This thesis explores and develops themes first outlined in my earlier MA dissertation, *Two Sentimental Novels*, and it should be noted that the argument set out in this study greatly augments and supports that of the other.

After a brief review of Sterne’s life, looking particularly at his familiarity with libertines, the study moves on to consider the long critical tradition that has associated Sterne’s work with libertine and deistic ideas. The same themes are described and illustrated in a selection of illustrations, including those from an early pornographic edition of *Tristram Shandy*, and the first section concludes with a brief review of the way Sterne himself has been seen by various critics to be making subtle allusions to unorthodox sources. This section strenuously critiques the notion that Sterne’s works can be regarded as an expression of his professed Anglicanism.

The second section first reviews three of Sterne’s lesser-known compositions in which such ideas are also strongly noticeable, and after a short preamble on the strategy, turns at last to *Tristram Shandy*. The remainder of the study comprises a close reading of the text, particularly those parts of it that deal with life at St Cuthbert’s Hall. Close attention is paid throughout to chronology which is regarded as the dominant structuring principle, and mapped out fully in an appended table. The final section offers a very radical reinterpretation of the text, challenging established assumptions while noting many connections with the material explored in the first section. The argument accumulates and is presented as a series of character studies, each of which draws to its own conclusion, rather than towards a conventional concluding chapter.
LIBERTINISM AND DEISM IN TRISTRAM SHANDY AND OTHER WRITINGS OF
LAURENCE STERNE

by
DUNCAN W. PATRICK

Thesis submitted in fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree scheme
Ph.D.

Department of English
Leicester University

February 2002
Preface

This study develops themes first outlined in my earlier work, *Two Sentimental Novels: The Vicar of Wakefield and A Sentimental Journey*¹, particularly developing the idea that Sterne's works are impious, libertine texts that satirise and ridicule most, if not all, of the conventional standards of the day. Obviously this notion is at odds with much contemporary critical opinion, and initially therefore considerable space is devoted to discussion of the tradition of mistrust and hostility towards Sterne that was once relatively widespread.

Although the argument advanced in this present study is solely concerned with *Tristram Shandy* and is intended to be sufficient in itself, it is nevertheless considerably augmented by reference my earlier work, very little of which is reproduced in what follows. This is particularly pertinent in the case of Yorick and the discussion of his character set out below is undoubtedly incomplete without full reference to that work.

---

¹ D. W. Patrick, *Two Sentimental Novels: The Vicar of Wakefield and A Sentimental Journey* (MA dissertation), Leicester University 1998
Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks are due to the Humanities Research Board of The British Academy who funded this research project, and also to Professor Duncan Cloud of Leicester University for his translation of Sterne’s ‘dog-Latin’ letter to Hall-Stevenson. I am personally greatly indebted to my brother Vaughan who is a rock; to Jim Fleming, Phillip Hardman, Helmut W, and others at Bowness Bay for their invaluable support, and to Stephanie Coward, Peter Saunders and Gerald Carlin for many years of friendship and encouragement. I owe a great deal to my parents, Kenneth and Marjorie Patrick, and more still to my son, Saul, without whom none of this would have been written.

In Memory of
Kenneth Alec Patrick
1910-1990
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 1: Contexts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction: ‘The Macaroni Sterne’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sterne among the Demoniacs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The ‘New Orthodoxy’ vs. ‘the spirit of Shandeism’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Criticism and other responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Unorthodox Illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Reluctant Victorians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sterne in the twentieth century</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Intertext: The ‘less verifiable followings’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 2: Texts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Three Fugitive Pieces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Tristram Shandy: Notes on ‘the reading process’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Yorick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Elizabeth: The Shandy clock and the ‘beds of justice.’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Two Midwives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. The ‘nine months’ Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Walter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16: Toby</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 1: Chronological Table | 204 |
Appendix 2: The ‘Slawkenberg’ Illustrations | 209 |

Bibliography | 221 |
Illustrations

Frontispiece: Thomas Bridges and Laurence Sterne as Mountebanks
    Charles John Smith, c. 1838, after a lost original by Bridges and Sterne.

Fig. 2: The Fruit-shop
    Frontispiece to The Fruit-shop, 1765

Fig. 3: Tristram Shandy
    Frontispiece to the 'Slawkenberg' edition of Tristram Shandy, 1771

Fig. 4: Such a silly question
    From the Slawkenberg edition of Tristram Shandy

Fig. 5: Laurence Sterne and Death
    Engraving by Thomas Patch, 1768

Fig. 6: detail from Laurence Stern and Death
    Thomas Patch, 1768

Fig. 7: Frontispiece to Tristram Shandy (I & II)
    William Hogarth, 1760

Fig. 8: Frontispiece to Tristram Shandy (III & IV)
    William Hogarth, 1760

Fig. 9: Right end of a woman
    From the Slawkenberg edition of Tristram Shandy

Appendix 2. Illustrations from the 'Slawkenberg' edition of Tristram Shandy

Fig. 10: par le moyen d'une petite Canulle

Fig. 11: A Limb is soon broke in such Encounters

Fig. 12: I will touch it

Fig. 13: The Intricacies of Diego and Julia

Fig. 14: Whiskers

Fig. 15: Take hold of my whiskers

Fig. 16: Widow Wadman

Fig. 17: Yes, yes, - I see

Fig. 18: the duce take that slit

Fig. 19: I seiz'd her Hand

Fig. 20: Tom's had more gristle in it
ABBREVIATIONS


ASJ  A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick, ed. Gardner D. Stout, Jr., Berkley, (1967)

EMY  Arthur H. Cash, Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years, London (1975)


LETTERS  Lewis Perry Curtis, ed. The Letters of Laurence Sterne, Oxford (1965)
LIBERTINISM AND DEISM IN TRISTRAM SHANDY AND OTHER WRITINGS OF LAURENCE STERNE
‘Thomas Bridges and Laurence Sterne as Mountebanks’
or
‘The Mountebank and his Macaroni’¹

...in all our numerous family, for these four generations, we count no more than one archbishop, a Welch judge, some three or four aldermen, and a single mountebank— ... In the sixteenth century, we boast of no less than a dozen alchymists.²

Tristram Shandy

¹ Charles John Smith, ‘Thomas Bridges and Laurence Sterne as Mountebanks’, c. 1838. Line engraving after a lost original by Bridges and Sterne. repr. Cash, EMY, facing p. 304. see also ibid. pp. 210-11, 299-300, 310.
² VIII. iii. 658
INTRODUCTION

Chapter One
The Macaroni Sterne

From the outset it must be acknowledged that this study is at variance with the work of the majority of Sterne’s twentieth century critics, and seems therefore most appropriately introduced with what is, to many, an unfamiliar portrait of Sterne, accompanied by the unsettling words of William Makepeace Thackeray.

There is not a page in Sterne’s writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption - a hint, as of an impure presence. ...The foul satyr’s eyes leer out of the leaves constantly...3

Obviously, since Sterne was a clergyman, such words call into question fundamental assumptions about the nature of his work. Briefly stated then, and broadly speaking, against a widespread modern consensus that the ‘sentiment’ and the humour of Sterne’s work are founded upon his ‘Anglican orthodoxy’, this study aims to take Sterne out of the pulpit and view him mounted instead upon the mountebank’s platform; arguing that a more reliable context is established by reading Sterne’s work not as a sermon, but as a libertine text, a product of the same ‘school’ that produced

---

3 William Makepeace Thackeray, The English Humourists and The Four Georges, (1949) p. 239
the *Makarony Fables* and *Crazy Tales* of his friend and fellow ‘hell-fire’ Demoniac, John Hall-Stevenson.⁴

The picture depicting Sterne as a mountebank’s assistant was painted by Thomas Bridges, in York, before Sterne became famous. The mountebank is a representation of Bridges done by Sterne upon the same canvas and, in keeping with Sterne’s literary practices, the image is ‘borrowed’ from another work.⁵ Obviously, to identify oneself as a mountebank is to identify with cheats and impostors, and, almost inevitably, to summon up the spirit of the great mountebank of the preceding age, Rochester’s *alter ego*, Dr. Bendo⁶. Although the connection might seem slight, for the present it is sufficient to point out that Sterne’s narrators, both Tristram and Yorick, are well provided with the first requirement of all mountebanks – ample skill in the art of *devious* eloquence:

> Their greatest grace is in the Countenance and Tongue, through which, they look so Saddely, and speak so eloquently, that a man would swear upon a booke for them, that they thinke as they speake, and speake no more, than they wil do.
>
> What so ever thing they have to sel ...whatsoever it be, they commend it and praise it before. But they doe it with such a Grace, and such a Constancie, with such Copie of words, with such moving of Affections, that it is wonderful.⁷

The same is true of Sterne, and although one can become dazzled by the ‘Copie of words’ and ‘moving of Affections’ in his work, nevertheless, one should approach his eloquence in exactly the way one would approach a mountebank – not in any doubt, but rather in the certain knowledge that one is being cheated. In what follows I will argue that for generations Sterne’s readers, particularly his ‘sentimental’ readers, have been thoroughly hoodwinked.

Sterne described the picture as “the Mountebank & his Macaroni”⁸ and hence, while one figure evokes Rochester, the other seems to anticipate Hall-Stevenson’s *Makaroni Fables*. The word ‘macaroni’, as it is used in these cases, is of uncertain signification,

---

⁵ ‘The Infallible Mountebank or Quack Doctor’. See Cash *EMY*, p. 299-300; plate II (facing p. 304)
⁷ From John Rastelle, *The Third Booke, declaring... that it is time to beware of M. Iewe* (Antwerp 1566); quoted by Carol Clark, *The Vulgar Rabelais*, (1983) p. 91
although the OED notes that the mountebank and the macaroni are also united in the Italian ‘maccherone’, used in a Spectator of 1711, with the sense, “blockhead, fool, mountebank.” The connection seems slight however, and OED suggest that the fashionable macaronis of the later century seem to have taken the name from the Macaroni Club – where the name derives from the members’ preference for foreign (and at that time) exotic food.

Although now generally perceived as fops or dandies, in a broad review of the century, historian Paul Langford passes from the rake to the macaroni in a breath. From the earliest part of the century, he notes, “the impious revellers of the hell-fire clubs had as a common bond their unorthodoxy or atheism…”, but later, when the hell-fire rakes were in decline, the 1760s and 1770s became instead, “…the heyday of the macaronis, outrageous offenders against the canons of bourgeois respectability.”9 This origins of this fashionable character are described in OED: “An exquisite of a class which arose in England about 1760 and consisted of young men who had travelled and affected the tastes and fashions prevalent in continental society.” Sterne, of course was a noted ‘exquisite’ of just such an era and with just such tastes, and the quotation that follows from Walpole’s correspondence (in which he refers to the macaroni as being “a creature … a thing of the neuter gender”) highlights certain affinities the Macaroni shares with Tristram Shandy itself: “It talks without meaning, it smiles without pleasantry … it wenches without passion.” Some years later, in 1783, Mme. D’Arblay noted another intriguing characteristic – complex chronology - that makes the Macaroni seem strangely ‘Shandean’: “It is the custom, you know, among the Macaronies, to wear two watches.”

Among other definitions, OED also cites a usage from 1611 that certainly suggest that Tristram Shandy is ‘macaronique’: “a confused heape, or huddle of many seuerall things.” This confused mixture is also apparent in macaronic verse, which exploits the confusion of two languages, as for example in Swift’s ‘A Love Song’, which is apparently written in Latin, and begins: “Apud in is almi des ire…”10 The façade of ‘high culture’ is deceptive however, and the meaning, in plain English (i.e. a pudding is all my desire…) is decidedly ‘low’. Similarly, although in a far more sophisticated way, Sterne combines ‘high’ spirituality and sentiment, with ‘low’ comedy and sexuality, and the result, I will argue, is an impious, libertine

work, with its satire directed firmly against ‘the canons of bourgeois respectability’. Sterne himself cryptically remarked of his critics, “the Wise heads of this Island,—they philosophize upon Tristram Shandy alike to a T—they all look too high...”\textsuperscript{11} This study, therefore, will look ‘low’.

The study is divided into two sections. The first, ‘Contexts’, reviews some of the more unorthodox aspects of Sterne’s life, and more broadly discusses the curious critical tradition of high praise intermingled with hostility and disapproval that his work has attracted. After questioning widespread assumptions about Sterne’s ‘Anglican orthodoxy’, and introducing an ongoing critique of those who actively promote such a view, the section concludes with a review of numerous veiled and evasive allusions in Sterne’s work – ‘the less verifiable followings’ – that suggest that Sterne’s ‘learned wit’ is grounded in a form of radical deism that is closely associated with libertinism.

The second section, ‘Texts’, begins with a review of three of Sterne’s lesser-known works and, before moving on to 	extit{Tristram Shandy}, there is a short discussion of the need for a reading practice able at once to accommodate the vagaries of Sterne’s highly idiosyncratic structure, his meticulous attention to chronological detail, his noted indebtedness to other writers, and the numerous other ‘riddles and mysteries’ associated with his work. This is followed by a closely detailed (and highly revisionist) study of several characters in 	extit{Tristram Shandy}, beginning with Parson Yorick, moving next to an extended study of Tristram’s mother, Elizabeth, before finally coming to briefly consider Walter and Toby Shandy in light of what has gone before. Throughout this section chronology is taken to be central to the ordering of meaning in the text, and is supplemented by a chronological table (\textit{Appendix 1}).

\textsuperscript{11} \textsc{Letters}, Letter 67, p. 122
SECTION 1

CONTEXTS
Chapter Two
Sterne among the Demoniacs

The bare outlines of Sterne’s life are sketchy, but well known. Born in 1718, the son of a soldier, he spent his early childhood in various barracks and lodgings as his family followed the movements of his father’s regiment. He attended school in Halifax from the age of nine, and later took a place at Jesus College, Cambridge, where, among other things, his friendship with Hall-Stevenson first flourished. He received his BA there in 1737, the following year he was ordained, and he gained his MA in 1740. Returning to Yorkshire, he married Elizabeth Lumley in 1741, and was then to spend the best part of the next twenty years leading the life of a rural clergyman, and living, in his own evocative phrases:

...in a bye corner of the kingdom, and in a retired thatch’d house... in a constant endeavour to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth; being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles,—but much more so, when he laughs, that it adds something to this Fragment of Life.12

This passage, from the dedication to Tristram Shandy, introduces - and typifies - Sterne’s ‘sentimental’ posture. Never in danger of lapsing into contemptible self-pity, the style is calculated to inspire not just sympathy, but the sympathetic admiration due to one who suffers adversity with such good nature, and with such obvious signs of humility. One can hardly resist becoming endeared to the author of

12 TS, Dedication ‘To the Right Honourable Mr. Pitt.’ (unnumbered page).
such a passage. But one must recognize that Sterne was the first to promote his own myth, and the charming persona of ‘the author’ that Sterne projects is carefully contrived, and not at all reliable as autobiography. Sterne worked hard to blur the distinction between narrator and author in his work, and so assiduously does he manage his ‘conversational’ style that it becomes difficult to distinguish one from the other; and one can easily become convinced that one hears the voice of Sterne speaking directly from the mouthpiece of his creation Tristram:

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.\(^\text{13}\)

A. E. Dyson has commented upon how effectively Sterne developed this very personal and intimate relationship with his readers, which he says is “far closer to friendship, in the normal sense of that term, than any other novelist ever comes.”\(^\text{14}\) Those readers, however, who have grown familiar with Sterne through his work in this way, and have been charmed into ‘friendship’ by what they mistakenly take to be the voice of Sterne himself, might well be surprised that the impression they had formed of this amiable clergyman does not fully prepare them for the details of his biography, which, in many respects, is that of a rake.

At the time of his marriage he was described by his wife’s cousin, Matthew Robinson, as having been “a Parson who once delighted in debauchery,”\(^\text{15}\) and Robinson’s sister, Elizabeth, echoed his view: “...Mr. Sterne has a hundred a year living, with a good prospect of better preferment. He was a great rake, but being japanned and married, has varnished his character.”\(^\text{16}\) The details of his life revealed in his letters, particularly those to Hall-Stevenson, indicate that whatever ‘varnish’ Sterne applied to his character at this time, it later wore decidedly thin. Sterne remained a life-long member of the ‘Demoniacs’, the ‘Hell-fire club’ founded by Hall-Stevenson at Cambridge, and later hosted at his Yorkshire home, Skelton Hall - renamed ‘Crazy Castle’ for their gatherings. Although critics are reluctant to dwell

\(^{13}\) I. iv. 9
\(^{15}\) LETTERS, p.15 n.1
\(^{16}\) ibid.
on the connection, Hall-Stevenson had strong links with the notorious ‘Monks of Medmenham’, the group of English libertines who gathered around Sir Francis Dashwood during the 1750s, as did Sterne himself through his close friendship with John Wilkes, perhaps the most notorious rake - in both his libertinism and his atheism - of the whole infamous ‘brotherhood.’ Certainly, Hall-Stevenson’s poem about Sterne, ‘The Blackbird’, suggests that he actively emulated the ‘Franciscans’ of Medmenham:

Like those good children of St. Francis;  
He seculariz’d all his airs,  
And took delight in wanton fancies.  

In a letter he wrote as a young man to his future wife, Sterne observed, “The Libertine says, let me enjoy this week in luxurious and forbidden pleasures, and the next I will dedicate to serious thought and reflection...”\(^\text{17}\) In 1764, however, long after his marriage had grown tiresome,\(^\text{18}\) he wrote to Hall-Stevenson describing his own behaviour in a way that mirrors exactly the example of ‘the Libertine’: “…I am going to leave a few poor sheep here in the wilderness for fourteen days—and from pride and naughtiness of heart to go see what is doing at Scarborough—steadfastly meaning afterwards to lead a new life and strengthen my faith.” The letter ends with a recommendation, and the name of another Medmenhamite: “If you can get to Scarborough, do ... Lord G[ranch]y is to be there—what a temptation!”\(^\text{19}\) A few weeks later, he wrote to Hall-Stevenson again:

My dear Cousin,  
I am but this moment return’d from Scarborough, where I have been drinking the waters ever since the races, and have received much marvellous strength, had I not debilitated it as fast as I got it, by playing the good fellow with Lord G[ranch]y and Co. too much... I have done nothing good that I know of since I left you ... I must try now and do better.”\(^\text{20}\)

John Manners, Lord Granby, was a noted rake, and as indicative of the kind of ‘temptations’ to be encountered in such company, Curtis quotes Tobias Smollett’s remarks on the fortunes of Sterne’s fellow Demoniac, William Hewitt, on the same

\(^{18}\) \textit{Letters}, 3, p.17 (1739/40?)
\(^{19}\) There seems little doubt that Sterne’s marriage was as unhappy as the savage caricature he drew of his wife suggests; see Holtz, \textit{Image and Immortality}, facing p. 80
\(^{20}\) \textit{Letters}, Letter 130, (September 4, 1764) p. 225
\(^{21}\) ibid. Letter 131, (27 September, 1764) p. 226
occasion: “...according to Smollett, [Hewitt] ‘came hither to Scarborough to pay his respects to his noble friend and former pupil, the M[arquess] of G[ranby], and forgetting that he is now turned seventy, sacrificed so liberally to Bacchus, that next day he was seized with a fit of apoplexy, which has a little impaired his memory.’”

Sterne’s resolution to ‘lead a new life’ after his visit to Scarborough was short-lived however, and a few weeks later he wrote again to Hall-Stevenson:

I have been Miss-ridden this last week by a couple of romping girls (bien mises et comme il faut) ... they have taken up all my time, and have given my judgement and fancy more airing than they wanted.—These things accord not well with sermon making—but ‘tis my vile errantry, as sancho [sic] says, and that is all that can be made of it.

Earlier in the same year, in a letter to Charles Churchill, Wilkes had written of their amity while they were together in Paris: “Sterne and I often meet, and talk of you—We have an odd party for to-night at Hope’s, two lively, young, handsome actresses, Hope and his mistress—Ah! poor Mrs. Wilkes!!”

Sterne obviously had little regard for the ‘vows of holy matrimony’ he had entered into, and he equivocates quite pointedly on matrimony and his other sacred vows in a letter to Hall-Stevenson:

My wife returns to Toulouse and purposes to spend the summer at Bagnieres—I on the contrary go and visit my wife the church in Yorkshire.—We all live the longer—at least the happier—for having things our own way.—This is my conjugal maxim—I own 'tis not the best of maxims—but I maintain 'tis not the worst.

This tends to confirm his disaffection with his domestic relationship, but Sterne’s ‘conjugal maxim’ works two ways, and it does nothing either to encourage the idea of his fidelity to his Yorkshire ‘wife’—the church.

A letter that John Horne-Tooke wrote to Wilkes around the same time vividly indicates the sort of spiritual company that Wilkes preferred to keep. Horne-Tooke was himself still a clergyman at the time and, anxious to forestall any misunderstanding, he first mentions that he had recently “passed a Week with Sterne

---

22 ibid. see p. 227, n. 2
25 LETTERS, Letter 118, ‘To Robert Foley’ (Montpellier, Jan 20, 1764) p. 209
at Lyon” - from whom, no doubt, he had learned how best to approach Wilkes - and he then proceeds to make his own position plain:

You are entering into a Correspondence with a Parson, and I am a little apprehensive lest that Title should disgust you: But give me Leave to assure you I am not ordained a Hypocrite. It is true I have suffered the infectious Hand of a Bishop to be waved over me: whose Imposition like the sop given to Judas, is only a Signal for the Devil to enter … But I hope I have escaped the Contagion. And if I have not, if you should at any Time discover the Black Spot under the Tongue, assist me kindly to conquer the prejudices of Education and Profession.27

Unlike Horne-Tooke, who abandoned his cassock and dressed fashionably when in Paris, Sterne retained his clerical garb, but Wilkes obviously felt no such ‘disgust’ in his company, and it seems clear that as far as Wilkes was concerned, Sterne had escaped any similar ‘contagion’; after hearing Sterne preach one of his more dubious sermons there, Wilkes remarked: “[he] pleads his cause well, ’tho he does not believe one word of it.”28 Wilkes’s closest confederate, Churchill, was a more openly apostate clergyman and, until his death later in 1764, the leading propagandist for the Wilkite cause – a position that was filled after Churchill’s death, albeit less successfully, by Hall-Stevenson. These are quite clearly the kind of circles in which Sterne felt most at home. In the month after this visit, shortly before his return to England, Sterne wrote to Hall-Stevenson that he was preparing to leave “this city of seductions” in the place he called “foutre-land”29 - literally ‘fuck-land’ - but on this occasion, clearly not anticipating any immediate reformation of his character, he bade Hall-Stevenson farewell, “...in full hopes on my side, that I shall spend many still more joyous deliriums with you over many a pint of Burgundy.” A distinct echo of this phrase - an echo that would certainly have been audible to Hall-Stevenson - occurs on the first page of the new volumes that were published soon after Sterne’s return from France, when, in a passage riddled with “slits in petticoats” and “bastardly digression”, Tristram addresses himself to “my dear Eugenius” and speaks of “Freeze-land, Fog-land and some other lands I wot of.”30

27 quoted by Cash, LY, p. 232
28 Wilkes to Suard, 25 March 1764. quoted by Cash, ibid. p. 182
30 VIII. i. 655-6
One could continue at length in this manner. As well as Wilkes, Churchill and Manners, the names of other Medmenhamites\(^{31}\) crop up regularly in Sterne’s biography, like Robert Vannisart,\(^{32}\) to whom Sterne turned for assistance in 1761. Early in 1766 Sterne was in Naples, enjoying the company of another, Sir William Stanhope, “...the younger brother of Lord Chesterfield, and a man who had the reputation of being less polite than his brother. He was a wit and a gambler, and Sterne liked him very much and became his correspondent.”\(^{33}\) In 1767 we find Sterne dining “with Lord Marsh & a large Company of the duke of York’s people.” Curtis sounds a note of alarm in his note on Sterne’s association with ‘Lord Marsh’ - William Douglas, Earl of March and Raglan: “It is to be hoped that Sterne preferred the wit to the morals of William Douglas...” although he readily assumes that, “...Sterne must have seen him frequently at York Races, whither he had gone in 1766, with Lord Ossory and the Duke of York.”\(^{34}\)

Few critics have been willing to pursue such connections to any great length, although there is clearly ample evidence to suggest that Sterne’s familiarity with the libertine tradition was more than just passing. Indeed, I will suggest that many of the ‘riddles and mysteries’ of Sterne’s texts have been compounded by this widespread reluctance to acknowledge his close confederacy with the rakes, which has resulted in a general misapprehension of what those texts actually are. *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* are clearly not ‘novels’ like *Tom Jones* or *The Vicar of Wakefield* and it is difficult to find them comparable in any way. This study will attempt to demonstrate that many of the problematic aspects of Sterne’s works can be resolved by recognising them or, initially at least, by being willing to approach them as Makaroni fables – ‘outrageous offenders against the canons of bourgeois respectability’ - and I am very aware, of course, that to many of Sterne’s readers, when one reflects upon the ‘friendship’ that Sterne cultivates so assiduously in them, this is asking a great deal.

\(^{31}\) See Louis C. Jones, *The Clubs of the Georgian Rakes*, Appendix 1, ‘Members of the Medmenham Monks’, pp. 203-205. This annotated list usefully provides “an opportunity to examine ... the problem of who belonged to the Medmenham Monks.” p. 203

\(^{32}\) LETTERS, p. 131, p. 132, n. 2


\(^{34}\) LETTERS, p. 295-6.
Chapter Three
The ‘New Orthodoxy’ vs. ‘the spirit of Shandeism’.

To suggest - as I do - that the impious libertinism, sketched in the last chapter, is the most important aspect of Sterne’s life to bear in mind when considering his work, is to come into open conflict with the great majority of recent criticism – indeed, there are few critics who do not take time to refute such allegations. There are none, however, who appear to have seriously considered the charge before dismissing it. While many have acknowledged their personal disquiet at various aspects of Sterne’s particularly ungovernable pen, only a few have pursued the disreputable side of his humour at any length, and then generally only with reluctance or – and more surprisingly – with a curious indifference to their own observations. This widespread faith in Sterne’s ‘good nature’ is particularly pronounced in the work of the scholar and editor Melvyn New, not only in the stated argument of his published work, but also in his editorial policy. Despite cataloging and recording much of the disquiet that has been registered by the greater body of criticism, his faith in Sterne’s professed Anglicanism remains unshakable. Like many others, however, his work seems to stem from an initial, affectionate response to the ‘friendship’ Sterne cultivates in his readers, and, based upon this, an equally fundamental assumption that ‘Thackeray was wrong’. My argument therefore is leveled against a widespread set of beliefs and opinions that did not originate with New, but which are brought into particular focus by the argument he strenuously promotes, and which might be dubbed, in order to combine both the general and the specific, ‘the New Orthodoxy’.
In his 1978 review\(^3\) of then recent Sterne scholarship, Lodwick Hartley describes two different types of negative response to two very different studies of Sterne: William Bowman Piper’s *Laurence Sterne* (1965),\(^6\) and New’s *Laurence Sterne as Satirist* (1969).\(^7\) Piper, according to Hartley, describes Tristram as “the last survivor and memorialist of a family cursed with impotence” writing what can be best described as “a threnody for the Shandy family.” Although it has a slightly unusual emphasis, Piper’s work is a most interesting and closely observed exploration of themes widely acknowledged to be central to Sterne’s work, but despite this, and despite conceding that Piper’s argument is “pursued with winning logic and cleverness”, Hartley nonetheless concludes that its main fault is that it runs too firmly against the tide of general opinion:

...many readers may feel that it flies so much in the face of their own reaction to the obviously joyous qualities of the book that it may be admired chiefly as a *tour de force* rather than a profound comment on the universal elements of appeal in the work.\(^8\)

Such a reaction is perhaps understandable however, because, among other things, Piper’s unusual study gives a very clear insight into the way in which the ‘obviously joyous qualities’ of the book are inextricably bound up with Tristram’s somewhat less obvious, but nonetheless incessant preoccupation with death.\(^9\)

On the other hand, the argument advanced by New, in *Laurence Sterne as Satirist*, that “*Tristram Shandy* can best be understood by locating it in the mainstream of the conservative, moralistic Augustan tradition”, was also received with little critical enthusiasm. Hartley writes: “...his book has aroused a chorus of dissent (sometimes angry) from reviewers who have regarded it as uncomfortably thesis-ridden, unreasonably reductive, and essentially humourless,”\(^4\) and he later cites thirteen reviews to illustrate what he calls the “controversial nature of this thesis and the widespread reluctance to accept it.”\(^4\) Today, Piper’s work is only occasionally mentioned, his ‘winning logic and cleverness’ marginalized not so much because of any valid criticism of his work, but because his disconcerting ideas

---

\(^7\) Melvyn New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of Tristram Shandy*. (Florida 1969)
\(^8\) Hartley, p. 7
\(^4\) ibid. p.8
do not sit well with popular perceptions of Sterne. On the other hand, critical reluctance to accept New’s thesis has been overcome to such an extent that he is now a leading authority in the field. As well as publishing a great deal of scholarly material, he is also editor of the popular ‘Penguin’ edition of *Tristram Shandy*, and the foremost name among the editors of the scholarly ‘Florida Edition’ of Sterne’s works. The growth of New’s influence seems to have been in no way inhibited by that early ‘chorus of angry dissent’.

In what follows, the particular criticism I will level against New’s work is also quite obviously applicable to many widely held notions about Sterne, but New’s dogged insistence on Sterne’s ‘orthodoxy’ seems to be the expression of these ideas at their most extreme form:

No-one who has read what I have written about Sterne over the past twenty-five years can fail to recognise that since 1969 I have been insisting on the necessary role of eighteenth century Anglican orthodoxy in any explication of his fictions.42

In this, I will argue, New could not be more mistaken, and the purpose of this study is, in short, to collate and present evidence and argument in support of the proposition that Sterne’s works are indeed satirical, but that they are the products of a libertine pen which shows little respect for Anglican orthodoxy, but rather, and on the absolute contrary, makes that ‘orthodoxy’ the very butt of its satire.

*The Spirit of Shandeism*

41 *ibid.* p. 66  
42 ‘Acknowledgements’, *Notes to the Sermons* (1996), p. xxiii. New has maintained his argument for almost forty years. from Master’s dissertation and Doctoral thesis; in the article ‘*Tristram Shandy* as Prose Satire’ (1966); and eventually in *Lawrence Sterne as Satirist*, (1969) where he argues that *Tristram Shandy* belongs ‘in the mainstream of the conservative, moralistic Augustan tradition’, (‘Introduction’, p.1) as quoted by Hartley, above. The same idea is aggressively promoted in the ‘Florida’ edition (1978) and in the recent ‘Penguin’ edition (1997) of *Tristram Shandy*. For a summary of some of New’s extensive later work see, ‘New Scholarship’, *The Shandean*, 6, (1994) pp. 128-132. More recently, New may have broadened his view - in ‘Four Faces of Sterne’, his introduction to *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne* (1998), he admits, “I do not know how many ‘faces’ Sterne may have, but surely it is more than four.” The *Notes to Tristram Shandy*, however, vigorously promote only one of these ‘faces’. His most recent discussion, in which he describes Sterne as “a quite reluctant participant in the late Renaissance moment Kant identified as Enlightenment” [*Three Sentimental Journeys*: *The Shandean*, 11, (2000)] is perhaps most useful to this discussion.
Commenting on the origins of *Tristram Shandy*, New suggests, plausibly enough, that the Demoniacs were quite probably its first intended readers, but he only seems to present this observation in order to diminish its significance. When reading *Tristram Shandy*, according to New, one can detect,

...a strong sense of communal effort and communal appreciation which seems to play a significant role in shaping its form... [evident in] the exuberance of Augustan satire which depends, above all, on confidence in one’s capacity to delight one’s audience, a knowledge that dazzling virtuosity, so integral a part of the satiric tradition, will be taken in the right spirit. The Scriblerians provided this appreciative reception for Augustan satire; for *Tristram Shandy* it is quite possible that, at least in the beginning, the ‘Demoniacs’ provided the same type of delighted audience.

Of this group ... we know only that they enjoyed their cups, their library of Rabelaisian satires, and their bawdy jokes – a traditional enough trinity... [It is hard to believe that they] would find entertainment in a sentimental tale; and, on the contrary, quite easy to believe that they, an inner circle, would enjoy an ironic attack on the York personalities they detested in common....

Although conceding that we know very little of the actual activities of the Demoniacs, New’s ideas are apparent in phrases like ‘at least in the beginning’ and ‘the York personalities,’ the inference being that Sterne would never have succeeded in London had he not first shaken off the influence of his boorish country cousins with their ‘library of Rabelaisian satires’ - for which one is clearly intended to read ‘smutty stories.’ rather than, perhaps, ‘the sophisticated literature of French scepticism.’

