlog is continually accumulating while he writes of his childhood. Rather, Tristram's progress towards bringing his writing chronologically closer to his actual living is impeded by Tristram's hyper-active mental life "now" as he writes.

This leads to another fact about Sterne's presentation of Tristram's consciousness. Aside from the inescapable reality of physical time, there is a second limit, according to Sterne's rendering of Tristram, to man's imaginative potential, viz., a man cannot escape his own imagination. A man cannot with certainty escape his individual consciousness.

To explain these sweeping statements I must refer to a point already made in my second chapter. The point is this: If, as Tristram implies, a person can never have truly

reaches the point from which the tortoise started, the tortoise will have moved forward to another point, and so on 'ad infinitum'. The paradox is analogous to Tristram's written attempt to 'catch up with' the life he is actually living at the time he writes. Bertrand Russell oversimplified Sterne's rendering of 'time' in his account of Sterne's version of Zeno's Paradox. While Russell fails to do justice to the complexity of Tristram Shandy, he does, however, provide an interesting account of paradoxes of this sort. The Principles of Mathematics, (London, 1903), Sections 340-341.

sufficient, rational grounds for inferring what other people think, then he must depend upon his imagination in order to attempt to understand them. If this is granted, then the only person I can be sure of knowing is myself. Everything I claim to know about others is in a sense imaginary.

Extreme subjectivism of this order was very much a part of eighteenth-century thought. Attempting to clarify the relations between ideas, words, and things, Locke had implied, and Hume clearly believed, that a person can know only his own thoughts and impressions of the moment.

Hume argued that the human mind at any given moment was a bundle of impressions and ideas, including present sense-perceptions and ideas as well as past thoughts and sense-impressions (remembered "now"), which were either true memories or fantasies. Sterne modelled Tristram's consciousness along these lines. By writing a book in which everything comes through the mind of the author-persona, and by creating an author-persona who records "now" his present thoughts and fancies about the past, Sterne followed the Empiricist's account of personal consciousness - an account which inevitably points towards solipsism.

Sterne whimsically dramatizes Tristram's difficulty in escaping his own mind. At one point Tristram suggests that his imagination may in fact transcend itself, by receiving (in Berkeley-like fashion) thoughts from heaven, and, what is more, thoughts intended by God for another person!

I believe in my conscience I intercept
many a thought which heaven intended for
another man.¹

But this is only the imagination imagining it can
transcend itself. Tristram provides a more accurate des-
cription of his solipsistic position when, as he organizes
his thoughts, he says:

—Leave we then the breeches in the
taylor's hands. . .
Leave we Slop. . .
Leave we poor Le Fever. . .
—And last of all,—because hardest
of all—
Let us leave, if possible, 'myself':—
But 'tis impossible,—I must go along with
you to the end of the work.²

Are there not dangers in being imprisoned in one's
own mind? Yes, and Sterne's self-aware author-persona
recognizes them. He realizes the consequence of over-fascin-
ation with one's own imagination, yet he sometimes falls
victim to the alluring peril. Idolizing the inventions of
his own imagination, he sometimes moves toward narcissism:

If. . .I am not blinded by self-love,
there must be something of true
genius about me. . .³

Similarly, when relating the story of the Abbess of
Andoüillets, Tristram interjects:

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 2, p. 516.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 20, pp. 426-427.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 12, p. 586.

I declare I am interested in this story, and wish I had been there.¹

At yet another point, after going to great imaginative lengths to describe Widow Wadman's left eye, Tristram hesitates, aware of his latent narcissism:

It was an eye—
But I shall be in love with it
myself, if I say another word about it.²

The first publisher of Tristram Shandy, Robert Dodsley, must have criticized Laurence Sterne's narcissism, for in a letter of reply Sterne concurred, within limits, with Dodsley's criticism:

—to Sport too much with your wit—or the Game that wit has pointed, is surfeiting—like toying with a man's Mistress—it may be a very delightful solacement to the Inamorato—tho' little to the bystander.³

By withdrawing inwardly to things imaginary and by luxuriating in the power to create, Tristram (or any artist) risks detachment from external reality. Moreover, to live in a subjective world of memory, reverie, and hyperactive

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 21, p. 482.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 25, p. 552.

3. Summer, 1759. Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L.P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), pp. 76-77.

imagination is to avoid the real sense datum of the extra-mental world. Indeed, present sense-perceptions of the external world are of importance to Tristram only insofar as they relate to the product of his imagination. When Tristram does comment about what he can see in his room "now" (as he writes), it is obvious that he values these present perceptions of the external world primarily because they relate contiguously to the writing of his book. Likewise, as noted earlier in this chapter, Tristram's plans are always plans for the future of his book, not plans for his existence in the external world.

In short, Sterne gave us a psychological picture of an author totally engrossed in and fascinated by his own imaginative art. As Tristram writes, thought breeds thought, associationally, with little or no intrusion from the external world, for the circuit is simply shut off between his five senses and the potential objects of perception.

When fully engaged in his own artistry and beguiled by his own creativity, the writer becomes oblivious to time. More importantly, the mind creates its own time. Images from the past can be wilfully conjured up, or appear spontaneously, as part of a mental sequence that differs chronologically (as well as circumstantially) from the order in which they were originally perceived.

For the most part Tristram exists happily in the

subjective time-schemes of his own imagination. Yet the grim reality of physical time - that irreversible movement towards the grave - naturally inheres in the very material from which Tristram fashions his reveries. Walter, Toby, Trim: all were supposedly real persons. But now, when Tristram writes, they exist no longer except in memory. "—O Toby! in what corner of the world shall I seek thy fellow?" laments Tristram.¹ The answer of course can only be a subjective one: that Tristram must keep Toby alive in his memory and imagination. Immediately following another touching tribute to Toby, Tristram vows to do just that - to keep Toby alive in memory:

Whilst I am worth one [a shilling], to pay
a weeder,—thy path from thy door to thy
bowling-green shall never be grown up.
—Whilst there is a rood and a half of land
in the Shandy family, thy fortifications,
my dear uncle Toby, shall never be demolished.²

Tristram's images of the future, like his images of the past, are unavoidably tainted by death. In Volume VII, Chapter 14, while recounting his journey to Paris, Tristram becomes confused. His thoughts flash by in precipitous disarray, a disarray occasioned by his thinking (and recording) "now" the thoughts that he should have next. He gets ahead

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 25, p. 435.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 34, p. 230.

of himself. Thinking now of what should come next leads him, associationally, to think now of what must eventually 'come next' in a sphere quite outside his own mind. He has a presentiment of death:

—but where am I? and into what a
delicious riot of things am I rushing?
I—I who must be cut short in the midst
of my days, and taste no more of 'em
than what I borrow from my imagination—
peace to thee, generous fool! and let
me go on.¹

In this passage Tristram finds a bittersweet joy in his paradoxical ability to imagine now what he would have done had he lived longer than the number of years he imagines he will live. Surely such a prolepsis stretches the imagination to its forward limits. One senses the parallel of extremes between this forward-looking imagination and the retrospective imagination at work through most of Tristram Shandy.

Man's imagination is extremely agile. He can build subjective worlds of past and future without reference to present external reality. But death is a certain touchstone - the one sure contact with reality outside one's self. Behind the amusing epistemological incertitude of Tristram Shandy, over and beyond the festive spirit of the unreliable narrator, is the certainty of death. In his sermon, "The

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 14, p. 473.

Description of the World", Sterne wrote:

We are creatures but of a day, hastening
into the place from whence we shall return
no more.¹

In Tristram Shandy Sterne wore a more festive mask, but nevertheless there is a skeleton at the Shandean feast. Like his more sober contemporaries, Dr. Johnson and Thomas Gray, Sterne, too, was preoccupied with death.

Death eventually kills the artist, but his works needn't die. The artist's external dramatization of his inner-life - the artist's creation - can continue living in the imaginations of his audience. As surely as the black page in Volume I fails to bury Yorick, the grave is not the end of the author who has written with wit and feeling, and created witty, affectionate, and memorable characters.

But in this life is there no escape for the artist from his continual introspective absorption? Must he always concentrate, egocentrically, upon his own creative inner-life?

Sterne indicates that the artist can liberate himself from egocentricity. In fact, paradoxically, it is the same imaginative power that tends to drive a writer into himself that becomes his salvation. The imagination can be used, according to Sterne, to extend the range of man's five senses and to make contact with extra-mental reality.

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume V, Sermon 20.

In presenting this idealistic view, Sterne followed an eighteenth-century line of thought that ran through philosophers as diverse as Shaftesbury and Hartley. Indeed, I touched upon this at the end of my second chapter, where we examined the intuitive moral sense. At the end of my third chapter I suggested that Sterne connected his 'life-giving' qualities (imagination, wit, laughter, sympathy, benevolence, love) with intuitive communication. Intuitive empathy was Sterne's answer to reasoned scepticism. The 'wise fool' communicates; the 'wise fool' feels for others. And he does so by purging himself of (1.) self-regard, (2.) inconsiderateness toward others, and (3.) too rigid a reliance upon the powers of reason.

Now I wish to suggest that Sterne proposed the sympathetic, intuitive moral sense as a means, also, of escaping the self-concentration of the psyche.

Consider again the epiphanous culmination of Tristram's journey to France in Volume VII. The relation of the author-persona to his material is the same as elsewhere in his book, insofar as Tristram is writing "now" of the past. The particular experience he recounts at the end of Volume VII is meant to be a memory experience, for he speaks in Hartley-like fashion of strong "vibrating" that fortifies the memory image. Yet the past event, which Tristram describes "now", shows how at a certain moment in southern France Tristram

escaped the bounds of his own consciousness.

The vehicle for Tristram's escape was his sympathetic imagination. By "stopping and talking to every soul I met", by "joining all parties before me", by seeking communion with other men, Tristram turned his "'plain' into a 'city'".¹ Mysteiously, his imagination galvanized his senses into an intuitive appreciation of the world outside him. The imaginative crescendo which concludes his account of the journey toward humanity was:

the most fruitful and busy period of
my life.²

Here "on the road betwixt Nismes and Lunel" Tristram escaped himself and achieved an edifying union with mankind. He employed his imaginative powers in natural, harmonious conjunction with his sense-perceptions. His imagination became outgoing. He 'felt' for his fellow men, while at the same time observing them and fraternizing with them. Imagination put to this use overcomes self-interest. It results in empathy, rather than a withdrawal into one's own mental world: life rather than death. Sterne's message is "Viva la Joie!" of human brotherhood, "Fidon la Tristessa!" of morbid self-concern.³

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 43, pp. 510-511.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 43, p. 510.
 3. Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 43, p. 512.

At other times in the novel Sterne, through his author-persona device, praises Yorick and Toby for their ability to communicate intuitively. Toby in particular is of interest in this regard, for his creative imagination is centred on the bowling green, as Tristram's is on his book. Yet Toby, especially, has an active, social, sympathetic imagination as well. He reveals his greatest magnimity when he bursts forth from his mental cocoon - when he escapes his obsession with fanciful fortifications - and employs his imagination sympathetically to apprehend the distress of Le Fever.

The sympathetic sense, in Sterne's view, unites mankind by transcending the self-interest of each individual man. And to be oblivious of self-interest is to be free of narcissism and egoism.

This chapter has considered the psychology of Sterne's author-persona. We saw first that Tristram is always writing "now" insofar as at any particular moment in the book he records his present flow of thought. Bearing this in mind, I attempted to analyse Tristram's complex use of language, in an effort to illuminate his unreliability. Tristram's comments about what he had previously written - is writing, or will write - are subject to textual verification. They need only be matched against what actually appears in Tristram Shandy. When a discrepancy occurs, Tristram can

be called unreliable, although he is so life-like a personality that we may wish to say that his unreliability was not always intentional.

The verification procedure breaks down, however, as a tool for analysing Tristram's accounts of past events. Logical analysis can take us only so far when we deal with the psychologically realistic personality of Sterne's narrator-device. Here my analysis illuminates the difference between philosophical language and the language of the creative writer. The former tries to communicate rationally; the latter aims to capture and stimulate the reader's imagination.

Tristram's accounts of past events cannot be analysed for consistency. At a mimetic level, however, it is immediately apparent that some of the past events are probable, some possible, some highly impossible. Moreover, Tristram's supposed sources (e.g., testimony, documents), while sometimes possible, can seldom be deemed sufficient to account for his detailed descriptions of things which happened long before he was born. Often the reader must presume he is encountering not Tristram's memory-statements, but his imaginary stories.

Through Tristram, Sterne illustrated the psychological complexity and interrelation of an author's memory and imagination. Through the self-dramatization of his author-persona, Sterne shows that the imagination communicates where

logic and philosophy fail. Hence, it is possible, for instance, to explain Tristram's failure to fulfil his repeated promises about the way he would handle Toby's amours as a creative impotency at the crucial moment, rather than as a memory failure or an intentional deception. By concentrating on the memory, the imagination, and related psychic phenomena, Sterne followed a major trend in eighteenth-century novel-writing, a trend "concerned with psychological processes and states of consciousness."¹

Sterne exhibited, through Tristram, the artist's ability to reshape his past experiences and fashion an imaginary world, uninhibited by physical time. Indeed, the creative artist can fashion an imaginary world which goes on communicating long after he has died. Of course narcissism can result from the artist's persistent inward concentration. Yet, paradoxically, the same imagination which tends to enslave the artist within himself, also has a liberating potential. The imagination which fashions fanciful, private

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1. R. Paulson, Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, (Yale, 1967), p. 51. Paulson suggests that "the English novel developed in two directions in the eighteenth century. . . One was concerned with psychological processes and states of consciousness, but with their presentation rather than their analysis. The other branch of the English novel was devoted to ordered exposition, sometimes bordering on - and in Fielding becoming - subtle analysis; but it analysed a moral problem (for example, the rightness or wrongness of Tom Jones' actions), not the psychology of a character." See also, I. Watt, The Rise of the Novel, (Peregrine paperback, 1968), pp. 198-202; pp. 302-308.

worlds can also function, Sterne indicates, in conjunction with man's sense perceptions to unite man with man, intuitively and sympathetically, in social harmony.

In A Sentimental Journey Sterne displayed renewed interest in man's imagination, but in his second novel he focused his attention more directly upon the intuitive, socially-oriented imagination of the man of feeling. Sterne developed his second narrator, Yorick, as an imaginative perceptor of others, rather than as an author happily imagining and creating his own book. Yorick is repeatedly depicted using his imagination to heighten the quality of his sensations of the external world (and especially of other people) at the moment of sensation. Indeed, the cooperation between Yorick's sense-perceptions and his imagination becomes the 'modus operandi' of A Sentimental Journey. I shall consider this change in the psychology of Sterne's narrators in my final chapter. But first I want to comment on the artistic success of Tristram Shandy.

CHAPTER V

THE ARTISTIC SUCCESS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

To read Tristram Shandy is to experience an author's attempt to harness his creativity to a form which will successfully communicate with the reader.

In reading Tristram Shandy, we are never allowed to forget that the activity of creation, as an activity of forming perceptions and maneuvering them into an expressive order, is itself the subject.¹

Through Tristram, Sterne illustrates the difficulties of writing a book: the battles which a writer must fight with his own inner resources, with his medium, and with his reader. Indeed, the magnificent paradox is that Tristram Shandy must be acknowledged as a triumphant process of communication which proceeds by satirizing the very possibility of rational communication. Sterne's victory in the battle of words tells us a great deal about the nature of creative artistry.

1. Communication through Creativity

A book to be written or a book in the process of being written poses a vast array of problems for its author. To state the obvious: an author is limited, psychologically, by the range of his own sensitivity and by his ability to

1. D. VanGhent, The English Novel, (Harper paperback, 1967), p. 109.

evaluate and organize his perceptions of the ever-changing manifold of the external world. This problem overcome, there remain unavoidable technical problems. Thoughts must be put on paper; they must be organized so the reader can comprehend them. A writer must select a form to suit his content, and this basic selection may be determined by even more practical considerations. How much time can the author spare from real life to indulge himself in writing - to indulge in imagining? Similarly, how much time does the author think his reader will devote, periodically or continuously, to abstracting himself from reality and imagining himself in a fictional world?

All fiction implies aesthetic questions of this order, whether or not the author is consciously aware of them. However, these basic questions are not often acknowledged explicitly within the pages of the work of fiction. For the most part the tools and presuppositions of story-telling are employed without their being acknowledged or questioned. Yet the truly creative writer will scrutinize the existing literary conventions and produce an innovative work, which in turn will expand the future possibilities of his craft.

In Tristram Shandy Sterne questions the presuppositions of fiction explicitly (Tristram continually harps on them) as well as implicitly (Tristram Shandy succeeds as an innovative work of fiction). Sterne succeeded in extending the boundaries of the novel form, while simultaneously

succeeding in presenting an author-persona who is attempting to harness those very creative impulses which enable the creative transcendence of established literary convention.

Sterne was well aware of the existing boundaries of prose fiction. They had been extended by his literary predecessors (Erasmus, Rabelais, Cervantes, Montaigne, Burton, Swift, Pope, Richardson, and Fielding), and Sterne was determined to extend them even further.

It is true of course that Sterne drew the 'content' of his novel from the mainstream of eighteenth-century thought. However, the amusing dilemma of philosophical scepticism and its resolution through fellow-feeling had yet to be successfully dramatized in novel form. By combining contemporary epistemic and moral problems with an advanced 'form', Sterne fashioned a novel which broke with established tradition, while at the same time delineating the arduous effort of an author attempting such a break.

The opening pages of Tristram Shandy clearly indicate that Sterne intended to move beyond the established norms of prose fiction. Such norms existed, although in 1759 the novel genre was new and ill-defined. Normally, for instance, a novelist suggested at the very outset the nature of the forthcoming action, where the action occurred, and when. Sterne blithely ignored this traditional procedure. By the same token, a writer usually gave his readers some indication

of his narrator's trustworthiness. If the narrator was a picaresque, the author generally provided some guide for judging the truth of the picaresque's remarks. Again, this is not the case in Tristram Shandy.

Although Sterne, like Richardson, fashioned his fiction around "instantaneous descriptions and reflections",¹ the disordered unreliability of Sterne's instantaneous persona makes sense only retrospectively as the reader progresses into the book. Of course Sterne knew very well that he would confuse his reader, yet he pursued this course intentionally and assiduously. To portray an author's consciousness is to portray the confused thoughts which an author struggles to organize.

Very early in the novel Sterne's author-persona boasts that it is not his purpose to follow the customary rules for writing:

In writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his [Horace's] rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived.²

But what, the reader wonders, will be the outcome of rule-breaking on this massive scale? What indeed can it mean to write a book following no rules?

Other writers had of course advertised their

1. Clarissa, "Preface".

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 38.

authorial autarchy. "I shall not look on myself," wrote Fielding's narrator in Tom Jones, "as accountable to any court of critical jurisdiction whatever."¹ Yet, despite the pretence, Fielding's writing was far from iconoclastic. Certainly, his careful organization precluded the sort of rule-breaking which might confuse his readers.

Generally, when eighteenth-century novelists appealed to their autonomy they meant merely that they were re-shaping the techniques, devices, and literary canons of the past. They were tailoring their compositions to suit their own rules. Furthermore, their own rules, more often than not, can be readily deduced by the discerning reader. Tom Jones is carefully plotted and balanced. Even Smollett's rambling, picaresque novels and Dr. Johnson's hastily-written Rasselas are rule-governed insofar as the protagonist advances along a chronological plot-line.

Although Sterne's rhetoric is clearly innovative, his major innovation was to free himself from the usual rules of story-telling. The past two-hundred years have produced a variety of interpretations of Tristram Shandy, all of which point to Sterne's rhetorical fireworks, but none of which demonstrates a set of rules that determine the unfolding of his story. Only with untiring effort can a critic such as Fluchère piece together, for instance, the linear order of

1. Tom Jones, Book II, Chapter 1.

Shandean events from the chronological jumble of the narrative.¹

Of course Sterne himself had a master plan, and that was to make his novel reflect the problems of an author in collecting his thoughts, in fighting against solipsism, narcissism, and time, and in communicating with his reader.

Yet the claim of Sterne's author-persona not to be rule-bound must be taken seriously.² It is one of those Shandean remarks which is reliable because it agrees with Sterne's written performance. Coming very early in the novel, this remark signals the creative tour de force that is to follow.

"Creative" is the operative word. Tristram Shandy depicts the creative mind at work. In an important sense Sterne's novel reflects the peculiarly indeterminate nature of the creative process; a true innovator cannot be rule-bound, for rules determine steps to be taken, whereas true

1. Laurence Sterne: from Tristram to Yorick, English trans. B. Bray, (London, 1965), pp. 104-110. See also, C. Parish, "A Table of Contents for Tristram Shandy", CE, XXII, (1960), pp. 143-150. A.A. Mendilow, I think, puts the case too strongly for an 'organized' Tristram Shandy. "Not the smallest incident but its date is given or can be deduced, or, at the very least, can be fitted into its chronological order. . . Every piece in the jig-saw puzzle is found to fit in its place. This is itself against unplanned writing, demanding as it must have done an intricate system of cross-references." Time and the Novel, (London, 1952), p. 170. Although Sterne probably had dates and events pinpointed in his own mind, Tristram Shandy, nevertheless, has pieces (e.g., Jenny) which do not fit, even chronologically, into the "jig-saw puzzle".

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 4, p. 38.

creativity calls for a step into the unknown. In effect, Sterne's author-persona asks, "Who knows what I shall write next?" and answers, "I certainly don't!" Tristram Shandy purports to be extremely intolerant of the dreary uncreativity of rationally planned composition.

Now consider, Sir, what nonsense it is, either in fighting or writing, or any thing else (whether in rhyme to it, or not) which a man has occasion to do—to act by plan. . .¹

The indeterminate nature of creativity is dramatized in the spontaneity of Sterne's style. His author-persona is obsessed with the need for originality, his own ability to be original, and a desire to communicate in an original way. It is the lack of this quality - originality - among the many writers who imitated Tristram Shandy (Volumes I and II) that Sterne attacked in his third volume.

At the time of the appearance of Tristram Shandy, Sterne's publishers were also printing Edward Young's plea for originality-in-writing, Conjectures on Original Composition. Like Sterne, Young was wary of that "most fatal of errors", namely, "too great an indulgence of Genius";² yet, like Sterne again, Young extolled original genius:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 23, p. 549.
2. Conjectures on Original Composition (London, 1759), p. 39. R. & J. Dodsley published this, as they did the early volumes of Tristram Shandy.

A 'Genius' differs from a 'good Understanding', as a magician from a good architect; 'That' raises his structure by means invisible; 'This' by the skilful use of common tools. Hence Genius has ever been supposed to partake of something Divine.¹

Young, too, thought that the artist's wit, imagination, and originality were ultimately employed socially, to communicate:

Wit, indeed, however brilliant, should not be permitted to gaze self-enamoured on its useless charms, in that Fountain of Fame (if so I may call the Press) if beauty is all that it has to boast; but like the first Brutus, it should sacrifice to its most daring offspring, to the sacred interest of Virtue, and real service of mankind.²

Tristram's awareness of his own originality, as such, focuses attention on the very process of creative improvisation. The persistent emphasis upon Tristram's writing "now" and upon his incessant struggle to say something new or shocking in his next breath mirrors the immediacy of the creative process. Proceeding ungoverned into the unknown, the creator produces surprise after surprise. Aware of his last successful innovation, Sterne's author-persona continually strives to confound his reader "now" with something even more innovative:

1. Conjectures on Original Composition, (London, 1759), pp. 26-27.

2. Op. cit., p. 6.

I have a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter nonsensically, and I will not baulk my fancy.—¹

Sterne's dirigent force, obsessed with creativity, is under great pressure. He must always extend himself one better than his last witticism. Merrily, he builds a sequence of witticisms, often based upon his self-dramatization of his own unpredictable idea-associations. When the witty sequence brings him to the point of exhaustion, he undercuts the whole top-heavy structure with a surprising anti-climax. Thus the anti-climax becomes the final creative stroke to topple towers of earlier creativity. In a larger sense, the expectations which Tristram continually generates but sometimes leaves unfulfilled are also anti-climaxes, though of course these tell us more about the aspirations of the creative artist than about his actual creative performance.

Sterne's rendering of 'creativity' reflects the alternating strain and ease of the creative process. On the one hand Sterne depicts Tristram under self-conscious pressure to be ingenious and to create. Yet on the other, Sterne gives glimpses of an author whose innate creativity seems to supercede conscious effort. Indeed Tristram is sometimes so naturally spontaneous that the creative process seems totally irrational and involuntary. The words flow effortlessly without the mediation of the author's consciousness.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 23, p. 96.

The subconscious acts as an immediate amanuensis; forgotten memories arise to the surface. Like John de la Crosse, whom Walter mentions, Tristram's pen is sometimes commandeered by devilish, unconscious inspiration.¹ Tristram's remark that his pen "governs me—I govern not it,"² suggests the involuntary, subconscious drive - a drive that bypasses conscious judgment and presses towards new, unexplored, creative adventures.

The trance-like inspirational drive - a perfect communion of the poet with his muse - was taken quite seriously by Blake and the Romantics. With Sterne of course nothing must be taken too seriously. Clearly, however, Sterne does at times suggest that Tristram feels his hand guided by the god of creativity. One thinks here of Coleridge's poet who has fed on honey-dew and "drunk the milk of paradise",³ and of Akenside's tribute to the imagination:

Mind, mind alone (bear witness, earth and heaven!)
The living fountains in itself contains
Of beauteous and sublime . . .⁴

Sterne's celebration of the free-flowing creative imagination over calculated thought and planning dovetails

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1. Tristram Shandy, Volume V, Chapter 16, p. 368.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 6, p. 403.
 3. Kubla Khan, ll. 53-54.
 4. The Pleasures of Imagination, (1744), ll. 481-483.

into his overall theme that men understand each other best at supra-rational, uncalculated levels. Creative literature conveys truth in ways that purely rational communication cannot. In Tristram Shandy Sterne both announced and demonstrated an author's potential to write and communicate through an inchoate form - an inchoate form that is prior to, and less constricting than rational judgment and planning.

2. Victory over the Medium

In the most fundamental sense, every artist must employ a medium to communicate with his public. The novelist's medium is, of course, words. By carefully articulating his thoughts on paper, the novelist seeks to convey his imaginary world to the reader. Yet, it is often said that the truly creative artist attempts to transcend his medium - to use innovative techniques to achieve new levels of meaning. Experimentation of this sort lies at the heart of Tristram Shandy. Sterne's author-persona continually draws our attention to his originality, while Sterne substantiates Tristram's claim by creating a novel which did indeed transcend the prescribed rules for writing.

The praise Sterne heaped on Garrick for not acting according to the rules of his profession redounds on Sterne, who in his chosen medium also refused to be rule-bound.¹ The most obvious surface-manifestation of Sterne's innovative

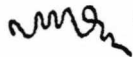
1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 12, p. 192.

technique is his use of graphic devices: black and marbled pages, copious asterisks, dashes, indices and bracketing, skilful deployment of type sizes and faces. Of course none of these characteristics was uniquely Sternean. Long before Sterne, various Grub Street writers had tried their hands at capriciously intermixing type sizes and faces.¹ Likewise, Richardson had used brackets and indices in Clarissa, and the early critic, Ferriar, had reported a marbled page in print before Sterne's.² Yet the massive, purposeful, and sometimes innovative deployment of such devices struck eighteenth-century readers as it strikes us today: uniquely Shandean.

Sterne's typographical paraphernalia served several purposes. To some extent they amused and surprised his readers. To some extent, too, they displayed the sprightly freedom and originality of the author. But the explanation probably goes deeper.

Since a major Shandean theme is the distrust of words, Sterne's graphic devices can be seen as attempts to go beyond the mere words on the printed page and convey (or

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1. In particular see the excerpts from John Dunton's The Life and Errors of John Dunton, (1705), in P. Pinkus, Grub Street Stripped Bare, (London, 1968), pp. 104-107.
 2. Ferriar cites Gabriel John, An Essay Towards the Theory of the Intelligible World, (c. 1748). Illustrations of Sterne, (London, 1798), p. 52.

parody the hope of conveying) a more exact meaning to the reader. What words can express death better than a black page? What verbal description of the flourish of a walking stick can surpass the pictogram ? What words can better describe the Shandean scepticism (i.e., the doubt that men can communicate rationally with one another) than the symbol of Sterne's work, the marbled page? What can more pointedly throw the onus upon the reader's imagination than the graphic device (or anti-graphic device!) of the blank page?

Sterne's devices contain their own meaning; they depict what they mean; they needn't be deciphered into rational language in order to communicate. Perfidious words do not obscure their meanings. The Shandean asterisks suggest, rather than define their meaning. Similarly, the characteristic Sternean dashes of different lengths show rather than tell the reader that a conversation has been interrupted, that a character is speaking slowly, or, indeed, too rapidly - in the midst of great confusion. The meaning of such symbols is apparent at a non-linguistic level, and Sterne valued this non-linguistic transmission of meaning in much the same way as he valued non-verbal, intuitive understanding between men.

In this light the black page, the marbled page, and the blank page can be seen as symbols of the communicative process itself. Death, Sterne indicates with his black page,

does not stop the deceased from living on in memory, nor does it stop his communicating through the writing he has left behind. The marbled page symbolizes the uncertainty of communication; the author can never know positively that he has conveyed his meaning across the epistemic gap. Some of the author's meaning may be modified and supplemented by the reader's imagination. Indeed, Sterne never tires of encouraging such imaginative cooperation, and the blank page is its symbol.

To conceive this right,—call for pen and ink—here's paper ready to your hand.—Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind—as like your mistress as you can—as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you—'tis all one to me—please but your own fancy in it.¹

The blank page symbolizes an author's dependence upon his reader's imaginative cooperation. It is a blank page, but it shouldn't leave an empty impression on the reader; if the reader's imagination isn't stimulated, an author has failed.

Many of Sterne's typographical devices (the asterisks in particular) call attention to themselves as devices, as mere substitutes for words. Hence, while seeking new and better ways to communicate, Sterne indulges in typography which:

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 38, p. 451.

lays bare the apparent absurdity that symbols on paper can represent experience in life.¹

Simultaneously, therefore, Sterne pushes at the limits of his medium and reveals those limits to his reader. Tristram Shandy is a book that reveals the limitations of the medium in which any book is written.

When speaking of Sterne as an innovator, Christopher Ricks asked:

How far can you use words to insist on the limitations of what words can do?²

Ricks' query brings out the point that Sterne, like any novelist, had to work with words despite his quest for new ways to transmit meaning. Indeed, Sterne's persistent preoccupation with transcending verbal communication can be noticed not only from his graphic devices but also from his very use of words. The many Shandean passages describing, in minute detail, gestures and physical postures constitute attempts, paradoxical attempts, to transcend words. It is as if Sterne were saying that actions speak louder than words, though of course his medium demanded words to describe the actions.

1. W. Holtz, "Typography, Tristram Shandy, the Aposiopesis, etc.", The Winged Skull, ed. A.H. Cash and J.M. Stedmond, (London, 1971), pp. 247-257.

2. The Novelist as Innovator, (London, 1965), p. 25.

At one level Sterne's self-dramatization on the printed page has connexions with self-dramatization on the stage. The author/actor P.J. Kavanagh recently noted the resemblance between creative writing and creative acting:

A visualizing habit and a tactile sense are essential to both. How a man sits and where, the angle of his shoulders in relation to others in the scene, how he turns his head, how he punctuates a speech by putting down his glass - there is likely to be only one inevitable way, in terms of character, of doing all these things, and a sense of their rightness or wrongness is not a mere matter of technique, it comes from the visual and tactile imagination.¹

At another level Sterne's use of words to give his reader the feeling of action has a connexion with the difficulty of knowing what another person really has in mind. The idea that a person's true meaning could be determined from what he did, rather than what he said, had a great vogue in late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century literature. Verbal claims for "honour" or "virtue" were often belied by the facts, and this discrepancy between words and meaning had provided the satirical tension for Restoration comedy. Likewise, Swift and Pope exploited - for purposes of irony - man's tendency to say one thing while doing another. Fielding and Smollett extracted humour from the same human frailty. Sterne was in this tradition, but he treated the dichotomy between word and deed from a different perspective.

1. "On the Stage, On the Page", TLS, July 27, 1973, p. 861.

In his novels and sermons Sterne repeatedly implies that man's seemingly trivial movements - his uncalculated responses and spontaneous gestures - provide a better understanding of the man than his words.¹ As Walter Shandy says:

There are a thousand unnoticed openings [unguarded, seemingly trivial actions]. . . which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul. . . a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room, —or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him.²

Here Walter seems to express Sterne's own viewpoint, a viewpoint which contributed to Sterne's habit of describing many trivial movements at greater length and in more detail than they seem to deserve. Critics have seldom failed to notice this trait. Robert Donovan commented upon Sterne's use of "words (and gestures and other non-verbal signs)" as "openings into the soul."³ Peter Quennell, too, saw that Sterne's method "gave special emphasis to the outward evidence

1. For example: "I would sooner form a judgment of a man's temper from his behaviour on such little occurrences of life, as these, than from the more weighted and important actions, where a man is more upon his guard. . ." The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume V, Sermon 31, "St. Peter's Character". "Let their actions speak it, instead of their words, or at least. . . let them both speak one language." Op. cit., Volume II, Sermon 11, "Evil-Speaking". My final chapter contains examples from A Sentimental Journey.
2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 5, pp. 401-402.
3. The Shaping Vision, (Cornell, 1966), p. 95.

of inward happenings." ¹ An earlier critic, Walter Sichel, likened Sterne's "minute touches of observation" to those of the impressionist painters. ²

Tristram's performance agrees with his claim that his method is not to draw "the great contours" of character, but to give the reader "some familiar strokes and faint designations of it." ³ Sterne's detailed descriptions of seemingly trivial gestures give the reader hints about the Shandean personalities - hints which are in Sterne's view more valuable than direct value-judgments about the characters. Hints appeal to the reader's imagination; they offer more subtle character-revelation than direct presentation. Gestures and the "transition from one attitude to another" provide the "unnoticed openings" that "let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul." ⁴

Toby's habit of whistling, for instance, can be seen through the course of the novel as a gentle defense-mechanism. The rather inarticulate Toby answers irrelevant or ridiculous philosophical arguments with a whistle, thus avoiding useless conflict. Though it lacks logical form,

1. Four Portraits, (London, 1945), p. 153.

2. Sterne, A Study, (London, 1910), p. 47.

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 22, p. 94.

4. Tristram Shandy, Volume IV, Chapter 6, p. 278; Volume VI, Chapter 5, p. 401.

Toby's whistle does communicate. It refutes false premisses or absurd conclusions with a finality that language or logic is powerless to counter.