On the other hand, New’s observations, even as he states them, make a perfectly valid argument as to why one should read Sterne in the context of the libertine tradition and place his work among the more ‘curious’ literature in vogue at ‘Crazy Castle.’ If we accept that at first Sterne wrote to please his fellow ‘Demoniacs’, then this seems to be a perfectly good, indeed a strong argument as to why one should set out to read Sterne in the same ‘right spirit’. And furthermore, if ‘in the beginning’ the ‘Demoniacs’ were the audience who might be ‘delighted’ by

---

43 New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist*. 1969, p. 62-3 Cf. Lodwick Hartley’s similar comments on Sterne’s ‘involvement with the bawdry of Hall-Stevenson’ discussed below, p. 71, n. 247
Tristram Shandy, why should one not assume that Sterne’s later companions like Wilkes, Diderot or Crébillon might not also have shared the same sort of joke?

In June 1761, Sterne wrote from the “wilderness” of rural Yorkshire to John Hall-Stevenson, who was at that time enjoying himself in London. Sterne’s “misery,” he says, is relieved only by “the spirit of Shandeism... [which] will not suffer me to think two moments upon any grave subject.” He continues:

“...you are going to Ranelagh tonight, and I am sitting, sorrowful as the prophet was when the voice called out to him and said, ‘What do’st thou here, Elijah?’ – ‘Tis well the spirit does not make the same at Coxwold – for unless for the few sheep left me to take care of, in this wilderness, I might as well, nay better, be at Mecca – When we find we can by a shifting of places, run away from ourselves, what think you of a jaunt there, before we finally pay a visit to the vale of Jehosophat?

Sterne finishes the letter with a postscript:

[P.S.] What few remain of the Demoniacs, greet – and write me a letter, if you are able, as foolish as this.

In order to read this letter aright, it is necessary to read it in ‘the right spirit’ - and that is ‘the spirit of Shan-deism’ which animates the writer. Sterne refers to I Kings in which the voice of the Lord directs Elijah to Damascus, not Mecca - although ‘a jaunt to Mecca’ might seem more fitting for one animated by such a spirit. When one encounters Shandeism (or any other form of deism) and Mecca on the same page, one might suspect that Sterne is intending a reference to ‘Mahometan Christianity’ - terms relating to Islam being endowed with a special significance to the deists, which the conjunction of the two terms intensifies, and which would not, one feels, have been lost on a reader like Hall-Stevenson.

James R. Jacob’s recent reassessment of Stubbe’s An Account of the Rise and Progress of Mahometanism is particularly useful in describing the evasive strategies Stubbe employed, and the type of reading strategy and critical apparatus - complicity

---

44 Sterne’s early familiarity with Crébillon is indicated by the phrase ‘les égarements du cœur’ in a letter of 1759 (LETTERS, 47, p. 88). The two writers later considered a literary ‘persiflage’ when they met in Paris in 1762. (LETTERS, 87, p. 162) A recent study from France, Alain Montandon’s ‘Yorick et les égarements de la bienséance: Sterne et Crébillon’, (reviewed by Anne Bandry, The Shandean 6, 1994, p.127) “...establishes links between the two authors, the difference being that whereas Crébillon’s world is limited to the nobility, in ASJ, ‘the whole of society has received the veil, the gauze of a light and bantering crébillonage.” Diderot later imitated, and acknowledged Sterne in his own Jacques le Fataliste. noted below, p. 219

45 LETTERS, 77. ‘To John Hall Stevenson’ (June (?) 1761) p. 140

46 I Kings, xix, 9
with, and (preferably) foreknowledge of the ‘hidden agenda’ - that one need bring to his work in order to ‘expose’ his meaning:

On the surface, Stubbe’s writings ... appear as so many defenses of traditional loyalties and institutions. But ... there is another, deeper level of meaning in these works which, when exposed, reveals Stubbe as a radical critic of the Restoration settlement. He was not free to express his real views openly, and so resorted to subterfuge and contrived a new rhetoric of double meaning.  

Although Stubbe’s meaning was long overlooked by orthodox scholarship, Charles Blount, among others, was astute enough to recognize his strategy and later quoted from his work in letters to Hobbes and Rochester. Stubbe’s meaning was understood only by those who, like Blount, took his work ‘in the right spirit’, and – obviously - in composing it, he must have anticipated some degree of ‘knowingness’ in his audience. The same strategy, and for much the same reason, is also at work in Sterne’s writings. Despite the widely promoted tolerance and latitude of the times, sceptics and freethinkers generally had to exercise extreme caution in the direct expression of their views, a situation that had changed little by the time Sterne came to publish his own unorthodox ‘opinions’. Although prosecutions were infrequent, when successful the punishment was occasionally severe - Leonard W. Levy records three cases that occurred late in Sterne’s life. In 1755, Jacob Ilive received three years hard labour for ridiculing the divinity of Christ; in 1761, the rationalist Peter Annet published *The Free Enquirer*, in which he was deemed to have discredited the Pentateuch, for which he was imprisoned for a month, fined, pilloried twice and condemned, at the age of sixty-eight, to a year of hard labour. Annet’s case, being contemporaneous with the early volumes of *Tristram Shandy*, is no less interesting for his affinity with Sterne: “Some of Annet’s remarks were amusing, such as his comparison of miracles by Moses to stories in *Don Quixote* and *Gulliver’s Travels*.

---


48 Jacob, op. cit. pp. 139-141: p. 155


50 Levy, *Blasphemy*, p. 320. Annet’s name is linked to Sterne’s in *Dialogues of the Living* by ‘Littleton Shandy, Gent.’ (1760), in which several “celebrated Personages” discuss aspects of *Tristram Shandy*, including “Peter A-mm-t and the Rev. Mr. W—tf-d, on the New Birth.” See Anne Bandry, ‘Queries’, *The Shandean* 2 (1990), p. 237
But he was vicious and vulgar ... his ridicule finally passed the point of toleration."\(^{51}\)

And, of greatest interest to Sterne, Wilkes was forced into exile as a result of the blasphemy, rather than the obscenity, of his *Essay on Woman*, which was judged by the House of Lords to be ""a most wicked and blasphemous attempt to ridicule and vilify the person of our most blessed Saviour."\(^{52}\) The significant factor in this minor rash of successful prosecutions around Sterne’s time is the element of derision and mockery common to the three – and that same derisive, mocking laughter is also present in Sterne’s work.

Sterne’s affinity with the English deists, however, seems closest to Blount, as Wilbur Cross makes clear in his comments upon Blount’s *Philostratus, concerning the life of Apollonius Tyaneus*

...Blount made the old spiritual romance of Philostratus merely the occasion for learned essays, far exceeding in extent the original Greek, on dress, whiskers, swearing, death, *et cetera*, themes which Sterne did not forget, as every reader of him knows, when he came to write *Tristram Shandy*.*\(^{53}\)

Although Wilbur Cross does cite this work as being by “Charles Blount, the deist,” he uses it only as an example of the kind of “erudition, real or pretended” that Sterne enjoyed, and he further assures us that Sterne “disregarded, as well we might, the author and bent his mind upon understanding the editor.”\(^{54}\) Nevertheless, Cross is obviously confident that such allusions were so blatant that they could scarcely be missed, and although nowadays we might qualify the broad assumption that ‘every reader knows’ and might rather say, ‘as every scholar should know’, it seems remarkable even at this stage to note that New fails to list Blount in the ‘Selective Index of Authors cited in the Notes’ to his, if anything, over-annotated edition of *Tristram Shandy*,\(^{55}\) and nor does he discuss him elsewhere.

A few writers have recognized more general signs of deism in Sterne’s work: Walter Bagehot, for example, sided with Thackeray: “Sterne is a pagan. He went into the Church; but Mr. Thackeray, no bad judge, said most justly that his sermons ‘have not a single Christian sentiment’. They are well-expressed, vigorous moral essays,

---

\(^{51}\) ibid. p. 320-1  
\(^{52}\) ibid. p. 324  
\(^{53}\) Wilbur Cross, *Life and Times of Laurence Sterne*, (1909) p.137  
\(^{54}\) ibid. p. 139  
\(^{55}\) NOTES, p.561-572. New offers only this ‘selective index of Authors’ and no index at all to other texts cited. The lack of an adequate index is a serious fault in this edition.
but they are no more." After quoting this passage, Henri Fluchère described the theology of Sterne’s sermons as "...more like moral philosophy that fervent Christian doctrine, and ... dangerously close to the heresy of 'natural religion', which bases faith on reason or 'nature' ... and not on revelation or miracle - in short, it much resembles deism." James R. Foster goes further: "[Sterne's] attitude toward feeling and the passions is that of the deists. Deistic thought ... had a considerable influence him. Any deist would have wholeheartedly applauded Sterne’s well-known apostrophe to feeling... The famous sermon on conscience, although perfectly orthodox, contains many ideas and points of view more or less closely related to deism." On the other hand, writers who maintain Sterne’s orthodoxy are often led into making suggestions that are altogether as ‘odd’ as the work they are discussing. Ian Campbell Ross, in the introduction to his edition of Tristram Shandy, is in no doubt about Sterne’s beliefs: "...it is important to stress that Tristram Shandy, for all Sterne’s delight in bawdy, is at heart a genuinely moral work," and Ross is not the first to take the inclusion of the sermon in Volume II as "...direct evidence of Sterne the Christian moralist." His next comment however is hardly reassuring: “Horace Walpole thought the sermon the best thing in the book…” Since Walpole was not a great admirer of Sterne, this is saying very little, and, in the absence of any discussion, the remark that follows seems almost preposterous “...and Voltaire regarded it so highly as to later recommend it in the Philosophical Dictionary.”

In his ‘Introduction’ to the Notes to Tristram Shandy, New reflects at length upon his own need to be aware of “the boundary between elucidation and interpretation” when annotating a text, and he makes the following observation on Gardner D. Stout and his edition of A Sentimental Journey:

...Stout takes a noncommittal, ‘objective’ stand on the issues of the work—a very ‘proper’ annotator’s stance. But Stout is far from uncommitted or objective; rather, he has closed the work in his own mind within the parameters of romantic irony... Stout’s noncommittal annotations (and, as well, the annotations he does not write, most especially those required to...
elucidate the intricacies of Sterne's bawdy texture) work to inhibit all other readings... Stout's interpretation provides the rationale for a set of notes that are highly selective and highly interpretative; they tend, above all, to assert the innocence of the text, which, when dealing with Sterne, is a major interpretative statement.61

But when one encounters the note of annoyance that seems to creep into New's voice as, after all these years, he is forced to remind the inattentive reader once again of 'the necessary role of Anglican orthodoxy' - it seems quite apparent that New himself has also 'closed the work in his own mind' to a very great extent, and his annotations continually 'work to inhibit all other readings.' Those mentioning Blount, and many others that 'he does not write' - including many of those 'required to elucidate the intricacies of Sterne's bawdy texture' - make apparent New's own reluctance to seek or recognise allusions beyond the scope of his own well-defined expectations. New himself quite vehemently 'asserts the innocence' of Sterne's writings, and even if it were merely true, as Cross suggests, that Sterne 'disregarded' the deism of the author, and 'bent his mind' instead upon understanding the technique of Blount - who was a most curious 'editor' of his own, and of others' 'Opinions' (a key word in the vocabulary of scepticism) - even then, one can not read Blount without noting Sterne's obvious affinity with this dealer in covert meanings and indirect allusions, an affinity which is surely worthy of some notice.

Similarly, New's dismissal of the Demoniacs' fondness for 'Rabelaisian satires' is also evident in his own editorial policy towards such writers, as when he briefly mentions a cluster of them, but only in order to dismiss them:

There has been a persistent myth about Sterne's reading, begun by Ferriar, and reflecting his own interest in French imitators of Rabelais, that Sterne was heavily indebted to such authors as Beroalde, Bouchet, Gilles Menage, and Bruscambille. Cross is particularly enthusiastic on the subject of this debt, without offering any concrete evidence, and he has been often echoed by later critics, despite the fine 1931 doctoral dissertation of C. F. Jones, 'The French Sources of Sterne', which concluded that Sterne was probably not familiar with these authors in any significant way. Our own view is similar.62

Few, perhaps, will have read what is indeed a very fine, although otherwise unpublished study, and Melvyn New blatantly misrepresents its argument, which actually runs so counter to New's own as to be its very antithesis. True, Jones finds

61 ibid. p. 6
62 NOTES, 'Introduction'. p. 20-21
little evidence of “direct borrowing” from those writers he calls ‘the lesser Pantagruelists’, but, after noting George Saintsbury’s comments on Sterne, he retains a strong awareness of the ‘less verifiable followings’ that Saintsbury discusses, and he is not quite as keen as New suggests he is to dismiss Beroalde’s *Le Moyen de Parvenir*: “We may be sure that [Sterne] knew the work, but it remains to discover what use he made of it.” However, to say that ‘Jones concluded that Sterne was probably not familiar with these authors’ is positively misleading, since Jones makes his beliefs quite clear: “…Sterne was probably influenced … by a number of French authors from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries; the effect on him was doubtless cumulative, and it is impossible to distinguish the contributions of individual writers.”

The comments Jones makes on the broader issue of Sterne’s debt to French authors - not perhaps ‘imitators’, but doubtless ‘heirs’ of Rabelais - are worth repeating, and, since Jones’ thesis is not widely available, I will quote at length from his work, which argues that although Sterne never fully subscribed to the outright atheism of D’Holbach and Diderot, “…while he thus disassociated himself from one section of the French rationalists he appears to have followed closely in the steps of the other section by substituting for Christianity a form of deism. His very description of the Deity as ‘the great First Cause of all things’ and ‘the great Artificer’ … remind us strongly of Voltaire.” Jones later goes on to offer a general summary of “Sterne’s religious beliefs”:

...he laid great stress on the importance of reason... [and] even in his sermons he avoided dogma; he considered Nature an active and benevolent force in the government of the world, and hence believed that man should follow Nature’s guidelines... he continued to believe in God ... but the God whom he worshipped was not the Trinity in Unity: the Godhead of the Son and the Holy Ghost meant very little to him; and it is difficult to see that he had any belief in redemption, in grace, in justification by faith; in short, he was not merely a heretic, he was definitely un-Christian in his views.

...while he could be pious where such an attitude was likely to be pleasing to his reader, when he wrote to those whom he had no reason to deceive as to his true feelings, he displayed an habitual lack of respect for things religious which certainly seems to suggest that, like the *philosophes*, he felt towards

---

64 ibid. p.69, p.71
65 ibid. p.260
66 ibid. p. 271-2
religion a contempt which was not merely the result of occasional outbursts of feeling, but was a permanent state of mind. ...In his letters to John Hall-Stevenson ... we find this attitude of contempt for religion very strongly marked.  

In short, Jones himself is 'particularly enthusiastic' on the subject of Sterne’s debt to French literature, especially the sceptical tradition, and after describing Sterne’s ‘contempt for religion’, he concludes: “There can be little doubt that this attitude was the result of his intercourse with French rationalists of the eighteenth century.” To this, it must be said, ‘our own view is similar’, while it is difficult to feel that New’s ‘summary’ of Jones’ work is anything but a wilful misrepresentation.

New is not alone in his inclination to ‘assert the innocence’ of Sterne’s texts, and similar assumptions regarding Sterne’s ‘orthodoxy’ also inform many other writings, including the two recent biographies by Arthur H. Cash and Ian Campbell Ross. Despite conceding, for example, that Sterne would probably have preferred to conceal “the complete truth about his intimacy with Wilkes”, Cash nevertheless confidently asserts that the comments he made after hearing Sterne preach, were in “perfect misunderstanding” of Sterne’s position. Wilkes, however, was not the only one who knew Sterne, and doubted the sincerity of his professed belief. In 1767, when commenting upon Sterne’s prolonged battle against ill-health, Ralph Griffiths expressed a similar view: “His living for Ten Years past was a Miracle, and that he would live for Twenty Years to come, was the only Miracle, I fancy, that he believed in.” Cash, however is unwilling to let there be any doubt about Sterne’s religious convictions:

The question of whether or not he was sincerely religious is hardly worth raising. Almost everyone at that time was. The clergy who attacked atheists from the pulpit had seldom met one. Sterne met an atheist once - or rather, a man whom everyone assumed to be an atheist - David Hume, and promptly engaged him in a public debate about miracles. Rather thoughtless aspersions have been cast upon Sterne’s religious convictions, but not by anyone who had looked into his sermons.  

67 ibid. p.281-2  
68 ibid. p. 286  
69 Cash, EMY, I, p. 61  
70 LETTERS, p. 416, n. 2  
71 Even regarding atheism, Cash’s comment is an unacceptable generalization, and entirely inappropriate with regard to Sterne. The theme is usefully discussed by Jeremy Gregory, ‘Christianity and Culture: Religion, the Arts, and the Sciences in England, 1660 - 1800’, Culture and Society in Britain, 1660 - 1800, ed. Jeremy Black (Manchester, 1997), pp. 102-123  
72 Cash, EMY, p. 61-2
Even if we overlooking the fundamental error of discussing atheism instead of deism, and the doubtful orthodoxy Sterne's fellow Demoniacs, William Hewett, and Hall-Stevenson - even so, Cash could hardly have chosen a weaker example to illustrate this point. As Cash himself explains elsewhere, this debate took place while the two men were enjoying the hospitality of one of the most notorious atheists in Europe, Paul Henry Thiery, Baron D'Holbach. Although his name was largely unknown at the time, when he anonymously published his views in 1770 his *Système de la nature* “…raised a storm in eighteenth century France second only perhaps to that occasioned by *De l'esprit*, and because of its aggressive atheism enjoyed a notoriety second to no work of his contemporaries.” During the 1760s, D'Holbach was actively promoting his atheist philosophy more discreetly perhaps, but no less enthusiastically, in the less volatile atmosphere of his salon, and Alan Kors is in no doubt as to the strength of D'Holbach’s feelings on the issue even at this time, when, he tells us: “D’Holbach was an atheist and he proselytized.” Nor is there any doubt as to the strength of Sterne’s delight in the company of D’Holbach and “the rest of the joyous sett” at his Parisian salon.

One could make much the same criticism of Ross, who notes: “The fact that Sterne felt so much at home among what he termed this ‘joyous sett’—gives some circumstantial weight, at least, to the possibility that he was himself tempted by contemporary religious scepticism.” One feels, however, that Ross has never seriously considered the idea. Ross also discusses the Demoniacs briefly, but only in order to dismiss them.

…it is the supposed irreligious nature of the Skelton circle that has given it a degree of notoriety, not least in relation to the religious convictions of the Revd Laurence Sterne. How deserved this is, however, remains open to question...

This is perhaps the most significant point - the discussion and assumptions of all the critics we have reviewed are based upon an almost total absence of reliable evidence to settle the matter one way or another. It is impossible to know just what was

---

73 see Cash *EMY*, p. 190; LETTERS, p. 202-3
75 ibid. p. 45
practised behind closed doors by the Demoniacs or the Medmenhamites, but time and again critics authoritatively dismiss the 'myths' that have grown up around them. Thus while Ross notes that the vocabulary of diabolism “sits oddly on the lips of an ordained clergyman—and it is true that in the years of his fame more than one friend considered him a sceptic…” he nevertheless goes on to confidently assert that this “…by no means supports the more colourful of the speculative accounts which grew up concerning the activities of the circle at Crazy Castle.” One would be interested to know what ‘colourful accounts’ Ross is referring to, since, as we shall see, most writers on the subject only seem anxious to portray Hall-Stevenson as a feigned rake and an embarrassing bore, and then to distance Sterne from anything even remotely associated with him.

Setting aside all critical inference and speculation, Arthur Cash puts the matter in a nutshell:

It seems likely that Hall-Stevenson and Lascelles together formed the convivial club which we now call the Demoniacs. Unfortunately, we know little about it, not even its official name. No membership or book of rules survives, though it appears Sterne was among the original members.

This, it seems to me, is about as much as can be confidently stated upon the subject, and anything further generally stems from each individual’s own perception of Sterne, and with such perceptions most heavily influenced by the reading of his texts. It is from this that each then infers an idea of ‘the sort of club that Sterne would have belonged to.’ Consequently, those who most regard Sterne as an ‘amiable humourist’, and Tristram Shandy an ‘innocent’ text, tend most to insist, like New, that Hall-Stevenson “made use of Sterne’s success to publish some bawdy and unskilful scribblings that probably embarrassed Sterne…” and from then on to ignore what is acknowledged to be the long-term influence of all other such ‘ill company’. While all such discussions are generally couched in terms of likelihood and probability, throughout almost the whole of the twentieth century, few have ever seriously considered any other possibility, although Sterne’s readers have not always been so squeamish. We will now therefore turn our attention to the long tradition of hostility and disapproval that Sterne has inspired in the critics of earlier generations.

---

78 ibid.
79 See esp. Chapters 6 & 7, below.
80 Cash, EMY, p. 185, & n. 4
Chapter Four
Criticism and other responses

i) Early reception
The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent. was published in York late in December 1759 and copies first became available in London in January 1760. When Sterne arrived there early in March and inquired after its progress he learned that the book was an enormous success: "...there was not such a Book to be had in London either for Love or money,"82 - and in the wake of this success, Sterne himself also became famous, almost overnight. He was enthusiastically received among the fashionable bon ton, and within a few days of his arrival in London he wrote, "I have the greatest honours paid me, & most civilities shewn me, than were ever known, from the Great; and am engaged already to ten Noble men & men of fashion to dine."83 Despite its undoubted success however, from the beginning Tristram Shandy had a mixed reception; indeed, as the work of Alan B. Howes84 amply demonstrates, reaction to the book was sharply divided. Some, obviously, were simply delighted, like the reviewer in The London Magazine, who, while searching for terms to describe Sterne, focussed mainly on his overtly 'sentimental' qualities: "...sensible—humorous—pathetic—humane..." and, of course, his 'oddity': " — unaccountable!—What shall we call thee?" The review goes on to confidently

81 TS (ed. New) 1977. I. xii, 25, & n. 3, p. 552
82 'Anecdote of John Croft', quoted by Cash, LY, p.3
83 'To Catherine Fourmantel, London, (March 8th 1760).' LETTERS, p.96
predict: “If thou publishest fifty volumes, all abounding with the profitable and pleasant, like these, we will venture to say that they will be read and admir’d ... by the best, if not the most numerous class of mankind.” Other readers, on the other hand, were wholly unimpressed. Horace Walpole, as noted earlier, found the work “a very insipid and tedious performance ... It makes one smile two or three times at the beginning, but in recompense makes one yawn for two hours.” One can easily understand why, rather than being entertained, he and many other readers might be baffled, confused and even bored by Sterne’s rambling narrative. The only praise Walpole could muster was faint indeed: “The best thing in it is a sermon—oddly coupled with a good deal of bawdy, and both the composition of a clergyman.” While Walpole was able to simply dismiss such ‘oddity’, in the view of yet another section of Sterne’s reading public such a mixture of spirituality and sexuality was found to be thoroughly distasteful, and this particular aspect of Sterne’s work frequently drew comment. In 1762, Charles Johnstone, who was later to write Chrysal (1765), the book that ‘exposed’ the activities of the Medmenhamites – made an early attempt to expose Sterne also, when he suggested that Tristram Shandy “exhausted the spirit of profanity and profaneness....” Although, in common with much criticism of this type, he is reluctant to go into any specific detail, the tone is darkly suggestive: “…Nor is this all; there are some things over which nature herself commands to throw a veil. To lift this up therefore ... is a great offence.” Later volumes of Tristram Shandy were greeted with similar criticism, and nor were Sterne’s other works spared. In The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, one reader detected, “…the crying abomination of the age - contempt for Christ.” and of A Sentimental Journey, another asked: “…who that indulges serious reflection can read his obscenity and ill applied passages of Holy Scripture without horror!” The briefest glance through Howes’ Critical Heritage provides ample evidence that the idea of Sterne as “a hard-hearted, unprincipled man; a cassocked libertine and ‘free thinker’” was frequently repeated, with varying degrees of hostility: “...anti-gospel ... penned by the hand of the anti-Christ himself”; ”...bawdry and obscenity”;

87 ibid.
88 ibid. p.150
89 ibid. p. 79
90 ibid. p. 203
91 ibid. p. 326
"...obscenity most odious, ...blasphemy”; “...impiety and corruption”; 
"...everywhere indecent ... a morbid sensibility in the perception of indecency.”

This type of criticism, furthermore, emanated from two quite distinct sources: some seem genuinely shocked by Sterne’s impiety while others, in what Howes has dubbed ‘the bantering attacks’, repeated much the same charges but with expressions of mock-horror and the ironic outrage of ‘wits’ who were clearly hugely entertained by the joke. The most famous of these, *The Clockmakers Outcry Against the Author of Tristram Shandy* (1760), for example, ominously dubs Sterne “forerunner of Antichrist” and makes protest against the “the heretical and damnable Opinions of TRISTRAM SHANDY.” However, the clockmakers are speaking of ‘heresies’ only in terms relative to their own trade, and it transpires that they are mainly complaining about the damage done to trade by the bawdiness of ‘the winding of the clock’ episode in chapter one, which had since made clocks unmentionable in polite society. The ‘heresies’ encouraged by the ‘damnable’ work are similarly mundane - prostitutes, it alleged, were enticing clients with the offer, “‘Sir, will you have your clock wound-up?’”

Although in this, and other similar pieces, the condemnations are obviously intended as a tribute, the recurrence of the same themes - impiety and obscenity - is pronounced. The very combination suggests the libertine agenda, and most obviously evokes Rochester, whose name became the bye-word for sexual and spiritual depravity, and it is therefore surprising to find that Sterne’s crimes, according to many of his readers, were greater still: “…broad Rochester”; “…he has almost out-rochestered Rochester”; “…Aristotle and Rochester were mere Puritans compared to Shandy.”

There are other responses too, which also dwell on the same themes.

A small volume entitled *Tristram Shandy in a Reverie to which is added The Litera Infernalis of Poor Yorick* was published anonymously in London in 1760. The first part, *Tristram Shandy in a Reverie*, makes some clumsy attempts to emulate Sterne’s innuendo and offers to unravel some of the riddles of the text. In order to understand the meaning of a line of four asterisks, for example, the reader is invited to discover the word either by inserting the fairly obvious first letters of a four line acrostic, or alternatively, “…set down the third, the twentieth, the fourteenth, and the

---

92 ibid. pp. 100, 231,337,321,302
93 ibid. *The Clockmakers Outcry Against the Author of Tristram Shandy* (1760), pp. 67-72.
94 ibid. pp. 96, 163, 321. See also pp. 65, 211, 228, 299, 324-5.
nineteenth [sic] letters of the English alphabet, and the acrostic you'll find needs no comment to illustrate the text."\(^{95}\)

More interesting, however, is the second part, *The Litera Infernalis of Poor Yorick*, which seems, fairly obviously, to be the work of another hand. Here we find the ghost of Yorick, "in the World below," reflecting upon the first reception of *Tristram Shandy* in that above:

"...they were ready to go mad after *Tristram Shandy*; - the men read him at home, at taverns, at coffee houses, and even in the streets; - the ladies shut themselves up in their closets, and admire how he writes *Cantharides* ..."\(^{96}\)

Later, he also reports on the behavior of the 'shades' in the place he now inhabits, and how it too has been altered since the publication of *Tristram Shandy*: "The married ladies... are going to form themselves into a society ... [and] intend to put themselves and their husbands under articles..." These articles include the provision that "...no lady shall be admitted whose husband has not read *Tristram Shandy* and who does not fully understand all his double meanings, whether of the ANIMALCULI, HOMUNCULI, OVARIA, &c."\(^{97}\) Another demands that, "...she instruct the good man, if he be ignorant, how to mount Hymen's hobby-horse, and ride away full speed, without begetting a fool; ---- according to the rules for riding laid down by *Tristram Shandy*."\(^{98}\) Yorick's report is eventually brought to an abrupt conclusion when some famous 'shades' among those assembled, become infuriated: "Hold! hold! cries Rochester, for by all that's luscious, I am a puritan to this Shandy --- and d-mn him roars Aristotle I shall be eclipsed..."\(^{99}\) In conclusion, 'Yorick' reflects upon the 'paradox' of *Tristram Shandy*'s reception in 'the world above':

It was a paradox past their reconciliation that the world should go mad after *Tristram Shandy*, the facetious Tristy, --- and patronise virtue, with such solemnity and vigour. --- Dear *Tristram* ... unriddle this paradox, for we are all at our wit's end about it.

I rest,

In silence and secrecy, thine
Poor YORICK.\(^{100}\)

\(^{95}\) Anon, *Tristram Shandy in a REVERIE, to which is added The Litera Infernalis of Poor Yorick.* (London 1760), p. 15

\(^{96}\) ibid. p.44

\(^{97}\) ibid. p. 45

\(^{98}\) ibid. p. 46

\(^{99}\) ibid. p. 46-7

\(^{100}\) ibid. p. 48
Yorick is also ‘resurrected’ by the anonymous author of \textit{Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued}, an obscene continuation that was published in 1774 and long attributed to Hall-Stevenson. In the preface, the author looks back to an earlier time: ‘…when the third and fourth volumes if \textit{Tristram Shandy} made their appearance …’ The novelty of the style and manner no longer remained; his digressions began to be tedious, and the meanings of his asterisks, which by this time had been pretty clearly pointed out, were by many considered as too gross and indelicate for the eye of chastity’.\footnote{Anon, \textit{Yorick’s Sentimental Journey Continued}, (London 1774) ‘Preface’, p. xv.} The attribution to Hall-Stevenson, one feels, probably stems from nothing more than his reputation for scurrility combined with a widespread desire to portray his friendship with Sterne as shallow and opportunist. Who else, it might be reasoned, would deface Sterne’s ‘work of redemption’ with such crude humour? The continuation however, although certainly lacking all subtlety, was not altogether out of key with the tone of Sterne’s work, and this was noted in the annotations to \textit{A Sentimental Journey} attributed to John Scott, Earl of Clonmell (1739-1798) which describe several instances of the way Sterne “insinuates” more subtle ‘indelicacies’ into his work: “But how gently & how delicately he treats y’s Ideas of 2 Whores & a Pimp.”\footnote{Paul Franssen, ‘‘Great Lessons of Political Instruction’: The Earl of Clonmell Reads Sterne’, \textit{The Shandean}, 2, (1990) p. 157 For further discussion of the ‘2 Whores and a Pimp’ noted by Clonmell see my \textit{Two Sentimental Novels}, p.102} Nor was Clonmell convinced of Sterne’s sincerity when it came his spiritual belief: “His Observation is always Just & unaffected and springs (whatever he may pretend to y’s contrary) from his considering Man a Mere Machine Wrought upon by internal & External Application.”\footnote{ibid. p. 165} According to Paul Franssen, Clonmell’s annotations “…provide us with a rare insight into the way Sterne was read by a reader of his own period,“\footnote{ibid. p. 194} and Franssen interestingly summarizes Clonmell’s view of one aspect of Sterne’s work: “Women are regarded as fair game, and Sterne’s \textit{A Sentimental Journey} is almost turned into a manual of seduction.”\footnote{ibid. p. 191}

It is indeed a paradox that the same texts should provoke such widely differing responses – both the outraged exclamations of the pious and the bantering tributes of the wits - while simultaneously appealing to those readers of excessively refined taste who regarded Sterne among the finest of the ‘sentimental’ writers. That
the 'forerunner of Antichrist' should inspire the 'cult of sentiment' is perhaps one of the greatest 'oddities' of his work.

J. C. T. Oates’s Shandyism and Sentiment,catalogues the paraphernalia associated with the 'sentimental' response to Sterne, and vividly illustrates the paradox. Oates summarizes the immediate response to Sterne's work quite succinctly: "Tristram and its improprieties were indeed a scandalous success…"\(^{106}\) and he reproduces a portion of An Admonitory Lyric Epistle to the Rev. Tristram Shandy, to denote something of that 'scandal.' As usual, Sterne is particularly condemned for his combination of obscenity and impiety:

Your humour  
Is like an ulcer or a tumour  
Always gathering and running  
Corrupted matter;  
Religion is but lint and plaster,  
That by confining, makes it run the nastier;  
I wish you were both modester and fatter.\(^{107}\)

Howes usefully provides an additional note: "[the] versifier pretends to censure Sterne for his alleged lasciviousness and suggests that he either quit the priesthood and become a mountebank’s assistant or submit to 'an operation fit' and make himself ‘an eunuch for heav’n’s sake: / And cheat the devil of his stake’."\(^{108}\)

However, Oates goes on to illustrate the remarkable way in which "the bawdy divine" eventually achieved "the respectability of the drawing-room"\(^{109}\) and it becomes clear from the material he discusses that Sterne soon became hugely popular as a 'sentimental' writer, and it is wholly upon this tradition that the remainder of Shandyism and Sentiment is concentrated.