When off on one of his philosophical tangents, Walter frequently finds Toby an exasperating partner. Toby is an anti-intellectual foil for Walter's curious scholarship. Yet, a telling glance or a touch of Toby's hand communicates the warmth of feeling between them and reveals Toby's innate aptitude for calming others and preserving harmony without relying on calculated reason.

Yorick's death-bed scene, too, is replete with hand-to-hand and intense hand-to-heart touches which show the reader and make him feel (rather than tell him) the emotional bond existing between Yorick and Eugenius. By insisting on the importance of carefully delineating even those movements which seem trivial, Sterne highlighted the problem facing all writers of fiction, viz., how to show the reader and make him feel, rather than tell him.

Occasionally, the gesturing and posturing are so outrageously overdone that they call attention to the actions as actions. Then, of course, the gestures and postures become travesties of the subtle, meaningful Shandean movements; as such they point to the writer's difficulty in successfully dramatizing himself and communicating through words. In this regard I have already indicated a number of ridiculously magnified, trivial movements and related them to the festive

spirit of Tristram Shandy.

When Sterne's miming actually does reach carnival-esque heights - when it draws attention to mime as mime - then Sterne obviously aims to reduce to absurdity an author's descriptive powers (his powers to 'show' rather than 'state') in much the same way that he sometimes reduces typographical devices to absurdity, and for much the same reason: to illustrate, comically, the limits of an author's medium. Words describing actions are not the actions themselves, no matter how intricate the description.

Sterne's graphic devices and his penchant for stressing seemingly trivial actions must be seen in the context of the novel as a whole. Although Sterne endorses (and parodies) these two methods of 'circumventing' words in order to convey truer meaning, his methods are always at the command of his extremely flexible, verbal wit. Indeed, the circumventory tactics only emphasize Sterne's skill with language. Witty discourse binds the novel together and ultimately permits Sterne's fanciful experiments with the limits of his medium.

Occasionally the reader finds Sterne's verbal wit in hilarious conjunction with graphic devices and seemingly trivial actions. Consider the close of Chapter 6, Volume II. There Sterne performs merrily with the breaking of a pipe-stem, with asterisks, and with the way that the printed word

conveys meaning.

[Walter and Toby are discussing why Mrs. Shandy prefers the services of a midwife to those of Dr. Slop]

Mayhap, brother, replied my uncle Toby, my sister does it to save the expence:—A pudding's end,—replied my father,—the doctor must be paid the same for inaction as for action,—if not better,—to keep him in temper.

—Then it can be out of nothing in the whole world, quoth my uncle Toby, in the simplicity of his heart,—but MODESTY:—My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a man come so near her****. I will not say whether my uncle Toby had completed the sentence or not;—'tis for his advantage to suppose he had,—as, I think, he could have added no ONE WORD which would have improved it.

If, on the contrary, my uncle Toby had not fully arrived at the period's end,—then the world stands indebted to the sudden snapping of my father's tobacco-pipe, for one of the neatest examples of that ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the 'Aposiopesis.'—Just heaven! How does the 'Pio piu' and the Poco meno' of the Italian artists;—the insensible MORE or LESS, determine the precise line of beauty in the sentence, as well as in the statue! How do the slight touches of the chisel, the pencil, the pen, the fiddle-stick, 'et caetera',—give the true swell, which gives the true pleasure!—O my countrymen!—be nice;—be cautious of your language;—and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend.

—'My sister, mayhap,' quoth my uncle Toby, 'does not choose to let a man come so near her****.' Make this dash,—'tis an Aposiopesis.—Take the dash away, and write 'Backside',—tis Bawdy. Scratch Backside out, and put 'Covered way' in, 'tis a Metaphor;—and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle Toby's head, that if he had been left to have added one word to the sentence, —that was it.

But whether that was the case or not the case;—or whether the snapping of my father's tobacco-pipe so critically, happened through accident or anger,

— will be seen in due time.¹

Sterne's pastiche of graphic devices and exaggerated descriptions communicates imaginatively to the reader, while simultaneously exhibiting the limits of the novelist's medium. Yet, perhaps Sterne's most intriguing search, when writing Tristram Shandy, was for suitable organizational patterns to give the reader a life-like feeling of temporality, while simultaneously revealing the limitations of a novelist in 'putting' time into his book.

Consider a book on a table. Whether the book is a dictionary, a volume of poetry, a chap-book, or a novel, that book exists as a physical object in space. We can see it, touch it, measure it. The question of how a book - a physical object - could imaginatively 'incorporate' time interested Sterne, and his interest in this matter is not surprising when we consider his overall interest in the relations between matter and spirit, between physical objects on the one hand and mental conceptions on the other.

In what ways can a book 'incorporate' time? In his curious flirtation with this question Sterne indicates that a book, any book, has temporal potential insofar as it relates

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 6, pp. 119-120. In the third paragraph of this passage, Sterne plays with William Hogarth's notion that "Il poco piu - 'the little more'. . . is expected from the hand of a master." The Analysis of Beauty, (London, 1753), Chapter X.

(1.) to someone in the process of reading the book, or (2.) to someone in the process, originally, of writing that book. Furthermore, if the book attempts to represent life, then (3.) the story itself is set in a fictional time period, and the characters move through the time-span of the novel. The first two treat 'time' as duration, i.e., the time consumed in doing something. The third deals with temporal relationships - past, present, future - in the lives of the fictional characters.

Examples of Sterne's acute awareness of these three aspects of time can be easily found throughout Tristram Shandy. Chapter 8 of Volume II, for instance, deals with the reader's time, the author's time, and the problems of time-space relationships within the boundaries of a book.

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr Slop, the man-midwife;—so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come;—though, morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get his boots on.

If the hypercritic will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell, and the rap at the door;—and, after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths,—should take upon him to insult over me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability, of time:—I would remind him, that the idea of duration and of its simple modes, is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas, —and is the true scholastic pendulum, —and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this

matter,—abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever.

I would, therefore, desire him to consider that it is but poor eight miles from Shandy Hall to Dr Slop, the man-midwife's house;—and that whilst Obadiah has been going those said miles and back, I have brought my uncle Toby from Namur, quite across Flanders, into England:—That I have had him ill upon my hands near four years;—and have since travelled him and corporal Trim in a chariot and four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire;—all which put together, must have prepared the reader's imagination for the entrance of Dr Slop upon the stage,—as much, at least (I hope) as a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts.

If my hypercritic is intractable, alleging, that two minutes and thirteen seconds are no more than two minutes and thirteen seconds,—when I have said all I can about them;—and that this plea, though it might save me dramatically, will damn me biographically, rendering my book from this very moment, a professed ROMANCE, which, before, was a book apocryphal:—If I am thus pressed—I then put an end to the whole objection, and controversy about it all at once,—by acquainting him, that Obadiah had not got above three-score yards from the stable-yard before he met with Dr Slop;—and indeed he gave a dirty proof that he had met with him,—and was within an ace of giving a tragical one too.

Imagine to yourself;—but this had better begin a new chapter.¹

Notice that this chapter also illustrates Sterne's amused interest in psychological time, i.e., duration based upon the acceleration or deceleration of idea-associations. Among the many different but related 'times' of Tristram Shandy we find therefore: reading time, writing time, the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 8, pp. 122-123.

time-order of past events in the Shandy's history, and psychological time - as it relates to the reader's experience in reading Tristram Shandy, as it accompanies Tristram's mental experiences as he writes, and as Tristram shows the duration of Walter's and Toby's idea-associations.

Such an obsession with time was highly unusual for an eighteenth-century novelist. The typical writer of the period merely assumed without question that 'time' could be reduced to a spatial model. 'Earlier' and 'later' in fictional time-schemes usually paralleled 'before' and 'after' in the book; usually the fictional events taking place on page ten preceded (in the fictional time-scheme) what occurred, say, on page twenty, despite occasional flashbacks and interpolated tales.

Sterne spotted the absurdity. A place in space, Sterne realized, is too static to represent a moment in time. A place in space simply cannot be tantamount to a moment in time, even though our language often uses the two analogously.¹ Accordingly, Tristram Shandy satirizes the whole idea that time in a work of fiction can be satisfactorily represented in a page to page progression. Mis-numbered and misplaced chapters serve this satirical purpose, as does Sterne's reduction of his first six volumes to spatial diagrams.²

1. For example, we say, "Tomorrow lies before me," just as we say, "The forest lies before me."

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 40, pp. 453-454; Volume IX, Chapters 17-26.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to become involved in the philosophical complexities of time and space, except insofar as Sterne exposed these complexities in Tristram Shandy. Suffice it to say, then, that the category-difference between time and space can be summarized as follows: It is essential to the concept of 'time' that things happen in a certain order, but this has no exact equivalent in our concept of space. The word "while" (or "when") on the one hand and the word "where" on the other function differently in our language. Hence, the statement, "While x happened, p and then q happened," has no exact equivalent when we talk of purely spatial relations.¹ Sterne amuses himself with this identical linguistic construction in Volume I, Chapter 22:

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great outlines of my uncle Toby's most whimsical character;—when my aunt Dinah and the coachman came across us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system. . . .²

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1. P.T. Geach argues that although a proposition such as "while r, (p and then q)" is acceptable, "Nothing analogous to this is possible for propositions describing spatial order: 'x is between (y is above w) and z' gives us mere gibberish if we replace the schematic letters by names." "Some Problems about Time", PBA, Volume LI, (1965), p. 333. The differing logic of temporal and spatial expressions has also been clearly shown by R.M. Gale: "There is a surface grammatical analogy between 'Don't live in the past' and 'Don't live in the Bronx', but similarity covers up a sharp divergence in logical grammar; we can ask where the Bronx is and request instructions for getting there, but we cannot ask the same questions about the past." The Philosophy of Time, (London, 1968), p. 6.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 22, p. 94.

Throughout that chapter Sterne draws attention to the "two contrary motions", digression and progression, which he claims are working harmoniously in his book. The novel is progressive insofar as each additional page adds to the bulk of the whole and reveals more about the Shandys. But although the book progresses spatially page by page, the time-order within the book digresses because it does not follow the page order. Moreover, it is the digressive characteristic (the characteristic which seeks to remove time from a spatial model) which Sterne prizes, calling digressions "the sunshine" of his work.¹

How accurately, Sterne must have wondered as he began Tristram Shandy, can a book - a physical, spatial object - provide a life-like representation of time? Sensing that time-order and spatial order differed in crucial respects, Sterne attempted to perform in practice when he felt was impossible in principle, i.e., to encompass time within a physical space. Tristram Shandy acknowledges the writer's job of representing a period of time (successive events, changes, durations) within a certain limited space. Sterne's author-persona, like any writer, faces the task of imposing order on his present idea-associations (influenced, according to Sterne, by memory, habit, and opinion, but mostly by imagination) and reducing that order to book-form, so as to

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 22, p. 95.

represent not only the succession of his own mental phenomena but also the sequential events in the story he is telling. While the rule-bound critics faulted Sterne's digressions for being departures from literary tradition, Sterne's technique successfully adds life-like temporal dimensions to the consciousness of his author-persona.

The difficulty of representing time with verisimilitude in book-form is further compounded in a supposedly autobiographical work like Tristram Shandy. The starting point of an autobiography is arbitrary. Where does one's life begin? with the homunculus? with one's ancestors? Moreover, there is a necessary difficulty about ending an autobiography. A complete autobiography is impossible simply because the author cannot live long enough to write down the penultimate idea in his final idea-association. He cannot live long enough to conclude his full life's story. Hence, the last thought of a dying man is not communicated rationally in words, but, if communicated at all, it is by a look or a gesture, by an imaginative, intuitive understanding such as that between Yorick and Eugenius at the moment of Yorick's death. The black page which Sterne places immediately thereafter symbolizes the end of rational communication; yet, of course, Yorick lives on imaginatively in Tristram's consciousness.

Sterne's habit of halting the action and his accentuated slow-motion transitions from posture to posture

may also relate to his interest in temporality. Philosophers since Zeno have recognized 'motion' as the connexion between time and space, primarily because a motion occurs in successive instances and in successive places. Overly elaborate descriptions of movement, such as we find in Tristram Shandy, call attention to the discreet quality of time, in contrast to the transitional. Hence, the reader becomes aware of each minor movement which goes to compose the larger, sweeping movement, and his attention is directed toward the temporality of motion.

Not until Sterne, and not for years thereafter, do we find a novelist who in so many ways questions the verisimilitude of casting time in a spatial mould. Not until Sterne do we find a novelist who, by jettisoning the linear plot-line, by playing havoc with the tenses of the English language, by juxtaposing various temporal relations and contrasting the duration of clock-time with the feeling of psychological time, tried repeatedly to transcend (and parody the possibility of transcending) the limitations of his form, with a view toward conveying to the imaginations of his readers the truest possible impression of time.

3. Success with the Creative Reader

To consider Tristram Shandy from the reader's viewpoint is to recognize immediately that such a creatively

written book (and, indeed, a book about creativity) demands a creative response from the reader. Like good conversation, the reading of Tristram Shandy requires the active collaboration of two people. The reader's job is to attempt to comprehend what Sterne has in mind. Yet much is left unsaid, or is not said clearly; consequently, much is left to the reader's imagination.

Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation: As no one would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine in his turn, as well as yourself.¹

Sterne's reader cannot remain a passive receptor; on the contrary, he must reach imaginatively - he must extend himself - to meet the imaginative aura radiated by Sterne's creativity. Of course it would be dangerous to speak categorically about an 'ideal' or 'correct' response to Tristram Shandy, if only because the book withstands many readings at many levels. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest in broad terms the type of response that Sterne sought to evoke, for that response is the natural consequence of his themes, his author-persona device, and his persistent efforts to push past the limits of the printed page.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 11, p. 127.

We have already seen Sterne's interest in the relation between language and thought. This will be an appropriate starting point, and it is appropriate, too, as always when dealing with Sterne, to begin with basic fundamentals.

Any reader of any book encounters 'ink-marks' (letters) on the printed page. These marks are physical, insofar as they constitute impressions on paper, but their arrangements are meant to be understood by linguistic conventions rather than physical laws. Conventionally, the printed matter conveys thoughts. Somehow the grouping of letters into words and words into sentences is intended to transfer thoughts and convey meaning.

Few authors or readers pause to consider basic linguistic conventions. Fewer still find them mysterious. And only a writer interested in making comic capital from philosophical scepticism - only a writer like Sterne - would question the logic behind the presuppositions of fiction within that very work of fiction. It is in this sense that commentators are correct in calling Tristram Shandy a satire of the novel genre or even an anti-novel.

To Sterne the very idea that a word can go proxy for a thing, or that a group of words can stand for an action, seemed rife with droll philosophical difficulties. Similarly, Sterne saw something cockeyed in the belief that an author

translates his thoughts into words and that the reader re-translates the words into thoughts closely akin to those of the author. How, Sterne wondered, can an author guarantee the transmission of his exact meaning? Aren't words coloured by connotations (e.g., "noses", "whiskers")? Aren't they sometimes ambiguous, per se (e.g., "love", "modesty")? Isn't innuendo sometimes overlooked by the reader, and isn't it sometimes 'found' where not intended? In fact, isn't any interpretation of writing bound to be somewhat subjective?¹

In one of his letters Sterne claimed that an appreciation of his humour rested in great part upon the reader's imagination:

It is not in the power of every one to taste humour, however he may wish it; it is the gift of God; and besides, a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him; his own ideas are only called forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within him entirely correspond to those excited. —'Tis like reading himself—and not the book.²

Naturally, as an author, Sterne necessarily was tied to the convention under which his words were supposed to

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1. By 'halving' the problem of the communication process, and making it depend in part upon the reader's imagination, Sterne followed a pre-Romantic psychological and aesthetic theory, which was consolidated and advanced formally by Lord Kames in his Elements of Criticism (1762). Kames linked the aesthetic merits of art and literature with the emotions and passions stirred in the observer or reader.
 2. Feb. 9, 1768, to Dr. J. Eustace, Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L.P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), p. 411.

represent the thoughts of his characters, and under which 'what is written by the author' is meant to be understood by the reader. Sterne was tied to the conventional relation between writer and reader, even though he mocked the convention by creating a crack-brained, forgetful, and seemingly deceptive author-persona. He was tied as necessarily to this convention as he was to the convention that a work of fiction must somehow encompass temporality within a spatial limit. Yet, as with his treatment of temporality, Sterne sought to probe the limits of an author's ties to the literary convention which supposes that objective communication exists between writer and reader.

Sterne's choice of an unreliable narrator-device dramatizes the need for something more than mere words to convey meaning. A reader never seems entirely certain whether Tristram (in any particular remark) is being serious or foolish. What is the reader to take at face value, and what is he to take 'cum grano salis'? Sterne forces this central question upon his reader. Tristram's mountebank-characteristics bring to mind the story of an equally 'ingenuous' humourist who, reproached by his audience for verbal mystification, once agreed to raise his thumb whenever he was merely joking - only to have his audience realize that he might sometimes be raising his thumb in jest!¹ Even the

1. This anecdote is borrowed from a non-Sternean context. M. Black, The Labyrinth of Language, (London, 1968), p. 96, footnote.

"meta-language" of gesture doesn't guarantee the communication of meaning. Even Sterne's intricate descriptions of gestures leave much for the reader to interpret imaginatively.

Sterne's initial decision to employ an author-persona with a mania for creative improvisation also dictates to a surprising degree the reader's response. Unlike the reader of most novels, the reader of Tristram Shandy encounters wholesale literary rule-breaking. Indeed, the reader of Sterne's artfully chaotic novel is constantly reminded, implicitly and explicitly, that the material he is reading is not rule-governed in the way that a literary work usually is. Sterne's rhetorical device, as pointed out in my second chapter, is peripeteia (a falsification of expectation), the figure which a recent aesthetician has called:

a disconfirmation followed by consurance;
the interest of having our expectations
falsified is obviously related to our
wish to reach the discovery of recognition
by an unexpected and instructive route.¹

As a side-issue, I touched upon Sterne's penchant for literary innovation and rule-breaking in chapters one, three, and four of this study; earlier in this chapter I considered rule-breaking as a characteristic of the creative writer. Now I shall consider the consequences of Sterne's

1. F. Kermode, The Sense of an Ending, (Oxford, 1966), p. 18.

rule-breaking upon the reader.

Given an author intent on spontaneity and inventiveness, the reader cannot rely upon the author's previous ploys to set the pattern for future moves. In Tristram Shandy Sterne's unlimited freedom precludes the reader from making inferences about what will happen next, based upon what has gone before. Sterne's reader is barred from adducing and formulating rules that would determine with any accuracy the future moves of the author-persona. There is an arch delight in Tristram's threat not to have the next page printed if he thought that the reader had "the least judgment or probable conjecture" of what would be on that page.¹

Rules can be deduced only from activities that were previously formalized, but Sterne's highly improvisational technique attempts the very antithesis of formalization. The reader, therefore, continually encounters the unexpected, the surprising.

If Sterne had written in a conventional, rule-bound way, the reader would have relied more on his memory, because the steps that Sterne would have taken as the novel progressed would have depended more importantly upon previously established patterns, and the reader's anticipations would have been based upon memories of that pattern. He would have

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume I, Chapter 25; p. 101.

observed the pattern and conjectured, rationally, about what would come next. As Tristram Shandy stands, however, Sterne intends us never to know what to expect next. The interpretive burden, then, falls not so much upon the reader's memory or his reason as upon his imaginative faculties.

There seems to be a reciprocity, therefore, between (1.) Sterne's structural device, who writes (as I have shown in my fourth chapter) more from imagination and "mad" idea-associations than from memory or calculated reason, and (2.) Sterne's reader, who is precluded from predicting what will come next and is, accordingly, forced to read imaginatively. The innovative author creates anew at each instant, and the reader not only witnesses, but also is made to participate in the creative act at the moment he reads. Sterne reveals the truly imaginative author as more than a rule-follower, and his creative writing forces the reader, too, to be more imaginative than rule-following. Thus Sterne succeeds in using the words on the printed page as stimuli for our imaginations. He transforms us into creative readers. Moreover, in the very process of reading, the reader is also drawn into Sterne's thematic satire of 'knowledge of other minds', the 'insufficiency of language', and 'idea-association', for only the imagination, Sterne indicates, can transcend such epistemic difficulties.

But if the imagination of each reader plays such a

crucial rôle in the experience of reading Tristram Shandy, then isn't Sterne's novel open to many interpretations? Yes. Two-hundred years of varied criticism have shown this. Yet, the possibility of varied interpretation is precisely Sterne's point. He is using language to reveal the limitations of language and to show that words are only a jumping-off point for the imagination. Perfect knowledge of other minds, perfect thought-transference through language, is impossible, so Sterne asks: Why not admit the impossibility and strive instead for communication through imagination?

Sterne never intended his novel to be judged upon conventional eighteenth-century literary norms, or by calculating philosophers.¹ Indeed, if judged upon these grounds, Tristram Shandy fails. It lacks the unity and coherence of a formally organized novel, even though unity and coherence were unclearly defined in the early days of the novel genre. It lacks plot as well. It even lacks the adventure-after-adventure pattern of the Bildungsroman. Of course, the omnipresence of the persona does unify the book, but the

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 4, pp. 174-175; in a letter of September 9, 1760, Sterne wrote to the Rev. Robt. Brown: "The Wise heads I see on the continent are made up of the same materials, & cast in the same Moulds; with the Wise heads of this Island,—they philosophize upon Tristram Shandy alike to a T—they all look too high—'tis ever the fate of low minds." Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. L.P. Curtis, (Oxford, 1935), pp. 121-122.

reader directly encounters the thoughts of the persona rather than his worldly adventures. Then, too, Sterne's novel lacks the conventional beginning, middle, and end; indeed, Sterne accentuates the difficulty in deciding where to start and indicates the absurdity of an author's hopes to finish his complete life-history. Moreover, in Rabelaisian incidents such as Tristram's circumcision, Sterne violates eighteenth-century demands for probability, or even for that wider desideratum, possibility.

On purely rational grounds, too, Tristram Shandy seems to fail. If we ignore the imaginative humour and analyse the Shandean philosophical message, we find nothing but a deep-seated scepticism that could have been argued with more clarity in a philosophical treatise.

But to judge Tristram Shandy on conventional literary norms or on philosophical grounds is highly inappropriate, for these criteria overlook what Sterne set out to do and what he succeeded in accomplishing. Tristram Shandy was meant to highlight the insufficiency of stereotyped literary techniques and rationally organized language. Sterne revolted against literature as a finished product, against organized homogeneity, against totally and tediously 'possible' fiction. Tristram Shandy shows that neither rule-following nor logical form is of importance in the imaginative meeting of minds between author and reader. The comic illustrations

of communicative failure between Shandean characters - failures at a purely rational level - only heighten our appreciation of the supra-rational, imaginative, communicative successes.

Tristram Shandy was intended, then, to communicate at supra-rational levels and to exemplify the great potential of such imaginative communication. Even my earlier attempts at philosophical analysis of the statements of Sterne's author-persona led ultimately to this same conclusion, for the analysis finally revealed the emphasis Sterne placed on imaginative, logic-defying, creative writing. Men's imaginations really can communicate, whereas philosophy at best ultimately serves to define the limits of rational communication and at worst may be a fraudulent façade to conceal stupidity, as in the case of the grave but ridiculous Phutatorius. Imaginative worlds of the artist's creation, dramatized in imaginative language, and received imaginatively by the reader: this is Sterne's formula for ideal communication.

It is the imaginative spirit, the festive spirit, the spirit of participating in fiction, that makes for a meeting of minds between author and reader. True wisdom, Sterne insists, extols man's imaginative power and enables him to communicate. Hence, true wisdom is a participation in what much of the world calls "folly". Sterne revels in this paradoxical wisdom; he praises Tristram implicitly, and

Parson Yorick and Toby explicitly (through Tristram) for being 'wise fools'. There is praise, too, for the reader who surrenders reason and rises to the occasion by greeting imaginative literature with his own powers of imagination and feeling. Such a reader is also a 'wise fool'.

In contrast to the Enlightenment ideal of the balanced, totally rational man, Sterne looked back toward a Cervantic hero. Like Don Quixote, Tristram Shandy is a great imaginative novel about the imagination - a tribute to the imaginative worlds men's minds erect. In contrast, likewise, to the Enlightenment assumption that Nature serves as an objective criterion for man's generalizations about the world, Sterne looked proleptically toward the Romantics and stressed the subjective, imaginative power of the individual creative artist.

It is within this broad framework of creativity that the communicative successes of Tristram Shandy can be located. First, Sterne succeeds in conveying the inner-life of a writer as he writes. The ingenious structure maneuvers the past into the present so that, besides our getting to know the character who is writing and his family, we see, simultaneously, the creative hyper-activity behind a literary work-in-process. Through skilful juxtaposition of idea-associations and innovative use of time-schemes, Sterne gives us a life-like dramatization of the inner-complexity of

thought - a suggestion of the organization and the disorganization of the writer's mind.

Of course complexity in language does not necessarily mirror complexity of thought. Often Sterne uses rhetoric for rhetoric's sake. But even these excesses are pardonable on the grounds that they realistically reveal the temptations of a writer to indulge in rhetoric. Likewise, Tristram's confusion - the opposite of calculated rhetoric - is transformed into a vehicle for communication. Uncertainty itself (a characteristic of the indeterminate nature of creativity) communicates, as do ambiguity and innuendo because they involve the reader imaginatively.

Through Tristram's consciousness we come to know the Shandy family, and, although we do finish reading the novel, Sterne's characters live on in our imagination and memory as surely as Toby continued living in Tristram's mind. Hence, the truly creative writer does defeat death, and his book will "swim down the gutter of time",¹ not because of his rational presentation, but because of his ability to stir men's imaginations.

Through his unswerving trust in man's imaginative potential, Sterne's artistic message is related to his moral message. Though the moral message is considerably less original, it was no less important to Sterne.

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 8, p. 582.

Man's capacity to direct his imagination toward the feelings of his fellow man (and through altruism escape solipsism) was fashionably known in the eighteenth century as the sympathetic or moral sense. Related as it was to the social virtues of friendship, good nature, kindly laughter, benevolence, and intuitive fellow-feeling, the moral sense was praised by those seeking to disprove Hobbes' and Mandeville's unflattering views of mankind. The 'healthy' social virtues were continually contrasted with the 'unhealthy' vices of spleen, undue gravity, ridicule, self-interest, and disregard of others. Sterne never tired of reiterating the principle of the mainstream of eighteenth-century moral thought:¹

For, as men, we are allied together in
the natural bond of brotherhood. . .²

Uncle Toby is of course the prime Shandean vehicle for illustrating "the natural bond of brotherhood" and the honest heart. Through Toby, Sterne clearly means to praise innate, uncalculated benevolence. In scene after scene, however, Yorick, Walter, and Trim, as well as Toby, display goodness of heart and kindness which, Sterne hopes, will also touch the reader's sympathetic imagination and make him 'feel'.

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1. For selections from this mainstream see L.A. Selby-Bigge, British Moralists, (New York, 1964), new edition with "Preface" by B.H. Baumrin.
 2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume VII, Sermon 41, "Follow Peace".

The reader, then, is drawn into the moral sentiments of Tristram Shandy just as he is drawn into the satire of rational communication. In both cases Sterne evokes the reader's imagination.

But it is the artistic imagination, rather than the moral, that predominates in Tristram Shandy. Sterne's central structural device insures this, for Sterne's primary concern was to dramatize the consciousness of an author through the medium of words. He does so superbly, of course, despite the paradoxical use of thematic and structural material that questions the possibility of such communication. Whereas Sterne, the 'poseur' sceptic, points to the logical impossibility of communicating, Sterne the creative writer transcends the impossibility. What seems to be a rational impossibility is turned on its head, and the festive spirit which mocks philosophy by appealing to a higher truth - imaginative truth - ultimately triumphs.

CHAPTER VI

THE CONSEQUENCE OF TRISTRAM SHANDY: A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY

It is fitting to conclude this study by comparing Tristram Shandy to A Sentimental Journey. The comparison suggests how the narrator, Yorick, evolved from the author-persona, Tristram, and it also helps to explicate Sterne's second novel. But more to my purpose it clarifies and summarizes many of my previous observations about Tristram Shandy.

The ninth volume of Tristram Shandy appeared on January 30, 1767, at a time when Sterne had already begun work on A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy. The latter novel was published at the end of February, 1768, and did not evoke anything like the uproarious laughter on the one hand, or the moralistic disapprobation on the other, that had greeted Sterne's first novel.¹ Two reasons may account for this.

First, there is a considerable difference of content between the two novels. The Rabelaisian stories and techniques are notably absent from A Sentimental Journey.

1. For a summary of the critical commentary that greeted A Sentimental Journey see G.D. Stout, "Introduction", A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, (California, 1967), pp. 21-24. All future page-references are to this edition.

In their stead we find delicately presented feelings, existing in an atmosphere of refinement that tends to disguise the latent sexuality. Sterne's second novel seemed, somehow, more moral, or at least less immoral, than his first. On the whole Sterne's more decorous treatment of sex pleased the critics.

Secondly, there is a difference in style and narrative structure between Sterne's two novels. As a narrator-device, Yorick, unlike Tristram, is neither disgressive nor unreliable. Notably absent in the second novel is the tremendous stress on authorial spontaneity, the tendency toward unexpectedness and rhetorical anti-climax. Yorick is often as confused about his feelings as Tristram was about his writing, yet Sterne's persona in A Sentimental Journey does not use language, as such, to confuse the reader. Similarly, Yorick's narrative avoids the complexity of psychological time and follows instead a conventional linear plot-line. Moreover, the events related by Yorick are all possible - never absurd, as the events of Tristram Shandy sometimes are.

All these factors contribute to make A Sentimental Journey less complex, less difficult to read, and less likely to be misinterpreted. Accordingly, literary critics have generally felt more at ease with A Sentimental Journey than with Tristram Shandy.

Of course A Sentimental Journey does contain one central and controversial ambiguity: Is Sterne praising or satirizing Yorick's sentiments?¹ I shall comment on this question shortly. At present it need only be said that even such a central ambiguity does not impede the reading of A Sentimental Journey to the extent that riddles, digressions, confusion, and unreliable commentary do impede the reading of Tristram Shandy.

1. The Difference in Content

Looking first at the difference in content between the two novels, we find a glittering patina of urbanity surrounding A Sentimental Journey that is clearly lacking in

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1. Controversy persists as to how the reader should understand Yorick's sentimental effusions. One group of critics holds that Sterne meant to satirize excessive feelings and that Yorick is in some degree an object of ridicule. See for instance: R. Putney, "The Evolution of A Sentimental Journey", PQ, XIX, (1940), pp. 349-369, and Putney again "Laurence Sterne: Apostle of Laughter", in The Age of Johnson, (Yale, 1949), pp. 159-170; E.N. Dilworth, The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne, (New York, 1948); L. Thompson, A Comic Principle in Sterne, Meredith, and Joyce, (Oslo, 1954); W.B. Piper, Laurence Sterne, (New York, 1965); A.H. Cash, Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments, (Pittsburgh, 1966). Diametrically opposed are those who think that Sterne's sentiments are sincere and that Sterne meant to praise such sentiments. See for example: P. Quennell, Four Portraits, (London, 1945), pp. 132-186; J.E.P. Thomson, "The Morality of Sterne's Yorick", AUMLA, XXVII-XXVIII, (1967), pp. 71-78; G.D. Stout, "Introduction", A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, (California, 1967), pp. 1-47.

Tristram Shandy. Rabelaisianism of the Shandean kind never quite surfaces. The fragment beneath Yorick's serving of butter, though written in "the French of Rabelais' time", is neither outrageous nor ribald enough to be truly Rabelaisian.¹ The incident of the dwarf in the audience of the Opéra Comique borders on Rabelaisian knock-about, but Sterne exploits the sentiment instead.² Similarly, Sterne eschews Rabelaisian low-burlesque in "The Rose—Paris", preferring instead a form of high-burlesque reminiscent of Pope's Rape of the Lock:

Of all women, Madame de Rambouliet is the most correct; and I never wish to see one of more virtues, and purity of heart—In our return back, Madame de Rambouliet desired me to pull the cord—I asked her if she wanted anything-- 'Rien que pisser,' said Madame de Rambouliet.

Grieve not, gentle traveller, to let Madame de Rambouliet p—ss on—And ye fair mystic nymphs! go each one 'pluck your rose', and scatter them in your path—for Madame de Rambouliet did no more—I handed Madame de Rambouliet out of the coach; and had I been the priest of the chaste Castalia, I could not have served at her fountain with a more respectful decorum.³

Just as the Rabelaisianism is suppressed in A Sentimental Journey, so too is the satire of philosophical systems that had imbued Tristram Shandy. There is of course

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Fragment, Paris", pp. 250-255.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Dwarf, Paris", pp. 174-179.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Rose—Paris", pp. 182-183.

a blow struck at materialism, when Yorick assures himself that his benevolent feelings cannot arise "from any combinations of matter and motion."¹ Also, Yorick wittily dissuades Madame de V*** from her Deistic views by suggesting that the only defences of a man of feeling against her natural beauty and charm are the tenets of revealed religion.² But compared with the massive Shandean satire of Scholasticism, Neoplatonism, and Empiricism, the treatment of philosophical systems in A Sentimental Journey is negligible.

Although philosophical systems are spared in A Sentimental Journey, philosophical problems are not. From the variety of these problems that he had comically explored in Tristram Shandy, Sterne selected two for particular development in his subsequent novel. Reappearing more subtly in A Sentimental Journey is the Sternean fascination with the insufficiency of language and the knowledge of other minds.

As we have seen, words were always suspect in Tristram Shandy. The tendency of language to misconvey or fail to convey the intended meaning led to the quizzical scenes of Shandean fumbling. Within a narrowed range A Sentimental Journey is, like Shandy, concerned with language. In his second novel, however, Sterne concentrated upon

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", p. 271.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Paris", pp. 264-265.

a single level of discourse. He examined the cultivated idiom of eighteenth-century France and the subtle feelings this idiom was supposed to communicate.

Smollett had touched upon this same subject in his Travels through France and Italy (1766). In a choleric mood, Smollett accused the French of "a volubility of tongue, and a set of phrases, which constitutes what is called polite conversation."¹ Henry Brooke, too, had dealt briefly with this subject in The Fool of Quality, as had Fielding in Amelia.² Likewise, Casanova de Seingalt, while visiting Paris in 1750, made the same sort of comic blunders in a foreign language that Yorick was to make during his journey.³ The merits of particular languages and the faux pas one could make in such an elegant language as French were topical subjects in an age that placed so much stress on witty, salon conversation.