The 'cult of sentiment' undoubtedly had an enormous following, as Oates makes clear: "...to judge from the book-lists and magazines, all England and most of Europe during the last thirty years of the eighteenth century were infested with sentimental travelers, their pencils poised to record in carefully distraught English, French or German, their instantaneous emotions or whatever lugubrious sights they might encounter."\(^{110}\) But Oates also makes it clear that such responses were greatly

---

\(^{106}\) J. C. T. Oates, Shandyism and Sentiment (Cambridge 1969) p.7  
\(^{107}\) ibid. p. 7-8  
\(^{108}\) Howes op. cit. p. 79  
\(^{109}\) Oates, op. cit. p. 18  
\(^{110}\) ibid. p. 14
aided and encouraged by the publication of extracts or 'beauties' of Sterne which were often reprinted and anthologized for those who wished to be spared the more puzzling aspects of the author's 'sensibility'. Furthermore, the full-blown 'cult of sentiment' associated with Sterne was far stronger on the continent, where English slang, puns, innuendo, and much else that is essential to Sterne's style, must inevitably have been lost in translation, whereas at home, his 'sentimental' reputation has always been somewhat diluted by a greater awareness of his 'oddity'. Indeed, Sterne's oddity is most pronounced when one reads him in the context of English 'sentimental writers' like Sarah Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith or Henry Mackenzie, while Samuel Richardson thought *Tristram Shandy* 'execrable.' Although it is impossible to consider that tradition without reference to Sterne, such works are of little use when discussing his - it is impossible to believe that Goldsmith's Dr. Primrose, for example, would have any notion of the humour behind such phrases as 'old hats', 'buttered buns' or 'green gowns', and equally difficult to understand why 'sentimental' readers who were charmed by Primrose's 'simple tale' should respond in the same way to Tristram's 'tangled skein'.

Much attention has been given to the notion of sentiment - the term became popular during the eighteenth century, and since then many have attempted to define its meaning. Whatever its value in other contexts, for Sterne's definition one need look no further than the letter in which he particularly celebrates the word's usefulness in the art of seduction: "I am glad that you are in love..." he writes, before speaking of his own 'affairs':

...I myself must ever have some dulcinea in my head—it harmonises the soul—and in those cases I first endeavour to make the lady believe so, or rather I begin first to make myself believe that I am in love—but I carry on my affairs in quite the French way, sentimentally—"l'amour" (say they) "n'est rien sans sentiment"—Now notwithstanding they make such a pother about the word, they have no precise idea annex'd to it—And so much for that same subject called love.113

---


112 Even quite recently, Alan Dugald McKillop was naíve enough to described "a world of chambermaids, green-gowns, and old hats" as "...the world of homely objects and simple thoughts." *The Early Masters of English Fiction,* (1956) p. 200.

113 LETTERS, 148, To John Wodehouse, Coxwould [?August] 23, 1765. p. 258
Sentiment then, according to this, is an act of wilful self-deception, undertaken in order to counterfeit sufficient 'emotional realism' to facilitate the deception and seduction of another; and in order to succeed one must 'make the lady believe' in the validity of a hazy discourse with 'no precise idea annex’d' - a triumph of ironic detachment that would not look out of place amid the complex, manipulative strategies of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. In his fictions too, I will argue, the calculated intimacy of Sterne’s 'conversational' style is derived 'in quite the French way' from the same duplicitous tradition, and to an extent that makes 'criminal conversation'\(^3\) seem a more apt designation for Sterne’s 'conversational' style.

\(^3\) On ‘Crim. Con.’ see Peter Wagner’s *Eros Revived*, ‘Trial Reports and Criminal Conversation Literature.’ pp. 113-132.
Chapter Five
Unorthodox Illustrations

The Fruit-shop

In addition to the textual responses to Sterne discussed above, there have also been a great many responses in a variety of media — the seemingly endless train of illustrated editions, prints of various well-known scenes, pottery figures and other paraphernalia that is regularly featured in The Shandean. Much of this material is 'sentimental', some of it comic, and some of it odd: Toby and the Widow Wadman were depicted by Austin Cooper on an L.N.E.R. railway poster in the 1930s, in a series depicting 'Booklovers Britain'. As with their textual counterparts however, some of these illustrations are also distinctly unorthodox. There is explicit realization of Sterne's innuendo in a 1795 edition of A Sentimental Journey published in New York, with a frontispiece depicting Yorick in close conference with a lady with exposed breasts, and a caption reading: "Such were my temptations—". The illustration is reproduced by Peter Wagner, who notes that it was "daring, by American standards." In 1884, the French illustrator, Maurice Leioir, oddly embellished another edition of the same text with a honeycomb, buzzing with bees, and set in a primed bear trap. Among the prints displayed in Sterne's old house at Coxwold, now called 'Shandy Hall' and managed like a museum by the Laurence

115 I possess this print in the form of a postcard, on the back of which is the written inquiry to Julia Monkman that I go on to quote. see n. 118, below.
116 Peter Wagner, Eros Revived, (1998) p. 296-7, fig. 92
Sterne Trust, there is a picture of a clergyman smoking a pipe with the Devil, entitled ‘Enjoying an Old Friend’. In answer to a written request, Julia Monkman, the curator of the house was reluctant to state that what she called “the Newton print” was intended to represent Sterne: “[the] caricature might be taking Sterne as the parson, but not definitely so.”118 There are other illustrators however that encourage far stronger notions of Sterne’s impiety, including two very interesting, yet almost entirely neglected responses to Tristram Shandy that were described in 1885 by Henry Spencer Ashbee – writing under the pseudonym ‘Pisanus Fraxi’ – in his Bibliography of Prohibited Books. The first of these is an unusual publication - an ‘oddity’ in all respects - entitled The Fruit-shop, which was published anonymously in 1765.

Fig. 2. The Fruit Shop (1765), frontispiece.

118 see n. 115, above. I have been unable to locate another copy of this print, nor to establish who ‘Newton’ was, although my research in this area has not been extensive.
...there is a curiously engraved frontispiece, signed C. Trim ... representing a
garden scene; before a temple of oriental design stands a yew tree shaped like
a phallus, above which two cupids hold a wreath in the form of the female
organ; a man dressed in academic robes, and leaning on an ass, points to the
phallic tree, while a boy squirts at him with a syringe. [The man] is intended
for the ‘distinguished personage’ to whom the volume is dedicated, to whom
the author addresses himself.119

After this, Ashbee further informs us, there is “a violent tirade... evidently intended
for the author of Tristram Shandy (the book on which the ass stands in the
frontispiece).”120 This ‘tirade’ forms the Preface to The Fruit-shop, and it is violent
indeed - Sterne is described as “High priest of incoherence and obscenity”, accused
of producing “so many volumes of unconnected and slattern ribaldry”, and for such
crimes he is now “displayed in our frontispiece, by way of a satirical gibbet.” There
are several references to episodes in Tristram Shandy, including “the four-footed
philosopher you cultivated such an intimacy with at Lyons, and whose long-eared
solemnity, seems not only to listen to, but even to converse with you, in a sly and
chuckling manner...”121 The whole thing is made quite extraordinary by the fact that
The Fruit-shop itself, as its place in Ashbee’s Bibliography would suggest, is a
pornographic work, although this is mainly because of the offensive image
reproduced above. Sterne is evidently not being criticized simply for his obscenity,
but rather for his ‘unnaturalness’: “The object of the book,” according to Ashbee, “is
to inculcate the use of woman as nature intended her to be used - as a source of
pleasure and a means of propagating the race; those who refuse thus to use her, either
celibates, masturbates, or sodomites, are severely censured.”122

Although overlooked by Sterne’s critics, The Fruit-shop is mentioned in a
footnote to Peter Wagner’s study, ‘Anti-Catholic Erotica in Eighteenth Century
England’.123 Wagner is pursuing the general argument that, “...popular as they were,
anti-monastic erotica had a pervasive influence on other literary genres and shaped
the ‘mentalités’ of readers and of many writers we now consider to be major
novelists.”124 In such material, he argues, “...[f]or their own bawdy and obscene
works English writers [found] a formidable variety of sources that could be

120 ibid.
123 Wagner, Peter, ‘Anticatholic Erotica in Eighteenth Century England’ in Erotica and the
constantly tapped." The Fruit-shop is one such work, according to Wagner, who describes it as: "...a bawdy satire which pretends to be an attack on Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. However, it merely imitates Sterne's narrative strategy and provides numerous attacks on Catholics and the Catholic orders." Unlike Ashbee, whose interest was primarily in the forbidden imagery of the frontispiece, Wagner is more interested in the book's political significance, but, rather like the blind men and the elephant, the observations of both, nonetheless, give a reasonable impression of the book. Regarding Sterne however, Wagner notes:

"...[he] found many occasions to criticise and ridicule the 'Romish Church' in his *A Sentimental Journey* and in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne's critics, who found fault with the sexual ambiguities and the bawdy punning of his major novel, joined forces with him in anti-Catholic ribaldry."

But Wagner's comments do not account for the vehemence of the 'tirade' that is launched against Sterne by an anti-Catholic propagandist who, according to Wagner's own argument, one would expect to be among the first to applaud Sterne's efforts in the same field. Instead of this, we find quite the contrary case - Sterne is particularly denounced for the laxity of his own Protestant position:

You are displayed in our frontispiece, by way of a satirical gibbet, as (which is the truth) totally neglectful of what should be in your eye, a sacred edifice (because for that end, liveried in its service) and fixing all your attention upon inferior things.

Sterne is depicted in the proximity of what appears to be a church, but the building is so badly drawn it is difficult to tell whether this is intended to represent the church that Sterne is accused of ignoring (even though it is quite clearly 'in his eye') or, and in keeping with the phallic tree and the other emblems of Sterne's disgrace that lie scattered about, whether it is intended to represent another one of those 'inferior things.' Ashbee certainly assumed that such was the case when he described it as 'a temple of oriental design' and the lines of the building might easily suggest Islamic architecture. The point echoes an earlier writer, who commented on Sterne's sermons

---

124 ibid. p. 188
125 ibid. p. 172
126 ibid. p. 188, n. 25
127 ibid. p. 188 Wagner is somewhat inconsistent in his view of Sterne. In his *Eros Revived*, (1998) he writes, "Some ordained men ... like Laurence Sterne, even joined the ranks of those who wrote against their own profession." (p. 60)
128 *The Fruit Shop*, 'Preface' (unnumbered pages)
with similar imagery: "...except for a single phrase or two, they might be preached in a synagogue or a mosque without offence."  

The Slawkenberg Edition

Repeatedly, Sterne is either suspected of being other than he appears, or he is openly celebrated as the mountebank he depicted himself as. Certainly, to many of Sterne’s contemporaries, ‘sentiment’ was not the principle ingredient of his work, and over the years, as well as earning new admirers for his sentimentality, the more dubious aspects of Sterne’s work continued to attract a considerable amount of adverse attention. Some years later, when Samuel Taylor Coleridge tried to analyze the ‘source’ of Sterne’s humour, he described it as being founded upon "...a sort of knowingness,"

...the wit of which depends, first on the modesty it gives pains to; or secondly, the innocence and innocent ignorance over which it triumphs; or thirdly, on a certain oscillation ... a sort of dallying with the devil ... an inward sympathy with the enemy.

This source, unworthy as it is, may doubtless be combined with wit, drollery, fancy, and even humour, - and we have only to regret the mesalliance; but that the latter are quite distinct from the former may be made evident by abstracting in our imagination the characters of Mr. Shandy, my Uncle Toby, and Trim, ...and suppose instead of them two or three callous debauchees, and the result will be pure disgust. Sterne cannot be too severely censured for this, for he makes the best dispositions of our nature the pandars and condiments for the basest.

It seems very odd to suggest that one substitute a ‘callous debauchee’ in the place of any character, but in the case of Uncle Toby the idea seems almost preposterous - William Hazlitt’s words seem to leap to his defense: “My Uncle Toby is one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature. He is the most unoffending of God’s creatures... Of his bowling-green, his sieges, and his amours, who would say or think anything amiss!” - and once again, one is strongly reminded of the widely differing responses that the text has inspired. Coleridge was not the first, however, to hit upon the idea of populating Shandy Hall with ‘debauchees’, as another entry from Ashbee’s Bibliography makes clear:

130 Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ‘Sterne’s Wit and Humour’, p.486
I have before me a set of fourteen mezzotints to illustrate The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy; they consist of a portrait ... and thirteen designs... They were obviously done for a special edition, as volume and page are inscribed on two of them. The portrait ... is the head of a clergyman whose nose and upper lip represent a phallus.\footnote{Ashbee, op. cit. Vol. III, p.415-6}

Ashbee’s assumption was correct: “The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman. Including the Sentimental Journey, [by L. Sterne] In four volumes ... with a curious set of cuts. Amsterdam: printed for P. Slawkenberg, 1771.”\footnote{Hereafter referred to as ‘he Slawkenberg edition. The remaining illustrations from this edition are included in Appendix 2 below.} is shelved in the British Library’s once-notorious ‘Private Case’.

The name of the publisher, ‘P. Slawkenberg,’ is obviously derived from Sterne’s Hafen Slawkenbergius, whose name means (at best) something akin to ‘offal-mountain’.\footnote{‘mountain of clinker or excrement’ (Ross, p. 562); ‘pile of slag’ or ‘offal’ or possibly ‘excrement’ (NOTES, p. 267); ‘pile of offal’ (Petrie, p. 634) All derive Hafen from ‘chamber-pot’, and appended to such a name, one might assume that Sterne had something closer to the modern ‘pile of shit’ in mind.} The first three volumes contain Tristram Shandy, the fourth, A Sentimental Journey, and although it is a uniform edition the illustrations are all related to Tristram Shandy and there are no plates at all in the fourth volume. The illustrations are clearly all done by the same hand, with the exception of the frontispiece, which is perhaps by another. The librarian’s coy description of the prints as ‘curious’ could not be more aptly applied. The portrait of the clergyman mentioned by Ashbee stands as a frontispiece, and although it is entitled Tristram Shandy it depicts a far more portly figure than is usual, and nor is it common to see Tristram in clerical garb - or, for that matter, with genitalia sprouting from his face.
There is another illustration that does not depict a specific scene from the text, Whiskers, but which seems rather designed to shed light on the paragraph headed “Upon Whiskers” in which Tristram regrets that “the world will not bear” a chapter upon such a subject. All the other prints are carefully placed adjacent to the passages they represent, and all offer radical interpretations of the scenes depicted. Many details indicate that the artist was working closely with the text: the portrait,

---

135 V. i. 409
Widow Wadman, fills the place left empty by Tristram for that very purpose - although there is no indication in the text of the dildo to be seen depicted beneath her bed. In *Such a silly question*, Elizabeth gestures towards the clock as she asks the question, and in response Walter raises his hands in disbelief.

![Image](image_url)

**Fig. 4: ‘Such a silly question’ (I. i.)**

The clock, however, has only one hand, a large phallus, indicating a time close to eleven o’clock - which establishes a sorry contrast with Walter’s smaller version, which stands at just a little after nine. In all of the prints, the male figures are depicted with elongated genitals, with the single exception of Walter – presumably because the artist remembered Tristram’s observation that, “nothing was well-hung in our family.”¹³⁶ In *The right end of a Woman*, a broken pipe lies on the floor, obviously the pipe that Walter snapped shortly before when Toby first confessed his ignorance of the subject.¹³⁷ Sterne’s religious sincerity is called into question by *the deuce take that slit*, in which there are several male figures, including a clerical

---

¹³⁶ V. xvii, 449
¹³⁷ II. vi. 115 – discussed below, Chapter 16.
Tristram, and a female figure representing the ‘nut brown maid’ with the slit in her petticoat encountered by Tristram during his journey in France. Unusually, however, the slit reaches the maid’s navel, and her petticoat is spread widely open, while all the male figures are fully clothed. The group are dancing around a large phallus like a maypole, and this pagan imagery, especially in the presence of the clergyman, adds significantly to its blasphemous or sacrilegious thrust.

Despite the fact that these illustrations are often explicitly obscene, they are not without some wit, and the majority possess a somewhat disarming levity. Despite its graphic sexual content, for example, it is difficult consider *Take hold of my whiskers* as being seriously offensive when the grinning gentleman’s exuberant moustache exactly resembles the pubic hair of his female companion. On the other hand, *par le moyen d’une petite Canalle*, seems almost calculated to inspire, in Coleridge’s phrase, ‘pure disgust’. Of greatest concern at present, however, is the very existence of this expensive, clandestine, near-contemporary edition, which was produced and very evidently intended to be read by readers who were early prepared to approach the text in exactly the way described by Coleridge half a century later.

*Thomas Patch’s ‘Laurence Sterne and Death’.*

In view of the fact that, in his own time, Sterne’s name was frequently associated with Rochester, the ‘arch-fiend’ - or the champion - of the English libertines, it seems strange that clear references to Rochester have been overlooked, particularly since Sterne names Rochester during one of the more celebrated scenes in the book - Tristram’s ‘dialogue with death’ and his ensuing ‘flight to France’. The episode is especially significant since is one of the very few passages in which the narrative follows the activities of the adult Tristram, and thus offers a rare glance of the ‘author’ himself, whose presence dominates and controls the whole work...

The episode begins as Tristram digresses from an address in praise of his own resilient ‘spirits’ which:

... never tinged the objects which came in my way, either with sable, or with a sickly green; in dangers you gilded my horizon with hope, and when Death himself knocked at my door—ye bad him come again; and in so gay a tone of careless indifference, did ye do it, that he doubted of his commission—

---

138 - a leaner figure than in the frontispiece, and closer to Thomas Patch’s clerical Tristram/Sterne – discussed further below.
139 This discussion of Rochester develops the discussion in my ‘Two Sentimental Novels’, p. 86-7
... '—There must certainly be some mistake in this matter,' quoth he.140 It is worth noting at once that Tristram’s ‘gay tone of careless indifference’ is an agent of deception powerful enough to beguile even Death itself, but as soon as the deception is accomplished, the artificial charm is abandoned for the earthier terms of Tristram’s undisguised feelings: “...this son of a whore has found out my lodgings,”141 he cries, before hastily departing for France. His departure, one might also note, is suspiciously vigorous for one with death, quite literally, knocking at his door:

Allons! said I; the post boy gave a crack of his whip—off I went like a cannon, and in half a dozen bounds got into Dover.142

Before leaving the country however, he takes the time to look back upon his journey through England, and he informs us:

...I never gave a peep into Rochester church, or took notice of the dock at Chatham, or visited St. Thomas at Canterbury, though all three lay in my way.
—But mine, indeed, is a particular case—143

Strangely, no editor has ever thought fit to annotate the passage that brings ‘son of a whore’, ‘the post-boy’ and ‘Rochester’ together within the space of a few lines, although the allusion to Rochester’s poem To the Post-boy is unmistakable:

Son of a Whore, God Damn you, can you tell
A Peerless Peer the readyest way to Hell?

To which question the post-boy needs little time to consider his answer:

The Readyest way to Hell? come quick, nere stirr!
The Readyest Way, my Lord’s by Rochester.144

A little later, and still in the presence of the post-boy, Tristram twice repeats that he hates “to make mysteries of nothing”145 and in such a context it is impossible to

140 VII, i. p.576
141 ibid.
142 ibid. p.577
143 ibid.
145 VII, xv, p.594, l. 6 - VII, xvi, p.595, l. 18
ignore the echoes of Rochester’s overtly blasphemous and atheistic ‘Upon Nothing’, but to find the phrase repeated a few lines further down the page more strongly evokes the similar poem, his translation of Seneca’s verse beginning “After Death nothing is, and nothing Death.” Later Tristram goes on to confirm “I look upon a chapter which has, only nothing in it, with respect,” but at this point he uses the phrase to both introduce and to conclude a ludicrous mock-scholastic discussion of the “gradual and most tabid decline” of the soul: “I hesitate not one moment to affirm that in half a century, at this rate, we shall have no souls at all.” This causes him to “doubt likewise the existence of the Christian faith” beyond such a period, after which thought he looks forward with undisguised glee to the return of the pagan deities - “...for now you will all come into play again, and with Priapus at your tails—what jovial times!” Framed between two allusions to Rochester, Sterne inserts a passage that gestures equally strongly towards Charles Blount’s ‘Concerning the Immortality of the Soul’, which was written in response to the same poem, and wherein he too expresses his mistrust of those who ‘make mysteries of nothing’ - “the Harangues of Parsons, [and the] Sophistry of the Schoolmen.” A clear allusion to Blount is unverifiable, but Sterne reproduces if not the argument, then certainly the process by which the Blount mocked the ‘mysteries’ of revealed religion, and further, by comparison to the pagan deities, reduced Christianity to just one religion - or cult - among many.

Tristram’s dialogue with death is depicted in Thomas Patch’s Laurence Sterne and Death, which was painted in December 1765, while Sterne was in

---

147 IX. xxv. 785
148 VII. xvi. 594
149 ibid. The idea, and the time-scale, are first introduced a few pages earlier; “…and if the belief in Christ continues so long, will be so these fifty years to come.” VII. ix. 589
150 VII. viv. p. 595. In Scotland, in 1697, Thomas Aikenhead was hanged for, among other things, expressing a similar idea: “…the hope and belief that Christianity would be extinct within a century.” (J. M. Robertson, A Short History of Free Thought II, p. 181) Sterne’s time-scheme is broadly congruous with Aikenhead’s.
152 Like ‘Opinions’, ‘Mysteries’ is another significant word in the deist’s vocabulary. See Wotton’s remarks on A Tale of a Tub: “The author, one would think, copies from Mr. Toland, who always raises a laugh at the word Mystery, the word and thing whereof he is known to believe to be no more than a Tale of a Tub.” William Wotton. ‘A Defence of the Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning … with observations upon The Tale of a Tub.’ (1705) in A Tale of a Tub and Other Works, eds. Ross and Wooley (1986) Appendix A (ix), p 187
Florence. The striking image of Sterne (in clerical dress and, oddly, wearing a sword) enacting Tristram’s ‘dialogue with death’ has been made familiar in recent years by its reproduction on the cover of the popular Penguin edition of *Tristram Shandy*, and (in an alternate version) on the dust-jacket of Ross’s recent biography. Because of such long familiarity, it is difficult to think of this scene without thinking of Patch’s print as an illustration to the text. But the print merely follows the metaphor - the Grim Reaper did not ‘actually’ appear before Tristram in his brush with death. The easy confusion of author and narrator also makes it easy to assume that illness, the “vile athsma” that Tristram urges upon us, is the cause of the encounter, but there is not the slightest hint of that in the scene itself. Indeed, if we disregard the metaphor entirely and approach the text literally, then the scene becomes somewhat disturbing. A gentleman calls at Tristram’s door demanding his death and is artfully beguiled and turned away, but knowing that his presence means death, and that he will return when the deception is discovered, Tristram flies the country in great haste. If not a duellist or some other enemy, this sounds very much like the hangman – or one of his officers. Again, this is such an unusual suggestion that it might sound odd, but shortly after his arrival in France we are given a very rare insight – a glimpse of the adult narrator as he is seen by others – and three strangers, at a glance, decide that he is a criminal, and they only disagree as to the nature of his crime.

Although Patch’s paintings of this scene have become well known, he also engraved another version of the same scene, which, although it has been reproduced by Curtis and Cash, has received very little critical attention. In 1768, Sir Horace Mann sent a copy to Horace Walpole, with a brief accompanying remark: “I send you a *caricatura* which wants no explanation as to the principle figure. The rest is too complicated to be explained.” The equally terse remarks accompanying Cash’s reproduction are intriguing, but provide little in the way of explanation: “A reverse engraving [of the earlier painting] with a table in the foreground blocking out the

---

155 VII. vii. 585
sword. An elaborate background with symbols of Sterne’s career about the room, including a machine for shredding books. Curtis also adds very little comment, even though the details seem to demand a close examination.

---

Sterne and Death

*From the etching by Thomas Patch*

Fig. 5. ‘Sterne and Death’, Thomas Patch, 1768.

---

\(^{158}\) Cash, *LY*, op. cit.
The most obviously 'Shandean' symbol in this image is the map depicting the angular lines of fortifications, presumably one of Toby’s maps, which hangs behind the principle figure. The piece of armour beneath the table, however, is more difficult to understand, being noticeably too large for Tristram/Sterne’s spindly leg, and equally unsuitable to the era of Toby’s military campaigns. However, its depiction close to a volume marked “Ovid” makes the modern metamorphosis relatively simple - the use of ‘armour’ as a slang term for condom is an eighteenth century commonplace, and the martial metaphor is completed when such ‘armour’ is used in ‘storming a fort’ - the act of seduction. A bawdy parody of one of Horace’s satires by Thomas Rowe provides an example that is also notable for its specifically sexualized use of the ‘Shandean’ word ‘Whisker’:

In Armour clad, I venture’d on, Sir,  
A Merleton — a very Monster;  
A Whisker of such hideous Mien,  
In Whetstone’s Park was never seen…

Whetstone’s Park was notorious as the haunt of prostitutes, and there is little doubt as to the kind of ‘armour’ the speaker intends. James Boswell also makes contemporary ideas about Sterne’s general use of military terminology clear, when he describes a piece of ribaldry overheard at Child’s coffee-house in 1762:

‘...he had on just a plain frock. If I had not seen the half of his star, I should not have known that it was him. But maybe you’ll say a half-star is sometimes better than a whole moon. Eh? ha! ha! ha!’

- and Boswell further informs us that:

...both ‘star’ and ‘moon’ were terms used in fortification, and terms of fortification were at this time much on the lips of wiseacres, as the contemporary satire of Sterne in Tristram Shandy shows.

---

159 See, for example, the lines accompanying Rowlandson’s erotic drawing The Willing Fair, or Any Way To Please: “Ah! happy captain, charming sport! / Who would not storm so kind a fort?” A. D. Harvey, Sex in Georgian England: Attitudes and Prejudices from the 1720s to the 1820s, (London 1994) plate 16

160 Thomas Rowe, ‘HORACE’S INTEGER VITAE, &C. Imitated and Applied to the RAKES of DRURY. To Richard Thornhill, Esq; By Mr. Rowe.’ Misc. Tracts p. 27-8.


Evidently something of a ‘wiseacre’ himself, Patch’s caricature speaks sexual innuendo ‘from top to bottom’, and no less so in ‘the principle figure’ where the sexual metaphor in Sterne’s preoccupation with ‘death’ is easily overlooked.

Patch’s understanding of Sterne’s vein of satire, however, is not restricted merely to the winks and nudges of the ‘wiseacres’. The depiction of the paper-shredder bursting with books behind the door seems very unusual, and one would have to suppose that, long before Ferriar ‘exposed’ Sterne, Patch was extremely well-read (which is possible), or reliably informed (which is more probable), if one were to assume that this is an early reference to Sterne’s habit of ‘chopping-up’ other works and incorporating the ‘shreds’ into his own. This has been suggested as Patch’s intention by at least one writer, and Ferriar was not the first to refer to the practice in Sterne, but on the other hand, the actual destruction of texts recurs as a disturbing motif throughout Sterne’s life. When pressed to “reconsider Slop’s fall & my too Minute Account of it...” Sterne himself admitted, “I have Burn’d More wit, then I have published Upon that very Acc164 and others too felt obliged to consign Sterne’s work to the flames. His local satire, A Political Romance, suppressed because it threatened to damage the whole fabric of the church, was burned in York, in 1759. Large quantities of documents were also destroyed in the fires that damaged the parsonage at Coxwold in 1765 - and one must note Cash’s conjecture that Sterne’s under-paid curate, Marmaduke Callis deliberately started the fires. After Sterne’s death, his wife, Elizabeth, being abroad with his daughter Lydia, placed his affairs in the hands of a fellow clergyman, the Rev. John Botham.

They had every confidence that the Rev. Mr. John Botham would handle their affairs very well. He did not. ... They gave Botham specific instructions to send to York all the papers he found. Instead he read every letter and manuscript he turned up and committed to the flames everything he thought unfit for his sister-in-law’s eyes.167

163 C. Veth, Comic Art in England. “...a machine for tearing books to pieces is an allusion to his plagiarisms.” p. 37 However, Diderot joked about the idea of Sterne as plagiarist in Jacques le Fataliste. See also following note, & p. 219 below.
164 Anne Bandry describes several texts that dwell on this theme in ‘Later Reactions to Tristram Shandy in the Oates Collection’, The Shandean 2, (1990) pp. 27-44.
165 LETTERS, see Letters 38 & 38a, p. 77. On ‘Slop’s fall’, see Brady’s description of the “highly dubious encounter between Obadiah and Slop”, see p. 66, n. 225, below.
166 Cash, LY, p. 224-5
167 ibid. p. 335
As Lydia explained in a letter to Mrs. Montagu, Elizabeth was not pleased, particularly at the breach of the necessary ‘secrecy’ surrounding her father’s papers, although it is Lydia’s final comment that is the most telling:

It was not mama’s intention that anyone should read my Father’s papers, well knowing that there was some amongst them which ought not to have been seen no not even by his Daughter nor shd I have wished to see one of them! mama is very much chagrin’d at this for notwithstanding she can perhaps rely on Mr. Botham’s secrecy yet it grieves that even he should be so well acquainted with certain anecdotes, but to burn any paper was very wrong. I hope he will cease so doing & leave that care to Mama.”

While prudery and shame might cause his executor and his wife to disagree over who had the right to burn Sterne’s documents, it is surprising that the notorious John Wilkes, who thrived on scandal, also seems to have thought it the proper course of action. In 1775, when Lydia was making enquiries about her late father’s correspondence, “…she heard from Wilkes that he had destroyed all letters from Sterne,” while only a handful have survived of the “hundreds” of letters Sterne recalled having written to John Hall-Stevenson.

Thomas Patch, it is worth noting, was himself no stranger to controversy. His father, John Patch, “had been at one time surgeon to the Old Pretender at St. Germain,” and as a youth, Thomas also studied medicine under Dr. Richard Mead. He abandoned medicine, however, and moved to Rome, where he worked in the studio of the artist Claude-Joseph Vemet, and gained the patronage of Lord Charlemont. Around this time he also became acquainted with Joshua Reynolds, whose own portrait of Sterne is well-known. However, in 1751 “…he began the first of his quarrels with the Holy Office which culminated four years later in his being exiled from the Papal States.” The reasons are unclear, but first occasion may have arisen because of his outspoken views on religion: “Patch was not given to restraining his tongue, and habitually expressed his opinions in the most forthright way.” However, a letter written by the Bishop of Tivoli, in answer to Sir Horace Mann’s enquiry about the matter, suggests there may have been more to it: “The

---

168 LETTERS, Appendix, Letter xvii. p. 434
169 ibid. p.15 Editor’s note to Letter 1.
170 ibid. Letter 225, p. 407
172 Sterne’s reference to Mead (‘Kunastrokius’) in TS was written long before he met Patch.
173 Watson, p. 18
Bishop's letter ... hints at some unnameable crime so gross that the Bishop's conscience forbad him to allow its perpetrator to remain in his domains."174 This might suggest homosexuality, but nevertheless, Patch remained in Rome for several more years, possibly because of the influence of Lord Charlemont, a close friend of Pope Benedict XIV. Patch was still known for his "exceedingly difficult temperament," but shortly after Charlemont's final departure from Rome, and after another 'incident', Patch received an order from the Holy See to quit the papal States within twenty-four hours. The art dealer, Samuel Parker, having spoken of the earlier "disgrazia which hindered me from further friendship", upon hearing of his eventual banishment he said: "The most favourable construction is to say he is mad. Crazy he always was."175

Patch moved to Florence late in 1755. Sir Horace Mann, who was to develop a very close friendship with Patch, thought his banishment was due to "some indiscretion about religion", but other rumours also circulated. While continuing to paint landscapes, he also began to exercise his talent for caricature for the entertainment of the English expatriate community and the various travellers to be encountered there, and within a few years his caricatures were in great demand. This is an odd occupation at best, and possibly even dangerous for one already noted for his 'difficult' temperament - as one of his sitters observed: "...'tis absurd enough for a man to sit seriously down to be laugh'd at, in the Copy of his figure, who at the same time would cut one's throat for grinning at the original."176 Wisely, however, Patch was cautious in such matters: "...he was always so prudent as never to caricature anybody without his consent and a full liberty to exert his talents."177

It was not until 1765, Watson informs us, that Patch, virtually self-taught in the art, began to produce engravings; and at the end of that year he met Sterne and made what has become his most famous caricature, 'Sterne and Death'. Obviously, in the few days Sterne spent in Florence, Patch would have had little opportunity to do much more than execute studies for the two oil paintings, and it seems very unlikely that Sterne saw either one of them in its finished state at that time. However, it was not until 1768 that Patch produced his much elaborated engraving of the

174 ibid.
175 ibid. pp. 19; 21
scene, which Sterne, who died on the 18th March of that year, certainly never saw. Indeed, Mann sent his copy to Walpole on 31st March, barely two weeks after Sterne’s death. In view of the coincidence of these dates, it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that, uncertain as to whether or not the ‘full liberty’ Sterne had granted for the earlier caricature would be extended to cover his later, much-elaborated version, Patch only printed the engraving after hearing the news of Sterne’s death. Certainly, Mann would have seen the earliest copies, and it seems improbable that he would have delayed long before sending one of them to Walpole. Furthermore, amid their voluminous correspondence, the very brevity of the Mann’s remarks, and the complete absence of any response from Walpole concerning a print ‘too complicated to be explained’, or concerning Sterne’s death, are notable, at least, as intriguing omissions. It is in keeping, however, with the resounding silence that followed the news of Sterne’s death elsewhere in England.

Unlike the rest of the paraphernalia in Patch’s print, the two destroyers, the paper shredder and the hour glass, occupy the shared space between the two figures. Behind Death (through death’s door) nothing is visible, the same ‘nothing’, I would suggest, that Tristram ‘hates to make a mystery of’ - and when ones comes to consider the curious, many-breasted figure in the bell-jar on the table behind Sterne, it does not seem inappropriate to invoke Rochester and Blount once again.