Through the course of his journey, Yorick's understanding of the cultivated French idiom increases, and he becomes proficient at using it himself. At the same time

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1. Travels through France and Italy, "Letter the Seventh".
 2. The Fool of Quality, (London, 1777), Volume V, pp. 1-23. The original publication date of the fifth volume: c. 1765. Amelia, Book III, Chapter 8.
 3. The Memoirs of Jacques Casanova de Seingalt, English trans. A. Machen, (New York, 1958), Volume II, Chapter 7, pp. 135-161. Casanova's memoirs described the period 1725-1774. He compiled his memoirs from 1784 to 1798, but they were unpublished until 1820.

Yorick gradually becomes familiar with French finesse and savoir faire.

There is a progression here which Tristram Shandy lacks. Yorick's experiences change him during the course of 'his' book. As he comes to understand French manners, he finds the language gallant, gracious, and grand - a suitable accompaniment to the actions of "the most polished people" in the world.¹ The "'bon mot' is always worth something at Paris."² Unlike the English, the French display expertise at responding to compliments with compliments, and a compliment, Yorick believes, is the sublime urbanity of the French language.³

I have always observed, when there is as much 'sour' as 'sweet' in a compliment, that an Englishman is eternally at a loss within himself, whether to take it, or let it alone: a Frenchman never is . . .⁴

As his knowledge of French matures, however, Yorick begins to realize that the perfunctory exchange of compliments - the mode of French discourse - can develop into a mere linguistic game. Yorick gradually becomes disillusioned in his belief that the French language offered the ideal vehicle for communicating true feelings of sentiment. The

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Passport, Versailles", p. 116.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Dwarf, Paris", p. 179.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Wig, Paris", p. 159.
 4. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Calais", p. 88.

real meaning behind a compliment (if indeed there is any) gets lost in the ritual of complimentary reciprocity. As in Tristram Shandy, Sterne hints at the discrepancy between a man's words and the feelings the words supposedly signify.

In the final volume of Tristram Shandy Sterne wrote of the French folly in believing "That talking of love, is making it."¹ In A Sentimental Journey he further developed this thought. "The grandeur is 'more' in the word; and 'less' in the thing," comments the disillusioned Yorick.² "The French expression professes more than it performs."³

Yorick quickly masters the sophisticated discourse of the French. But as he finds himself purveying fashionable compliments like the French, he concludes that such precious civility can actually detract from the communication of sincere feeling.

A polish'd nation, my dear Count, said I, makes every one its debtor; and besides urbanity itself, like the fair sex, has so many charms; it goes against the heart to say it can do ill; and yet, I believe, there is but a certain line of perfection, that man, take him altogether, is empower'd to arrive at - if he gets beyond, he rather exchanges qualities, than gets them. I must not

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 25, p. 603.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Wig, Paris", p. 159.

3. Ibid.

presume to say, how far this has affected the French in the subject we are speaking of—but should it ever be the case of the English, in the progress of their refinements, to arrive at the same polish which distinguishes the French, if we did not lose the 'politesse de coeur', which inclines men more to human actions, than courteous ones—we should at least lose that distinct variety and originality of character, which distinguishes them, not only from each other, but from all the world besides.¹

Unlike Yorick, Smollett's travelling correspondent never willingly participated in the French game of complimentary exchange. In fact he scorned such discourse. But Sterne echoed Smollett's view that the Frenchman:

piques himself upon being polished above the natives of any other country by his conversation with the fair sex. In the course of this communication, with which he is indulged from his tender years, he learns like a parrot, by rote, the whole circle of French compliments, which you know are a set of phrases, ridiculous even to a proverb; and these he throws out indiscriminately to all women without distinction, in the exercise of that kind of address which is here distinguished by the name of gallantry; it is no more than his making love to every woman who will give him the hearing. It is an exercise, by the repetition of which he becomes very pert, very familiar, and very impertinent.²

At the Count de B****'s assembly, Yorick displays his recently acquired virtuosity at purveying compliments. Yet Yorick is suspicious that no true feeling lies behind the

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Character, Versailles", p. 231-232.
 2. Travels through France and Italy, "Letter the Seventh".

language of compliment. Just as a beggar may use flattery to solicit alms, so too may a purveyor of compliments be using counterfeited flattery to induce a return of good-will (which may also be counterfeited).¹ Disillusioned with the plethora of bogus compliments and the unnatural artistry of French discourse, Yorick decides to set out for Italy.

For three weeks together, I was of every man's opinion I met.'—Pardi! ce Mons. Yorick a autant d'esprit que nous autres.'—Il raisonne bien,' said another. —'C'est un bon enfant', said a third. —And at this price I could have eaten and drank and been merry all the days of my life at Paris; but 'twas a dishonest reckoning—I grew ashamed of it—it was the gain of a slave—every sentiment of honour revolted against it—the higher I got, the more I was forced upon my 'beggarly system'—the better the 'Coterie'—the more children of Art—I languish'd for those of Nature: and one night, after a most vile prostitution of myself to half a dozen different people, I grew sick—went to bed—order'd La Fleur to get me horses in the morning to set out for Italy.²

In Tristram Shandy Sterne drolly illustrated the faults and pitfalls of language that fails to convey meaning. In A Sentimental Journey Sterne narrowed the focus and changed the emphasis. He concentrated upon one particular language-game, viz., that which was current among cosmopolitan French of the mid-eighteenth century and which consisted in the exchange of urbanities. As in his Shandean critique,

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1. For the beggar sequence see Volume II, "The Mystery, Paris", pp. 239-240, and Volume II, "The Act of Charity, Paris", pp. 257-259.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Paris", p.266.

Sterne illustrated the lack of meaning behind words. Yet there is a subtle difference. Whereas in Tristram Shandy many of the Shandy family's misunderstandings hinged upon the auditor's misinterpretation (due to his preoccupation with his habitual idea-associations) of the speaker's words, in A Sentimental Journey Sterne locates the communication flaw in the speaker. In the cultivated French language, Yorick concludes, 'what-is-said' is, quite often, not what is meant. Thus, the specific irony which Yorick discovers in French discourse is this: that a language which professes to express high sentiments may be found wanting in any sincere sentiment whatsoever.

This leads to the second philosophical problem inherent in both Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, viz., knowledge of other minds.

In his Sentimental Journey Sterne metaphorically links the problem of escaping the confines of one's own mind with escaping from prison. At the surface level Sterne employs the "Bastile" and the "starling" simply as symbols of restraint of freedom, but all the while at a deeper level he suggests the comparison of physical incarceration with the incarceration of the psyche:

—And as for the Bastile! the terror is in the word—Make the most of it you can, said I to myself, the Bastile is but another word for a tower—and a tower is but another word for a house you can't get out of—Mercy on the gouty!

for they are in it twice a year—but with nine livres a day, and pen and ink and paper and patience, albeit a man can't get out, he may do very well within—at least for a month or six weeks; at the end of which, if he is a harmless fellow his innocence appears, and he comes out a better and wiser man than he went in.¹

The connexion of the Bastille with the 'tower of self', with the imagination of the writer in solitude, and with solipsism seems fairly clear. Yorick takes heart that temporary confinement may not be all bad. While his thoughts are still on this matter, he hears the starling crying, "I can't get out—I can't get out!"²

The starling's plaintive cry is also the cry of the psyche, wishing to communicate with humanity, but unable to escape the epistemic cage of 'self'. Yorick's unsuccessful attempts to liberate the bird point symbolically toward the isolation of each individual in his own mental world and the difficulty of communicating across the epistemic gap. The thought of the caged starling and the tragedy of imprisonment in 'self' figure in Yorick's vision of the "single captive . . . shut up in his dungeon."³

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Passport, The Hotel at Paris", p. 196.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Passport, The Hotel at Paris", p. 197.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Captive, Paris", p. 201.

In the next chapter Yorick adds the frustrated starling to his crest of arms.¹ The starling becomes as much a symbol for A Sentimental Journey as was the marbled page for Tristram Shandy. Both symbolize the difficulty of escaping 'self' and communicating positively with others.

Yorick's account of the subsequent history of the starling is also allegorical. The caged bird is passed from one Lord to another:

Lord D gave him to Lord E—and so on—half round the alphabet—From that rank he pass'd into the lower house, and pass'd the hands of as many commoners—But as all these wanted to 'get in'—and my bird wanted to get out—he had almost as little store set by him in London as in Paris.²

Sterne's italicized words "get in" are crucial to this paragraph. At the surface level, Sterne may have been punning (i.e., 'get into Parliament'), but this interpretation doesn't seem entirely satisfactory. If, however, we think of the starling as the symbol of the entrapped psyche, then "get in" indicates that people really want and need to communicate - to get into the mind of the other person who is himself trying to "get out" to others. But, as Yorick discovers, the eloquent French language - the idiom that was

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Starling, Road to Versailles", p. 205.

2. Ibid.

supposed to communicate true feeling - often consists only in parroted compliments with as little human feeling as the words the starling has been taught to recite.

Although Sterne stressed the impossibility of saying with certainty, "I know what you mean," he did, nevertheless, allow in Tristram Shandy that men could understand one another, if not at a totally rational level, then through the meeting of minds at the imaginative level. In A Sentimental Journey Sterne pushed even harder at his thesis that man can ultimately escape 'self' and communicate supra-rationally with his fellow man. Neither reason nor language, but feeling can lead to (though it doesn't always) understanding between men. A Sentimental Journey celebrates the triumph of imaginative human empathy over epistemic incertitude; it illustrates the functioning of the intuitive sympathetic sense which Sterne most clearly defined in his sermon on philanthropy:

In benevolent natures the impulse to pity is so sudden, that like the instruments of music which obey the touch—the objects which are fitted to excite such impressions work so instantaneous an effect, that you would think, the will was scarce concerned, and that the mind was altogether passive in the sympathy which her own goodness has excited. The truth is,—the soul is generally in such cases so busily taken up and wholly engrossed by the object of pity, that she does not attend to her own operations, or take leisure to examine the principles upon which she acts.¹

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, Sermon 3, "Philanthropy Recommended".

Through his imaginative sense, Yorick, the sentimental traveller, learns to intuit a great deal about other people, and many of his intuitions prove correct. However, at the outset of the novel Yorick is in a splenetic mood, a mood unreceptive to the feelings of others. He bites back, inwardly, at the gentleman who asks, "—You have been in France?"¹ And, although he believes himself to be at peace with mankind and talks of distributing largesse, he finds himself "predetermined" not to give Father Lorenzo, the suppliant, "a single sous". With an excuse reminiscent of Fielding's Parson Trulliber, Yorick indicates to Lorenzo that charity properly begins at home. Then Yorick descends to extremely uncharitable ridicule.²

Up to this point in the novel Sterne is, as G.D. Stout points out, echoing Smollett's ill-tempered, fault-finding traveller.³ Up to this point Yorick's sentimentalization has yet to begin. He is still acting from habitual self-concern rather than feeling, and his preconceptions militate against his purer intuitions - against his capacity for empathy with others. Malevolent reason, not benevolent imagination governs him.

Almost immediately, Yorick regrets his mordant treatment of Lorenzo, but for the time-being Yorick's mood

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, Chapter I, (untitled), p. 65.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Monk, Calais", pp. 70-74.

3. A Sentimental Journey, ed. G.D. Stout, (California, 1967), p.15.

remains self-centred. He seeks the privacy of a one-person post-chaise, closes the curtain, retreats into himself, and begins writing his preface.¹ Here we are reminded of the total solitude of the Shandean author-persona, who sequestered himself from the external world and lived totally in his own imagination. In A Sentimental Journey, however, Sterne is not primarily concerned with the imagination in isolation; indeed, Sterne uses Yorick's momentary seclusion for purposes of contrast with Yorick's forthcoming realization that the social imagination, working in various real-life contexts, is all important to the traveller.

The "Preface" written in the solitude of the desobligeant is especially revealing. With false self-assurance, the man who has not yet really begun his journey proposes to tell us all about travel. And what means does he choose? None other than the deductive, a priori reasoning usually associated with the Scholastics.

By defining and sub-defining, by treating of the "efficient as well as the final causes", Yorick reasons his way through the topic of travel.² And what does he conclude? That one can learn as much about life by staying at home, and

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Desobligeant, Calais", pp. 76-77.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Preface, in the Desobligeant", p. 79.

that in any case England is best. Although he calls himself a "sentimental traveller", he has, at this early point in the novel, no experience of what sentimental travel really is. He is still drawing entirely upon the resources of his own mind, rather than communicating outwardly with others. In the desobligeant Yorick muses upon the isolated predicament that the caged starling symbolizes:

We lie under so many impediments in communicating our sensations out of our own sphere, as often amount to a total impossibility.

It will always follow from hence, that the balance of sentimental commerce is always¹ against the expatriated adventurer . . .

This gratuitous assumption is of course later disproved by Yorick's actual experiences, for he discovers gradually that language can be a barrier to real sentiment. His travels teach him that the unspoken gesture, the glance, and in particular the spontaneous touch communicate more truly than words. Eventually, he finds that ignorance of the foreign tongue, coupled with an abundance of humanitarian good-will, communicates harmoniously across international boundaries.

Shortly thereafter, Yorick apologizes to Lorenzo, giving him his snuff-box as "the peace offering of a man who once used you unkindly, but not from the heart."² Yorick's

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Preface, in the Desobligeant", p. 78.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Snuff Box", p. 99.

spleen is beginning to vanish. He rebels again at his self-centredness when he finds himself poised to haggle with Monsieur Dessein over the hiring of a coach. Here, too, Yorick discovers his temptation to act from habitual opinion, rather than openly and with good-will. He recognizes his predisposition toward suspicion as a "base passion" whose "hand is against every man."¹

Yet it has been claimed that Sterne was mocking, not celebrating, intuitive feeling.² Some critics have viewed Yorick's sentiment as a sham, while others, to the contrary, interpret A Sentimental Journey as a "text-book on feeling" and a demonstration of Sterne's "sensitivity and goodness of heart."³

I do not propose to enter into the detailed history of this controversy. But some comment must be made if we are to see how the sentiments of Sterne's second novel reflect back to those of his first.

Those who find Sterne to be ridiculing Yorick's sentiment argue along the following lines: (1.) There are often compromising sexual overtones in Yorick's sentiments, and/or (2.) the sentiment is frequently too maudlin and too

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "In the Street, Calais", p. 89.
 2. For a list of the opposing groups, see the footnote at the beginning of this chapter, p. 363.
 3. P. Quennell, Four Portraits, (London, 1945), p. 183; J.E.P. Thomson, "The Morality of Sterne's Yorick", AUMLA, Volume 27-8, (1967), p. 71.

misplaced for anyone to take seriously. Therefore (3.) Sterne himself could not have believed in such sentiment, and Yorick is meant to be an object of satire, for he remains oblivious to his own sentimental excesses. Arthur Cash, for instance, holds this view:

So with Yorick - by an intemperate confidence in a harvest of lovely sentiments, he gets drunk on imaginary moral goodness and becomes a laughing stock.¹

Those opposed to this view maintain that Sterne meant to praise Yorick's sensibility. They argue, first, that Sterne preached the same doctrine of heart-felt sentiment in his sermons, and, secondly, that Yorick, far from lacking self-knowledge, is indeed extremely self-perceptive. Gardner Stout, for instance, claims that Yorick "observes himself with comic detachment."² From this viewpoint, if Yorick's sentiments were meant to be satirized, Sterne would have created a less self-aware narrator.

Despite the incompatibility of their conclusions, both groups tend to begin with the same implicit assumption, viz., that the sentiment expressed through Yorick must be meant either as false sentiment or as sincere sentiment. This demand for an either/or decision about Sterne's novel

1. Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments, (Pittsburgh, 1966), p. 53.

2. A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, (California, 1967), ed. G.D. Stout, "Introduction", p. 27.

seems unwarranted. It calls for a single answer, one way or the other. Such an answer could hardly begin to encompass Yorick's variety of sentimental evincements - some of which can be judged as sincere and some, I think, as bogus. It is as wrong to say that Yorick always goes overboard with his feelings as it is to claim that his perceptive sensibility never swerves from the straight and true. To generalize in either direction does an injustice to the situational variety and the qualitative diversity of feeling within the spectrum of Yorick's experiences.

My point, therefore, is that each incident should be closely examined before the verdict of true or false sentiment is passed. The examination should take into account the object of Yorick's sympathy, the degree of emotion evinced, and the self-interested motives that might taint the purity of his sympathy. This is the way an eighteenth-century moralist might have faced the problem, and we know from his sermons that Sterne himself was interested in such situational complexities. Like Dr. Johnson,¹ Sterne was, for instance, especially interested in men's tendencies to deceive themselves:

Experience and every hour's commerce with
the world confirms the truth of this seeming
paradox, That though man is the only
creature endowed with reflection, and

1. Rasselas, The Vanity of Human Wishes.

consequently qualified to know the most of himself—yet so it happens, that he generally knows the least—and with all the power which God has given him of turning his eyes inwards upon himself, and taking notice of the chain of his own thoughts and desires—yet in fact, is generally so inattentive, but always so partial an observer of what passes, that he is as much, nay often, a much greater stranger to his own disposition and true character than all the world besides.¹

Another of Sterne's sermons, "Self-Examination", repeats this call for a close analysis of the true motives behind men's actions:

There is many a fair instance of generosity, chastity, and self-denial, which the world may give a man the credit of,—which if he would give himself the leisure to reflect upon and trace back to their first springs,—he would be conscious, proceeded from such views and intentions, as if known, would not be to his honour.²

In both Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey Sterne displayed interest in intuitive sympathy and in the benevolent acts occasioned by such supra-rational communication. However, in A Sentimental Journey Sterne goes one step further back, to probe the subconscious motivation which underlies intuitional empathy.