---

177 Watson is quoting from Mann’s correspondence. Watson (1940) p. 24
178 ibid. p. 26
179 “Mann ‘took much’ to Patch and the artist was never out of the minister’s house a whole day, although he did not actually live there.” Watson, ibid. p. 25
180 It should not be forgotten that after Sterne’s death, he was disinterred, anatomised, reburied and left, the second time, without a marker of any sort. This may have been merely an unfortunate coincidence but, if it was intentional, then it may have been seen as a fitting end to a ‘Rake’s Progress’. See Cash, LY, pp. 327-339.
This figure is linked through the quill directly to the ink-stand and the surface of the writing-desk - the very tools of the author’s trade - and such a position strongly suggests that Patch intended the figure to represent Sterne’s muse. But this particular figure, the pagan goddess Diana of the Ephesians, is too closely associated with Charles Blount’s deist tracts, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*, and his translation of the biography of her prophet, *Philostratus concerning the Life of Apollonius Tyaneus*, to be anything but an improper source of inspiration for an Anglican divine. It is in this that Patch might well have felt that he had gone beyond the ‘liberty’ that Sterne had earlier permitted, but it is however, as no doubt Patch intended it to be, a perfectly appropriate figure through which to understand the “spirit of Shandeism”

---

181 ‘Diana of the Ephesians’: “The origin of the goddess is obscure. She was prob. a form of great Asiatic mother-goddess whose cult was adopted by Ionian Greeks who identified her with Artemis; ‘Euphesia’ was her local name. Her great temple, begun in 6th cent. B.C. was one of the wonders of the ancient world. The episode recorded in Acts 19:24 ff. attests popularity of cult. In art the goddess was represented in stiff upright posture, the top part of her body being covered with breasts. Her chief priest was a eunuch and bore Persian title of Megabyzos. Plutarch compared her maiden priestesses with the Roman Vestals.” *Dictionary of Comparative Religion* ed. S.G.F. Brandon (London 1970).
which permeates Sterne’s work, and which holds the ‘key’ to many of the mysteries of *Tristram Shandy*.

We have seen that Anglicanism was certainly not uppermost in the minds of a significant proportion of Sterne’s contemporaries and near-contemporaries when they approached his texts – although there is no doubt, when considering works so abounding in Biblical allusions, that a belief in the sincerity of Sterne’s religious faith is fundamental to any traditional notion of his ‘sentiment’. This divided response continued well into the nineteenth century, and while Sterne was still imitated, he was so only in his ‘sentimental’ strains - there were to be no more complicit texts like *The Clockmakers Outcry* and the ‘Slawkenberg’ edition. Indeed, as we now turn our attention to the nineteenth century, the critics seem to internalise the broad divisions of the past, and often begin arguing against themselves. During the same period, of course, there was an enormous willingness to promotion the ‘sentimental’ image of Sterne – since this necessarily promoted his Anglicanism – and the porcelain figures of Toby, the various poignant depictions of Maria, and other examples of Victorian sentimentalism catalogued in *The Shandean* bear witness to the success of this enterprise. However, and as is often the case with Sterne, the most interesting insights into the text are provided by dissenting voices, particularly the ‘inner dissent’ of critics who try write in praise of Sterne.
Chapter Six
Reluctant Victorians

There were others too, before Coleridge, who also suspected Sterne of a 'dalliance with the devil' and in addition to the recurrent charges of blasphemy and obscenity, his reputation was further sullied throughout the nineteenth century by the publication of John Ferriar's *Illustration of Sterne* (1798), which contained the results of his research into Sterne's unacknowledged sources. While the charge of plagiarism is no longer thought too significant, clearing Sterne of one crime does not clear him of them all, and evidence of plagiarism was not the only irregularity that Ferriar detected. While discussing Sterne's debt to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Ferriar was disconcerted by a curiously inappropriate mingling of names. In the text, Walter Shandy is discoursing (using Burton as a source) on "the irresistible and natural passion, to weep for the loss of our children," and as he does so, he recalls a list of names to illustrate his thesis: "—And accordingly, we find that David wept for his son Absalom—Adrian for his Antinous—Niobe for her children..."\(^\text{182}\) The allusion to David's grief for Absalom\(^\text{183}\) and the classical allusion to Niobe, are both apt and acceptable in a list of this sort, but caught uneasily between the two is the historical figure of Adrian. New adds no comment, but simply repeats the note from an earlier edition: "Antinous was an attendant and favourite of the Emperor Hadrian

\(^{182}\) V. iii. 418; The three names all appear in Burton, but Sterne's altered ordering brings Adrian and David closer together. Burton, more appropriately, is writing on "Death of Friends" not children. see also Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1.2.4.7. (p. 234)

\(^{183}\) 2 Samuel. 19
(76-138); at his suicide, the emperor was deeply grieved and caused extravagant respect to be paid to his memory. This is hardly sufficient. Hadrian’s grief for Antinous was a result of homosexual, not paternal love, and his grief was extravagant indeed - he built a temple to the youth and tried to transform the boy into a god. Adrian’s other achievements also make his name particularly abhorrent to Christians since, among other things, “…he erected a statue to Jupiter on the spot where Jesus rose from the dead, and one to Venus on Mount Calvary, and in doing so he desecrated two of Christianity’s holiest shrines. For a clergymen to refer to this pagan idolater’s love for his catamite in the same breath as David’s grief for Absalom is a serious breach of propriety - to do so inadvertently on a single occasion would be unseemly, but to do such things intentionally and repeatedly as Sterne does, is stretching the boundaries of ‘irreverence’ until it differs little from outright disrespect. Ferriar’s own comment is brief, but wholly to the point: “The time has been when this conjunction with the king of Israel would have smelt a little of the faggot.”

There is a similar ‘unfortunate’ reference which occurs in Tristram’s introduction to Toby’s unusually eloquent ‘Apologetical Oration.’, in which Tristram makes a comparison which has misled several editors:

“…it was not easy to my uncle Toby to make long harangues,—and he hated florid ones; but there were occasions where the stream overflowed the man, and ran so counter to its usual course, that in some parts my uncle Toby, for a time, was at least equal to Tertullus—but in others, in my own opinion, infinitely above him.”

Graham Petrie assumes that this is “[p]erhaps a reference to Tertullian”; Ian Campbell Ross suggests, “[p]robably an error for Tertullian... the most brilliant rhetorician among early Christian apologists,” as does Howard Anderson: “Tertullus is more likely who is meant, for he was a strong defender of the Christian Church in ancient Rome.” James Work (quoted by New, below) expresses much the same opinion in his edition. Despite offering more accurate information, New is
still reluctant to confirm what seems clearly the ‘more verifiable following’, and instead he manages to cloud the issue by perpetrating some at least of those earlier editors’ uncertainties.

Sterne may have in mind either of two men. One is Tertullus, the orator in Acts 24: 1-8, who speaks against Paul (himself a soldier, we should note) and is answered by him; cf. Acts 24: 25: “And as he [Paul] reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, Felix [the governor] trembled.” The other is Tertullian (c. 160 - c. 240), the “first great writer of Latin Christianity, whose chief work, Apologeticus adversus Gentes pro Christianis, an expertly argued vindication of the Christian church against false accusations, was the weightiest apologia for Christianity produced during the first two centuries.” (Work, p. 458, n. 2); cf. OCD, s.v. Tertullian.191

One must question the relevance of mentioning Paul’s remarks to Felix in a note on Tertullus, when it is surely more pertinent to note that it is Tertullus who accuses Paul of being “...a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes...” - and thus, something of a hero to the more radical deists. Levy, for example, mentions that in The History and Character of St. Paul, Peter Annett depicted St. Paul as “a liar, a hypocrite, and a power-hungry impostor.”192 New’s final short paragraph however, almost begrudgingly tacked on to the end of this discussion, is surely the most significant point:

Sterne had written about the first Tertullus in his sermon “Felix’s Behaviour towards Paul, examined”, which perhaps makes him the more likely candidate.193

By relying on the obscurity of Tertullus and the fame of Tertullian, Sterne wilfully encourages the confusion of identities that Work, Petrie, Anderson and Ross all duly succumbed to, but the fact that Sterne discussed Tertullus in one of his sermons, and was therefore certainly aware of this malevolent anti-Christian orator, must make him, not just ‘perhaps’, but ‘by far the more likely candidate’. In the later Notes to the Sermons, New is still clearly reluctantly to confirm the point: “Whether Sterne had the Tertullus of Acts in mind or Tertullian ... is open to question, although the

191 NOTES, p. 431
193 NOTES, p.431.
Florida editors lean towards the former."¹⁹⁴ But despite this ‘likeliness’ or this ‘leaning’, New (unsurprisingly) makes no attempt to account for the kind of ‘Anglican orthodoxy’ that would see fit to applaud Tertullus for his skills as an orator. Like Adrian’s love for Antinous, this is another wholly inappropriate reference that smells, more than a little, ‘of the faggot’.

During the nineteenth century, with Ferriar’s ‘evidence’ on hand to support their arguments, Sterne continued to attract hostile criticism; his bawdy, as ever, failed to please and the ‘smell of the faggot’ continued to taint his reputation. William Makepeace Thackeray was doubtless the most vociferous of such critics, and his hostility towards Sterne was extreme. Even in the ‘sentimental’ Journal to Eliza, Thackeray could detect “blasphemy to flavour the composition, and indications of scornful disbelief,”¹⁹⁵ and his general remarks on Sterne - the man and his works - are most severe:

...one can’t give the whole description. There is not a page in Sterne’s writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption - a hint, as of an impure presence.

Some of that dreary double entendre may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours, but not all. The foul satyr’s eyes leer out of the leaves constantly: the last words the famous author wrote were bad and wicked...¹⁹⁶

Thackeray continues at some length in this tone, and the range and intensity of the terms he uses - corrupt, impure, foul, bad, wicked - indicates the extent of his disgust, and it is well to remember that Thackeray was not at all ill-informed. Although extracts from his remarks are frequently reprinted, few critics now take his ideas seriously, but Thackeray was himself an aficionado of ‘gentlemen’s stories’ and eminently well-placed to judge of such matters, and therefore cannot be so easily dismissed; indeed, one would rather grant his words some authority when he came to consider aspects of Sterne that many others of his time would shy away from.

The responses of Sterne’s admirers at this time are no less revealing, particularly in their marked inability to deal in any way convincingly with the more disturbing aspects of his work. H. D. Traill’s attempt to negotiate this problem in 1889 is an startling example of awareness and evasion, which erupts late in the book, in an unexpected and wholly unsatisfactory and evasive digression, which is

¹⁹⁶ Thackeray, (1949) p. 140
smothered almost as soon as it is begun. At all other times Trail is an enthusiastic admirer of Sterne, but he is ill at ease when discussing Sterne's forays into the realms of bawdy and obscenity, which he describes as: "...that disagreeable question which no commentator on Sterne can possibly shirk, but which every admirer of Sterne must approach with reluctance…"

There is of course a sense in which Sterne's humour - if indeed we may bestow that name on the form of jocularity to which I refer - is the reverse of pure and delicate: a sense in which it is impure and indelicate to the highest degree. On this it is necessary, however briefly to touch; and to the weighty and many-counted indictment which may be framed against Sterne on this head, there is of course but one possible plea - the pleas of guilty. Nay, the plea must go further than a mere admission of the offence; it must include an admission of the worst motive, the worst spirit as animating the offender. It is not necessary to my purpose, nor doubtless congenial to the taste of the reader, that I should enter upon any critical analysis of this quality...

Traill goes on to consider Swift and Rabelais: "the two other great humourists who have been the worst offenders in the same way", but concludes:

...unfortunately for Sterne, he must be condemned on a quantitative comparison of indecency... There is no denying, I mean, that Sterne is of all writers the most permeated and penetrated with impurity of thought and suggestion; that in no other writer is its latent presence more constantly felt, even if there be any in whom it is more openly obtruded. The unclean spirit pursues him everywhere, disfiguring his scenes of humour, demoralizing his passages of serious reflection, debasing even his sentimental interludes. His coarseness is very often a greater blot on his art as on his morality ... it is sometimes so distinctly fatal a blemish from the purely literary point of view, that one is amazed at the critical faculty which could have tolerated its presence.\(^{197}\)

Read out of context, these passages might suggest that Traill and Thackeray were in close agreement, but in fact they are far from it - and after frankly acknowledging that Sterne wrote with 'the worst motive' and in 'the worst spirit,' Traill drops the subject entirely, and after returning to his former tones of admiration, he carries on with his celebration of the 'delights' of Sterne's 'whimsical' production. This single passage makes it clear that at all other times Traill's reading practice is based on the conscious and willful elision of what, in the eyes of many readers, are undoubtedly some the most significant features of the texts. As with the readers of anthologized

extracts, this is the type of reading practice that one must adopt if one wishes to understand Sterne only in terms of his sentimental ‘beauties’.

Traill, at least, accepts that Sterne is responsible for his own work, but from this time onward one can begin to trace that distinct vein of reluctant, or apologetic criticism that Sterne continued to attract throughout the twentieth century, which tends either, like Traill, to acknowledge Sterne’s faults and then dismiss them in the same breath, or, more frequently, to acknowledge them and then assign the blame in some way to Hall-Stevenson. Whatever the case, then as now, the discussion is generally brief. In 1896, for example, Percy Fitzgerald unequivocally set Sterne apart from “fashionable professors of vice” like Dashwood and Hall-Stevenson, despite being forced to concede that, “by his close fellowship with these merry but abandoned men, he has fairly laid himself open to the charge of partnership in their transgressions.” But instead of looking closely at such charges, Fitzgerald merely takes this as an opportunity to attack Hall-Stevenson. He condemns his character: “...he was Sterne’s fast friend—companion, perhaps, for the friendships of the dissolute are not very fast.”; he deprecates his taste: “...hopelessly depraved ... even below the degraded standard then fashionable with men of the world.”; and generally vilifies his writings which, “...outraged public decency.” Having thus settled the matter as little more than youthful folly, early in the first volume of his biography, Fitzgerald finds no reason to return to Sterne’s ‘close fellowship’ with such characters in later life.

In 1910, Lewis Melville catalogued Sterne’s close links with the Demoniacs, but was anxious to distance the Demoniacs themselves from the Medmenhamites: “...there is no reason to believe ... that [the Demoniacs] performed the blasphemous rites associated with the more famous institutions that served as their model...” Melville accompanies this with a common, and purely speculative assertion: “...Their indulgences were limited to coarse stories and deep potations...” Not satisfied with this, Melville still feels compelled to apologise for Sterne’s involvement even with these watered-down rakes: “...of course, it must be admitted that they were not fit company for a clergyman, and it is a matter for regret that Sterne should have been of the party.”

---

199 ibid. p. 43
In the same year, Walter Sichel observed how loosely the “robe of sanctity he was forced to wear” sat upon Sterne: “...it was his only outlet for a career. This is not an edifying spectacle, but such, in the eighteenth century, was often the profane church, and it was said at the time that it was far easier to find a bad actor than a good clergyman.” However, Sichel excuses Sterne on every available opportunity: “...[Sterne’s] libertinage is that of the freest fancy, not that of a fleshly rake.” Dazzled by Sterne’s ‘beauties’ however, Sichel had to go to extreme lengths, and elaborate metaphors, to excuse the inexcusable in Sterne’s many ‘faults’: “...though his cobweb of suggestion entangled filthy flies, it also caught the fresh dew of the morning.” Making a virtue of refusing to look too closely at these ‘filthy flies,’ and concentrating his attention instead upon the sparkle of Sterne’s dewy sentimentalism, Sichel is either unwilling or unable to take Sterne out of the pulpit, and he too assigns the blame for the presence of such material upon the bad influence of Hall-Stevenson and the other Demoniacs who were, he solemnly declares, “...a lawless brood ... and ill company for the Yorkshire vicar.”

Again and again, in these writers and many like them, one can detect a reading practice that relies on the conscious elision and avoidance of significant sections of the text, as each in their own way attempt to refine and separate the ‘fresh dew’ of (Sterne’s) sentiment from (Hall-Stevenson’s) ‘filthy flies’. Henri Fluchère also noted this tendency among critics, and after discussing Coleridge, he also quotes H. Taine, “an exact counterpart [of Coleridge] on the other side of the channel.” As others have done, Taine judged Sterne’s obscenity on a ‘comparative scale of indecency’, and concluded (as others have also done) that Sterne’s prurience had nothing to do with “beauty”, “sensuality”, or even with the love of pleasure of “refined voluptuaries”:

If he seeks out filthy corners, it is because they are forbidden and unfrequented. What he is looking for is singularity and scandal. What appeals to him in forbidden fruit is not the fruit but the interdiction; for the fruit he prefers to bite is all withered or eaten by worms.

---

201 Walter Sichel, Sterne: A Study (1910). p. 25  
202 ibid. p. 36  
203 ibid. p. 37  
204 ibid. p. 116  
206 H. Taine, Histoire de la Littérature anglaise, quoted by Fluchère, ibid.
Fluchère also mentions Leslie Stephen: "...while admitting that Sterne was perhaps ‘the greatest artist in the language’, [Stephen] declares that, ‘The judgement pronounced upon Sterne by Thackeray seems to me to be substantially unimpeachable. The more I know of the man, for my part, the less I like him’.” After also quoting Traill, Fluchère makes the following observation:

All the judgements quoted above are dictated by moral preoccupations which confuse the issue and make it difficult for the critical sense to operate freely. After condemning these shortcomings with more or less severity and vehemence, the critics calmly go on, without exception, to praise Sterne.207

As I have already suggested, this practice is still recognisable, not only in the work of New, Cash, and Ross - discussed above - but also in many others who, in recognising only Sterne’s profession, continue to assert the innocence of his work in the face of a considerable amount of evidence to the contrary.

In 1926 however, George Saintsbury was not quite so indulgent in his introduction to *Tristram Shandy*. Recognizing that Sterne’s work had its bawdy side, he too compared Sterne with other writers who might also be thought to have ‘sinned’ in the same way:

But if it be a sin to laugh now and then frankly at what were once called ‘gentlemen’s stories,’ then... [others] are damned, with Shakespeare and Scott and Southey, with Margaret of Navarre and Marie de Sévigné, to keep them in countenance.208

- but once again, even when judged on a ‘comparative scale of indecency’, Sterne is not excused. Saintsbury discusses the qualities - or the qualifications - which allow us to laugh at such unsavoury fare: “It must not be brutal or inhuman... It must not be underhand or sniggering... It must be frank and jovial... it may be saved... [like Swift] ...by the overmastering pessimism of despair...” Despite all this however, Saintsbury’s judgement on Sterne is absolute: “Sterne can plead none of these exemptions.” Terms like ‘underhand’ and ‘sniggering’ are familiar enough in the vocabulary of Sterne’s critics, but ‘brutal’ and ‘inhuman’ add an unsettling emphasis to Saintsbury’s sentence. Unlike those writers discussed above, who saw Sterne’s ‘dirty flies’ and then determinedly looked the other way, Saintsbury does offer some

---

207 Fluchère, op. cit. p. 221
208 Saintsbury, Introduction to TS, (1912) p. xi
more useful insights into Sterne's work, but he is still far from explicit in detailing the 'brutal' and 'inhuman' characteristics he condemns so completely.

Increasingly however, during the early twentieth century, such matters failed to come under consideration at all. Among other things, as Sterne's language gradually became more archaic, many of his improprieties simply faded from view, while his reputation also underwent something of a revival, particularly among the modernists, who celebrated, and often emulated, his innovative technique. In 1928, Virginia Woolf noted that "...it is significant of the change in taste that has come over us that it is Sterne's sentimentality that offends us and not his immorality," but one must wonder just how aware Woolf was of the range and extent of Sterne's 'immorality'. Although well aware of Sterne's artistry, her discussion of sexuality in *A Sentimental Journey* suggests an 'inner struggle' of some sort, between a Freudian subconscious rising up to disrupt and intrude upon the delicate writing that Sterne was consciously trying to create. – i.e. the subject of Woolf's concerns, not Sterne's.

Since then, as the remnants of Victorian sexual and spiritual morality have given way to the more liberated values of the later twentieth-century, Sterne's alleged obscenity has come to seem nothing more than the sniggering innuendo of an eighteenth-century Frankie Howard – priming his audience with 'innocent' innuendo and then blaming them for supplying the punch-line. While Sterne's reputation for bawdiness still survives, his ill-applied passages of scripture now very rarely attract attention and blasphemy has come to seem a harsh charge to level against this amiable, if somewhat irreverent clergyman. But the charges originated among Sterne's contemporaries, as Thackeray put it, 'in the freer times and manners' of that age, which only makes them all the more striking, and although various modernist and post-modernist revisions have successively found different reasons to admire Sterne's work, dismissing what we now perceive to be the excessive rigor of the Victorians still does not account for the gravity of those early accusations made by Sterne's Georgian contemporaries. Furthermore, it does not account for the disquiet that Sterne still frequently manages to arouse in more recent critics.

---

209 Virginia Woolf, Introduction to ASJ (1928), p.xiv
Chapter Seven
Sterne in the Twentieth Century.

A brief comment of A. O. J. Cockshut puts the matter in a nutshell:

[Sterne] has often been condemned – and by very intelligent and sympathetic readers – and yet the adverse verdicts have been delivered with hesitation or regret or simple puzzlement. Perhaps the only point on which nearly all the critics agree is that Sterne is worrying. 210

Others have voiced their concerns more specifically. Jean H. Hagstrum offers “a few miscellaneous examples which may bring to mind the whole surprising range of impolite allusions in Tristram Shandy”, including, “Dr. Kunastrokius ... making obvious allusions to an anal-oral perversion”, “the learned Kysarcius ... raises the question of incest”, and “…more than one suggestion that Obadiah’s new child ... is a product of bestiality.” Hagstrum also adds, “perhaps the most obsessive of all the double meanings in the novel are phallic,” 211 - an observation that brings to mind “the invisible cock” detected in 1765 by the bantering ‘REVIEWERS of BREECHES’ in the Critical Review. 212

---

212 ed. Howes, p. 160. see also p. 135, n. 495 below.
J. J. Mayoux is moved to redefine Sterne’s ‘conversational’ style when he suggests that, “…what Sterne proposes, nay imposes, upon the reader are relations of complicity,” and he illustrates this complicity with a short ‘reading’:

One reads the account of the rubbing of Trim’s knee by the Beguine, rhythmic, prolonged, increased until producing a sudden ecstasy, and one realizes with astonishment that the author has invited him to witness a scene of masturbation…

As noted earlier, the illustrator of the Slawkenberg edition anticipated this reading by two centuries by inviting the reader to witness just such a scene, and although it is now no longer a surprise, one can make the same point about the opening scene of *Tristram Shandy* where the reader is inveigled unawares into ‘witnessing’ Walter’s ejaculation during sex with his wife at the supposed moment of Tristram’s conception. One can, indeed, make very similar ‘interpretations’ of a great many scenes, not just those illustrated in the Slawkenberg edition.

Robert Alter was perhaps the first modern critic to tackle this matter head-on, seeing the double-entendre as “the basic rhetorical device - almost the narrative method - of *Tristram Shandy*,” and he too describes Sterne’s style in terms of complicity, and notes the way in which Sterne tries to “implicate the reader in the waywardness of the narration,” with a strategy designed “to make the reader Sterne’s accomplice.” Alter recognizes that Sterne “delighted in contriving ingeniously references to the act and organs of generation that could be at once prudently oblique and boldly explicit,” and while discussing Tristram’s “disquisition on cabbage-planting,” Alter observes that “two directional planting suggests sexual entry at more than one orifice.” An interesting gloss on this (and an interesting Victorian reading of Sterne’s ‘sentiment’) is provided by Peter Fryer, whose list of nineteenth-century euphemisms for the act of sexual intercourse

---


215 ibid. p. 319

216 ibid. p. 320

217 ibid. p. 316

218 VIII. i. 655-6

219 Alter, op cit. p. 319-20
includes: "...arrive at the end of the Sentimental Journey, ...be among the cabbages, [and] ...do a bit of front-door work".220

Alter, however, fails to address the fact that such 'boldly explicit' references in Sterne, particularly to 'sodomy', often seem to go well beyond the contemporary limits. Wagner describes homosexuality as "the worst imaginable perversion in the eighteenth century popular 'mentalite'”, and the very accusation made those accused seem, "...'unnatural' and placed them beyond the pale of ordinary and 'healthy' human life."221 Male homosexuals were criminals, actively persecuted and, if exposed, were in danger of being attacked by the mob - a situation that might be broadly comparable to the recent reactions to 'paedophiles' - and in such a hostile climate of opinion, then as now, to use such behaviour as a source of humour, even among those who were relatively broad-minded, is to deviate well beyond the realms of good taste. Homosexuality in Cleland's Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure - the most notorious of the English libertine texts - was deemed so 'obscene' that an expurgated edition was quickly produced, although in all other respects the text remained unchanged. "All subsequent editions, excepting Drybutter's edition of 1757 (he was apparently put in the pillory for this publication) excluded these passages."222 Those particularly offending passages were thus deemed too obscene even for the most notorious of works. It is useful to emphasise the crucial distinction between commonplace scatological references in eighteenth century texts, and the very rare and problematic representations of sodomy and male homosexuality. It is interesting also to recollect that the notorious Cleland himself criticised Sterne for his obscenity: "...if you had a pupil who wrote C— on a wall, would you not flogg him?"223

Frank Brady is another critic who has pursued the obscene side of Sterne's work at length, and he too found himself 'implicated by the waywardness of the narration.' Brady's comments illustrate perfectly the way in which Sterne's work has long inhibited discussion:

221 Wagner, p. 178. See also the essays collected by McComb in 'Tis Nature's Fault; and Richard Davenport-Hines, Sex, Death and Punishment, (London 1991) esp. Ch. 2, 'Phoenix of Sodom'.
222 Peter Wagner, 'Introduction', Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, (1985) p. 15
Anyone who investigates further soon acquires the uncomfortable feeling that both he and Sterne have abnormally contaminated minds, and that the better part of valour would be to keep Sterne's jokes to himself.\textsuperscript{224}

But having noted that Sterne wrote for the 'inquisitive', Brady goes on to observe, for example, "at least fifteen references to 'fingers and thumbs' in \textit{Tristram Shandy}, most of which suggest either sexual intercourse or masturbation," and he also finds other oblique "references to sodomy" - to illustrate which he offers an unusual interpretation of another celebrated scene:

There is a highly dubious encounter between Obadiah and Slop, in which Obadiah was 'mounted on a strong monster of a coach-horse, prick'd into a gallop, and making all practical speed the adverse way'. They meet, 'in the dirtiest part of a dirty lane' where Obadiah and his coach-horse fall 'pop - full upon him!' The result of this encounter is that Slop's 'hinder parts' are 'totally besmeared'.\textsuperscript{225}

Just as it was J. J. Mayoux, rather than Sterne, who invited the reader 'to witness a scene of masturbation,' Brady is also deeply implicated by his reading of the narrative and, in order to describe what he reads, he too must become the author of salacious texts. There is no doubt that Tristram's imaginary reader 'Madam' would react to such a suggestion in much the same words that Tristram ironically suggests: "Nothing, I think, in nature, can be supposed more terrible than such a Rencounter."\textsuperscript{226}

Such episodes illustrate two ways in which Sterne's humour inhibits discussion. Obviously, extreme and widespread aversion to the 'unnaturalness' of such material has long silenced those, like Thackeray, who would expose the 'foul satyr' but who could only lament that 'one can't give the whole description'. Furthermore, detecting this vein of humour is far from easy, as C. F. Jones made

\textsuperscript{224} Brady, '\textit{Tristram Shandy: Sexuality, Morality and Sensibility}', \textit{Eighteenth Century Studies} 4, (1970-71) p. 41
\textsuperscript{225} ibid. p. 43
\textsuperscript{226} II. ix. 122
clear in his thesis: “[One might not] realise at first reading when Sterne was being indecent; one sometimes chances on fresh examples at the tenth or subsequent reading.” Similarly, New describes the frequent difficulties he faced, as an editor, in annotating such uncertain and veiled humour. To give an example, New discusses “the punchline of a joke”, although he adds, “…most readers I ask to explicate the passage quite fail to see the joke that is so clear to me.” The joke occurs at the time of Tristram’s entry into Boulogne, when, as we have already noted, a number of strangers speculate on the reason for Tristram’s haste during that part of his journey: one suggests “high treason,” another “murder,” the third suggests, “the gentleman has been committing — — —.” Upon observing Tristram pay a compliment to a pretty young woman, however, another concludes, “No, it can’t be that.” New suggests, quite plausibly, that the omitted phrase that explains the reasoning behind this conclusion, is ‘unnatural acts’.

The more one engages in what New describes as “the game of sexual discovery” in Sterne, the more one can understand why numerous critics have found him ‘everywhere indecent’; and the more one becomes attuned to Sterne’s indecency, the more one can understand why Sterne’s humour went well beyond ‘bawdy’ to the eighteenth century ‘mentalité’ - as when New goes on to discuss various instances of Sterne’s play on the French verb ‘bougre’ - ‘to bugger’,

They are running at the ring of pleasure, said I, giving him a prick—By saint Boogar, and all the saints at the backside of the door of purgatory, said he...

Although Sterne’s humour is often heavily veiled, in this case, as New puts it: “…the ‘pricks’ at the ‘backside’ of the door of purgatory makes the allusion about as clear as one might wish,” having already observed that ‘saint Boogar’ “…presides over a number of events and allusions in Tristram Shandy.” Unfortunately, New concludes his short paper, by declaring that “[it] is not … the annotators role to define what the reader might discover… but rather to position the reader on the brink

228 Melvyn New, “At the backside of the door of purgatory”: A Note on Annotating Tristram Shandy” Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries, ed. Myer (1984), p. 15
229 VII. vii. 585
230 New, ibid. p. 16
231 VII. xliii. 649
232 New, ibid. p.21
233 ibid. p. 20
of interpretation,"234 and his 'note on annotating *Tristram Shandy*’ reveals itself to be a justification for the fact that New has largely neglected ‘Sterne’s bawdy texture’ in both of his recent editions.