Always one to argue that feelings come first and rational thought afterwards, Sterne scrutinized the human

1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume I, Sermon 4, "Self-Knowledge".

2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 14, "Self-Examination".

psyche and asked in his second novel; What governs our feelings? To what extent are our uncalculated actions (actions occasioned by feeling, not reason) coloured by subconscious 'proto-motives'? What complex drives and instincts control the very source of our intuitive actions? How pure are man's proto-motives? To what extent are they naturally tainted by self-interest?

Questions of this order are rehearsed throughout A Sentimental Journey. They point to the difference between the humour of Sterne's second novel and his first. Whereas the reader of Tristram Shandy laughs at the misunderstandings between characters, the reader of A Sentimental Journey smiles at what he sees (and Yorick only sometimes sees) to be the compromising proto-motives that often underlie Yorick's communication-through-feeling.

By way of illustration I shall offer examples of what I consider to be legitimate sympathetic communication (i.e., empathy that Sterne 'meant' and that the reader is not to take ironically) and, contrariwise, examples of imaginative sympathy run amuck.

Take the encounter between Yorick and the lady from Brussels.¹ Having seen the lady from a distance, Yorick was impressed by her "figure and appearance."² While bargaining

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "In the Street, Calais", through "The Remise, Calais", pp. 89-113.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 91.

with Monsieur Dessein, Yorick turns suddenly, finds the lady behind him, and offers his hand to assist her into the remise. Yorick continues holding her hand "almost without knowing it."¹ At first this is a spontaneous, courteous gesture, although Yorick's self-consciousness later destroys its spontaneity.

The hand-touching gestures which seem to communicate better than language begin here, run copiously through this encounter, and reappear as other touches of other hands - mostly feminine - throughout the novel. Yorick's first spontaneous touch sets off an elaborately subtle account of physical contact and imaginative communication. While Yorick holds the lady's hand, his imagination 'creates' her physical attributes:

I had not yet seen her face—'twas not material; for the drawing was instantly set about, and long before we had got to the door of the Remise, 'Fancy' had finished the whole head, and pleased herself as much with its fitting her goddess, as if she had dived into the Tiber for it—but thou art a seduced, and a seducing slut; and albeit thou cheatest us seven times a day with thy pictures and images, yet with so many charms dost thou do it, and thou deckest out thy pictures in the shapes of so many angels of light, 'tis a shame to break with thee.²

Yorick goes on to imagine (correctly) that the lady

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "In the Street, Calais", p. 90.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 92.

is a widow, just past her deep mourning.¹ Obviously, part of Sterne's purpose in this episode is to show how the mind creates its own world, and how we can intuit the truth about another person if we are sufficiently sympathetic. Yorick goes on:

—In a word, I felt benevolence for her; and resolved some way or other to throw in my mite of courtesy—if not of service.

Such were my temptations—and in this disposition to give way to them, was I left alone with the lady with her hand in mine, and with our faces both turned closer to the door of the Remise than what was absolutely necessary.²

A "temptation" toward "benevolence"? Strange, but it comes as no surprise, for Sterne has already alerted the reader to the duplicity of instincts that are motivating Yorick. The detailed sensual descriptions, beginning with the lady's black "silk gloves open only at the thumb and two fore-fingers"³ continually point to Yorick's sexual interest, while the actions themselves, however, are nothing less than modest.

Throughout A Sentimental Journey the sensual, suggestive rhetoric comes to the brink of describing actual

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 94.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 95.

3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "In the Street, Calais", p. 90.

sexual encounters, but usually the encounter fails to pass the flirtation stage, or, as in the case of the fillet de chambre, Sterne stops discreetly and begins a new chapter with equal discretion.¹ Since the actions never quite measure up to the suggestive rhetoric, the reader becomes acutely aware of the contrast between the world of action and the world of words (and thoughts). Sterne's style reinforces the subjectivism of the whole novel, i.e., the idea that the mind creates its own worlds.

But let us return to Yorick and the lady, who have just met and are sitting alone together in the Remise. Yorick, believing that "a silence of a single moment" would be "fatal to the situation", begins a conversation "instantly":²

This certainly, fair lady! said I, raising her hand up a little lightly as I began, must be one of Fortune's whimsical doings: to take two utter strangers by their hands —of different sexes, and perhaps from different corners of the globe, and in one moment place them together in such a cordial situation, as Friendship herself could scarce have achieved for them, had she projected it for a month—³

But Yorick's comment upon the situation breaks the magical rapport of sentiment. The intuitive communication,

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Temptation, Paris", "The Conquest", pp. 234-238.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "In the Street, Calais", p. 90.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 96.

which the lady also felt, should speak for itself; self-conscious thought and the language of words are fatal to the language of feeling. Disengaging her hand from Yorick's the lady says:

When the situation is, what we would wish, nothing is so ill-timed as to hint at the circumstances which make it so: you thank Fortune, continued she—you had reason—the heart knew it, and was satisfied; and who but an English philosopher would have sent notices of it to the brain to reverse the judgment?¹

Taken aback by the lady's rebuff, Yorick seeks to restore the initial, intuitive harmony of their communication. He does so, first, by calling upon the resources of his sympathetic imagination, and secondly, by renewing the physical contact. His imagination seizes upon the "unprotected look" that occasioned his original feeling for the lady, while his hand grasps hers once again.

I pitied her from my soul; and though it may seem ridiculous enough to a torpid heart,—I could have taken her into my arms, and cherished her, though it was in the open street, without blushing.

The pulsations of the arteries along my fingers pressing across hers, told her what was passing within me: she looked down—a silence of some moments followed.²

Here again Sterne creates a tension by using sensual language to describe feelings of pure (?) benevolence. Yet,

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 96.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 97.

the intuitive empathy is achieved, silently, without the intrusion of words. Yorick feels sentiment for the lady, and he knows that she knows he feels it: all without a word being spoken.

I fear, in this interval, I must have made some slight efforts towards a closer compression of her hand, from a subtle sensation I felt in the palm of my own—not as if she was going to withdraw hers—but, as if she thought about it—and I had infallibly lost it a second time, had not instinct more than reason directed me to the last resource in these dangers—to hold it loosely. . .¹

The sympathetic communication between the two, through imaginative feeling, seems real enough, and Yorick's motives (though perhaps covertly sexual) are far from being calculated and rationally planned.

The sexuality of much of Yorick's sentiment has disturbed commentators who are prone to impose their own ethical standards upon Yorick, or Sterne. However, if we remember that Sterne was delineating the operation of man's sympathetic faculty at the level of feeling rather than rationality, we will not be surprised that sexual impulses (too inchoate to be called "motives") often accompany Yorick's empathy with the fair sex. Nor is Yorick so unaware of this as is often claimed. Directly to the point, Sterne's narrator

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 98.

later comments:

If nature so wove her web of kindness that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece—must the whole web be rent in drawing them out?¹

Yorick's desire to impress favourably the lady from Brussels undoubtedly accounts in part for his more charitable treatment of Lorenzo, who reappears in the chapter entitled "The Snuff-Box". Also, of course, Yorick's mood has been changing from splenetic to sanguine ever since he moved symbolically from the one-person desobligeant toward the remise-built-for-two.

Upon Lorenzo's departure, Yorick tells us:

I had never quitted the lady's hand all this time; and had held it so long, that it would have been indecent to have let it go, without first pressing it to my lips: the blood and spirits, which had suffer'd a revulsion from her, crowded back to her, as I did it.²

But once again Yorick's tendency to think too much about the situation destroys the spontaneity of intuitive communication. The lady drifts away while a preoccupied Yorick makes plans and takes stock of his motives:

—Now where would be the harm, said I to myself, if I was to beg of this distressed lady to accept half of my chaise?—and

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Conquest", p. 237.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 104.

what mighty mischief could ensue?

Every dirty passion, and bad propensity in my nature, took the alarm, as I stated the proposition——¹

By skilful use of sensual language, Sterne has already prepared the reader for the possibility that sexual intentions lay behind Yorick's flirtation. Yet, when Yorick reviews his "dirty passions", he seems curiously unaware of the sexual desires that may be dictating his actions. Although naming avarice, cowardice, over-discretion, hypocrisy, meanness, and pride, he skirts around sex without explicitly naming it.² The reader, of course, sees the sexual implications, and wonders, "Is Yorick deceiving himself, or does he simply lack self-awareness?" Whatever the answer, Yorick suddenly realizes that too much cerebration kills the spontaneity of a benevolent act:

——But 'tis a civil thing, said I—and as I generally act from the first impulse, and therefore seldom listen to these cabals, which serve no purpose, that I know of, but to encompass the heart with adamant—I turn'd instantly about to the lady——³

But the lady had "glided off unperceived" and had met "a little French debonair captain."⁴ The talkative,

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 104.
2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 105.
3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 106.
4. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise Door, Calais", p. 106; "In the Street, Calais", p. 107.

extroverted officer adds a contrasting note to the intuitive communication between Yorick and the lady, but he leaves the scene as suddenly as he entered it.

Alone again with the lady, Yorick delivers a witty discourse on the art of love-making. He is not, as he was before, obviously editorializing on their being thrown together. The level of discourse here is more general and therefore less embarrassing for both parties. Yorick says that love should consist of:

A course of small, quiet attentions, not so pointed as to alarm—nor so vague as to be misunderstood,—with now and then a look of kindness, and little or nothing said upon it —leaves Nature for your mistress, and she fashions it to her mind.—¹

For the first time the subject of love has come into the open, and by now it is clear to everyone - the lady, Yorick, and the reader alike - that physical love as well as spiritually benevolent love has been in Yorick's subconscious. As in Tristram Shandy Sterne probes the complexity of our concept of love. The Shandean question is implicit: Is love "part God and part Devil"? If so: "How many parts of it—the one—and how many the other?"²

The lady responds to Yorick's declaration by speaking the hitherto unspoken word, "love":

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise, ^{Deer} Calais", p. 112.
 2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VI, Chapter 36, p. 448.

Then I solemnly declare, said the lady, blushing—you have been making love to me all this while.¹

Immediately thereafter, Sterne gives us final proof of the intuitive communication between Yorick and the lady. Yorick starts to propose that she accompany him in the remise, but she already knows - has already imagined - what is on his mind:

—You need not tell me what the proposal was, said she, laying her hand upon both mine, as she interrupted me.—A man, my good Sir, has seldom an offer of kindness to make to a woman, but she has a presentiment of it some moments before—

Nature arms her with it, said I, for immediate preservation—But I think, said she, looking in my face, I had no evil to apprehend—and to deal frankly with you, had determined to accept it.—If I had—(she stopped for a moment)—I believe your good will would have drawn a story from me, which would have made pity the only dangerous thing in the journey.²

The lady from Brussels figures also in an experience of Yorick's which counterfeits true sentiment. A few days after first meeting the lady, Yorick catches a glimpse of her passing in a post-chaise. There is no actual meeting between the two, yet Yorick remembers "that she had been prevented telling me her story . . ."³ The potentialities of the untold story galvanize Yorick's imagination into operation:

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise^{DocR} Calais", p. 112.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Remise, Calais", p. 113.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Amiens", p. 145.

With what a moral delight will it crown my journey, in sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer! to see her weep! and though I cannot dry up the fountain of her tears, what an exquisite sensation is there still left, in wiping them away from off the cheeks of the first and fairest of women, as I'm sitting with my handkerchief in my hand in silence the whole night besides her.¹

Yorick's sympathy is misplaced throughout this scene. His heart bleeds for the lady not because of her actual lamentable condition (her actual condition is really unknown to Yorick), but because of a sorrow which Yorick's mind officiously imposes upon her. There is no real benevolence in Yorick's apparent concern. Sterne simply illustrates Yorick's own maudlin desires. The lavish sentiment flows from Yorick's creative rather than his sympathetic impulses. For this reason Yorick's sentiment here travesties that real sympathy which unites two people in an empathy of feeling.

Yorick's mental love-affair with his imaginary doloroso is psychologically comparable to Tristram's narcissism in falling in love with his own description of the Widow Wadman's eye.² Both smack of too much self-interest, too much self-concern. Yorick's experience is even more complex, for it involves self-deception as a sop for his emotional needs.

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Amiens", p. 145-146.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume VIII, Chapter 25, p. 552.

It may of course be pointed out that Yorick tries to forget his maudlin, self-centred sentiment. Yet he claims, "There was nothing wrong in the sentiment."¹ Finally, he reproaches himself for feeling the way he does, but he reproaches himself for the wrong reason, i.e., he recalls his sworn "eternal fidelity" to Eliza:

—she had a right to my whole heart—to divide my affections was to lessen them—to expose them, was to risk them: where there is risk, there may be loss—and what wilt thou have, Yorick! to answer to a heart so full of trust and confidence—so good, so gentle and unrepublishing?²

It is not the false quality of his emotional response that bothers Yorick, but rather the fact that he has a prior emotional commitment to Eliza. Hence, one sentiment takes precedence over another, and Yorick is virtually confessing to the fact that he fancied more than a Platonic involvement, more than a benevolent act, with the lady from Brussels.

The cosy meeting in the remise withstands close analysis and seems to be an attempt by Sterne to portray what he considered to be an example of intuitive thought-transference. The second situation I examined (the lady passing at a distance and triggering Yorick's imagination

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Amiens", p. 146.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "Amiens", p. 147.

with maudlin desire) illuminates Yorick's tendency to be duped by his own feelings. In this second situation there is no genuine sentimental communication between Yorick and the lady, for, as I have shown, Yorick's response is actually egocentric, though it wears the mask of benevolence.

Presented with equal subtlety is Yorick's next flirtation, now with a beautiful Grisset.¹ This encounter, too, merits analysis along the lines I have already suggested. Although I will not go into great detail again, a few comments may be helpful.

First, we can see that Yorick's knowledge of sentimental communication has broadened since the remise-affair. He has learned to rely less on his reason; he thinks less and feels more. Also, he no longer worries about the remote consequences of a chance meeting with an attractive lady. There is no mention now of "eternal fidelity" to Eliza. All in all, he has become less self-conscious and more willing to be swept along on a wave of feeling. Even his compliments, he finds, are unforced and spontaneous.

Into Yorick's encounter with the Grisset, Sterne weaves his usual ambivalent pattern of instinctive proto-motives. I say 'proto-motives' because Sterne continually suggests that when a person abandons himself to feeling,

1. *A Sentimental Journey*, Volume I, "The Pulse, Paris", "The Husband, Paris", "The Gloves, Paris", pp. 161-169.

calculated motivation is precluded. In his outgoing, benevolent mood, Yorick learns to abrogate will-power and rational self-direction, trusting instead his capacity to feel. As he says later in the novel:

I am govern'd by circumstances—I
cannot govern them. . . ¹

Yorick becomes, then, rationally passive, but emotionally active and receptive. Relying upon his own native goodness and the native goodness of others, Yorick does, as the Grisset suggests, "lay himself" at the "mercy" of others.² Sterne, however, makes us wonder just how undesigned our instincts and feelings can be, by leaving unanswered the question: To what extent are sexual attraction and/or self-indulgence a hidden part of 'pure' benevolent sentiment?

With the Grisset, as with many of the women he encounters, Yorick's benevolent and imaginative sixth-sense seems curiously associated with voluptuous sensations stemming from his sense of touch.³ Sterne paints the scene in his

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Le Patisser, Versailles", p. 209.
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Gloves, Paris", p. 169.
 3. Regarding a possible "voluptuous sense", Voltaire wrote: "It is said that oysters have two senses, moles four, the others five, like men. Some people recognize a sixth, but it is obvious that the voluptuous sensation they have in mind comes down to the feeling of touch, and that five senses are our share". Philosophical Dictionary (1764), English trans. T. Besterman, (Penguin paperback, 1971), p. 378.

usual sensually-suggestive language, while the actions themselves (hand-holding, pulse-taking, glove-fitting) only symbolically indicate sex. Under the circumstances the physical touches may be (as Yorick suggests in an apostrophe to Eugenius) imprudent, but clearly they are not immoral.

In Tristram Shandy Sterne's narrator had artfully claimed that any immorality must be 'read into' the book by the reader's imagination. In a similar vein Yorick says:

I have something within me which cannot
bear the shock of the least indecent
insinuation . . .¹

Of course we know that Sterne is laughing up his sleeve, and had this disclaimer occurred in Tristram Shandy, we would have attributed it to the deceptive, mountebank-like characteristic of the author-persona. In A Sentimental Journey, however, the reader may be more prone to conclude that Yorick deceives himself, for Yorick's capacity for emotional self-deception is evident.

What really happens between Yorick and the beautiful Grisset? In simple terms: they meet by chance, are mutually attracted, and become willing participants in what an outsider might call "a mild flirtation". Neither party has ulterior motives, nor does either look forward to future emotional

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Passport, Versailles", p. 217.

involvement. They both act spontaneously and enjoy the empathy of the moment without seeking self-advantage. The Grisset performs a favour by giving Yorick directions to the Opéra Comique, and Yorick reciprocates by buying two pairs of gloves: a pleasant exchange of courtesies which parallels their emotional exchange. The physical actions, too, are slight: several telling glances and a few suggestive hand-touches. Yet Yorick feels "she look'd into my very heart."¹

Despite the sensual language, the sexual symbolism, and the sexual potential, the affair is, if judged upon its consequences, morally harmless. But the affair is not meant to be a simple, amoral caprice, for Sterne attempted to show that we can communicate harmoniously through our very humanity. In Sterne's view such a communication is possible, even if, as he suggested in Tristram Shandy, we cannot know rationally and positively what is in another person's mind. Yorick's words are to be taken seriously:

There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety—where whim, and sense, and seriousness, and nonsense, are so blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them—they are communicated and caught so instantaneously that you can scarce say which party is the infector.²

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Gloves, Paris", p. 169.

2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume I, "The Gloves, Paris", p. 168.

The belief in the prevailing goodness of man's passions and sentiments had a currency through much of the eighteenth century, although it was opposed to the neo-classical ideal which Steele, for example had expressed through Roger de Coverley: "Reason should govern passion . . ."¹

Sterne generally avoided this rationalistic doctrine, using it only in several of his sermons to combat the belief of the 'enthusiastic' Methodists in personal, divine inspiration.² The sermon within Tristram Shandy argues that neither revealed religion on its own nor a man's conscience, alone, is to be trusted.³ In either case too much rationalization can destroy the proper moral spirit. The two, writes Sterne, act to check and balance one another, although, ideally, a man's innate moral sentiments should be capable of being trusted.

In his Sermons, in Tristram Shandy, but most of all in A Sentimental Journey, Sterne elevated feeling or sentiment as a supra-rational faculty. His presentation of man's sympathetic passions, operating somehow prior to and more naturally than calculated reason, brings to mind Hume's

1. The Spectator, Nbr. 6, March 7, 1711.

2. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 14, "Self-Examination"; Volume IV, Sermon 25, "Humility"; Volume VI, Sermon 38, "On Enthusiasm".

3. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, pp. 139-155; The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume IV, Sermon 27, "The Abuses of Conscience, Considered".

famous dictum: "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions."¹

Hume offered this view as a psychological truth about the nature of man, and Sterne's Yorick clearly functions in accord with this view.² Indeed Yorick's actions concur with another observation of Hume's:

Moral distinctions, therefore, are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals.³

Hume found sympathy to be a "very powerful principle in human nature",⁴ and so did Sterne. During his travels, Yorick begins to act from sympathy rather than reason:

'tis a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of NATURE, and those affections which rise out of her, which make us love each other—and the world, better than we do.⁵

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1. A Treatise of Human Nature, Book II, Part III, Section 3.
 2. Hume was not setting up moral guidelines in this matter, but rather he claimed to be making an observation about man's nature.
 3. A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Part I, Section 1. Hume's point is that 'Reason' decides questions of "truth and falsehood", while moral questions are of a different order, i.e., "right and wrong".
 4. A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Part III, Section 6.
 5. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Passport, Versailles", p. 219.

Sterne's narrator speaks of sentiment in the way that more conservative eighteenth-century writers spoke of virtue, i.e., as a middle course between extremes:

A heart at ease. . .flies into no extremes—'tis ever on center.¹

But once again there is a tension between Yorick's words and what actually happens in the novel. Does the abrogation of will-power and the reliance upon feeling really keep one "on center"?

Consider Yorick's hotel-room affair with the fille de chambre. The chapter entitled "The Temptation, Paris" concludes with Yorick unbalancing the fair fille de chambre "off her center", and the next chapter contains Yorick's defense of his action.² He excuses himself by saying that Nature made man so that "kindness" is inextricably mixed with "love and desire".³ These lines echo a passage in Sterne's sermon "The Abuses of Conscience", and strongly suggest that conscience, "this once able monitor", can become overly permissive.⁴

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Address, Versailles", p. 208. Cf. Sterne's remark: "Virtue and true wisdom lie in the middle of extremes. . ." The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume II, Sermon 13, "Duty of Setting Bounds to our Desires".
 2. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Temptation, Paris", "The Conquest", pp. 234-238.
 3. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Conquest", p. 237.
 4. Tristram Shandy, Volume II, Chapter 17, p. 148.

It is worth noting, also, that the chapter in which Yorick justifies his sexual escapade with the fille de chambre (and not the chapter in which the sex begins) is called "The Conquest". The "conquest", then, may refer to Yorick's conquest over the rational dictates of his own conscience. Sterne, I believe, wants the reader to notice this, but he also wants Yorick not to be so self-aware. Sterne wants Yorick to appear so blinded by feeling that his moral judgment can occasionally be impaired.

In Tristram Shandy Sterne was preoccupied with the awkwardness occasioned by one person's inability to know with certainty what passes through the mind of another. This worked, as we have seen, at two levels. First, the Shandean characters fumbled comically when they tried, rationally, to understand one another. Secondly, the unreliable narrator-device drew the reader into the satire of epistemic problems, while Sterne's ambiguity and innuendo dramatized the fact that 'meaning' often depends upon the habitual idea-associations of the reader.

In A Sentimental Journey Sterne no longer drew the bulk of his humour from misunderstandings between characters or from possible linguistic misunderstandings between the narrator and the reader. The humour of Sterne's second novel stems from Yorick's absolute trust in his feelings and our realization that sometimes his feelings involve false, misguided, or misplaced sympathy. Despite the possible pitfalls,

however, Sterne illustrated the possibility of communicative rapport at supra-rational levels of feeling. The heart-felt, Shandean intuitionism that made communication possible (despite rational impossibilities) became, then, in Sterne's second novel an epistemic norm, as Sterne experimented with, and tested, the efficacy of communicating through sentiment.

One clear link between the Sentimental Journey and Tristram Shandy is a 'Maria episode' that appears in both novels.¹ In each case Sterne's protagonist encounters Maria, the deranged peasant girl. However, even though the pitiful subject, Maria, is the same, even though there are basic textual similarities between the two episodes, and despite the fact that they were probably written within a year of one another, Sterne's rendering of Yorick's meeting with Maria does more than repeat at greater length Tristram's emotional paroxysms. A comparison of the two 'Maria episodes' shows Sterne's desire in A Sentimental Journey to treat an ever-burgeoning range of moods and emotions.

In Tristram Shandy, Book IX, Sterne inserts a 'Maria episode' almost as an interpolated tale, and for much the same purpose that authors such as Cervantes and Fielding used interpolated tales, viz., to parallel and reinforce the main action. Thus, the 'Maria episode' concerns a marriage which

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, pp. 598-602; A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", "Maria", "Maria, Moulines", pp. 268-276.

never takes place, and as such it supports the main story-line of Book IX: the abortive Toby-Wadman courtship. Of course no such structural justification is necessary for the 'Maria episode' in A Sentimental Journey; there, Yorick's meeting with Maria is just one of an endless string of sentimental encounters.¹

The original Shandean tale tells of Maria from Moulines who had her "marriage bans forbid by the intrigues" of the local curate.² The curate's pertinacity had led Maria to despair and eventually driven her mad. Seeing Maria wandering with her pet goat, listening to her melancholy song, and hearing her sad history from the postillion, Tristram can hardly wait to leap from the chaise to investigate such human misery.

Ostensively, Tristram is intuitively moved to pity and seeks to comfort the girl. On the surface his action appears benevolent. But Sterne has already hinted that Tristram's motive is self-indulgence, for we are told that, upon hearing the story from the postillion, Tristram was pleased enough to "vow to give him a four-and-twenty sous piece."³ Inflamed with a morbidly imaginative curiosity,

1. Yet the 'Maria episode' of A Sentimental Journey does serve as a contrast to the scenes of artificial, Parisienne salon-life that immediately preceded it.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, p. 600.

3. Ibid.

Tristram seeks out Maria:

—she was beautiful; and if I ever felt
the full force of an honest heart-ache;
it was the moment I saw her—¹

Surely, Sterne is using "honest" ironically here. Tristram is deceiving himself, and, although he doesn't realize it, the reader should. No doubt Tristram sincerely feels his heart touched, but it is his own capacity to feel and his own feelings that Tristram cherishes.

Though he doesn't realize it, Tristram is using Maria as an emotional stimulant for his own feelings. Tristram offers no real comfort or help to Maria. On the contrary, he enjoys a witticism at her expense. Immediately thereafter, Tristram feels remorse at his "unseasonable pleasantry", but once again it is Tristram experiencing and cherishing the feeling.² In short, Tristram's sentiments here are too self-centred to allow for intuitive communication or sympathetic empathy between the two.

In A Sentimental Journey Sterne increased both the melodramatic background and the lachrymose foreground of the 'Maria episode'. Two pathetic, but grotesquely disparate, losses have increased Maria's sorrow: the death of her father

1. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, p. 601.

2. Ibid.

and the disappearance of her pet goat. Moreover, the goat is said to have been "as faithless" as Maria's lover.¹ The lover's faithlessness is something new (in the Shandy version only the curate was the villain), as is Maria's penniless wandering through France and Italy. In the foreground Sterne dwells mawkishly upon the blended tears of Yorick and Maria. Obviously, Sterne over-taxed every stereotyped device. He overloaded the pathos-evoking potential of the scene almost to the point of absurdity. For this reason Yorick's encounter with Maria seems, at first glance, even less likely to produce true sentimental communication than the 'Maria episode' of Tristram Shandy.

However, there is one redeeming feature. Maria now has occasional periods of lucidity. Whereas Tristram had been talking to a Maria who, in her utter madness, was unable to reciprocate, Yorick's Maria is at least capable of communicating.

Yorick, like Tristram, seeks out Maria because he has heard her story, and the story has stimulated his imagination:

'Tis going, I own, like the Knight of the
 Woeful Countenance, in quest of melancholy
 adventures—but I know not how it is, but
 I am never so perfectly conscious of the
 existence of a soul within me, as when I

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", p. 271.

am entangled in them.¹

Throughout this second 'Maria episode' Sterne hints at the importance of man's ability to sympathize intuitively and to communicate supra-rationally. If indeed men can communicate in this way, then solipsism and the epistemological problem of 'knowledge of other minds' are transcended. Moreover, the existence of the sympathetic sense would be proof positive against materialism, and, also, since the sympathetic sense is supra-rational, it would not be open to the philosophical objections of the Deists or the rationalists.

But, as we have seen, Yorick often deceives himself with false sentiment. Thus, for the 'Maria episode' to have the importance Sterne seems to want to give it, there must be real sympathetic communication.

Is Yorick's pity of Maria less self-centred than Tristram's? Does Yorick actually try to comfort the girl? Does Maria respond sufficiently to show that this communication-through-feeling is efficacious? The answer to all three questions is a qualified "yes".

Earlier in my examination of A Sentimental Journey I argued that Sterne's suggestive sensuality need not of itself preclude what he intended to dramatize as true intuitive communication. Inchoate sexual impulses, or proto-motives,

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", p. 270.

may hinder our passing of a definite black or white verdict on the pristine goodness of Yorick's actions, but, as Sterne repeatedly shows us, the origins of moral action are extremely complex. Now, in the case of Maria, I want to suggest that the surfeit of uncontrolled emotion does not of itself preclude true intuitive communication between Yorick and Maria.

Despite the ludicrous tear-wiping ritual, it is possible to show that Yorick succeeded where Tristram had failed. The action, the motive, and the consequence of the Maria-Yorick encounter are all of a more sincere nature than those of the Maria-Tristram encounter. Unlike Tristram, Yorick does actually attempt to comfort Maria. He converses sympathetically with her, and for a brief moment he:

touch'd upon the string on which hung
all her sorrows.¹

The vibrating string was a favourite metaphor for harmonious fellow-feeling throughout the eighteenth century, from Shaftesbury to Hume and Sterne and beyond.² Sterne employed it here to signify, as usual, person-to-person

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria", p. 273.

2. For example, Hume wrote: "As in strings equally wound up, the motive of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections pass readily from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every human creature." A Treatise of Human Nature, Book III, Part III, Section 1.

harmony. This particular harmony (the intuitive communication between Yorick and Maria) is achieved in the face of overly melodramatic detailing and lachrymose language, just as elsewhere in A Sentimental Journey intuitive communication takes place despite the latent sexual suggestiveness.

But for Yorick's compassionate feelings to be objectively valid they must not be self-centred. Is Yorick's treatment of Maria less self-concerned than Tristram's? Certainly Yorick doesn't think he is acting selfishly, for he considers his intuitive exchange with Maria to be a refutation of solipsism. Yet Yorick's feelings, as we have seen, can be specious. The following passage is crucial for any decision in this matter:

I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.

I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester'd the world ever convince me of the contrary.¹

Here Sterne gives us the clue that Yorick's meeting with Maria is meant to be an instance of reciprocal, intuitive communication. Although Yorick does refer his emotional experience to himself, he is not self-indulgent. Yorick feels "undescribable emotions", whereas Tristram in his meeting

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", p. 271.

with Maria had felt only his own "heart-ache" and maudlin "enthusiasm".¹ Moreover, Yorick's emotions are not harboured for their own sake. They are social feelings, and they prove, Sterne implies, that man has an immaterial (but nonetheless real) moral sense.

Of course it could be argued that Yorick's "undescribable emotions" should have proven that all men have souls. Notice, Yorick does not state that his avowal of the existence of his soul means that all men have souls. It is paradoxical that an instance of intuitive communication leads Yorick into affirming (or seeming to affirm) that the only person he can really 'know' is himself.

For the most part, however, Sterne believed that men could communicate through imaginative sympathy and that mankind was more naturally altruistic than egoistic. This belief, along with his efforts to deny the possible materialistic consequences of absolute Empiricism, and like his interest in problems of certitude, marks Sterne as a man of his Age.

Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, Hartley, Hume, Adam Smith, and innumerable lesser-known thinkers had been engrossed in these problems. On the literary scene, authors were less successful in dramatizing such moralistic doctrines,

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Maria, Moulines", p. 273. Tristram Shandy, Volume IX, Chapter 24, p. 601.

for they faced the difficulty which Leslie Stephen found in Akenside's Pleasures of the Imagination and Pope's Essay on Man, viz., that the creative artist who is also a would-be philosopher:

has to make bricks without straw; to turn a philosophical system into poetry without the help of symbolic imagery except a few hollow abstractions such as the Genius of the Human Race, Happiness, Virtue, and Remorse.¹

By Sterne's day the novel was becoming a medium for the dramatization of man's intuitive, sympathetic sense. Fielding had presented his characters, Thwackum and Square, as having "utterly discarded all natural goodness", and he contrasted these self-interested men with Tom Jones, who "was never an indifferent spectator" to the feelings of anyone.² Similarly, Henry Brooke's The Fool of Quality, published several years before the Sentimental Journey, had advanced a doctrine of natural sympathy and fellow-feeling closely akin to Sterne's.³ Henry Mackenzie's The Man of Feeling, begun in 1767 but not published until 1771, also advanced the doctrine that pleasure arises more often from social than from selfish action. Mackenzie of course went

1. English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, (London, 1902), Volume II, p. 364.

2. Tom Jones, Book III, Chapter 4; Book XV, Chapter 8.

3. The Fool of Quality was published serially, 1760-1765. See especially Volume IV, Chapter 16, pp. 213-216; Volume V, Chapter 1, pp. 22-29. (Page references are to the London edition of 1777)

much further than Sterne; indeed, he carried to absurd lengths the notion of intuitive sympathy, thereby spoiling any faint claim to verisimilitude which the novel might otherwise have had.

It may be, as Rufus Putney suggested, that in writing A Sentimental Journey Sterne decided to give the public the pathos they craved.¹ Yet Sterne's Sentimental Journey has infinitely more artistic merit than the grotesquely tear-filled novels of Brooke and Mackenzie. Moreover, in certain crucial scenes Sterne succeeds where Brooke, Mackenzie, and Goldsmith failed, i.e., Sterne sometimes makes the reader feel that communication through sentiment need not necessarily be mawkish or ridiculous. Then too, Sterne's pathos serves a purpose other than evincing or evoking feeling, for his sentimental scenes make the reader pause to consider the actual moral worth of many kinds of benevolence and pseudo-benevolence.

Whereas Tristram Shandy is built around linguistic understanding and misunderstanding, A Sentimental Journey concentrates on emotional understanding and misunderstanding. The reader of Sterne's second novel is confronted with a series of test cases that (1.) reveal the complexity of communicative fellow-feeling, and (2.) challenge the reader

1. "The Evolution of A Sentimental Journey", PQ, XIX, (1940), pp. 349-369.

to categorize each case as evincing true feeling, bogus feeling, absence of feeling, or many intermediate variations. A Sentimental Journey stimulates the reader to make moral judgments about Yorick's actions, whereas for the most part the reader of Tristram Shandy is involved in philosophical or, more pointedly, epistemological problems. Sterne's first novel ensnared the reader in sophistry; his second novel turns the reader into a casuist.

Of course it is one thing to say that A Sentimental Journey presents a series of cases testing true sentiment, and quite another thing to claim that Sterne knew how we, the readers, should finally judge each case. It would be another thing again to claim that Sterne himself had absolutely decided upon the value of each episode in Yorick's sentimental case-history. For instance, it seems impossible to prove, absolutely, that Yorick's self-interest did not somehow tarnish the quality of his sympathetic communion with Maria. Clearly, Sterne excelled at dramatizing human emotions, but as his Journal to Eliza glaringly reveals, he was better at 'feeling' and writing about his feelings than at evaluating their propriety and moral worth.