New, however, does confirm Brady’s suspicions regarding ‘fingers and thumbs’ and adds an additional insight when he encounters. “...the novice with the ‘whitloe in her middle finger’, brought about by ‘sticking it constantly into the abbess’s cast poultices, &c.’”235 The ‘whitloe’ plays on an eighteenth century slang-term for pregnancy through its alternative name ‘a white swelling’. New also comments: “Any reader who has travelled this far into *Tristram Shandy* is bound to be wary of anything finger-shaped stuck into anything of any shape. That suspicion can be rendered far more certain by knowing something about *et cetera.*” He then draws attention to one of the more archaic uses of the phrase listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “…as substitute for a suppressed substantive, generally a coarse or indelicate one.”236

Jaques Berthoud also pursues similar themes in his study, ‘Shandyism and Sexuality’, where his description of the progress of the word ‘whiskers’ through the court of Navarre illustrates the ubiquity of sexual allusion in Sterne’s writings. If the example of ‘whiskers’ demonstrates, as Berthoud puts it, that “a word may be ruined as easily as a virgin,” then the progress of other words through the pages of *Tristram Shandy* amounts almost to the rape of a language:

When he laments that bolsters, night-caps, chambre-pots, placket-holes, pump-handles and spigots now stand ‘on the brink of destruction’, he has already succeeded in pushing them over the brink... As a result, few of the English nouns that [appear in] his book remain intact. Ordinary domestic objects like button-holes and candles and empty bottles and sausages and old hats and sealing-wax and slippers and buttered buns start to look like articles in a sex shop catalogue.... The infection... spreads to the remoter regions of language.237

As mentioned before, Sterne’s work is at its oddest when one compares it with the works of his contemporaries, but this is perhaps because he is too often placed among the ranks of the ‘English novelists’. But the ‘infection’ that seems to set

---

234 ibid. p. 21
235 ibid. p. 18
236 ibid. p. 19
Sterne most apart from such company is an easily recognizable characteristic of the of some less prestigious works of that era:

It is common in salacious texts, jokes and adolescent games that any word can be charged with erotic significance. Nothing can remain innocent or neutral. There is a systematic attempt to destabilize all the apparent specialization of vocabulary. This is perhaps the basis of all prurience: to find hidden meanings, to play on ambiguities and to invent competing meanings without any rhyme or reason. Certain texts make use of, and even abuse this principle, a well known example being Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets*; ... The principle lies less in plays on extant double meanings than of attributing erotic meanings to any word by means of a process of contamination, once the decision has been made to enter that register.238

Sterne, of course, became friendly with Diderot when they met in Paris, but his association with writers of 'salacious texts' did not begin there, and if one were to search for a comparable English text, one need look no further than the work of Hall-Stevenson, who used the central device of *Les Bijoux indiscrets* for one of his own *Crazy Tales* (1762).239

Hall-Stevenson's fame is generally derived from his being ironically represented in *Tristram Shandy* as Eugenius - Tristram's 'wise councillor' - an ironic representation because, as we have seen, he is frequently represented as the 'ill company' most responsible for leading the Rev. Mr. Sterne astray. The common reluctance to closely associate the two is especially notable in Louis C. Jones' influential *The Clubs of the Georgian Rakes*.240 Jones vigorously promotes the belief that the Demoniacs were only a 'pale imitation' of the Medmenhamites, but his argument is exceptionally weak. He emphasizes the divisions that split Wilkes and his followers from the rest of the group in the 1760s, and the attacks made upon Dashwood in print and manuscript - the most vicious of which were those made by

---

239 'A. S.' [i.e. Hall-Stevenson's *nom de plume*, Anthony Shandy], *Crazy Tales*, (London 1762). 'The Privy-Councillor's and the Student of Law's Tale' features a tale "involving a knight with the preposterous magic power of evoking confessions from the female sexual organ wherever and in whatever animal he encounters it." (Hartley, p. 433). Diderot's *Les Bijoux indiscrets* features a magic ring with the same properties, although both might well have shared the same source. *Nocrian, Conte Allobroge* (1747), tells the story of "the knight Amador [who has] the power to make a woman's sexual organs speak." Chantal Thomas, 'The Indiscreet Jewels: A Dangerous Pastime', *The Libertine Reader* (New York 1997) p. 334
Hall-Stevenson after the death of Churchill.\footnote{See Lodwick Hartley, ‘Sterne’s Eugenius as Indiscreet Author: The Literary Career of John Hall-Stevenson.’ \textit{P.M.L.A.} 86, 1971. pp. 437-8} Dashwood and Lord Sandwich retaliated (somewhat hypocritically) by accusing Wilkes of being the author of the obscene \textit{Essay on Woman}. Jones’ argument is unclear, but after discussing the infighting of the 1760s, he goes on to assert that the Demoniacs were therefore not 'imitators' of the Medmenhamites. There is nothing to suggest however that at an earlier time the two clubs were not closely aligned, and in 1761, when Sterne sent greetings - tinged with regret – to his fellow founder-members and 'what few remain of the Demoniacs'\footnote{Quoted above, p. 17, n. 35}, he was clearly looking back to ‘the good old days’ - to the ‘age of the rakes’ perhaps, as seen from the ‘heyday of the macaronis’. As is common however, Jones's ideas about the Demoniacs seems to have been largely influenced by the presence of Sterne among their number; however, his comments on the ‘deeper meaning’ of \textit{Tristram Shandy} make little sense: "If the Medmenhamites had read \textit{Tristram Shandy} more carefully, they might have guessed that the wise advisor of Yorick [i.e. Eugenius/Hall-Stevenson] was not apt to enjoy their puerile frivolities."ootnote{Jones, \textit{Clubs of the Georgian Rakes}, (1942) p. 156}

Nevertheless, widespread reluctance to consider Sterne in such company is still apparent in the work of many critics who invariably portray Hall-Stevenson as a scurrilous hack, an embarrassment, and an unworthy Boswell to the great Laurence Sterne. Recently, New has been among those most anxious to perpetrate the myth of the cynical opportunist whose 'scribblings probably embarrassed Sterne', although Lodwick Hartley’s study of Hall-Stevenson’s work shows that his 'unskilful' reputation is not entirely justified:

\begin{quote}
\ldots anyone who takes the trouble to read all of Hall-Stevenson will find that he had considerable ability, that he was a man not only of a curious but also a sound reading background, that he was a classicist and, indeed, a linguist of some competence, and that he had at times better than a modest talent for satire.\footnote{Hartley, op. cit. p. 428}
\end{quote}

His scurrilous \textit{Crazy Tales} (1762) is something of a minor classic in its own right; in 1766, Thomas Gray was moved to remind Dr. Warton that “you all read \textit{Crazy Tales} without pasting [i.e. censoring]”\footnote{Quoted by Hartley, ibid. p. 434},\footnote{Quoted by Hartley, ibid. p. 434} the work ran to three editions before the decade
was out, and by the early nineteenth-century, *Crazy Tales* was memorable enough to appear as an emblem of outmoded eighteenth-century sexuality in one of Rowlandson’s erotic satires, *The Sinful Friar*,246 suggesting that the work had earned something of a reputation in its own right. Although Hartley’s study is frequently cited, it has done little to improve Hall-Stevenson’s reputation, although his remarks concerning the relationship between the two writers seems a rather more impartial assessment than the view promoted by New.

Sterne’s involvement with the bawdry of Hall-Stevenson indicates something more than mere guilt by association; and the value of the bawdry as a gloss on that of the other must not be overlooked. In fact, the often fantastic quality of Hall-Stevenson’s *Crazy Tales* should not obscure their remarkable thematic relationship with the first books of *Tristram Shandy*... As superior as the first two volume of *Tristram Shandy* most assuredly are to *Crazy Tales*, the latter volume suggests some of the atmosphere and some of the frame of reference out of which the work of genius developed.247

Despite the fact that Sterne’s interpolated tales like ‘Slawkenbergius’ Tale’ or ‘The Fragment’,248 keep perfectly good company with the smuttiest effusions of Hall-Stevenson’s pen, and indeed, Sterne only begin to look ‘odd’ when placed among the incongruous company of more refined and ‘respectable’ works, nevertheless, there are still many who seem determined to mistake Sterne’s prurience for evidence of the airiest sentimentality.

---

247 Hartley, op. cit.
248 III. i.; V. i.
Chapter Eight
Intertext: The ‘less verifiable followings’

In order to conclude this section, I will now briefly survey that aspect of Sterne’s ‘intertextuality’ that seems to reveal a mechanism at work within the text, a repetitive device which again invites the reader to choose between ‘two roads’ – an overt and usually relatively simple signification, and a ‘less verifiable following’. The phrase is George Saintsbury’s, who, while discussing Rabelais, suggested that Sterne was ‘following’ another writer, (of very dubious orthodoxy) when he detected echoes of Beroalde de Verville’s *Le Moyen de Parvenir*:

Nobody, even in [Sterne’s] own day, who knew Rabelais at all could fail to detect the almost servile following of manner in great things and in small which *Tristram* displays. No one—a much smaller designation—who knows the strange, unedifying, but very far from commonplace book of which, as I have hinted, I never can quite believe that Beroalde was the author, can fail to detect an even closer, though a somewhat less obvious and, so to speak, less verifiable following here.\(^{249}\)

The pattern of an obvious, unproblematic reference serving to obscure a less distinct, and highly unorthodox allusion is an interesting aspect of Sterne’s work, and there is a small ‘school’ of criticism devoted to it, of which Cross (with regard to Blount) and Saintsbury (with regard to Beroalde de Verville), are only two examples.

Tom Keymer has described by far the most interesting of these in Sterne’s complex parodic use of Marvell’s ‘Nymph Complaining of the Death of her Faun’ in

\(^{249}\) George Saintsbury, ‘Introduction’ to TS, (1912) p. xx
A Sentimental Journey, and more recently, Sterne’s involvement with Marvell’s ‘Upon Appleton House’ - a poem “nowhere alluded to in Tristram Shandy, and nowhere verbally echoed.” Sterne’s use of the poem goes beyond even complex allusion and into what he describes as “a classic instance of that particular mode of intertextuality to which Gerard Gennette applies the term ‘transposition’: a mode ... marked more by large analogy than local allusion.” Once such echoes are acknowledged, others also gain extra significance - Keymer notes the similarity between, “...Yorick’s adoption in Tristram Shandy of ‘a tone two parts jest and one part earnest’ and Andrew Marvell’s positioning of The Rehearsal Transpros’d ‘betwixt Jest and Earnest’" and after reading Keymer, it becomes difficult to think that Sterne could refer to a “coy mistress” without thinking of Marvell; and his frequent laments on ‘the swift and frightful passage of time’ bring to mind the same poem.

Indeed, it is not so much that Sterne reminds one of Marvell, but that Marvell’s work now frequently comes to put one in mind of Sterne. Tristram frequently adopts the narrative stance of Marvell’s ‘Last Instructions to a Painter: London, 4 September 1667’ although he is more often to be found aping those “antic masters” – satirised in the ‘Last Instructions’ - who “limn / the aly-roof with snuff of candle dim, / Sketching in shady smoke prodigious tools...”. An obscene play on “breeches” is perhaps too much of a commonplace, but one is reminded of Sterne yet again when one recollects that Elizabeth, like “Her Highness” has also discovered how “…heirs might be matured / In fewer months that mothers once endured.”; and again when one recalls that Tristram’s great-aunt Dinah had her affair with the coachman only a dozen years after “Castlemaine” became enamoured of her footman’s “brazen calves” and “brawny thighs.” The most interesting occasion however is when Marvell uses a classical allusion in the phrase - “to feign

252 Keymer, op. cit. (2000) p. 44.
253 ‘The Author’s Preface’ III. xx. p. 233
254 Andrew Marvell, ‘To His Coy Mistress’, The Complete Poems, ed. Donno, p. 50-1
255 Andrew Marvell. ‘Last Instructions to a Painter’, ibid. pp. 157-182
256 ibid. ll. 9-11, p. 157
257 Marvell, op. cit., l. 42, p. 158
258 ibid. ll. 49, 55-6, p. 158
259 ibid. l. 85, p. 159

73
the raging froth,” and we recall that shortly after Tristram’s encounter with
Maria, (a ‘sentimental’ icon, thoroughly debased by parodic reference to
Marvell’s nymph), he discusses potential similarities between his own work and that of others:
“...whatever resemblance it may bear to half the chapters which are written in the
world, or for aught I know may be now writing in it—that it was as casual as the
foam of Zeuxis his horse...” Sterne introduces this slightly garbled figure into his
work in 1767, exactly one hundreds years after the date commemorated by Marvel’s
poem, which makes more accurate use of the same figure Interestingly, Sterne now
also contrives a reference to two different artistic ‘illusionists’. The ‘raging froth’
was ‘feigned’ by Protogenes (fl. c. 329 B.C.) who threw his sponge at his canvas in
exasperation and, by chance, hit upon the effect that had eluded him. His story is
retold by Montaigne “as an example of the whims of Fortune,” and the detail of a
partridge in another of his paintings, ‘Sleeping Satyr’, is also said to have deceived
other birds. In this he does resemble Zeuxis (b. c. 445 B.C.), who lived at Ephesus,
and the innovative ‘realism’ of his painted grapes were also said to have fooled birds
into taking a peck — upon which he is supposed to have become dissatisfied because
the painted expression of the man in the picture failed keep them away — a
magnificent paradox that Sterne, one feels, would have savoured.

The text at this point, particularly when we remember Marvell, is alive with
the idea of the illusory and deceptive nature of ‘realism’, and stylistically we also
seem to come full circle, since, as James Grantham Turner has convincingly
demonstrated, in the ‘Last Instructions’, Marvell himself is also making ‘less
verifiable’ allusions to the sexually explicit engravings known as ‘Aretine’s postures’
and employing a technique of ‘transposition’ very similar to Sterne’s own.: To my knowledge Marvell does not directly mention the engraved
‘postures’... Nevertheless, this visually educated Italo-Machiavellian with a
taste for scandal and a penchant for intensely compressed allusion can hardly
have been innocent of what the term conjured up.

260 Marvell, op. cit., I. 22, p. 157
261 IX. xxv. p. 785
262 General information on Protogenes and Zeuxis is drawn from their entries in Lempriere’s Classical
Dictionary and Encyclopaedia Britannica; the story of Protogenes’ partridge however, is mentioned in
Harmondsworth’s Universal Encyclopaedia, (c. 1920), Vol. 8, s.v. ‘Protogenes’.
263 NOTES, p. 454, n. 755.9-10
264 James Grantham Turner, ‘The Libertine Abject’: The ‘Postures’ of Last Instructions to a Painter’,

74
Turner also notes that "...the *Last Instructions* in fact draws together a whole network of sexual-political tropes from the clandestine subculture of libels and whispers..."\(^{265}\) It is difficult to believe that Sterne was any less 'innocent' in his own use of 'intensely compressed allusion', and neither was his own abiding fascination for complex 'postures' limited to mere simple innuendo – Sterne's texts have Marvellian complexity, and furthermore, when the 'Marvellian' is combined with the 'Sentimental' as in the case of Maria, the result seems to verge upon the Sadeian.\(^{266}\)

Since Marvell's poetry was not widely known at the time that Sterne was writing, Keymer's description of the audience for whom this type of 'transposition' is intended is equally interesting: "We may safely assume that Sterne knows Marvell. So does a constituency of his readership; and Sterne knows they do."\(^{267}\) That 'constituency' comprised a group centring around Francis Blackbume and Thomas Hollis - known to Sterne - who were at work on a new edition of Marvell's works in York during the 1760s.

Hollis and Blackbume ...provide an intriguing set of connections between Sterne and some of the most controversial republican and heterodox circles of the 1760s. So far as Marvell is concerned, it is abundantly clear that within these circles 'the poet laureate of the dissenters' had some very dedicated admirers in the 1760a, and it is clear that Sterne had extensive contact with these admirers.\(^{268}\)

In addition to these two, Keymer mentions Wilkes, Pitt, Hall-Stevenson and Garrick among the limited circle who might also be privy to the "coterie interpretation" that this 'transposition' suggests.\(^{269}\) Hollis' edition of Marvell's work, when it finally came into print, was embossed with the (Wilkite) 'lyre of Liberty', while Blount's editor and fellow-deist Charles Gildon has been plausibly suggested as an earlier editor of Marvell's work, and as the author of the elegy 'On His Excellent Friend Mr. Marvell.'\(^{270}\) With this in mind, John Creaser's comments on Marvell's "radical ambiguities" and "tonal elusiveness" also draw attention to other ways in which Sterne's work also seems 'Marvellian': "Liberty is the very air that Marvel's poems

\(^{265}\) ibid. p. 227
\(^{266}\) Further to this, see the discussion of 'ill-applied passages of scripture' relating to the figure of Maria in my *Two Sentimental Novels* (pp. 106-110).
\(^{267}\) Keymer, op. cit. (2000) p. 44
\(^{268}\) Keymer, op. cit. (1993) p. 23
\(^{269}\) Keymer, op. cit. (2000) p. 44
breath. They hold authority in abeyance and take the active collaboration of reader with author to an extreme unusual among seventeenth-century writings.271

Let us return now to consider other ‘less-verifiable’ followings, particularly retaining the notion of Marvellian ‘transposition’. The Slawkenberg illustrator makes explicit the obscene joke ‘shadily sketched’ at the climax of the Trim’s encounter with the sausage-maker: ‘Trim’s had more gristle in it.’ Norman Simms, however, suggests that the bawdiness itself obscures another instance of ‘transposition’ - although he does not use the term. After describing ‘satura’: “the farcing of styles, themes, tones, images and genres” informing a collection of “Milesian (that is, bawdy, roguish and teasing) stories,”272 Simms suggests that the parallels with Apuleius’ *The Golden Ass* seem more than just coincidental. Simms brings Saintsbury forcibly to mind when he observes “...as this conjunction of food and sexual foreplay could derive from common folkloric and satirical traditions ... and may be found in authors such as Aristophanes [and] Rabelais. ...the similarities in the two scenes would be merely fortuitous - if there were not other, more incisive, thematic and imagistic connections between the two works of fiction”273. Another instance of Sterne’s ‘almost servile following’ of Rabelais seems to disguise a far more difficult textual engagement with yet another unorthodox writer, as is suggested by Simms’ description of the transformation of Lucius into an ass: “…an archaic and dangerously somatic foreshadowing of the Shandean hobby-horse.”274

Although Gennette’s term ‘transposition’ is obviously useful in these particular instances, I would nonetheless suggest the broader ‘metamorphosis’ to describe this characteristic of Sterne’s texts - whether in this complex mingling and shifting of Ovidian, Marvellian, Rabelaisian, Cervantic, and Apuleian metamorphosis; in the complex Shakespearean metamorphosis of Yorick described above, or merely in the plain bawdy of ‘Casanova’s overcoat’ - metamorphosis, in one form or another, is clearly a frequently used device in Sterne’s work.275

273 ibid. p. 113
274 ibid. p. 115
275 For other metamorphoses in ASJ, see my Two Sentimental Novels, pp 63-73; 94-99; 106-110.
Perhaps the most complex, certainly the most devious instance of this mechanism is discussed by Richard A. Davies, in his study of ‘the Fragment’ - the interpolated tale describing the progress of the word ‘Whiskers’ through the court of “the queen of Navarre”. It has long been assumed that Sterne was referring (with a wink and a nudge) to Margaret of Angouleme, the author of the anti-clerical, and mildly bawdy, Heptameron - but the names Sterne provides for the members of the court, as Davies has shown, indicate that the reference is in fact to another queen of Navarre, the libertine Margaret of Valois. What is more, for the great majority of Sterne’s earlier readers such a following was not simply ‘less verifiable’ but well-nigh unverifiable, for until the manuscript of Tallemant des Réaux’ Les Historiettes became available in print in 1834, no other description of Margaret’s court had been published. That Sterne himself should have access to such information is not surprising however, since he had numerous acquaintances among the French aristocracy and furthermore, from October 1763 to March 1764, as a resident of Montpellier, Sterne lived amid the “numerous chateaux in Languedoc” where Margaret held her Court. While in Paris, on the other hand, one of Sterne’s more flamboyant public displays was to exhort a crowd to kneel and pray before the statue of Margaret’s husband, the libertine Henry of Navarre, a popular hero in France and the man who reputedly converted to Catholicism (and gained the throne) with the words ‘Paris is worth a Mass’. Privately, at this time, Sterne was writing to Garrick on the benefits of “shandeism” as a “fence...against infirmities.”

Certainly, naming the maids at the court of Valois is a ‘coterie’ reference, and only a very select few of his readers could possibly be expected to make such an identification, which, as Davies’ study further suggests, is no doubt exactly as Sterne intended:

The ‘Fragment’ is set in a court that was notorious for its libertine ways and attributes a fascination for ‘whiskers’ to a queen who had an actual fetish for hair which Sterne may or may not have known. No wonder Tristram regards The ‘Fragment’ as a ‘dangerous chapter’. ‘Whiskers’ were ambiguous.

---

276 Richard A. Davies, ‘The Fragment’ in Tristram Shandy. V. i.’, English Studies 57 (1976); p. 58
277 Peter Wagner notes: “Tallemant’s Les Historiettes... was not published until 1834/5, but its manuscript version was well known and read.” Wagner, Eros Revived, p. 89
278 Cash LY, p. 166, see pp.166-176
279 Davies, op cit
280 Cash LY, p. 146; Ross, Laurence Sterne: A Life, p. 282-3
281 LETTERS, Letter 87, (Paris, April 1762) p. 163
282 V. i. p.409
enough in themselves: “In many places the punishment of Fornication was to have the beard cut off, as a mark of highest Infamy”. Like so much of *Tristram Shandy*, the ‘Fragment’ has its basis in reality, though through an unaccountable slip by one editor, readers have not been guided to the appropriate sources of Sterne’s comedy at this point in his work.\(^{283}\)

As if to direct the reader to another ‘appropriate sources of Sterne’s comedy’ in this ‘dangerous chapter’, the quotation regarding ‘the punishment of Fornication’ is taken from Charles Blount’s *Philostratus concerning the Life of Apollonius Tyaneus*, and Davies’ use of such a text to add commentary to a discussion of Sterne and ‘whiskers’ surely argues that, like Wilbur Cross, Davies assumes that ‘every reader knows’ this is the appropriate source. Richard A. Davies is listed among the editors of the Florida *Notes*, which makes the omission of any reference to Blount within them surprising, but more surprising still, New’s own discussion of the episode entirely omits reference to Davies, or the context he established. Sterne returns repeatedly to ‘beards’ and ‘whiskers’ and, in France, Tristram traveled “under a vow not to shave my beard till I got to Paris.” An interesting gloss is provided by Edward Gibbon who, while writing on ‘The Progress of Superstition’, and among a number of other activities that aroused the “pious indignation” of the early church fathers, lists “the shaving of the beard, which according to the expression of Tertullian, is a lie against our own faces, and an impious attempt to improve the works of the Creator.”\(^{284}\) In just such a way, no doubt, Sterne would not have felt free to ‘shave his own beard’ – and reveal his anti-Christian beliefs – until he had reached the haven of Paris, and the safety of the *salons* of the *philosophes*.

While Cross was at least amenable to the idea of Blount having some influence upon the text, New’s editorial reluctance to consider ‘the French imitators of Rabelais’ is even more pronounced when it comes to the English deists, particularly Blount, who he never mentions. On one occasion New refers the reader to Michael V. DePorte’s discussion of Sterne and Swift, and he reproduces a lengthy extract from *A Tale of a Tub*, in order to ‘elucidate’ the text:

```
AFTER so wide a compass as I have wandred, I do now gladly overtake and close in with my Subject, and shall henceforth hold on with it an even Pace to the End of my Journey, except some beautiful Prospect appears within sight of my Way, whereof, tho’ at present I have neither Warning nor Expectation,
```

\(^{283}\) Richard A. Davies, ‘The Fragment’ in *Tristram Shandy. V. i.*, *English Studies* 57 (1976); p. 58
yet upon such an Accident, come when it will, I shall beg my Readers Favour and Company, allowing me to conduct him thro’ it along with my self. For in Writing, it is as in Travelling: If a Man is in haste to be at home ... I advise him clearly to make the straitest and the commonest Road, be it ever so dirty...

ON the other side, when a Traveller and his Horse are in Heart and Plight, when his Purse is full, and the Day before him; he takes the Road only where it is clean and convenient; entertains hid Company there as agreeably as he can; but upon the first Occasion, carries them along with him to every delightful Scene in View, whether of Art, of Nature, or of both; and if they chance to refuse out of Stupidity or Weariness; let them jog on by themselves an be d—n’d...285

One might agree that Sterne often seems to follow ‘the manner of Swift’, and, since he refers to A Tale of a Tub by name, it does not seem inappropriate to draw the reader’s attention to the similarity. This passage strongly evokes Yorick - who makes the analogous activity of writing and travelling central to A Sentimental Journey - just as it is reminiscent of Tristram’s use of the same image:286

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,—straight forward ... without ever turning his head aside to the right hand or to the left,—he might... [foretell] ...his journey’s end;—but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible; For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along, which he can no ways avoid. He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly ...287

Clearly, there are similarities, but there is little to suggest that the similarities are particularly relevant, as New concedes: “DePorte ultimately argues, however, that Sterne and Swift have widely differing attitudes.”

On the other hand, in Blount’s reflections on his own “rambling” style, from his preface to Anima Mundi, one can clearly discern many characteristics closely associated with both Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, and I would argue that Sterne is echoing Blount far more closely than he follows Swift:

...And for my own part, when I have my Pen in my Hand, and Subject in my Head, I look upon myself as mounted my Horse to ride a Journey, wherein altho’ I design to reach such a Town by Night, yet will I not deny myself the satisfaction of going a Mile or two out of the way, to gratifie my Senses with some new and diverting Prospect. He that always keeps at Home, and never

285 NOTES, p. 80-81
286 cf. TS, VII xlii-xlili; ASJ p. 119.
287 I. xiv, p. 41

79
goes so far as to the end of his own Parish, only once a Year in Procession, may be called a Good Husband, but God deliver me from such a Companion. I confess I cannot but both love Men and Books of a Rambling Fancy, for even their very Extravagances are diverting: Now he that is of this Humour, will be sure to give me his Voice. However, in this I have honour to imitate the great Montaigne, whose Umbrage is sufficient to protect me against anyone Age of Criticks.  

Had this passage been written after the 1760s, one would hardly have doubted Sterne’s influence. The similarities between these ‘Hobby-horsical’ writers are distinct and numerous - in the irregular motions of their ‘vehicles’ and their shared aversion to those who, like Mundungus, “...travell’d straight on, looking neither to his right hand or his left lest Love or Pity should seduce him out of his road”; in their admiration of Montaigne, and their shared indifference to “the cant of criticism”; and in their desire to ‘gratifie’ their senses, their present delight in the journey and the diminished importance of their final destinations. Blount’s narrative is distinctly ‘Shandean.’ Although necessarily the ‘less verifiable’ of the two in view of the fact that Tristram urges A Tale of a Tub upon the reader, nevertheless in many ways Blount seems to be the closer of the two possible ‘followings’.

Despite the adverse criticism that greeted A Tale of A Tub, Swift, like Montaigne, became an author ‘fit for the parlour window’ in a way that Blount never did. Montaigne however also has a position in the history of ‘free-thought’ and the general influence of Montaigne was evident in first two volumes of Tristram Shandy to one, at least, of Sterne’s earliest readers, as can be surmised from the reply Sterne wrote to his letter in September 1760: “…[as] “for my conning Montaigne as much as my pray’r book”—there you are right again,—but mark …I have not said I admire him as much” – and nor does he deny it. From this reply, it seems safe to surmise that the writer had noted Montaigne’s influence spreading beyond the one occasion that he is mentioned by name in those volumes, when Tristram confidently predicts that his book will be, “…no less read than the Pilgrim’s Progress itself—and, in the end, prove the very thing which Montaigne dreaded his essays should turn out, that

---

289 ASJ, ‘In the Street. Calais’, p.119 cf. Smelfungus, who traveled, but would not “cultivate the fruits” of his journey, ibid. p. 115
290 TS. III. xii. p. 214
...the Jesuit François Garasse called the book a breviary for freethinkers and its author a secret atheist, whereas the bishop of Boulogne, Claude Dormy, and other prominent churchmen defended Charron. He, like Montaigne, has been the subject of continuing debate over his intentions. Difficulty also remains in determining Charron’s actual views, for, although his *Discours chrestiens* (1600), a collection of 16 discourses on various aspects of Christian life, and his own religious life indicate that his Christianity was sincere, portions of *De la sagesse* suggest that it was not.

This entry from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes a response Charron’s work that is as widely divided as the responses we have noted to Sterne’s work, and one must certainly feel that Sterne’s overt and pointed references to Montaigne suggest that he was studious to conceal his debt to the very text singled out for its ‘secret atheism’. Indeed, the ‘uncertainty’ surrounding Charron’s ‘actual views’ is a ready example of the characteristic ‘elusiveness’ of deism described by Robert E. Sullivan, and a very similar elusiveness, it has long been noted, is strongly characteristic of Sterne.

Sullivan also ventures the broad distinction between “dissembling deists” and “candid deists”, and, although the categories are oversimplified, it is clear at once that Sterne must be placed among the ‘dissemblers’. Tristram’s “Saint Paraleipomenon” – the saint of ‘things omitted’ - is an active influence upon Sterne’s work and a wryly ironic figure to invoke, being the one saint to whom, one might say, the deists regularly did honour. In 1702, the Unitarian Thomas Emlyn was arrested (and later served two years in prison) because “an influential member of his church noticed that he never referred to the doctrine of the Trinity or to Christ as God.”

What is not stated is often more important that what is. Martin’s tale is

---

292 I. iv, p. 5
293 see Francoise Pellan, ‘Laurence Sterne’s Indebtedness to Charron’, *MLR* 67 (1972) pp. 752-755
294 s.v. ‘Charron’.
296 ibid. p. 208
omitted from *A Tale of a Tub* – along with any clear notion of the Anglican orthodoxy that should moderate between Peter’s Catholicism and Jack’s Calvinism – which is no doubt among the reasons why, when discussing alignments, writers frequently place “the Swift of *A Tale of a Tub*” among the deists. Like Martin, as we will see, Yorick is also significantly absent from the latter stages of *Tristram Shandy*. Furthermore, Paraleipomenon is the name given in the Vulgate Bible to the Books of Chronicles in the Authorized Version. These re-tell the history in the Books of Samuel and Kings, leaving out the discreditable bits (concerning David’s adultery) and in detail contradict the earlier text. Such tampering with Holy Writ was seized upon by deists (and others) to discredit priests and ‘priestcraft’ as the corrupters of the ‘natural’ religion of the primitive church. For such reasons, Paraleipomenon is a most unorthodox saint, and a particularly interesting and recurrent device in Sterne’s writings.

Let us now return briefly to the figure of Charron. New suggests that Sterne might also have had his work in mind when he wrote his first chapter, and if this is indeed the case, the appearance of Charron in the first and last chapters of the text we know gives added weight to the argument set out by Wayne C. Booth, that, despite appearances to the contrary, “with his ninth volume, [Sterne] completed the book as he had originally conceived it.” In such a case, Charron becomes a very significant figure indeed, and, one must add, an unconventional ecclesiastical ‘spirit’ to be hovering over both the ‘genesis’ and the final ‘revelation’ of *Tristram Shandy*. In order to bring this section to a conclusion however, I will now describe another example of Sterne’s ‘elusiveness’ that is also to be found in the first chapter of

---

298 see, e.g. Klein (1994) p. 157. The idea is not recent. William Wotton thought *A Tale of a Tub* “…one of the profanest banters upon the religion of Jesus Christ … that ever yet appeared…” and one which showed the teller’s “contemptible opinion of everything which is called Christianity.” Wotton was also shocked that Swift (like Sterne) should compare a *Moutebank’s-Stage* with a *Pulpit.* See Wotton’s ‘A Defence of the Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning … with observations upon The Tale of a Tub.’ (1705) in *A Tale of a Tub and Other Works*, eds. Ross and Wooley (1986) Appendix A (ix), pp. 185-191


300 NOTES, I. l. ff.; 806. l. ff.

301 Wayne Booth, ‘Did Sterne complete *Tristram Shandy*?’ (ed. Anderson, 1980) p. 534. see also NOTES, pp. 39-40, 549-50. Booth’s argument is strong, and the passages from Charron suggest a ‘frame’ around Tristram’s narrative, as do the two ‘conversations’ I discuss elsewhere. However, ASJ could easily pass for the tenth volume of TS, and might easily be seen as a ‘lateral extension’ rather than a continuation of the tale. No similar signs of closure are evident in ASJ which, I believe, is certainly incomplete. The ‘Shandy project’, however, is not really available to any form of closure.
*Tristram Shandy*, and that seems to evoke yet another significant figure from the history of ‘free-thought’.

The obvious symbolic significance of Tristram’s birthday being the fifth of November is so obvious that it tends to overshadow all else, especially any significance that might be attached to the night on which *Tristram Shandy* begins: “I was begot in the night, betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the Year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen.”302 The conversation we witness in the first chapter certainly takes place on the Sunday evening - we can be sure of this because we later meet Walter and Elizabeth again on that same day during the ‘beds of justice’ held regularly on the first Sunday of every month.303 However, Tristram’s unusual manner of dating the event ‘betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month’ – his sole example of dating in this manner – is certainly intriguing, and made more so by the difficulty of ascertaining the actual date. This is the first chronological mystery we encounter in *Tristram Shandy* and this strongly suggests that more might be intended than meets the eye.

It is interesting, at this point, to note that although chronology is acknowledged to be important, or even, as I will argue, central to the ordering of meaning in *Tristram Shandy*, readers have not been well served by Sterne’s editors on this point. I have been able to locate only one critic, John A. Hay304, who correctly identifies the Sunday in question as March the 2nd, but he draws no attention to this fact and adds no comment. Oddly, Peter Nockolds states, “…[Tristram] was conceived at around midnight between Sunday the 2nd and Monday the 3rd of February, 1718,”305 by counting back ‘one kalendar month’ from a date that he has obviously identified but does not actually mention. Other than this, Ian Watt is clearly mistaken in his ‘Historical and Fictional Chronology’ where he states, “Night of March 1 / 2, Tristram Begotten.”306 Elizabeth Davidson’s ‘Integrated Chronology’ simply gives March 1718, and nor, it must be said, does this study bring much else that is new to the discussion, despite its rather grandiose

---

302 I. iv. p. 6
303 i.e. “the very night in which I was begot.” I. xvii. p. 49
306 TS, ed. Watt, (1965)
Theodore Baird’s ‘Time-scheme’ (1936) gives no date at all, and nor does Baird mention ‘the nine months problem’ that interested Nockold, and that we will encounter later in this study. While there is no doubt that Baird’s work is a landmark in Sterne studies, he focuses his attention almost exclusively upon the military history that brings chronological coherence to the tale of Toby’s campaigns, and fails to notice that there are many other chronological devices at work in Sterne’s text. Obviously, Baird can not be faulted for this, but one could fault Elizabeth Kraft’s ‘Chronology’ for the singularly unhelpful “night of the first Sunday and the first Monday in March”, while New, in two editions, simply ignores the date.

Generally then, curious readers - who may not have Hay’s study to hand, and who have simply been led back to square one by successive editors - are now confronted with a problem, for the exact dates of ‘the first Sunday and the first Monday in March’ of 1718 are not easily checked. Even if one lived in Sterne’s time, to locate the precise dates one must locate a long obsolete calendar, or undertake tedious calculations made more formidable by the fact that the date is given “to the æra fixed on” which is to say ‘old style’, reckoned according to the Julian calendar, officially obsolete after 1752, and a notorious source of confusion then and ever since. The calendar reformation itself, and the sudden disappearance of eleven days in September 1752 is a quintessentially Sternean event, like the “chasm of ten pages” in Volume IV, but Tristram makes no other reference to it despite writing from one side of the ‘chasm’ about events on the other. Without a 1718 calendar, or arithmetical dexterity, one could grapple with the liturgical calendar of the Book of Common Prayer or some other perpetual calendar; consult old correspondence, either in manuscript or published collections; or, like Tristram, consult old family documents. None of these options are particularly simple, and are clearly not the sort of thing one generally does when relaxing with a novel.