Written concurrently with A Sentimental Journey, the Journal to Eliza dwells extravagantly upon Sterne's feelings of empathy with Eliza Draper, who had just departed

for India.¹ Implicit in the Journal are Sterne's earlier notions of the ambivalence of 'love': To what extent is love corporeal? incorporeal? Also present is Sterne's overriding faith in sympathetically imaginative communication. The Journal records Sterne's intuitional feelings about Eliza, his memories of her, and his day-dreams of their future union. Sterne was up to his old trick of abandoning reality and living in the world of imagination and feeling. Rarely does he seem to realize that the 'world' his mind was busily creating could never come to be.² Only occasionally does he seem to know that the 'benevolent' sentiments he evinces are really tainted by self-pity. Yet the almost hysterical, special-pleading of the Journal to Eliza is enough, in itself, to suggest that Sterne may have realized the absurdity of it all. Be this as it may, Sterne seems to have become as much a slave to feeling as his narrator, Yorick. Once one surrenders totally to imagination and feeling, what faculty remains to make moral judgments?

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1. For a full account of this period of Sterne's life, see D. Thomson, Wild Excursions, (London, 1972), pp. 256-277.
 2. Despite Sterne's wishful-thinking, the reality of the situation was this: Both Eliza and Sterne were already married; Sterne was thirty years Eliza's senior; Sterne's health was poor, and Eliza was sailing away from England as well as from Sterne's life.

Leaving aside the question of Sterne's personal life, we can, I think, see clearly that in his Sentimental Journey Sterne spread a wide spectrum of sentiment, ranging from true sentiment at one end of the scale to false at the other. Whatever communicative value or moral worth we may attribute to any particular action of Yorick's, there is little difficulty in viewing Sterne's second novel as a continued exploration of the possibilities of supra-rational communication which were touched upon in Tristram Shandy.

2. The Contrast in Narrative Structure

The differences between Sterne's two narrators, Tristram and Yorick, follow naturally from the divergent structures of the two novels. Unlike Tristram, Yorick is not primarily the charismatic author, the cynosure and dirigent force of a book that is essentially an interior monologue. Yorick is primarily a traveler, not an author. Only occasionally does Yorick compare his feeling as he writes with the feelings he had at the time of his adventures. This Shandean dimension is, for the most part, absent. Nor does Yorick often address his reader directly. There is no mock-dialogue with the reader. Never does Yorick gloat over his freedom to write whatsoever he pleases, nor does he call attention to well-executed figures of speech. Yorick is the self-conscious traveller, whereas Tristram was the self-conscious author.

To harmonize with the more refined atmosphere of his Sentimental Journey, Sterne fashioned a less impertinent narrator than Tristram. Although the tone is still anti-philosophical, the spirit of A Sentimental Journey bears few traces of mocking, carnivalesque festivity. Yorick is no intractable con-man. He neither laughs at his reader, nor intentionally offers himself for the reader's amusement. At times of course the reader may conclude that Yorick has deceived himself through his unswerving faith in his own sensibility. Yet, however much we may laugh at sentimental extravagances which Yorick fails to recognize as such, there is no indication that Yorick, like Tristram, intends to have a laugh at the reader's expense (though Sterne himself may well have enjoyed such laughter).

Yorick, therefore, was a more conventional narrative device than Tristram. There is no need to analyse Yorick's statements in an attempt to separate the reliable from the unreliable.

In A Sentimental Journey no discernible time-gap exists between Yorick's experiences and his reporting of those experiences. Yorick is not engaged, as was Tristram, in recording "now" an imaginative mental replay of events forty years past. By removing the time-lag between the telling of past events and the occurrence of those events, Sterne undercut Yorick's importance as a creative author. At

one stroke this freed Sterne's second novel from the chronological complexity and the counterpunctual time-schemes so essential to the proper psychological representation of his earlier narrator.

A Sentimental Journey simply records how the external world affected Yorick during his travels. Sterne fashioned Yorick as an imaginative sense-perceptor, rather than as an imaginative writer. Consequently, Yorick is not the psychotic author, externalizing mental images, inserting himself "now" into past situations and speaking "now" to characters who are not physically present.

It also follows from Sterne's more conventional narrative device that Yorick's stories will be less fantastic than Tristram's. Yorick's duty is to record his travels and his thoughts during his travels, while Tristram's was to record his thoughts at the moment of writing - be those thoughts wilful or random, be they memories or flights of fancy. Sterne's second novel, therefore, satisfies Fielding's directive to keep "within the bounds of possibility."¹ A Shandy-style, miraculous circumcision would, for instance, have been incongruous in Yorick's tale.

Tristram represents the artist's imagination in solitude, trying desperately to create a work of literature.

1. Tom Jones, Book VIII, Chapter 1.

Sterne sequesters Tristram in the study of Shandy Hall and attempts to depict Tristram's mind as it bears the present idea or is in the birth-throes of the next idea. Tristram Shandy supposedly records the present thoughts of an author as he writes a book intended to capture his present thoughts. As a book about personal artistry, Tristram Shandy is a psychologically accurate portrayal of the tribulations of imaginative creativity.

Contrariwise, Yorick, the narrator of A Sentimental Journey, is not sequestered from society. Far from being overly concerned with 'his' book as the object of his imagination, Yorick exhibits the power of imagination to assist him in apprehending the external world. Yorick's imagination functions in conjunction with his sense-perceptions and acts to heighten the emotional impact of those sense-perceptions. Yorick displays what Ernest Tuveson has called "a great hope of the later eighteenth century", namely:

that the instinct of benevolence, encouraged
and if necessary restored by imagination¹
could solve the problems of human welfare.

The interest in man's sympathetic imagination bursts forth occasionally in Tristram Shandy, but comes into full bloom in A Sentimental Journey, where Yorick calls it the

1. The Imagination as a Means of Grace, (Los Angeles, 1960), pp. 161-162.

"great SENSORIUM of the world!"¹ Those critics who view Sterne's second novel as a resounding satire of sentiment may in fact be denying the existence of the sympathetic sense.² They may be saying that the whole idea of such a faculty is nonsense. And they have a point, for sufficient objective criteria cannot be offered to prove that such a sympathetic faculty exists.³ But for Sterne, as for many eighteenth-century moralists, it was a very real thing.

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1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Bourbonnois", p. 278.
 2. Also, of course, critics who see A Sentimental Journey as a satire of sentiment may point to incidents such as Yorick's encounter with the fair 'fille de chambre' as evidence of a salacious, rather than a moral, sense. (Volume II, "The Temptation, Paris", "The Conquest") But I have previously indicated that it seems wrong to generalize about the whole book on the basis of instances in which Tristram deceives himself about his real motives and sentiments.
 3. For obvious reasons the faculty of the sympathetic imagination must always remain somewhat nebulous. It exists, supposedly, as a predisposition towards empathy with others - an interior feeling. As such, it lacks objective criteria for identification, and so admits of variable private interpretations. True, from the occurrence of a benevolent action we may infer a moral sense in the agent. Eighteenth-century moralists were fond of jumping to such conclusions in their efforts to prove the fallacy of Hobbism. Yet the inference is not necessary, for an action that appears benevolent could have been performed from self-interested motives. Richardson, Fielding, and particularly Swift with his sharp irony had illustrated the duplicity of motives which may lie behind an action - even an action which looks morally good on the face of it. Sterne treated the same topic in many of his sermons, including the "Sermon on Conscience" in Tristram Shandy. But the greater message of Sterne's Sermons is that man's natural sympathetic sense does exist, if we will but give it the chance.

Even in his first novel, as we have seen, Sterne provided examples of the imagination functioning intuitively to establish a sympathetic understanding between men. Recall that in Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Tristram escapes symbolically from Death (the death of the self-centred imagination) to a joyous imaginative union with mankind (represented by the peasants of Languedoc). This scene has a parallel in A Sentimental Journey.

Toward the end of A Sentimental Journey the reader has met test after test of real or false sentiment. Yorick himself has been converted to the shibboleth of feeling, ever since he became disillusioned with the inability of polite language to convey those sincere feelings which accompany man's sympathetic imagination. The urbane discourse of the salons, he has found, merely purports to express heart-felt sentiment. Suspicious of this "beggarly system"¹ of flattery, Yorick departs post-haste from Paris.

Again, as in Tristram Shandy, Sterne leads his protagonist towards a sublime and imaginative experience of man's universal brotherhood. Yorick's communion with Man is set on the side of Mount Taurira near Lyons. In the passage quoted below notice the total absence of speech between Yorick and the peasant family. Every move is accomplished through intuition understanding. Thus, the danger of

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "Paris", p. 266.

language obstructing heart-to-heart communication is avoided:

They were all sitting down together to their lentil-soup; a large wheaten loaf was in the middle of the table; and a flaggon of wine at each end of it promised joy thro' the stages of the repast—'twas a feast of love.

The old man rose up to meet me, and with a respectful cordiality would have me sit down at the table; my heart was sat down the moment I enter'd the room; so I sat down at once like a son of the family; and to invest myself in the character as speedily as I could, I instantly borrowed the old man's knife, and taking up the loaf cut myself a hearty luncheon; and as I did it I saw testimony in every eye, not only of an honest welcome, but of a welcome mix'd with thanks that I had not seem'd to doubt it.

Was it this; or tell me, Nature, what else it was which made this morsel so sweet—and to what magick I owe it, that the draught I took of their flaggon was so delicious with it, that they remain upon my palate to this hour?¹

Of course there are many things one can point to in this dramatic scene. The sacramental symbolism of the bread and wine is obvious, as is the fact that Sterne chose a mountain location for Yorick's apotheosis. The event itself is a marvelously evocative paradigm of natural, sincere, and intuitive empathy at a supra-rational level. It is Yorick's one communication-through-feeling that bears absolutely no taint of self-interest. Yorick's feeling for humanity is completely devoid of motives and proto-motives in a way that none of his other sentimental communications ever could be.

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Supper", pp. 281-282.

Immediately following his sublime communion with humanity, Yorick describes the thanksgiving - a joyous dance which parallels the Gascoigne roundelay (Viva la Joia! Fidon la Tristessa!) of Tristram Shandy, Volume VII, Chapter 43.

It was not till the middle of the second dance, when, from some pauses in the movement wherein they all seemed to look up, I fancied I could distinguish an elevation of spirit different from that which is the cause or the effect of simple jollity.—In a word, I thought I beheld 'Religion' mixing in the dance—but as I had never seen her so engaged, I should have look'd upon it now, as one of the illusions of an imagination which is eternally misleading me, had not the old man, as soon as the dance ended, said, that this was their constant way; and that all his life long he had made it a rule, after supper was over, to call out his family to dance and rejoice; believing, he said, that a cheerful and contented mind was the best sort of thanks to heaven that an illiterate peasant could pay—

—Or a learned prelate either, said I.¹

We can, I think, be certain that Sterne meant to stress the importance of man's sympathetic imagination in giving him an intuitive insight into the oneness of humanity. We can be certain of this, whatever interpretation we place upon the sentimental extravagances of Yorick's imagination elsewhere in the novel, and whatever our belief or disbelief in the existence of an interior, imaginative, and sympathetic sense.

1. A Sentimental Journey, Volume II, "The Grace", pp. 283-284.

Much of Sterne's preaching echoes his belief in the mystical unity of man, although, not unexpectedly, this belief is stated more orthodoxly and less artistically, more as revealed religion and less as natural religion, in his sermons. Take this excerpt from "Follow Peace":

—We have the same Father in heaven, who makes us and takes care of us all.—Our earthly extraction too is nearer alike, than the pride of the world cares to be reminded of: for Adam was the father of us all, and Eve the mother of all living.—The prince and the beggar sprung from the same stocks, as wide asunder as the branches are.—So that, in this view, the most upstart family may vie antiquity, and compare families with the greatest monarchs.—We are all formed too of the same mould, and must equally return to the same dust.—So that, to love our neighbor, and to live quietly with him, is to live at peace with ourselves.—He is but self-multiplied, and enlarged into another form; and to be unkind or cruel to him, is but, as Solomon observed of the unmerciful, to be cruel to our own flesh.¹

Here of course Sterne seems merely to be repeating homiletic banalities - "old threadbare phrases" which Swift had disparaged some years earlier.² To preach brotherhood among men was simply to follow orthodox Christian doctrine; moreover, it was the fashionable belief of the eighteenth-century man of feeling. But to be able, as Sterne was in his

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1. The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, Volume VII, Sermon 41, "Follow Peace".
 2. A Letter to a Young Clergyman, Lately Entered into Holy Orders, (1720).

fiction, to dramatize with consummate skill the rôle of the imagination in fostering a realization of universal brotherhood was a seldom-accomplished achievement. Shaftesbury had attempted as much in his Philosophical Rhapsody, and Akenside, too, in The Pleasures of the Imagination.¹ However, while both these authors caught the sublimity of the idea of man's mystical brotherhood, neither succeeded, as did Sterne, in transforming the intractable sublimity into a convincing human experience which the reader could 'feel'.

Awed by the potential of man's imagination, Sterne attempted in his novels to trace the varied functions of the imaginative faculty. Tristram Shandy is primarily concerned with the author's creative writing process and the reader's creative reading of, and participation in, the process of literary creation. By miming an acutely alive mind at the moment of creativity, Sterne enabled future readers to participate in the act of creation. Yet, though Tristram Shandy itself does succeed in this reciprocal fashion, Sterne also points to pitfalls on the way to successful communication.

An author's narcissism and solipsism can destroy the communicative bridge between himself and his reader, as can a reader who refuses to surrender "the reins of imagination into his author's hands."² Self-centredness on either

1. Characteristicks, Treatise V, "The Moralists"; The Pleasures of the Imagination, Book II.

2. Tristram Shandy, Volume III, Chapter 12, p. 193.

side of the communicative process can vitiate communication. Even an author's language is suspect, and the question of sexual innuendo, for instance, must ultimately be decided by the reader's imagination. Moreover, as I have shown, attempts to analyse the words of Sterne's author-persona for consistency and verisimilitude lead back, ultimately, to the fact that an author's imagination, not his logical reasoning, impregnates a work of fiction with its lasting appeal. Sterne's 'fool of an author' is really, then, a wise fool because he knows the basic presupposition behind all fiction (i.e., that fiction must appeal to fancy, not reason), and he performs accordingly.

Within Tristram Shandy Sterne illustrated yet another function of the imagination. It acts, Sterne thought, to enable men to communicate intuitionally in a world beset by rational incertitude. If, philosophically speaking, we are precluded from knowing with certainty what another person has in mind, then, says Sterne, so much the worse for philosophy. The happy alternative to philosophy and reason is the imagination, which Tristram, the wise fool, symbolizes. Hence, besides probing the limits of literary communication, Tristram Shandy also began to probe the limits of communication-through-imaginative-feeling.

In his Sentimental Journey Sterne naturally relied upon imaginative cooperation from his reader, but having

dwelt at length on this theme in Tristram Shandy, he chose to develop his new protagonist, Yorick, as a centre of imaginative feeling. Thus, instead of encountering an author who insists that all authors of fiction must be con-men and who therefore demands imaginative cooperation, the reader encounters Yorick, whose own imaginative feelings sometimes deceive Yorick himself - though Yorick's heart, like Tristram's, is in the right place.

Repeatedly, Sterne shows Yorick's imagination acting to enhance his sense-perceptions of others and evoking, sometimes, a rare sympathetic understanding where language fails. But like the creative imagination of the artist, the imagination of the man of feeling demands reciprocity in order to communicate outside itself.

Supra-rational communication, as Sterne envisioned it, was a balanced act, to the particular advantage of neither party, but for the general good of both. Feeling fails to communicate when one party is too self-concerned or when one party abrogates the feelings of another to suit his self-indulgent tastes. As in his Sermons, Sterne points to man's lack of self-knowledge and his capacity to delude himself even about the sincerity of his own sentiments.

The danger with a sympathetic imagination, then, is that we can deceive ourselves into mistaking false sentiment for real sentiment. The danger with Tristram's type of

creative imagination is that it may beguile an author into worshipping his own creation and lapsing into solipsism. Regardful of the dangers, though undaunted by them, Sterne aimed to celebrate the creative force of man's imagination and the power of the social imagination to combat disaffection or malevolence. Over and above these functions of the imagination, Sterne aimed to raise on high man's ability to experience a mystical unity with his fellow man.

To twentieth-century readers Sterne's interest in the sympathetic sense and intuitive benevolence may seem curiously old-fashioned. It is a period-piece ethic from the age of David Hume and Adam Smith. Even so, the highest principle of that ethic (the power of the imagination to foster brotherly love) was cherished thereafter by the Romantic Poets generally, and defended in particular by Shelley in his Defense of Poetry half a century after the publication of the Sentimental Journey.

When we look today at Sterne's writing we are likely to admire not the sentiment but the proleptically modern techniques and the comic incertitude. Yorick's starling in the cage, for instance, may remind us of Wittgenstein's "beetle in the box", insofar as both are symbols of man's difficulty in communicating his feelings to others. Similarly, in Tristram Shandy there are clear resemblances - though tenuous connexions - to the works of Proust, Joyce, Virginia

Woolf, Beckett, and many other twentieth-century writers. Sterne's spontaneous style, his abandonment of the linear plot-line, his concentration on the subjective mind, his rendering of what is now called "stream of consciousness", his interest in the psychology of creativity, his dramatization of psychological time, his profuse doubt of man's rationality: all these make Sterne's first novel seem more contemporary than his second, despite the fact that Tristram Shandy is seeped in the humanistic satire of metaphysics and is bursting with the Renaissance hilarity of Erasmus, Rabelais, and Cervantes.

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