309 The ‘old style’ Julian calendar (from the time of Julius Caesar) was revised by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582. Gregory suppressed 10 days by calling October 5th, 1582, October 15th. The new style was slowly adopted throughout Europe over the years, but not introduced into England until 1752, when eleven days were eliminated between Sept. 2 and Sept. 14. See Robert Poole, *Time’s Alteration*, (London 1998)
Having gone through this elaborate procedure, it is rather disappointing to find that there is no particularly obvious significance attached to the second of March, and what is more, no obscure or ingenious significance either. One can understand why Hay should pass over the date in silence, and indeed one might feel that, like Elizabeth, one has been asking a 'silly question'. But this is because we focus all of our attention upon the single moment of the conversation in chapter one, instead of noting the dual signification of Tristram’s actual phrase. There are in fact a group of characteristics assembled here that we will encounter again: the devious use of chronological detail, the use of dual signification, and signs of deliberate obfuscation or studied obscurity. All of these will become important themes in this study and frequently, as on this occasion, when pursued they tend to lead one in unexpected and almost inevitably unorthodox directions. In this case, if we assume that no chronological detail in Sterne’s work can be ignored, then the seemingly superfluous date of ‘the first Monday’ of March, 1718 might well be the more interesting of the two – and so it is. The third of March is the anniversary of the birth of Herbert of Cherbury (b. March 3, 1583), known as the father of English deism, and the “pioneer” whose work marked a turning point in the history of ‘free-thought’ - for with Herbert’s Religio Laici, “...the negative generalities of Montaigne here pass into a positive anti-Christian argument.”\footnote{J. M. Robertson, \textit{Short History of Freethought}, II, p. 70-71} This I take to be the starting point of not only \textit{Tristram Shandy}, but of Sterne’s entire life and works.
Section 2

Texts
Later in this study I will look closely at *Tristram Shandy*, taking full cognizance of the sort of contexts outlined above, in order to demonstrate that much of the critical discussion of Sterne’s work (upon which we found many of our ideas about Sterne himself) has been based upon a very imperfect understanding of those works. This has come about partly as a result of the sly and baffling complexity of Sterne’s work, but also, in part at least, as a result of critical reluctance to consider ‘unorthodox’ sources. Before coming to consider *Tristram Shandy* however, I will briefly review some of Sterne’s lesser-known writings which are seldom discussed.

i) *The Unknown World*

Elizabeth Kraft’s response to Sterne’s early poem, *The Unknown World*, seems typical the curt and dismissive response of criticism in general: “To speak honestly, it is a poem of little merit or interest other than its authorship.” Kraft’s dissatisfaction with the text stems from her inability to reconcile the poem with her conception of its author. *Tristram Shandy*, she asserts, is “a narrative written by an eighteenth century clergyman … written within the conceptual framework … of

---

Anglican orthodoxy and obviously this is the figure she also has in mind when considering his poem. Similarly, Ian Campbell Ross recently ventured a few lines of commentary when he reprinted a version of Sterne’s but he also finds the poem difficult to reconcile with his idea of ‘Sterne the Christian moralist’:

Sterne’s poem seems barely convinced by its own fideistic argument. It is not that the author does not try, even if lines such as:

Well, let my sovereign, if he please,
Lock up his marvellous decrees;
Why sh’d I wish him to reveal
W’t he thinks proper to conceal?

which represent the Heavenly King as arbitrary monarch, were unlikely to hold unqualified appeal for a mid-eighteenth-century Whig. It is a rationalist, questioning voice which breaks in at the outset of the final quatrain, to ask in tones which do for once speak of personal unease: ‘But oh! what worlds shall I survey / The moment that I leave this clay?’ In the final couplet the emphasis on faith returns, but weakly, and it is hard to believe that any wavering believer reading ‘The Unknown World’ in 1743 is likely to have found much comfort in it. [Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life*, (2001) pp. 110-112.]

Ross is being kind to Sterne. It is difficult to find any ‘emphasis on faith’ in the poem at all, since the poet’s main problem is that stated at the outset: “God has locked up the mystic page, / And curtain’d darkness round the stage!” So much is ‘unknown’ about such ineffable concepts as ‘God’, ‘Soul’, ‘Heaven’ and the kingdom of God itself - the ‘Unknown World’ of the poem’s title - that the poet can only represent them symbolically, accompanied by the lament, “Whether we will or no, we must / Take the succeeding world on trust.” It is surprising that these lines have received such little attention since “Trust!” is seen to be a wholly unreliable basis of belief in Yorick’s sermon, and Tristram’s own opinion of the sufficiency of trust, in his ‘Author’s Preface’, is sceptical indeed:

...it is no more, my dear Sirs, that a report, and which like twenty others taken up every day upon trust, I maintain to be a vile and a malicious report into the bargain.315

Whatever ‘emphasis on faith’ the poem displays, it only occurs late in the poem, almost an afterthought, and it is accommodated with no more than a careless shrug of

314 ibid. p. 49
acceptance. At best is might be possible to suggest, as Cash does, that "...it does not question the existence of an afterlife [and] it concludes on a pious note of acceptance," but it is equally possible to suggest that saying 'no tongue can tell' the meaning of heaven and hell is an attack on 'priest-craft' and a specific denial of Christ. The poem’s creed is encapsulated with a brevity that eluded even Herbert of Cherbury, ‘the father of English deism’ - "It is enough yt I believe / Heaven's brightn I can conceive.” If there had been any emphasis on faith in the poem, this line might indeed have suggested the ‘fideistic skepticism’ that has often been urged upon Sterne - the ‘scepticism of scepticism’ that reinforces faith rather than destroying it - but such arguments can have little to do with The Unknown World.

ii) ‘Fragment Inedit’

The so-called ‘Fragment Inedit’ or ‘Meditation on a Plum Tree’ is certainly the least discussed, and the least known of all of Sterne’s works. A strictly formal composition which is notably free of the ‘conversational’ irregularities of his letters, sermons and other fictions, it has never been reprinted in full since Paul Stapfer first published it in Paris, in 1870. This is a surprising neglect of an interesting and unusual piece of writing.

The ‘Fragment’ also considers ‘unknown worlds’ – those of the new cosmology, specifically developing, the narrator tells us, “a hint I had read in Fontenelle,” - whose Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds (1686), was itself a work which, although fairly innocuous, “...cannot but have undermined dogmatic faith in some direction.” Sterne’s variation upon the theme is no mere copy however, and although Fontenelle is invoked, the ‘Fragment’ itself ‘hints’ much more towards the belligerent spirit of Giordano Bruno, who made similar

315 TS, III. xx. ‘The Author’s Preface’, p.235
316 Cash, EMY, p. 152
320 ‘Fragment Inédit’, ed. Stapfer, p. xlv
321 J. M. Robertson, Short History of Freethought, (1915) II, p. 143

89
speculations as early as 1584. Bruno was eventually burned at the stake for his ideas, many of which "...were still heretical in the early eighteenth century, and some like the plurality of worlds were endlessly debated. Bruno had written all those years before of the need to ‘convince our minds of the infinite universe’... [and] ‘Dissolve the notion that our earth is unique and central to the whole.’" — an extremist position, and a damaging refutation of the ‘great chain of being’.

After an evening in his orchard, the narrator of the ‘Fragment’ retires to bed and, in a ‘dream vision’, he is reborn as a microscopic infant upon the surface of a plum. Here he is subject to the relative duration of time that he had earlier contemplated, in which “an hour or a minute of that duration may appear as long as 4 score and 10 years to us.” Using such a relative scale, the narrator describes the history of the plum during the remaining hours until dawn.

After growing to manhood on the plum, the narrator’s first act is to reject the ‘natural philosophy’ of the world he now inhabits, a rejection which is the essence of earthly scepticism:

After having made escape from the follies of youth, I betook myself to the study of natural philosophy. The philosophy there profess’d was reckon’d the most excellent in yᵉ world and was said to have receiv’d its utmost perfection. After long and tedious study, I found that it was little else than a heap of unintelligible jargon...

From that point onward, instead of seeking after spiritual faith, the narrator becomes an heroic freethinker, both Copernicus and Bruno combined in one figure, and a champion of scientific reason in the search for truth. Dissatisfied with the ‘flat earth’ (or ‘flat plum’) theory currently prevailing in his part of the plum, he first travels to “...a foreign country renown’d for wisdom; but found there instead of knowledge only a vain affectation of mystery in order to gain yᵉ veneration of yᵉ vulgar, and thereby serve yᵉ ends of government,” and one can instantly recognize in this the classic sceptical definition of earthly religion. His long travels thereafter, “through infinite dangers and difficulties” echo Bruno’s “fourteen years of wandering”

---

323 see also J. M. Robertson, op. cit. pp. 43-51
324 ‘Fragment Inédit’, ed. Stapfer, p. xxvi
325 ibid. p. xxx. Also quoted by Fitzgerald, op. cit. p. 38-9 n.
326 ibid. p. xxxii.
327 ibid.
328 J. M. Robertson, op. cit. p. 45. (see pp. 43-5)
throughout Europe trying to stay ahead of the Inquisition (a ‘flight from Death’ that Bruno was eventually to lose), while his astronomical observations, culminating with his return to his place of origin to find “ye heavenly bodys all in the same position, as I had left them” - convince him of the truth of his heretical ideas: “I no longer doubted that the world was globular. I openly declar’e my opinion, and ye grounds of it. But it being thought contrary to the doctrines of a religion wch then prevail’d, I narrowly escap’d being burnt for a Heretik.” Religion is now clearly portrayed as the enemy of truth and scientific reason.

At this point, Isaac Kramnick’s remarks on the notion of ‘enlightenment’ serve to illustrate the centrality of this stance to the whole enlightenment project:

Central to the Enlightenment agenda was the assault on religious superstition and its replacement by a rational religion in which God became no more than the supreme intelligence or craftsman who had set the machine that was the world to run according to its own natural and scientifically predictable laws. This deism... was inherently anticlerical and deeply suspicious of religious fanaticism and persecution.

In his interim existence on the plum, the narrator retains the relative time of his sleeping persona, and is therefore “exempt from ye Fate of the other inhabitants of that world, whose life was limited to a term,” and so, rather than being burned for his heresies, he is able to retire to a solitude of “3 or 4 ages” in which he learns to distinguish between the motion of “ye great light” the moon, and the stasis of the other ‘heavenly bodys’ – the actual stars, and the plums, called “second stars”, which hang nearby in the nocturnal orchard. From the ‘natural and scientifically predictable laws’ of the motion of the moon, the narrator is eventually able to become a seer and a prophet: “I even foresaw, wth great grief, ye time when ye great light shoud’ (as I had observed several stars had done), sink under the dark veil, and leave us in eternal night.”

After making these observations in his several ages of solitude, and returning at last to society, the narrator now discovers an ‘age of enlightenment’, and is encouraged to find that “free-thinking was now ye fashion, as much as religion had

---

329 ‘Fragment Inédit’, p. xxxiv.
330 ibid.
332 ibid.
333 ‘Fragment Inédit’ p. xxxiv.
been formerly."\textsuperscript{334} Again he reveals his knowledge of the truth: "...that ye heavens had a motion, [and] that this our world was a globe." Such ideas, however, still prove too radical for the prevailing orthodoxy but instead of the physical oppression he faced from ‘Religion’ his ideas are met (suitably enough for such an age) with universal derision: "I found I was like to be persecuted as much now with ye Raillerie of free-thinkers, as before by ye fury of bigots. So true it is that superstition and Infidelity are both founded in ye same narrow way of thinking."\textsuperscript{335}

The narrator’s ideas, although true, are extremely radical, and it is interesting to note that after an age of ‘Religion’ followed by an age of erroneous ‘free-thinking’, there should next come an age of barbarism, which “defac’d all footsteps of learning.”\textsuperscript{336} The narrator is once again forced to flee to another country where he continues to develop his own ideas to the highest degree of unorthodoxy until, eventually, a “vast streak of light” signals the approaching earthly dawn, and the narrator sees signs in this that confirm “some old broken Remains of tradition I had met with” - the fables that described the end of the preceding earthly day. “They imported that there had formerly been a golden age, when ye heavens and earth were deck’d with a sevenfold lustre. Mountains sweat w’h honey, and Rivers flow’d with wine, but that the golden god who then govern’d ye world, pursu’d by ye silver goddess his daughter, had plung’d, and hid himself in ye vast abyss.”\textsuperscript{337} The narrator begins to imagine from this the return of the ‘golden age’ – the coming day - but this idea is also meets with derision, and rightly so perhaps, since the narrator himself, although undoubtedly ‘right’, is left clinging to no more than the ‘broken Remains’ of ancient fables, and having reached the limit of his capacity to reason any further, he can only speculate on an unknowable future, or ruminate on the meaning of ancient, broken myths.

Despite his careful observations and faultless reasoning - and a life extended through many life-times - one is always aware that the diminutive narrator must remain forever unaware of the planetary system that lies beyond the ‘great light’ of the moon, and although he describes actual ‘truths’, they are but partial truths, and pitifully limited. Even while gazing at the universe, he remains wholly ignorant of the tree upon which his ‘planet’ grows, and the earth itself is known only as the “dark

\textsuperscript{334} ibid. p. xxxvi.
\textsuperscript{335} ibid.
\textsuperscript{336} ibid. p. xxxviii.
veil” or the “huge dusky veil,” beyond which lies ‘yᵉ vast abyss’ of which nothing is known. The words of Tristram seem to hover about this phrase:

...you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motley emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unravell (sic) the many opinions, transactions, and truths which still lie mysteriously hid under the dark veil of the black one.338

The marbled page, which these words introduce, is colourful, dynamic, vital, fluid, and, at least in the original editions, each one is unique; the marbled page represents life, and like Tristram’s world, it is a muddle, and a treacherous muddle at that. Yorick’s black page is its inversion, it is the absence of all of these things, it is nothingness, and it signifies death; and all the sages and theologians of the ages, like the microscopic man on the plum, have never been able to peer an inch beyond its unfathomable ‘dark veil’. This might well be read as the central motif Tristram Shandy.

As in small things, so in great – and having come to understand the deepest mysteries of his former state, once back in his orchard the narrator need only turn his own eye to the cosmos, and the cycles of “the great platonic year”339 to be confronted once again with the same unending mystery, and he immediately becomes a mere mortal, a fly-speck, foolishly seeking to understand the workings of a mechanism that lies far beyond his powers of comprehension. Just as his miniature self could have no conception of the solar system that regulates the motion of the moon; nor even understand the “many various glimmerings... like our northern lights”, which turn out to be no more mysterious than “Yᵉ playing of yᵉ leaves in yᵉ moon-beams,”340 far from being contrasted with the inhabitants of the plum, mankind exists in exact parallel. From this perspective, “situate on a kind of isthmus, wᵉch separates two Infinitys”,341 mankind looks in vain for traces of an ineffable and unimaginable ‘god’ who might equally well turn out, in the grand scheme of things, to be a mere gardener and no more of a god than you or I. Tristram puts the matter most succinctly: “———Endless is the search for Truth”342, and ‘The Unknown World’ stresses the same point: “God has locked up yᵉ mystic Page / And curtain’d

337 ibid. p. xl.
338 III. xxxvi. 268
339 ibid. p. xxviii
340 ibid. pp. xxx; xlvii. n. (C)
341 ibid. p. xx
darkness round ye stage!" To try to peer beyond the curtain is futile, and religious belief, in these circumstances, can quite well be encapsulated in the single statement, 'It is enough y I believe / Heaven's bright y I can conceive.' In the face of the incomprehensible, reason can at best gather the 'Broken remains' of truth - legends and fables - while organized religion can never be anything more than 'priest-craft' - 'a vain affectation of mystery in order to gain y vulgar, and thereby serve y ends of government'. This is deism at its furthest extreme, where it differs little from outright atheism, and if the narrator of the dream-vision 'hints' at Copernicus and Bruno, back in his orchard he draws closer to D'Holbach, whose philosophy made him an outright enemy to religion: "Why, O theologians! do you presume to rummage in the impenetrable mysteries of a first being, whom you call inconceivable to the human mind?"343

It is difficult to find the slightest trace of sincere Christianity in the entire 'Fragment Inédit'. No serpents lurk among the fruit-trees in the orchard, and the 'fall', when it comes in an early morning breeze, is as natural as the seasons; indeed, even at the final crisis, when "all was consternation, horror, and amaze; no less was expected than an universal wreck of nature..."344 the narrator does not pray for deliverance or prepare himself for the afterlife, but simply continues to chart the progress of the 'second stars' as they are hurled into the abyss. More tellingly, however, he does so with an eye that notices that the fall of fruit in an orchard is governed, very distinctly, by the law of gravity: "I perceiv'ed their swiftness continually increased."345 Having lived the life of the perfect scientific rationalist, at the very end the narrator reveals himself to be 'a second Newton'.

Having read the 'Fragment Inédit', one can only say that, at best, New's discussion of it is remarkable for its lack of insight:

Sterne converted the findings of science into moral and theological concepts, and for him the microscopic and telescopic wonders which he discusses in the 'Fragment Inédit' are a reminder of the fragility and fugacity of all life, evidence of the power of God and the weakness of man.346

---

342 II. iii. 103
343 'No need of theology... only of reason' from D'Holbach's Common Sense (1772), in The Portable Enlightenment Reader, ed. Kramnick, p. 140
344 'Fragment Inédit', p. xliii
345 ibid. p. xliii.
New can only arrive at this conclusion by ignoring virtually the whole of the ‘Fragment’ and merely asserting that its subject is “the mutability of nature”\(^{347}\), a reading he ingeniously derives from the line ‘Plums fall, and Planets shall Perish.’ New totally ignores all the ‘moral and theological concepts’ raised by the ‘Fragment’ itself, and instead, he uses Henry Baker’s *The Telescope Made Easy* and some reference to Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, to promote nothing more that a general context. New’s notes on Baker are useful, but his argument about the ‘Fragment Inédit’ is based solely upon broad generalizations and his conclusion is wholly unconvincing. Once again, in view of the material he chooses to ignore, one might feel that this is a willful misreading of the text, although it is perhaps only a case of New’s inability to find anything in Sterne’s texts other than the ‘Anglican orthodoxy’ he is already expecting to find. The *Florida Notes* contains only one reference to the ‘Fragment Inédit’, a reference that refers the reader to New’s own work with Henry Baker and Swift.\(^{348}\) The note itself is concerned with Sterne’s conception of time and, like the longer study, refers the reader to Addison, Swift, Locke and Henry Baker, rather than to a polished piece of Sterne’s own work. The ‘Fragment’ seems to have been included in the Sterne canon only to be strangely excluded.

Since this work is so seldom discussed, one further note is useful. When the sleeper awoke and returned to his orchard again, to the inhabitants of the plum he had becomes god-like, with the power to crush a world between his fingers, and with the knowledge of the deepest mysteries that lie beyond the ‘dark veil’ and the ‘great abyss’ of his former state. Indeed, to the inhabitants of the plum, he is a god – a being beyond the limits of their understanding, whose ‘providence’ tends the tree that sustains them but which they can not imagine; a being, furthermore, who occupies the omniscient, but utterly disinterested position of the deists’ god, to whom the fall of planets is as equally significant as the fall of plums, or, for that matter, as the fall of man.

*Plums* fall, and *Planets* shall Perish. ... “And now a Bubble burst, and now a world.” The time will come when ye\(^{e}\) powers of heaven shall be shaken, and ye\(^e\) stars shall fall like ye\(^e\) fruit of a tree, when it is shaken by a mighty wind!\(^{349}\)

\(^{347}\) ibid. p. 593  
\(^{348}\) NOTES, p. 231  
\(^{349}\) ‘Fragment Inédit’, p. xlvi. Also quoted by Cash, *EMY*, p. 258, who describes the piece as ‘...a neo-classical satire on human pride, but it lacks the bitterness of Swift.’ (p. 259)
Readers who have been appalled by Sterne’s ‘ill-applied passages of scripture’ in his other works, would no doubt be equally appalled to find that Sterne concludes his meditation by acknowledging the quotation from Pope’s ‘Essay on Man’ with conventional marks, while silently embroidering the passage with the words of Christ: “…and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.” Thus, by reproducing Christ’s words as his own, the final words of the ‘Fragment Inédit’ set the piece easily within the traditions of rationalism – most willing to identify Christ as a persecuted ‘freethinker’, but nevertheless denying his divinity. But in giving the ‘authorized’ words of Pope in this way, and promoting them above the words of Christ, Sterne identifies the piece as an impious joke, in which Christ’s words are reduced to mere commonplace ideas, and Christ himself to no more than a microscopic philosopher gazing, no less blindly, into the abyss.

iii) An Impromptu

Finally, and rather more briefly, An Impromptu, printed by Lydia Sterne shortly after her father’s death, provides a useful introduction to an aspect of Sterne’s that I have termed ‘metamorphic’ writing, a technique he employs frequently throughout Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey. It also reveals a side of Sterne’s humour that says as much about Sterne as it does about the critics who have either not noticed, or have studiously overlooked, its rather obvious - and distasteful - innuendo. One need only add the subtitle ‘On a Cundom’ and note the euphemistic parallel between the English term ‘French letter’ and the French counterpart ‘capote anglaise’ (English overcoat) to put the matter beyond much doubt. The narrator is concerned, of course, with its prophylactic, rather than its contraceptive effectiveness – “…it is no more a defence than a cobweb – a very sieve, o’ my conscience!” and he makes use of one of the most over-exploited puns in his repertoire when he

350 On ‘ill applied passages of Scripture’, see also my Two Sentimental Novels pp. 68-9; 94-97; 108-110
352 Matthew 24:29 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.”
challenges the reader to “…distinguish between a coat and a pair of breeches.” It is surprising that Tom Keymer failed to note the particular innuendo, despite being aware of the echoes of Rochester that occur towards the end of the piece, “…for I never can say, sub Jove … that it is a pleasure to be wet.” The comments made in 1775 by the unknown ‘S. P.’ celebrating Sterne’s “happy choice of metaphors and allusions” are clearly ironic, and in full complicity with the text. No doubt ‘S. P.’ was not disappointed in his expectations of “…much entertainment from this posthumous work” when Sterne’s daughter obviously failed to realise what she was publishing, and decided to reproduced this example of extremely ‘low’ humour among her late father’s collected letters.

Each of these three texts could well be the subject of much fuller discussion, but it is most important to note that these particularly problematic texts have been largely ignored by Sterne’s critics, and once again one is made aware of the critical reluctance to confront Sterne’s various unorthodox practices that has resulted in the twentieth-century preoccupation with the ‘joyous qualities’ of his texts and a corresponding decline in awareness of many of the less palatable aspects of his work.

355 ibid, p. 145
356 ibid, p. 146; Keymer notes that Sterne is “…playing on the obscenity of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester”, p. 163
357 ibid. 144
Chapter Ten

*Tristram Shandy*: Notes on 'the reading process'

There can be few texts that are as difficult to 'understand' as *Tristram Shandy*. Digressions, evasions, discontinuities, omissions and numerous other forms of deliberate obfuscation make a chaos of Tristram's stated aim, to tell the story of his life. As well as deliberately engineering such chaos, Sterne introduces an erratic narrator who inspires little confidence, and who freely admits to his own unreliability: "Writers of my stamp have one principle in common with painters. Where an exact copying makes our picture less striking, we choose the lesser evil; deeming it ever more pardonable to trespass against truth, than beauty." Remarks like this are not uncommon, though they are casually introduced and seldom overstated: "For my own part I never wonder at anything—and so often has my judgement deceived me in my life, that I always suspect it right or wrong..." Tristram devotes considerable space, early in Volume I, to his elaborate portrait of Parson Yorick, but the credibility and authenticity of the whole piece is fundamentally undermined by a single provision, casually slipped into a reference to Yorick's character much later in the book: "...it was his misfortune all his life long to bear the imputation of saying and doing a thousand things of which (unless my esteem blinds me) his nature was incapable." From this alone it seems clear that Yorick's general reputation does not live up to the high opinion Tristram has of him -

---

358 II. iv. 104
359 V. xi. 439
ill-repute dogged him ‘all his life long’ and his death is eventually ascribed to the activities of numerous enemies acting in ‘grand confederacy’. On the other hand, Tristram’s ‘esteem’ for Yorick is so enthusiastically and repeatedly asserted that, inevitably, the portrait becomes too good to be true, and Tristram’s reliability as an historian is seriously undermined. Eulogising Yorick, and describing him only through the distorting medium of his own ‘sentiments’ – admiration and friendship, mingled with his poignant sense of loss and regret – Sterne invites the same emotive response to Yorick that he urges the reader to feel for the harried ‘author’ himself, ‘fencing against the infirmities of life’, but here, as ever, the bold emotive phrases mask the ‘rhetoric of double meaning’ by which Sterne disguises his devious agenda.

Such devious writing, frustrating conventional reading practice, demands a specialised ‘reading strategy’, and this can only be gleaned from Tristram’s regular passages of advice to the reader and sundry reflections on the role of an author; and Sterne’s own practices as an author: his use of parallel passages, repetitive phrases and other structural and thematic devices - most particularly, the details of the time-scheme which Sterne obviously took great pains to install. Further to the immediate significance of chronology itself, the care with which Sterne embedded its scattered details once again emphasises the need for close consideration of other apparently carelessly placed details which might also carry disproportionate significance. Further to this, Sterne’s inter-textual allusions also require the consideration of a very broad range of secondary texts, some of which are obscure, while others, especially deist or libertine texts, demand that one must become attuned to recognising covert references to a discourse which is, at best, voiced only with extreme discretion.

Before approaching the text then, it is useful to review some basic issues, such as those discussed by Wolfgang Iser in his essay, *The reading process: a phenomenological approach*. However, as useful as that essay is in general, in reaching profoundly different conclusions to those reached by Iser in his later work on *Tristram Shandy*, this study will make little direct use of his work beyond this introduction, where the earlier essay will serve to introduce several important preliminary matters.

---

360 IV. xxvii. 385
As one reads Iser’s *The reading process*, one could almost feel that Iser is not so much expounding his own theory of reading, as merely re-discovering Sterne’s. When he describes the necessary “process of anticipation and retrospection” amongst readers, he adds little to Tristram’s similar, and frequent comments on such procedures in his own writing practice: “…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,” and as a result of Tristram’s ‘strange’ non-linear narrative, the reader of *Tristram Shandy* has no option but to accommodate this procedure. And while Tristram urges, “read, read, read, my unlearned reader, read,” and, at the same point, invokes “the great saint Paraleipomenon” - the saint of ‘things omitted’ - Iser, in turn, insists upon the importance of re-reading, and widely discusses the “omissions” in texts and the necessity of “establishing connections [by] filling in the gaps left by the text itself.” There are few texts, certainly, in which “an active interweaving of anticipation and retrospection” on the reader’s part is a more important part of the reading process; and, upon a second or third reading, there are equally few for which the statement, “certain aspects of the text will assume a significance we did not attach to them on a first reading” could be more true - one might recall C. F. Jones’ discovery of fresh of examples of indecency ‘at the tenth or subsequent reading’. The matter of Sterne’s indecency also conveniently illustrates the significance of Iser’s further observation that “[e]ven while the reader is seeking a consistent pattern in the text, he is also uncovering other impulses which cannot be immediately integrated or will even resist final integration.” In the search for coherence amid the apparent chaos of *Tristram Shandy*, among its many indecencies, the multitude of tiny details, interpolated tales, obscure allusions, puzzling references and ambiguities, its jumbled time-scheme and its digressive narration, with regular ‘hard knots’ to negotiate and many other ‘things omitted’ from a life story left obviously incomplete – it is inevitable that the reader will find a great deal of material that, for one reason or another, ‘resists final integration’. For many, this is

---

363 Iser, ‘The reading process’, p.216
364 VI. xxxiii. 557-8
365 III. xxxvi. 268
366 Iser op. cit. p.217, 218
367 ibid. p.218
368 ibid. p.217
369 see above, p. 67, n. 228
simply taken as being all part of the central joke – or the philosophy – of *Tristram Shandy*: that there is no ‘final integration’, and that the mystery and complexity of ‘life’ - or even of ‘a life’ - can not be contained by a single, simple ‘story’. To some extent this is true, but to assume, like E. M. Forster, that there is no ‘final integration’ in the work itself, and that ‘the God whose name is Muddle’ still presides in some way over *Tristram Shandy*, is to promote a theory that is still widely assumed, but no longer easily supported - the apparent chaos of Sterne’s work is actually carefully orchestrated, and only serves to obscure and disguise Sterne’s close control of his themes and structures.

On the other hand, this study differs from Iser for several reasons, all inter-related, the first of which may be dealt with briefly. While Iser’s observations on the practice of reading are undoubtedly useful generally, there is nothing in Iser to prepare one for the particular problems one regularly encounters when reading Sterne; and, in his later reading of *Tristram Shandy*, Iser seems to have made little effort to adapt his general theory of reading practice to accommodate a particular work which is perhaps the supreme example of irregular writing. Furthermore, whatever the merits of Iser’s textual analysis, in his later study he entirely neglects Sterne’s ‘inter-textuality’ by altogether abandoning even the most obvious sources like Rabelais, Cervantes or Shakespeare in favour of an extended discussion of Locke, while importing Freud at the total expense of the many other writers whose works are, often literally, incorporated into Sterne’s own. Iser rightly insists upon the importance of close and repeated re-reading of the text, but when Tristram urges one to ‘read, read, read’, this advice, as his many literary allusions make clear, is not intended to apply to *Tristram Shandy* alone. In the case of Sterne’s work, Gérard Genette’s general observation is also particularly pertinent: “...literature is not only a collection of autonomous works, which may ‘influence’ one another by a series of fortuitous and isolated encounters; it is a coherent whole, a homogenous space, within which works touch and penetrate one another...”.

The question of what context, and of what other texts should be considered and brought to bear upon one’s interpretation of Sterne’s work is crucial, but in Iser’s analysis, as in many others,

---

370 Iser, op cit. p.220
371 E. M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, London 1927, p. 146 Forster actually wrote, “Obviously, a god is hidden in *Tristram Shandy* and his name is Muddle, and some readers can not accept him.”
one is almost invited to forget the fact that Sterne’s work is ‘touched and penetrated’ by an astonishingly diverse array of other works, while an over-dependence on one—particularly to derive a context for reading Sterne from Locke—seems particularly unsound.

The main reason, however, that this study differs not just from Iser, but from a great many other critics too, has more to do with the reader’s own predisposition towards the text, and one’s fundamental assumptions regarding the very genre of Sterne’s work. No discussion of the English sentimental writers can afford to ignore Sterne, but neither can one possibly overlook the harsh treatment that he has received from the pens of so many other writers. There is one remark in particular that Iser makes on the significance of “preconceived ideas” which seems to shed most light on this problem:

With a literary text ... comprehension is inseparable from the reader’s expectations, and where we have expectations, there too we have one of the most potent weapons in the writer’s armoury—illusion.374

Once again, Iser seems to merely repeat what Tristram has already carefully drawn to our attention:

It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates everything to itself, as proper nourishment; and, From the first moment of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by everything you see, hear, read, or understand. This is of great use.375

Tristram frequently returns to this figure - “...our preconceptions having (you know) as great a power over the sounds of words as the shapes of things,”376 while the behaviour of the ‘arch-theorist’ Walter Shandy, “…whose way was to force every event in nature into an hypothesis, by which means never man crucified TRUTH at the rate he did…”377 constantly illustrates it.

Within the first few chapters of Tristram Shandy readers will encounter numerous ‘signposts’ which could well predetermine their expectations: a ‘gentleman’ hero that was born on November 5th; his father, the country squire; his

373 See also Melvyn New’s comments on those who “shape a meaning for Tristram Shandy around the Locke-Sterne nexus” in his ‘Introduction’, NOTES, p. 7 & (esp.) pp. 16-17.
374 Iser, op. cit. p.219
375 II. xix 177
376 VIII. xxxii. 717
377 IX. xxxii. 804
uncle, the kindly old veteran of King William’s wars; the amiable Anglican parson who is presented in strong contrast to the grotesque Catholic man-midwife; a dedication to Pitt; a glowing tribute to ‘the sagacious Locke’ and the full, and thoroughly anti-Catholic text of a genuine Anglican sermon - these are signs which, taken all together, seem to suggest quite blatantly, that at heart Sterne’s work expresses a range of ‘establishment’ views which are broadly typical of many another eighteenth century text, and that, despite his ‘oddity’, these unmistakable signals clearly indicate Sterne’s overall ‘orthodoxy’. But such blatant references are obviously not the ‘partly-hidden connections’ of Sterne’s ‘wit’ that we are encouraged to seek, since to discover them requires no wit at all, but rather, I will argue, these all too obvious signs are actually stumbling-blocks, or misleading pointers set purposely to lure the unwary reader into assuming a thoroughly illusory set of expectations, and into ‘conceiving of an hypothesis’ which is false, but which nonetheless, ‘generally grows the stronger by everything you see, hear, read, or understand’ - its growth stimulated, furthermore, by continual encouragement from Tristram. It is perhaps not quite as foolish as it sounds to say that if this study draws conclusions that differ from those of Iser, and other critics, it is because it begins with an entirely different set of ‘reader’s expectations’, and ‘an hypothesis’ which, although it has come to seem rather unorthodox, has a well established tradition and, furthermore, does not seem at all unreasonable.

Finally therefore, and certainly most importantly, one must be willing to seek the ‘Demoniacal’ element in Sterne’s work, and one must abandon, utterly, the notion that Sterne’s ‘sentiment’ has anything to do with Christianity. If, as is often suggested, Sterne’s Eugenius is supposed to represent Hall-Stevenson, then in order to proceed one might well begin by pursuing the insight offered by Eugenius at the point where he discovered “two senses” in the word “…Crevice, in the fifty-second page of the second volume of this book of books” - and one must also consider Tristram’s response:

And here are two roads, replied I, turning short upon him,—a dirty and a clean one,—which shall we take? —The clean, —by all means, replied Eugenius…

---

378 III. xxxi. 258
Immediately after this Tristram appeals to his readers, urging them also to take the ‘clean road’: “…for the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil…”, and to believe that, “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.” The palpable insincerity of this declaration is demonstrated by Paul-Gabriel Boucé in his discussion of the “extraordinary anatomical myth, which establishes a size-relationship between the nose and the penis.” Boucé points particularly to *Tristram Shandy* as “a seemingly inexhaustible source of puns, jokes, innuendoes and spicy double entendres” on the subject. And this is perhaps the heart of the matter, for Tristram’s ‘jokes’ and particularly his ‘innuendoes and spicy double entendres’ are too easily dismissed as trivia – the ‘dirty flies’ lamentably entangled in Sterne’s ‘dewy web’. When such material is pursued however, and with the sort of dogged prurience that one imagines readers like Hall-Stevenson would have brought to the text, then one discovers that very often there are indeed ‘two roads’. Many readers have followed Tristram down the ‘clean road’, and with such absolute faith in their guide, that they have failed to notice that the ‘dirty road’ is indeed a viable option. This is perhaps because the innuendo is not always sexual and, as the next chapter will demonstrate, it leads one in the most unexpected directions.

379 ibid.
Chapter Eleven
Yorick

I have argued elsewhere that in *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick is also a deceptive and wholly unreliable narrator, and his address to his own ‘fancy’ is one of his more significant utterances to bear in mind when reading his narrative.

...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.  

The passage is applicable to either of Sterne’s narrators, or indeed to Sterne himself, who has cheated and seduced his readers for generations with a notion of ‘sentiment’ that is quite unlike anything to be found elsewhere. Indeed, it seems most apt that the words of St. Paul should suggest something satanic in the transforming power of Yorick’s ‘fancy’: “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. / And no marvel, for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Since ‘the foul satyr’s eyes’ also leer out from the pages of *A Sentimental Journey*, much of my earlier work would add considerably to the force of the argument now presented and should rightly form the conclusion to the present study, but there is little other justification for duplicating large portions of that work here, and indeed, little need. When observed closely, there is more than enough in the sinister presence of Yorick in *Tristram Shandy* to seriously undermine many ‘preconceived ideas’

---

Where’s Mr. Yorick?

Parson Yorick is obviously a very significant name in Sterne’s writings, but not one that is easily understood. A clergyman like Sterne, the character is often taken to be a loose self-portrait an author who, throughout his life, maintained a close identification with the name: in *The Sermons of Mr Yorick*; in *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick*; it was a name he used in his own correspondence and in the *Letters to Eliza*; and it was also the slightly scandalous name by which Sterne, a hugely successful self-publicist, first became well known. But at this point, let us closely examine Mr. Yorick as he is first introduced, in the early part of *Tristram Shandy*, with particular reference to Hogarth’s prints designed, at Sterne’s request, for the first London editions.
The first two volumes of *Tristram Shandy* became available in London, in January 1760, at which time Sterne’s name was completely unknown; by March, when the second edition came out - with the addition of Hogarth’s plate depicting Trim reading the sermon – Sterne had become famous. Capitalising on his success, in May he published a collection of his sermons under the title, *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, and they too were enthusiastically received. The list of 661 subscribers to the volume is described by Cash as “one of the most impressive of the eighteenth century”: it includes Bishop Warburton and four other bishops; Lord Chesterfield and Lord Rockingham and a long list of others of the ‘nobility’; and various other distinguished names like John Wilkes, Elizabeth Montagu, David Garrick, Joshua Reynolds and, of course, Hogarth himself. A second edition of the *Sermons* followed in July, and there is no doubt that the name of Mr. Yorick, by mid-1760, was as famous as Sterne’s own. So when *Tristram Shandy* Volumes III & IV were published in January 1761, graced by the second of Hogarth’s prints, it might be expected that the celebrated Yorick, who had hardly appeared in Volume II, would perhaps become more prominent, or would at least acknowledge in some way the very great compliment that the public had paid him over the course of the last year. Strangely then, Yorick is entirely absent from the whole of Volume III, and it is not until the fourteenth chapter of Volume IV that his name is even mentioned, when Walter Shandy asks what has by now become a very pertinent question, and one which had perhaps been running through many reader’s minds: “And where’s Mr. Yorick?” – a question to which the maid, Susannah, gives the unhelpful reply: “Never where he should be...” and then adds, “…but his curate’s in the dressing-room, with the child upon his arm, waiting for the name...” Astonishingly, at what might be thought to be the most important moment in the book, Yorick is still absent. This is most certainly a crucial moment for Tristram, who after three-and-a-half volumes of his ‘Life and Opinions’ has finally managed to get himself born, and, at the moment illustrated in the print, has just been baptised and received into the church. He has also been inadvertently christened with the wrong name, an error which deals a terrible blow to Tristram’s father because of his strange theory of names; and what is more, the child, it seems, is “black in the face” and “in a fit,” and may well be on

---

383 See Cash, *LY*, p.39
384 *IV*. xiv. 343.
385 ibid.
the point of dying - like his mother also, who has had a very difficult labour. So at
the time of Tristram’s birth, baptism, christening, and at a time when Tristram and
his mother have both come very close to death - Yorick, the local parson, is certainly
not ‘where he should be’. Indeed, Yorick seems somewhat indifferent to Tristram’s
birth, for on the following day, “Yorick sent a servant to my uncle Toby’s house to
enquire...” - not about Tristram and his mother, as might be expected, but because he
is concerned about his missing sermon.386

One would also perhaps imagine that Yorick, having been given two separate
opportunities of being ‘immortalised’ by Hogarth himself, either at the reading of his
own sermon, a scene that dominates Volume II, or at the baptism of this celebrated
member of his own flock, that he would bother to turn up at least for one of the
sittings - but not Mr. Yorick. It is also interesting to note that in 1761 the plate
depicting the reading of the sermon was placed at the front of Volumes I & II, and
the baptism scene at the front of Volumes III & IV, so the first readers of the new
volumes may well have read through the whole of the third volume and half of the
fourth, assuming that the clerical figure holding the child is the figure of the
celebrated Mr. Yorick - which it certainly should be, but isn’t. The figure is Yorick’s
curate, who is also called Tristram, and who appears, unannounced, for a few
moments only, christens the child with the wrong name (his own) and then
disappears again equally abruptly and entirely. Such ‘oddities’ are often simply
dismissed, but the curate’s appearance, while brief, is elaborately contrived, and
coming at such a highly significant moment, that one must suspect that Sterne had
more than just mere ‘oddity’ in mind. This is perhaps the reason that New, half in
jest, has suggested the curate as a potential father to Tristram.387 While this seems
unlikely, we will closely consider the circumstances of Tristram’s misnaming.

No record of a meeting with Sterne exists, but it seems inconceivable that
Hogarth could have understood the text well enough to have chosen these two scenes
- which both depict the absence of Yorick - without being directed to do so, and very
much easier to assume that he was working under quite specific instructions from
Sterne.388 All that is visible, in both cases, is Yorick’s ‘ghost’ - Trim reading the

386 II, xvii, 166
388 William V. Holtz reproduces Hogarth’s original sketches and discusses the letter Sterne wrote in
order to solicit the Hogarth prints, clearly assuming that, other than the broad hints in the letter,
“...*Tristram Shandy* itself constituted Hogarth’s actual commission.” (p. 28) Hogarth might perhaps
sermon and the curate baptising the child are both substitute figures signifying Yorick's absence from his proper place, and this seems entirely suitable, since 'absence' is strongly associated with Yorick. Indeed, while Walter's question, "And where's Mr. Yorick?" is certainly worth repeating, one might also ask the same question of his disappearing curates, of his elusive servant, or indeed of his 'missing' sermon, and perhaps most significantly - where's Mrs. Yorick? - who enjoys her own few brief moments in the first volume and then disappears from the book entirely - nor is she mentioned in Yorick's own narrative, A Sentimental Journey. 589

Yorick's wife is also often unwisely dismissed as a character that Sterne either abandoned or simply forgot, but there can be no doubt from the elaborate portrait of Yorick in Volume One, that he came 'fully formed' into the world of Tristram Shandy, and he did so conspicuously portrayed as a married man – and there seems to be very little justification for ignoring the fact at a later stage. By way of contrast, in the same volume Tristram is openly evasive about his own marital status, and if Tristram's marital status tends to be overlooked, or if he is assumed to be single, it is because conclusive evidence never seems to find its way into the text to fully determine the matter. Yorick's marriage, on the other hand, tends to be overlooked because his wife simply disappears - and this in itself, is quite in keeping with other things associated with Yorick. Indeed, until Walter asks his question in Volume Four, it might be just as easy, although equally ill-advised, to assume that Sterne had also forgotten about Yorick himself.

In fact, after a servant is sent to look for Yorick390, he finally turns up in the twenty-third chapter of volume four,391 having not been seen since his death in volume one,392 and not heard of since Tristram said farewell to his "ghost" in volume two393 - an interval of almost two hundred pages in the Florida edition. Chapter twenty-four, like so many other things associated with Yorick, is missing; and in chapter twenty-five he rides on ahead of the company to the 'Visitation Dinner' – an

---

389 "the wife of the parson of the parish" I. vii. 10; "the gentlewoman, the parson's wife." I. x. 17
390 IV. xix. 356
391 IV. xxiii. 360
392 I. xii. 36
393 II. xii. 167
ecclesiastical gathering where he is to deliver another sermon – but the reader arrives there, in chapter twenty-six, too late and another sermon is ‘missing’ never to be found, at least by the reader, since Yorick has already finished, and is “cutting [his sermon] all into slips, and giving them about to light their pipes!” Even at this stage we might begin to question Yorick’s ‘orthodoxy’: in his first published sermon - as read by Trim - he begins, as Dr. Slop observes, by ‘abusing the prophet’; one of the Sermons of Mr. Yorick opens with a flat denial of Scripture; and now another sermon is publicly torn up as scrap paper. But rather than going on to discuss these closing chapters of Volume IV at this point, let us return instead to the figure of Yorick as we first meet him in the early parts of Volume I.

Who Is Mr. Yorick?

The majority of Sterne’s reader’s and critics would probably agree with Robert A. Erickson’s description of Yorick as, “a friendly man associated with new birth, generosity, play, freedom, mirth, candour, and genial satire…” and indeed, even before we learn that he is named after a jester, the first few details we gather give us enough to discern an amiable character, and even, perhaps, something a stock character – a good-natured, benevolent and yet slightly eccentric parson, in some ways comparable to Fielding’s Parson Adams or Goldsmith’s Dr. Primrose. We learn at first that it was the parson who “cheerfully paid the fees” to have the local midwife, who later attends at Tristram’s birth, installed and licensed, indicating his humane and benevolent nature; and since his wife “did run away at that time with the whole of the [merit] it also suggests a commendable modesty accompanying this act of charity. We then learn of his unpretentious horse, a “lean, sorry, jack-ass of a horse” and, as another indication of Yorick’s character, “as sorry a jade, as Humility herself could have bestrided.” Eventually we catch our first sight of Yorick and see the comic figure he makes as he rides out on his bony old horse in his ‘sallies about his parish’:

394 IV. xxvi. 376
395 “It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.— That, I deny!”
396 Robert A. Erickson, Mother Midnight, New York, (1986) p.217
397 I. vii. p.10.
398 I. x. p.17
399 I. x. p.18
In the several sallies about his parish, and in the neighbouring visits to the gentry who live around him,—you will easily comprehend, that the parson, so appointed, would both hear and see enough to keep his philosophy from rusting. To speak the truth, he never could enter a village, but he caught the attention of both old and young.—Labour stood still as he pass’d,—the bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well, ——the spinning-wheel forgot its round,—even chuck-farthing and shuffle-cap themselves stood gaping till he had got out of sight; and as his movement was not of the quickest, he had generally time enough upon his hands to make his observations, ——-to hear the groans of the serious, ——-and the laughter of the light-hearted; ——all which he bore with excellent tranquillity.

This equestrian portrait of Yorick comes shortly after Tristram’s chapter on Hobby-Horses and is followed by a detailed account of the elaborate connection between Yorick’s ‘jack-ass of a horse’, and his decision to assist a distressed widow and set her up as the midwife. The unmistakable alignment of Yorick with the “thin, upright, motherly, notable, good old body of a midwife” bears significantly on the heated debate between Walter and Elizabeth over who should be present at Tristram’s birth, when her desire for the traditional figure, who “trusted little to her own efforts, and a great deal to those of dame nature,” is contrasted strongly with Walter’s insistence on the “little, squat, uncourtly figure of a Doctor Slop” with his “sesquipedality of belly,” his equally overt Catholicism, and his “new-invented forceps”.

Yorick’s initial ‘act of charity’ in assisting the midwife was misinterpreted by the villagers as a “fit of pride”, and although he could have explained himself and set the matter straight, he remains silent, since, we are told, “he would rather bear the contempt of his enemies, and the laughter of his friends, than undergo the pain of telling a story, which might seem a panygeric upon himself.” — to which Tristram adds the comment: “I have the highest idea of the spiritual and refined sentiments of this reverend gentleman, from this single stroke in his character…” This unstinted tribute to Yorick reinforces the shock we receive when we learn, a few lines later, that “about ten years ago … [Yorick] left his parish, — and the whole world at the same time behind him… Yorick is dead — and so, rather like his famous namesake, he has already ‘laid i’ the earth’ a good many years before we meet him. But so too, of course, have most of the other characters in the book by the time

\footnotesize

400 I. x. p.19
401 I. vii. p.10
402 II. ix. 121
403 II. xix. 180
404 I. x. 23-4.
Tristram comes to write his memoirs, and the irregular time-scheme allows them all to appear whenever needed - indeed, the words that conclude the final volume are spoken by Yorick.

After learning of his death, we then learn a little more of his life: Yorick, it seems, is a direct descendant of Shakespeare's jester, whose jovial spirit he inherited, but we also learn that Parson Yorick was often "indiscreet" and "foolish" in his jests, a dangerous thing when combined with "an invincible dislike and opposition in his nature to gravity" especially when a grave appearance served "as a cloak for ignorance, or for folly". Yorick's friend Eugenius arrives to deliver a clear warning to Yorick that "this unwary pleasantry of thine will sooner or later bring thee into scrapes and difficulties of which no after-wit can extricate thee out of...", and hard upon the heels of this warning, the prophesy appears to come true. Yorick's powerful enemies fall upon him, and he eventually dies, after a highly sentimental deathbed scene. Finally, we arrive at the famous page, printed entirely black on both sides, in mourning for Yorick. In short then, having been told at first that Yorick is dead, we are then guided to his bedside to witness his death, and now we stand at his graveside and read his epitaph. And this is strange because, as noted, more or less all of the other characters in the book are also dead by the time Tristram writes, but for some reason Yorick is absolutely, and most emphatically dead. Oddly though, as William Bowman Piper notes, "...[by] describing Yorick's part in his life after he has described Yorick's death ... Tristram seems to have cancelled out Yorick's mortality".

At his graveside, the strong link to Shakespeare in Yorick's name is reinforced by the three word 'epitaph and elegy' inscribed on his headstone and reproduced alongside the black page, 'Alas, poor YORICK!' "Ten times in a day," we are told, "has Yorick's ghost the consolation to hear his monumental inscription read over..." Now being thus confronted with the death of this amiable character, and reading his epitaph in these particular words, has the strange effect of casting the reader exactly in the role of Hamlet, the black page itself being as inscrutable as the grave which confronted Hamlet, and from which Yorick's skull was disinterred. As

---

405 I. xi. 28
406 I. xii. 31
407 I. xii. 37-8
409 I. xii. (twice) p.35, p.36
readers of *Tristram Shandy* soon come to realise, in Shandy Hall, just as in Denmark, the world is somewhat ‘out of joint’; and Yorick, who is named after a jester, is also named after a skull, the very emblem of death. Yorick’s ancestors, we are also informed, chose to emigrate to England at about the same time that *Hamlet* is set – and if we recall the international scene in *Hamlet*, while Laertes brings poison from France, and Poland and Norway are warlike neighbours, it is England which represents that ‘bourne from which no traveller’ is supposed to return. Hamlet is meant to die in England, but he never arrives; Rozencrantz and Guildenstern on the other hand, like Yorick’s ancestors, do arrive, never to return to Denmark. And the reference to ‘Yorick’s ghost’ is also reinforced a little later when we are told that after his death many of the villagers were said to believe that Yorick’s spirit “still walks”, rather like King Hamlet; although if the reader is cast in the role of Hamlet, Yorick’s epitaph also carries a perfect echo of the first words that Hamlet speaks to his father’s spirit: “Alas, poor ghost.”\(^{410}\) And strangest of all perhaps is Yorick’s later return in *A Sentimental Journey*, wherein, Sterne ‘cancels out Yorick’s mortality’ again, by having him travel to France in 1762, 14 years after the date of his death. This, however, is not Yorick’s only chronological oddity, and we must extend Walter’s question once again, and ask:

**When is Mr. Yorick?**

On his death-bed, after Eugenius has offered the hope that he may yet live to see him made a bishop, Yorick dies, we are told, “...over-power’d by numbers, and worn out at length by the calamities of the war, --- but more so, by the ungenerous manner in which it was carried on...”\(^{411}\) and we receive very distinct impression of a good man cut down in his prime by these ‘ungenerous’ enemies. The impression is apparently confirmed when we later see Yorick’s ‘unwary pleasantry’ make an enemy of Phutatorius at the Visitation dinner of 1718, and Yorick’s re-emergence into the text at this point is ominously marked with “a smile... for the company [and] a threat ... for Yorick”\(^{412}\). But if one attends to Yorick’s chronology, these matters are not quite so straightforward as they may seem.

\(^{411}\) I. xii. 33
\(^{412}\) IV. xxvii. 386
The midwife was left “a widow in great distress...in her forty-seventh year”\(^{413}\), at which time she was assisted by Yorick, but by the time she comes to attend at Tristram’s birth, she is described as an “old woman” who has now gained some experience “in the course of her practice of near twenty years in the parish.”\(^{414}\) So, as Tristram is born late in 1718, we can date Yorick’s assistance to more or less the turn of the century, probably some time in 1699. We also learn that “for about five years before the date of the midwife’s license”\(^{415}\) – since 1694 then - Yorick had been poorly mounted, but that “in the first years of this gentleman’s life”, when he purchased his fine saddle, he “…loved a good horse”\(^{416}\) and despite having “every nine or ten months a bad horse to get rid of,—and a good horse to purchase in his stead”, he rode well mounted for “many years together”\(^{417}\). Allowing ‘many years together’ to be more than just ‘a few years’ or ‘a couple of years’, we must allow at least another five or six years, which takes us back, interestingly enough, to 1688 or 1689. These, of course, were the years in which many Anglicans were ‘just starting out in the world’ in the wake of the ‘Glorious Revolution’ and the coronation of William of Orange. It seems that Yorick’s career as a clergyman reaches right back to the very beginnings of ‘eighteenth century Anglican orthodoxy’.

Further to this, we also know that he was “at the age of twenty-six” at the time of “his first setting out”\(^{418}\) It seems clear that ‘the first years of this gentleman’s life’ must refer to the same period as ‘his first setting out’, and hence Yorick was aged twenty-six in or around 1688, and was therefore born around 1662. At the time of his apparently untimely death then, in 1748, Yorick is about eighty-six years old. This being a full thirty years after the incident with Phutatorius, it becomes difficult to understand why the incident with the chestnut should provoke such long-term enmity. It also difficult to believe that it is merely accidental that in 1762, in his visit to France in *A Sentimental Journey*, Yorick is more or less exactly one hundred years old.

Tristram does indeed seem to have ‘cancelled out Yorick’s mortality’, but nonetheless, death and emblems of mortality cling to his figure like a shroud. We learn that the parson, like his ‘jack-ass of a horse’, carried “never an ounce of flesh

\(^{413}\) I. vii. 10
\(^{414}\) I. xviii. 51
\(^{415}\) I. x. 17
\(^{416}\) I. xxi. 21
\(^{417}\) I. xxi. 22
upon his ... bones”; that both rider and horse were somehow ‘centaur-like, both of a piece’; and furthermore, that upon such a horse he could meditate on the vanity of the world and the swift passage of time “as delightfully ... as with the advantage of a death’s head before him”\footnote{I. xi. 27-8}. We are also given a detailed description of the flamboyant saddle Yorick purchased when, in ‘the pride and prime of his life’ he preferred to ride well-mounted, and which now, in his modesty, he keeps hung up in his study:

...a very handsome demi-peak’d saddle, quilted on the seat with green plush, garnished with a double row of silver-headed studs, and a noble pair of shining brass stirrups, with a housing altogether suitable, of grey superfine cloth, with an edging of black lace, terminating in a deep, black, silk fringe, \textit{poudre d’or}.\footnote{I. x. 20}

With its grey superfine cloth, black lace and black silk fringe, this is very clearly a saddle suitable for neither a country parson, nor indeed for a country gentleman - it is a saddle suitable only for a funeral, and while it is not surprising that the imagery of death should surround Yorick at his deathbed or his graveside, it is strange to find it here when we see him ‘first setting out’ in ‘the pride and prime of his life’. One might repeat the words of an early critic, who asked:

Can you tell me, Yorick, by what strange mistake you were condemned to so grave a garb, together with all the formal solemnities which wait upon that office—What had you to do with such grimace?\footnote{I. xi. 27-8}

At this point, and with such a question in mind, it is useful to refer again to Sterne’s particular indebtedness to Shakespeare, and especially his rather less obvious allusions to \textit{Hamlet}.

Yorick’s funereal saddle was quilted with ‘green plush’, and although more generally in Shakespeare, “green is a colour associated with sexuality”\footnote{Gordon Williams, \textit{A Glossary of Shakespeare’s Sexual Language}. (1977) p. 146}, in \textit{Hamlet} green imagery is almost always associated with death, or, more particularly, with the memory of death: Claudius’ opening words introduce the association: “…though yet
of Hamlet our dear brother’s death / The memory be green..."\(^{423}\) and the recurrence of this combination of images is pronounced: "...at his head a grass-green turf, / and at his heels a stone"\(^{424}\), "...we have done but greenly / in hugger-mugger to inter him..."\(^{425}\), and the description of Ophelia as a "green girl"\(^ {426}\) while apparently referring to her present youth (and connotations of 'green-sickness'), may also in one way prefigure her death to come, and may also look back, in another way, to ‘death’ as a metaphor for sex - in the same way that Hamlet himself uses, if not green, then certainly the rural ‘greenwood’ imagery of “country matters”\(^ {427}\) to allude to the subject. Green imagery at the time of Ophelia’s death actually announces it through its poetry: “There is a willow grows aslant the brook / That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream...”\(^ {428}\) The apparently pastoral image of the green willow, reflected in the water, reveals the ‘hoar’ shades of death in the silvery-grey underside of the leaves - and when we look through the reflection and into the water, we find Ophelia’s corpse.

Similarly, in Sterne’s work the same set of associations are at play, and while often seen as a sexual metaphor - the bawdy play on ‘green gown’ for example - green is most firmly associated with death; and since Tristram’s narrative is ‘a threnody for the Shandy family’ – then for Tristram death is inevitably ‘the memory of death’. We find it in the scenes of bloodshed that Toby re-enacts in miniature on his bowling-green, for example, or Dr. Slop’s ‘green baize bag’ kept, significantly, “betwixt ... two pistols, at [his] bed’s head” and in which he carries his brutal “instruments of salvation and deliverance”: “thy tire-tête, —thy new-invented forceps,—thy crotchet, —thy squirt,”\(^ {429}\) only one of which, the forceps, is in any way useful in preserving the life of the child, the others are all associated with its destruction.

Once this persistent association is noticed, it undermines other obvious assumptions we might be tempted to make. For example: the news of Bobby’s death brings “a green sattin night-gown of my mother’s”\(^ {430}\) forcefully into Susannah’s head, but why this should be is a mystery. Since it is made of ‘green sattin’,

\(^{424}\) ibid. IV. v. 31-32, p.73
\(^{425}\) ibid. IV. v. 81-81, p. 74
\(^{426}\) ibid. I. iii. 101, p. 17
\(^{427}\) ibid. III. ii, 104, p. 51
\(^{428}\) ibid. IV. viii. 164-5, p. 83
\(^{429}\) II. xi. 127
Susannah can hardly be thinking of the gown's suitability as mourning apparel - although this seems to be the suggestion. Since it is a night-gown, it does seem that the idea of 'death' carries strong sexual connotations for Susannah, but this is not the idea that predominates. Susannah is only thinking of Bobby's death because she clearly hopes that the shock of the news will kill Mrs. Shandy: "—O! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress, cried Susannah.—My mother’s whole wardrobe followed. ...the word mourning ... excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black, - all was green.—The green sattin night-gown hung there still."⁴³¹

Even in the relatively obvious connection with the sermon that Yorick preached at Le Fever’s funeral, green still seems to carry a significance not immediately obvious upon a casual reading, not least of which is the fact that the sermons themselves are tied in a bundle by "a piece of green whipcord, which seems to have been the unravelling of Yorick's whip-lash."⁴³²

Amongst these, there is that particular sermon which has unaccountably led me into this digression——The funeral sermon upon poor Le Fever, wrote out very fairly, as if from a hasty copy.—I take notice of it the more, because it seems to have been his favourite composition——It is upon mortality; and..."⁴³³

Although Tristram’s punctuation is also apparently ‘governed by no man’s rules’, in this example the first long dash, despite the capitalisation that follows it, clearly allows for full continuity: ‘that particular sermon’ is ‘the funeral sermon’, and the long dash might stand for a silent ‘conversational’ pause equivalent to a phrase like ‘that is to say’. The full-stop after ‘copy’ ends the sentence and, after a shorter dash, a more significant change is introduced - the sense moving from the sermon itself to Tristram’s reason for singling it out. The second long dash then, like the first, allows for full continuity, and hence, it seems quite legitimate to read the phrase as: ‘it seems to have been his favourite composition, (that is to say), it is upon mortality’. The final semicolon (in this extract) ends the sub-clause and introduces a more significant change of subject.

Yorick’s favourite sermon is on death, thoughts and images of mortality cling persistently to him, and ghostly figures flit around him. Although Yorick’s curate

⁴³⁰ V. vii. 429
⁴³¹ V. xii. 429-30
⁴³² VI. xi. 514
⁴³³ VI. xi. 515

117
appears at the time of Tristram’s christening, on the second, and final occasion that he appears, Trim tells Toby that upon visiting the inn to offer comfort to the dying Le Fever and his son, he found the curate there already:

—Mr. Yorick’s curate was smoaking a pipe by the kitchen fire,—but said not a word good or bad to comfort the youth.—I thought it wrong; added the corporal—I think so too, said my uncle Toby.434

Although we might immediately assume that his presence would be to minister to the dying man, judging from his position by the fireside it seems that the curate’s visit to the inn was social, although it is not entirely made clear why he is there - the curate simply looms out of the shadows, wreathed in smoke, as if waiting patiently for death to finish its work. When he speaks, it is only to question the assumption that the dying man upstairs is at his prayers, and to insult him, and the army more generally: “I thought, said the curate, that you gentlemen of the army, Mr. Trim, never said your prayers at all.” Despite acknowledging Trim as a military man, the curate slights him by omitting to call him by his customary title, and although the landlady affirms that she heard Le Fever pray “very devoutly”, she too seems to side more naturally with the curate when she adds, “...and with my own ears, or I could not have believed it.” To this, the curate adds one final bantering insistence: “—Are you sure of it?” 435 The details of Cash’s biography suggest that Sterne was on bad terms with at least one of his own curates, which might suggest that this is a ‘portrait’ of a fellow clergyman, and part of Sterne’s original ‘local satire’, but nevertheless, in the context of Tristram Shandy, one might have expected Yorick to have appointed a less cold-hearted and unfeeling man as his curate. But like other characters associated with Yorick, the figure seems almost ghostly - nameless, abruptly appearing and then disappearing, with physical characteristics consisting of nothing more than a cloud of smoke. This might be curate Tristram, who simply appears out of nowhere twelve years later and bungles Tristram’s christening, but we have no way of knowing.

At this point we might observe the fact that Yorick’s horse is described as “full brother to Rosinante”436, Don Quixote’s horse, and also that Yorick’s dying

434 VI. vii. 505
435 ibid.
436 I. x. 18
words were spoken in “something of a cervantick tone.” Quixote, famously, saw a transformed reality, where windmills were turned into giants, and something of this is also suggested in Yorick: “There is a fatality attends the actions of some men. Order them as they will, they pass thro’ a certain medium which...twists and refracts them from their true directions...” But the figure of the genial parson, if we pay close attention, ‘twists and refracts’ into another, quite different figure, and while the transformation might be ‘cervantick’, the figure of Yorick is quite unlike Don Quixote.

New observes that “…Yorick’s function in Hamlet is not that of a jester, but rather of a memento mori”, and he also recognises in Tristram Shandy, “the pervasive presence of death throughout the work” that is particularly associated with Yorick. But although Yorick’s resurrection now seems tinged with the uncanny presence of Shakespeare’s ghost, this is not allowed to interfere with the ‘Anglican orthodoxy’ that New is determined to find: “Yorick, rising from the dead, so to speak, is the gentle yet insistent reminder, throughout Tristram Shandy that, do what he will, a man’s life is a fragile and limited experience, accompanied by death even in the midst of procreation.” But New is unwilling to see further than the word “HUMILITY”, the overt sign which Tristram writes in big letters on the page, and while this is obviously inviting, it is not sufficient - there are simply too many details that ‘resist final integration’ into such a theory.

If we now return to the ‘portrait’ of Yorick discussed above, we find that Yorick’s portrait is not actually there – we have only a description of the impression he makes on others when they see him, and we can only ‘deduce’ his portrait from these reactions. Accordingly, we will find a comic figure if we pay attention to Tristram, and even a saintly figure according to New, but when examined closely, Yorick is neither. It is useful to refer once again to the volume of Ovid in Patch’s print, while noting Boswell’s development of the idea of ‘metamorphosis’ in his early, and enthusiastic tribute to Sterne and his work: A Poetical Epistle to Doctor Sterne, Parson Yorick, and Tristram Shandy (1760). The poem is prefaced with the opening lines of Book I of Ovid’s Metamorphosis: “Of bodies changed to various forms I sing...”, and within the poem, Boswell elaborates upon the theme:

437 I. xii. 34.
438 I. x. 24
439 Melvyn New, Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of Tristram Shandy; Florida (1969). p. 76-77
Now, God of love or God of wine,
Or muse, whichever of the nine
That erst blithe Ovid's tuneful tongue
Touch'd till he fancifully sung
Of Transformation's wondrous Power,
Such as Jove turn'd to Golden Shower,
O! to my supplication list!
I will describe, if you assist,
As strange a metamorphosis,
I'm sure, as any one of his.  

If we rid ourselves of the 'pre-conceived ideas' that Tristram (and innumerable critics) have urged upon us, then we must envisage a gaunt, angular figure, all in black, moving slowly upon a skeletal horse, whose ancestor is a skull, and who seems to be the solitary heir of a particularly bloodless line: "...[he] seem'd not to have had one single drop of Danish blood in his whole crasis; in nine hundred years it might possibly have all run out:" - at which point one may also be forced to wonder not 'Who is Yorick', but rather 'What is Yorick?'

In the several sallies about his parish, and in the neighbouring visits to the gentry who live around him,—you will easily comprehend, that the parson, so appointed, would both hear and see enough to keep his philosophy from rusting. To speak the truth, he never could enter a village, but he caught the attention of both old and young.----Labour stood still as he pass'd,---the bucket hung suspended in the middle of the well, ——the spinning-wheel forgot its round, ——even chuck-farthing and shuffle-cap themselves stood gaping till he had got out of sight; and as his movement was not of the quickest, he had generally time enough upon his hands to make his observations, - - to hear the groans of the serious, ——and the laughter of the light-hearted; —all which he bore with excellent tranquillity.

An early critic of *Tristram Shandy* wrote: "I think [Sterne] should have told us the horse was white, to have made the symbolical application:—but he did not dare declare himself so openly upon this head..." Although ostensibly alleging political allegory in *Tristram Shandy*, the writer seems to suggest by this that Yorick is "a rider on a pale horse", with its obvious 'symbolical application' - "and his name that

---

440 pp. 110-11, above
442 I. xi. 27
443 I. x. 19
sat on him was Death.” Yorick visits both rich and poor, young and old, the grave and the gay alike; when he passes, stillness and silence reign; all work stops, and even the gamblers cease to game. The bucket, which might be drawing the waters of life, hangs suspended; the spinning-wheel, which may be spinning out the threads of fate, forgets to spin, and again one hears biblical echoes of mortality, now from Ecclesiastes: “...or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the system. / Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit return unto God who gave it.” With Yorick’s passing, the whole world seems to hold its breath; his movement is ‘not of the quickest’ since it is ‘of the dead’, and having ‘time enough upon his hands’ completes the image of the Grim Reaper with his fearful hour-glass. Yorick’s ‘excellent tranquillity’ comes to all in the end, but Yorick himself is a figure from nightmare. This is perhaps why Yorick twice missed the opportunity of being ‘immortalised’ by Hogarth; why Tristram owes his life to the Catholic man-midwife Dr. Slop and not to Yorick’s nameless protégé; why Yorick’s curate shows no trace of compassion in the presence of death; and why it is Yorick, and not Tristram, who has the last word in The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy.

445 This ‘symbolical application’ is not perfect. In Revelation, John speaks of both “a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6: 2) and also “a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.” (Rev 6: 8). However, the Demoniac William Hewett rode a white horse while in Italy and, became known as ‘Cavallo Bianco’ from the same imperfect ‘application’ of Rev. 6: 8 (see Cash, EMY, p. 190)
446 Ecclesiastes 12: 6-7
Chapter Twelve
Elizabeth: The Shandy Clock and the ‘beds of justice’.

Although we will return to consider Yorick’s other ‘oddities’, for the present let us further consider the time-scheme more generally. Like the apparent chaos that disguises Sterne’s well-ordered formal structures, Tristram’s fragmented narrative belies the high degree of precision and historical accuracy with which he recollects his memoirs. He refers early on to the careful research he has undertaken as Shandy historian - “...archives at every stage to be look’d into, and rolls, records, documents and endless genealogies”447 - and an equally painstaking research is also demanded of the reader in order to discover the accuracy of this aspect of Shandy history.

This is one of the greatest oddities of Tristram Shandy, and it does not seem unreasonable to suggest, and for much of this study I will avow, that Theodore Baird’s much cited The Time-scheme of Tristram Shandy and a source is perhaps the most significant piece of Sterne scholarship of them all, for until it was published, no one appears to have noticed that Sterne took such elaborate care with his chronology. Baird concludes his study by suggesting that Tristram Shandy, “...far from being a wild and whimsical work, is an exactly executed historical novel. ...the neatness of the plan is impressive...”448 Commenting on Sterne’s dexterity in this regard, A. A. Mendilov is also clearly impressed: “...[Sterne] astonishes us by the accuracy with

447 I. xiv.
which the dates, scattered as they are in scores of so-called 'digressions', are nevertheless made to cohere. ...to maintain and control the chronology consistently is a feat reminiscent of a juggler keeping a large number of balls in the air at the same time." 449 With a similar degree of admiration, and similar imagery, Jean-Jacques Mayoux describes the time-scheme as:

"...a complicated system, or interstructuration, of significant relations which will be found to be almost entirely time-relations. He does it most successfully - triumphantly - but rather in the manner of a skillful clown, pretending to be perplexed, tangled even, by the difficulties that he himself has created. He it is who directs the game, and very carefully engineers its turns and hesitations..." 450

What makes this 'triumph' most impressive is that Sterne maintained this close control for a number of years, during intermittent periods of composition disrupted by his various travels. However, New's comments on this matter seem inadequate:

"To be sure, there is a chronological time-scheme to the events of Tristram Shandy; Sterne needed one to give Tristram an order to violate. It is not, moreover, unduly difficult to keep chronological track of Tristram's story, if one desires to do so. The reader's attention, however, is directed to the violations of chronological order..." 451

It is ill considered, and plainly wrong, to suggest that it is not 'unduly difficult' to keep track of time in Tristram Shandy, as the chronological table attached to this work might demonstrate. If Sterne had merely wanted to suggest disrupted order, he had no need to take such elaborate pains to install such fine chronological detail, but since he evidently did, then one is forced to wonder why he should obscure it so completely that the book was read for more than 160 years before anyone became aware of its presence. Sterne described the work as being "more read than understood," 452 and it seems he went to his grave content in the knowledge that in this respect it remained so, although one would imagine that such an eager self-publicist would rather strive to draw attention to what is certainly one of the masterstrokes of his artistry. The initial furore over the bawdy aspects of the

448 Theodore Baird, 'The Time-scheme of Tristram Shandy and a source', PMLA, Vol. 51. 1936; p. 819
‘winding of the clock’, celebrated in pamphlets like The Clockmakers Outcry soon after Tristram Shandy was first published, seems only to have served to draw attention away from the very precise chronology which the clock in chapter one also signals, of which Sterne must have been proud, and which he continued to pay careful attention to throughout the years. This activity would appear to be pointless, wholly senseless, unless one accepts that Sterne was happy to allow the bawdy joke to gain all of the attention, and that it was discretion that led him to obscure the chronological details because he did not want them to be readily noticed or too widely acknowledged. Chronology, I will argue, is a particularly important ‘key’ to Tristram Shandy.

This seeming paradox of an apparently chaotic narrative incorporating an elaborate and accurate time-scheme is fundamental to The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, and to resolve it one need look no further than the title of the work, and Tristram’s explanation of it: “I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also...” It is necessary therefore to discern between the ‘Life’ of Tristram - that is, the ‘hard’ historical and biographical details - and the ‘Opinions’ of Tristram, which more broadly suggests a collection of personal, subjective reflections upon life in general. Of all the many pronouncements and observations on the relationship he seeks to cultivate in his reader, surely the most significant is the motto which stands prefixed to the whole work, and which reinforces this distinction: “It is not things, but opinions regarding things that disturb us.” If one then begins to regard the ‘things’ that compose Tristram’s life and his history - dates and events as well as the physical objects which he describes with such care and precision - as accurate, historical ‘facts’; but to cast doubt upon Tristram’s ‘opinions regarding things’, then one becomes increasingly aware of the distortions introduced by his unreliable narration. Charles Parish observes that Tristram “views his life through the medium of his opinions; his opinions control the presentation of his reminiscence,” but Parish is not alone in underestimating the high degree of control that Tristram imposes on his history. In telling his story, Tristram does not simply flesh-out the bare historical details with innocuous ‘period’

---

452 SERMONS, p. 255
453 I. iv. 9
454 TS, Vol. 1, ‘Title page’ (unnumbered); NOTES, p. 37
touches, although these are plentiful, but he also adds a great deal of interpretative commentary, so that the ‘life’ of Tristram - and the ‘lives’ he recounts of others - become obscured and greatly distorted by the force of his ‘opinions’.

The principal means by which Tristram achieves this deception is through his affable tone, the ‘friendship’ and intimacy he cultivates with the reader, and the trust he inspires through his conversational manner, but, despite the playfulness and the sentimental effusions, one must always be aware that with nothing more than an affable smile and ‘a gay tone of careless indifference’, Tristram is capable of deceiving even Death itself. This study will aim, therefore, to separate the details of the ‘life’ of the Shandy family from the unreliable ‘opinions’ of Tristram, and we will now look particularly carefully for the ‘real’ Elizabeth Shandy as distinct from Tristram’s ‘opinionated’ portrayal of ‘my mother’.

Elizabeth Shandy

Like Yorick, with whom she is closely aligned, Elizabeth Shandy is another vague, loosely sketched character who, despite being the first character to speak, is also conspicuously absent for much of the text thereafter. After her memorable, inopportune, and much-mimicked first words: “Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock?” (I. i.) she makes an equally brief appearance when Walter recalls the occasion of Tristram’s conception a few pages later (I. iii); another brief appearance in the coach back from London after her false pregnancy (I. xvi); and then, like Yorick, she virtually disappears. As with Yorick and his sermon, Elizabeth’s person is also displaced by a document, and it is in her absence that we read the terms of her marriage settlement and learn of the details governing her ‘lying in’(I. xv). Nor does she appear when we hear of her dispute with Walter over the midwife (I. xviii), and she remains absent throughout the rest of Volume I. In Volume II, she is ‘confined’ upstairs and in labour with Tristram while we remain in the parlour throughout Trim’s reading of the sermon, and indeed, we do not actually encounter her again until Volume V when she is held in a suspended narrative for eight chapters (V. v. - V. xiii.) in the act of eavesdropping, at the end of which she bursts into the parlour, only to be rapidly ushered out again by Toby. Her appearances in Volume VI are limited to her dialogues with Walter in the two ‘beds of justice’ scenes (VI. xviii; VI. xxxix), in the first of which she discusses Tristram’s ‘breeching’, and in the second she introduces the subject of Toby’s amours.
Elizabeth is wholly absent from Volume VII, when the narrative accompanies Walter and company to France while Elizabeth remains at Shandy Hall. (VII. xxvii). Late in the eighth volume, she makes a brief appearance in full company in the parlour (VIII. xxxii), and at the end of the volume and the beginning of the ninth, she walks out with Walter to watch Toby's approach to Widow Wadman's house. (VIII. xxxv; IX. i) Finally, she appears in the closing scene, the second occasion that we see Elizabeth in full company, once again with Yorick, Walter, Toby and Dr. Slop. (IX. xxxiii).

Tristram refers to his mother more frequently than she appears, and his comments are uniformly unflattering. Shortly after her undignified introduction, she is described as being slow-witted: "...she knew no more than her backside what my father meant." On another occasion, Walter himself laments the "cursed luck!" that he should have a wife "with such a head-piece, that he cannot hang up a single inference within side of it," and Tristram reinforces the impression by adding that Walter's argument on this occasion, "was entirely lost on my mother." He also describes his mother as "a woman of no deep reading" who seems quite content in her ignorance: "...[she] would go on using a hard word twenty years together ... without giving herself any trouble to enquire about it"; and again, this is a source of misery to Walter: "It was a consuming vexation to my father, that my mother never asked the meaning of a thing she did not understand." And, not only in words, but in all things, Tristram describes his mother as being passive to the point of indifference:

...my mother—(truest of all Poco-curante's of her sex!)—careless about it, as about every thing else in the world which concerned her;—that is,—indifferent whether it was done this way or that,—provided it was but done at all.

However, close observation of Elizabeth undermines the impression that Tristram strenuously urges upon us - an impression that many critics have unwisely accepted without question.

Ruth Faurot has adequately demonstrated that commonly used terms like "phlegmatic" and "passive" are inappropriate to Elizabeth, and Faurot's reading

456 I. iii. 4
457 II. xix. 172
458 V. xiii. 442
459 IX. xi. 758-9
460 VI. xxxix. 569
strategy is particularly interesting. Not convinced by Tristram’s words alone, Faurot chooses instead to weigh them in the balance with the “contrary impressions demonstrated by Mrs. Shandy’s dramatic role and what others say about her.” Faurot is particularly helpful when she describes the “three modes of presentation” Sterne uses to depict Elizabeth, and she also suggests an appropriate response to the first two. Firstly, when Elizabeth appears, “…in a few rare scenes as an actor in company with other characters…” then, Faurot suggests, “We judge objectively.” Secondly, when she appears “…in the same dramatic fashion but with the added comments and interpretation of Tristram on her behaviour…” then, she suggests, “We weigh our observations with Tristram’s.” The third mode of presentation is made up of “bits and scraps of evidence” from miscellaneous sources, and these we must judge as we find them. Faurot also makes the very important observation that “…failure to notice these three modes of presentation has, in the case of Mrs. Shandy, distorted the impression” - and one would only add that the same holds true of many other characters - and situations - that Tristram describes. Let us then now review what we know about Tristram’s mother.

Firstly, one would note that Elizabeth asks her famous question in the fragment of conversation at the very beginning of the book, and apparently at the very moment of genesis that begins Tristram’s life, and this provokes Walter’s first utterance, an oath: “——Good G—! cried my father, making an exclamation…” Similarly, in the last chapter of the final volume, and this time with an oath of her own, she also asks the question which brings Tristram’s ‘Life’ to a conclusion: “Lord! said my mother, what is all this story about?”, and the questionprovokes Yorick’s closing ‘Revelation’, “——A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick—and one of the best of its kind I ever heard.” In a sense then, *Tristram Shandy* opens with Elizabeth in conversation with Walter, and closes with her in conversation with Yorick, an interesting transition from an unsatisfactory sexual encounter to a perfectly satisfactory - if somewhat bawdy - social exchange.
There is an unmistakable alignment of Elizabeth with Yorick throughout, which, for the reasons discussed above, her ‘shadowy’ presence particularly denotes; as does her preference for Yorick’s protégé, the midwife, rather than Walter’s choice of Dr. Slop. Furthermore, like the anonymous midwife, whose personal identity is less important than the formality of the license from which her identity as ‘the midwife’ is derived, Elizabeth also remains ‘un-named’ by the characters who surround her: to Tristram she is invariably ‘my mother’; to Toby she is ‘my sister’; to Susannah, ‘my mistress’; while Walter uses only the formal ‘Mrs. Shandy’ and an occasional ‘my dear’. It is only by ‘chance’ that we learn her Christian name from a document, introduced for other purposes, that she was “Elizabeth Mollineux” at the time of her marriage to Walter. Indeed, other than this single document, Elizabeth has no name apart from Walter’s, and no personal history with the single exception of “the fortune which Mr. Shandy got with her” at the time of their marriage.

Paradoxically, although Elizabeth has no personal history and very little physical presence, chronologically she is particularly interesting. Indeed, with Yorick’s sinister presence in mind, it is particularly significant that Elizabeth, the most taciturn of the major characters, should yet be the first to speak, and that she does so in order to introduce Time - Death’s accomplice - both of which, in Tristram Shandy, might well be listed as major characters in their own right.

The ‘beds of justice’.

...in the act of Coition
His Mother had chanc’d all the sport to have spoiled
For She interrupted the midst of Fruition
With questions yt none would have ask’d but a Child.

Song: ‘Tristram Shandy’ (c. 1760)

Elizabeth’s question in the first chapter is arguably the most significant event in the book, since, at least according to Tristram, the dispersal of the ‘animal spirits’ that it occasioned was to have a profound effect upon the course of his whole life.

---

468 I. xv. 43-46
469 I. xviii. 18
Remarking on widespread misunderstanding of Elizabeth’s character, however, Faurot cites a number of Sterne’s critics whose assumptions regarding this matter seem wholly unsound. Of John Stedman, for example, Faurot observes: “[Stedman] … finds little to say of Mrs. Shandy and neglects the subtlety of her character when he labels her opening remark, ‘a stinging comment … made with no realization of its significance.’” And indeed, except for Tristram’s repeated assurances, there is very little evidence to support Stedman’s assumption.

Even taken at ‘face value’, when put to Walter at the climax of a sexual encounter, Elizabeth’s question in the first chapter, is, as Tristram describes it in the second – “a very unseasonable question at least”; and one might sympathise with Walter who, we are told in the third chapter, “oft, and heavily, complained of the injury.” One could easily assume at this point that Walter complains of the injury done to “the HOMUNCULUS”, but that injury is clearly part of the adult Tristram’s direct address to the puzzled reader in the second chapter, where he gives his own explanation (or his own opinion) as to why the question was ‘unseasonable’: “…let me tell you, Sir, it was a very unseasonable question at least,—because it scattered and dispersed the animal spirits…” Although, some years later, Walter also numbers the scattering of the ‘animal spirits’ among the “embryotic evils” that befell Tristram, the injury he complains of at the time is undoubtedly that done by the interruption itself, just as, when Tristram later returns to “the very night in which I was begot”, it can only be injured pride that caused him to feel “a little chagrin’d and out of temper … as they lay chatting gravely in bed afterwards.” Even at best, if the question was, as Tristram urges, simply the result of a spontaneous Lockean association of ideas - which is to say, more simply, that Elizabeth’s mind was wandering - then this, in itself, is an unflattering reflection upon Walter’s sexual prowess. But if one assumes that is a premeditated utterance, then one must also concede that it is well-timed, extremely cutting, and not without some wit - characteristics not often associated with Elizabeth.

Faurot also rightly observed that when we later return to the same location, the marital bed, to witness one of Walter’s ‘beds of justice’, Elizabeth also manages

---

471 Faurot, op. cit. p. 579-80, n.2 quoting Stedman’s *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne* (Toronto 1967) p. 9. Faurot also cites seven other writers who make the same assumption. Similar statements made by Hay, Cash, Piper, Hunter and New are discussed in the next chapter.

472 ‘My Father’s Lamentation’, IV. xix. 354

473 L. xvii. 49
to frustrate Walter verbally. There is, however, yet more to be said about the scene that Faurot seems to have missed, perhaps because she overlooked Tristram’s initial suggestion that we are being invited into a very private and intimate space – “you shall step with me, Madam, behind the curtain.”

In his ‘beds of justice’ Walter’s desire is for the cut and thrust of a heated debate, after the model of the “ancient Goths of Germany” from whom he derived his practice. The Goths (apparently) debated everything twice: “...once drunk, and once sober:—Drunk—that their councils might not want vigour;—and sober—that they might not want discretion.” On this occasion then, assuming that Walter’s real passion is now for verbal rather than sexual engagement, one can only pity Walter as he is once more confronted with Elizabeth’s stoical indifference, which frustrates him from the moment he initiates this wrongly named ‘debate’.

We should begin, said my father, turning himself half-round in bed, and shifting his pillow a little towards my mother’s, as he opened the debate——

We should begin to think, Mrs. Shandy, of putting this boy into breeches.—

We should so,—said my mother.—We defer it, my dear, quoth my father, shamefully.—

I think we do, Mr. Shandy,—said my mother.

—not but that the child looks extremely well, said my father, in his vests and tunicks.—

He does look very well in them,—replied my mother...  

And so the ‘debate’ continues through a total of nineteen similar exchanges during which Elizabeth simply mirrors her response to agree with, and thus negate, Walter’s various advances. Eventually, as in their first engagement, frustrated by his wife’s total lack of interest in the proceedings, and again with an exclamation - “There’s for you! cried my father” - Walter once again loses his temper. By this, as Faurot rightly observes, “…the reader discovers Mrs. Shandy’s skill in the art of frustration.”

Faurot follows this observation with its opposite, and notes that Elizabeth “in her turn encounters frustration” as, for example, after the accident with the sash

474 VI. xvi. 523
475 VI. xvii. 523
476 VI. xviii. 526
477 VI. xviii. 529
478 Faurot, op. cit. p. 582
window, when she imagines that Walter is consulting “an herbal”\textsuperscript{479} for a remedy only to find that it is a book on the history of circumcision;\textsuperscript{480} and, similarly, one might recall that Elizabeth was frustrated in her desire to ‘lie in’ with Tristram in London. Faurot seems to suggest by this that the one balances the other out - that Elizabeth ‘frustrates’ as much as she is ‘frustrated’ - but this balance is far from level. There is another way in which Tristram’s carefully researched dates also seem to suggest that both of his parents equally ‘encounter frustration’, but, when closely observed, Walter’s frustration appears to be the carefully cultivated product of Elizabeth’s long-term policy.\textsuperscript{481}

Tristram states with certainty that he was conceived “in the night between the first \textit{Sunday} and the first \textit{Monday} in the month”\textsuperscript{482} because that was the night on which Walter wound the clock and at the same time settled “some other little family concernments” - particularly those that would account for Tristram’s ‘begetting’. One should note this chronological cycle, initiated with the winding of the clock, is given as “a small specimen of this extreme exactness of his, to which in truth he was a slave”\textsuperscript{483} - a ‘slavish exactitude’ that sets in motion a very regular chronological device amid the apparent chaos of the narrative. Tristram is sure that he was not conceived any earlier because, as he explains to the inquisitive ‘Madam’, “…all \textit{December},—\textit{January}, and \textit{February}… [Walter] …was all that time afflicted with a \textit{Sciatica}.”\textsuperscript{484} In view of this, Elizabeth’s question is clearly ‘unseasonable’ in more ways that one, and the word itself is another example of the delicate way Sterne often uses chronological references to signal more than measurement of time.

\textsuperscript{479} V. xxvii. 459
\textsuperscript{480} Faurot, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{481} Juliet McMaster also examines these themes in ‘Walter Shandy, Sterne and Gender: A Feminist Foray’ \textit{Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne}, ed. New, New York 1998. (pp. 198-214) McMaster rightly notes that Faurot’s “shrewd article” was greeted with critical indifference (p. 198) before going on to review some of the material I discuss below. McMaster’s feminism is often too enthusiastic, however, as illustrated by her uncritical dismissal of Dr. Slop: “[Sterne] makes it plain why Mrs. Shandy prefers natural childbirth assisted by a competent midwife to caesarian section or podalic version performed by the incompetent Dr. Slop.” (p. 201) Like many others, McMaster completely overlooks the fact that the ‘competent midwife’ could not manage her task, and handed responsibility to Dr. Slop, who duly saved the lives of Tristram and Elizabeth. McMaster’s study is a useful reference at this point, and although we discuss similar material in similar terms, we differ greatly, and I have not otherwise referred to her work.

\textsuperscript{482} I. iv. 6
\textsuperscript{483} ibid.
\textsuperscript{484} I. iv. 7
We know also that in “latter end of September, 1717,” the supposedly pregnant Elizabeth set out with Walter on her trip to London, at a time thought to be “six weeks before her full reckoning.” The whole question of the false pregnancy of 1717 is suspicious, but for the present let us consider two particular possibilities. One the one hand, while it might seem unlikely that Walter would make two return journeys to York in such a short space of time, Tristram notes that Walter is particularly annoyed at being “whistled up to London, upon a Tom Fool’s errand” at a time “when his wall-fruit, and greengages especially ... were just ready for pulling.” Although this in itself might seem small incentive to make Walter hasten back from London, (and having been in business as recently as 1713 he would certainly have contacts there), it serves as a ‘seasonable’ reminder that ‘wall-fruit’ would not be the only crop that preoccupied Walter at such a time of year. Walter is a farmer – when he thinks of improving the ox-moor he sees the land, somewhat optimistically perhaps but nevertheless with a knowledgeable eye, in terms of crops and yield: “...a hundred lasts of rape, at twenty pounds a last, the very first year ...an excellent crop of wheat the year following—and the year after that, ...in all likelihood, a hundred and fifty—if not two hundred quarters of pease and beans—besides potatoes without end.” At harvest-time, therefore, one might feel that very little could induce Walter to spend six weeks idling in London while his wife lay confined by her condition.

On the other hand, the false pregnancy might well have revealed itself soon upon their arrival, in which case a fairly immediate return would have brought them back to York in early October. This does not seem to be the case, however, because on another occasion Walter worries that “the damp of the coach-lining about my loins, may give me the sciatica again, as it did December, January, and February last winter.” (IV. xxv) It is clear from this that Walter’s sciatica was provoked by a journey in November, and it affected him and (as Tristram very specifically states) “all December” (I. iv.) and on into the New Year. As no other coach-journeys are mentioned, it seems certain that the pair traveled from London to York, via Stilton and Grantham, early in November 1717. Either with Walter or without him,

485 I. xvi. 46, & I. xvi. 47
486 I. xv. 43
487 I. xvi. 47
488 IV. xxxi. 399
489 VI. xxv. 374
Elizabeth had her full six-weeks in London and, although the matter can never, perhaps, be settled conclusively, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that poor Walter was put to the trouble and expense of two trips to London. Crucially then, Elizabeth’s absence for a six-week period in London after ‘the latter end of September’ would mean of course (and with a neat precision) that on the first Sunday in October, and, more importantly, on the first Sunday in November, by which date she could not possibly be still falsely ‘confined’, Elizabeth was also absent from Walter’s ‘beds of justice’. It is almost certain therefore (and what follows, I feel, puts it beyond any doubt) that Elizabeth’s ‘silly question’ was put to Walter after a full six-month period of sexual inactivity – at least, in Walter’s bed.

Having gazed six months into the past, we can also look into the future. Tristram is also sure that he was conceived no later than the first Sunday in March, 1718, because “on Lady-day” - 25th March - Walter set out with Bobby for Westminster School, and furthermore, “he did not get down to his wife and family till the second week in May following”.490 We further discover therefore, with very little doubt, that Elizabeth interrupts Walter with her silly question during their sole sexual encounter between the first Sunday of September 1717 and the first Sunday of June 1718 - a full nine-month period. Furthermore, we must also consider that by June, with Tristram due in November, Elizabeth would perhaps have been far enough advanced to have been ‘confined’ once again by her pregnancy, a condition that would also have continued for some time after Tristram’s birth in November. Similarly, her ‘confinement’ in 1717 would presumably have predated her trip to London. Tristram’s remark that Elizabeth’s question was ‘unseasonable’ therefore seems heavily ironic, since, at this period in their marriage, rather than monthly, or even ‘seasonally’, sexual activity between Tristram’s parents seems to have been more like an annual event. Clearly, Tristram’s anxiety to dispel any doubt that he was conceived during a single encounter that was critically interrupted by Elizabeth, who was obviously bored, becomes quite understandable – because in some respects, his conception might seem almost miraculous.

More still is revealed if we compare the opening scene very closely with the discussion concerning Tristram’s ‘breeching’ that occurs “about a month before”491

490 I. iv; IV. xxv.
491 VI. xvi. p522
the accident with the sash window, and which also takes place in one of Walter’s ‘second beds of justice’:

...he fixed and set apart the first Sunday night in the month, and the Saturday night which immediately preceded it, to argue it over, in bed with my mother: By which contrivance, if you consider, Sir, with yourself, * * * * * 492

Earlier, in Volume I, having read ‘backwards and forwards’ through several chapters in order to understand Tristram’s cryptic comments about ‘little family concernsments’, now, mid-way through Volume VI, we learn that Walter’s second ‘bed of justice’ was another such activity that Walter incorporated into his monthly routine. If one then considers Walter’s ‘contrivance’ it seems that his practice was very closely related to the Goths’ original formula, but based on sexual appetite rather than thirst. Thus, in theory, when Walter debates matters with his wife on the Saturday night it is at the end of a period of sexual abstinence - before sex, and on the Sunday night they debate matters again at a time of sexual satiety - after sex. As one would expect from this formula, when Tristram returns to “the very night that I was begot” we find the two of them “chatting gravely in bed afterwards,”493 and, vice versa, the scene discussed above also reveals itself to be very closely related to that opening scene. The same characters appear in the same location; both scenes end with Walter’s frustrated exclamation; and, although separated by some years in historical time, contiguity is established by returning to exactly the same point in Walter’s monthly cycle:

There’s for you! cried my father, losing temper—Pleases me!—You never will distinguish, Mrs. Shandy, nor shall I ever teach you to do it, betwixt a point of pleasure and a point of convenience.—This was on the Sunday night:—and further this chapter sayeth not.494

It is not until the very end of the exchange that Tristram gives the chronological signal that directly connects this conversation to the specifically sexual conversation on the Sunday night of the first chapter, a connection emphasised - and precisely located - by Walter’s final loss of temper. Once this connection is established, and we realise that the two scenes are exact parallels, then the whole discussion of ‘breeches’ can be recognised as a long interplay of quite explicit sexual innuendo -

492 VI. xvii. 523-4
493 1. xvii. 49
494 VI. xviii. 529
which was no doubt understood by ‘THE REVIEWERS of BREECHES’ in The Critical Review, who criticised Sterne for his ‘invisible cock’: “His purchasers have bought the sight of his invisible cock, without being cheated; for they have been beforehand told he is invisible.”

Although one should perhaps allow the matter under discussion to remain unsettled, if the sexual innuendo is allowed to predominate, and we take phrases like ‘this boy’ and ‘the child’ as euphemisms, we gain a good deal of insight into the nature of Walter’s frustration. When he first turns to Elizabeth with his opening words, “We should begin to think, Mrs. Shandy, of putting this boy into breeches,” Walter is trying to initiate sexual activity, and his second remark refers to their infrequent sexual encounters: “We defer it, my dear, quoth my father, shamefully.” The ‘invisible cock’ is introduced when he alludes suggestively to his (concealed) erection and the ‘sinfulness’ it represents: “...the child looks extremely well ... in his vests and tunicks ... and for that reason it would be almost a sin to take him out of ’em.” Walter’s advances falter however when Elizabeth agrees too readily: “It would so.” He presses on however, and reminds her, “But indeed he is growing a very tall lad.” Elizabeth agrees again, “He is very tall...” but adds, significantly, “…for his age.”

Elizabeth’s chronological rejoinder reminds Walter – and the reader - that at the time of Tristram’s conception he was “somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age” a time when even Walter admits to being, “…in the decline of [his] days—when the powers of his imagination and of his body were waxing feeble.” Five years later therefore, at the time of Tristram’s ‘breeching’, he must be ‘somewhere around sixty’ and presumably ‘waxing even feebler’. One is reminded of the unflattering contrast introduced to the scene by means of the phallic clock in the Slawkenberg illustration, and Tristram’s own observation that “nothing was well hung in our family,” and Walter also seems aware of his own inadequacy: “I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father, who the duce he takes after.” Elizabeth suggests that this might be the cause of her infrequent

495 Howes, op. cit. 159-60
496 VI. xviii. 526
497 I. iv. 6
498 IV. xix. 354
499 V. xvii. 449
500 cf. Walter’s inability to understand why his grandfather had to pay ‘an unconscionably large jointure’ to compensate for the fact that he had ‘little or no nose.’
pregnancies: “I cannot conceive, for my life, --- said my mother.” Walter responds with a “Humph!” and then ruminates “gravely” upon the parallel between his height and the size of his penis: “I am very short myself...”, but again, Elizabeth’s agreement brings him back rather too pointedly to the present situation. “You are very short, Mr. Shandy.” Affronted by this, and with another “Humph!” Walter turns away entirely for “three and a half minutes.”

This passage brings into sharp focus the curious relationship my work has with that of New - his own detailed analysis of this scene runs close to my own, and he too is very aware of the sexual innuendo running throughout the whole episode, even going so far as to suggest that “the many hints of illegitimacy hovering over Tristram’s head culminate in this exchange.” However, New’s insight is available only to readers of an American textbook that is not distributed in the United Kingdom and so obscure that it even carries a ‘playful’ note addressed to “errant scholars who do stumble over it.” The same material is not available to readers of the compendious Notes the Florida edition, in which the passage is almost entirely neglected. Short of reproducing an entire chapter, I can only refer the reader to it in order to point out how closely we discuss the same material, and yet our conclusions could not be further apart, particularly regarding New’s interpretation of the ‘many hints’ towards Tristram’s illegitimacy.

One aspect of the scene that is often overlooked is Time which is, throughout, Elizabeth’s ally; Walter knows with certainty that after this evening he will have not have sex with his wife for at least three months, and in the silence one can almost hear the echo of his earlier words - ‘we defer it most shamefully.’ When he returns, it is with a show of sexual bravado, “When he gets these breeches made, cried my father in a higher tone, he’ll look like a beast in ‘em,” but Elizabeth merely assumes that he will be “very awkward in them at first”, and when Walter ominously concedes, “And twill be lucky if that’s the worst on’t”, Elizabeth once again agrees with some emphasis - “It will be very lucky.” - and Walter is almost defeated. His sense of sexual inadequacy now makes him compare himself with others, “I suppose...he’ll be exactly like other people’s children.” When Elizabeth responds

501 VI. xviii. 527
503 ibid. p. 99
504 ibid. p. 26
with “Exactly”, she seems to offer reassurance, but Walter, perhaps not wishing to pursue the problem of Elizabeth’s authority in this matter, ends with a dismissive, “Though I would be sorry for that.”

When the discourse resumes, the innuendo has almost disappeared, as have Walter’s sexual advances. It now seems that, all along, the conversation has ‘really’ been about Tristram’s breeches, and Walter salvages the shreds of his self-esteem by steering the conversation away from the allusive venereal discourse, and more firmly, and quite literally, towards the material discourse of Tristram’s apparel: “They should be of leather, said my father...” The innuendo and ambiguity have all gone and Walter’s words now only have a single meaning, and he continues to return to words like “fustian” and “dimity” which focus on the physical material of Tristram’s breeches. But Elizabeth, relentless, continues to frustrate him even in this, until, eventually, she hands over all responsibility to Walter and becomes entirely indifferent: “Order it as you please Mr. Shandy...” With one last effort, Walter tries to re-establish the discourse of sex, and his verbal innuendo is displaced by the narrative innuendo that now suggests his physical activity: “But don’t you think it right? added my father, pressing the point home to her.” As New is aware, “[t]he ‘point’ is almost certainly sexual,” but Elizabeth merely restates her own personal indifference: “Perfectly, said my mother, if it pleases you, Mr. Shandy,” and Walter’s frustration finally explodes, as on the earlier occasion, in an exclamation.

In this scene, although ‘Madam’ may not realise it, we have not only witnessed the discussion that took place during the second of Walter’s ‘beds of justice’, but also the sexual activity (or lack of it) which, by the formula from which it was derived, should precede the discussion. Elizabeth’s ‘careless indifference’ lacks the gay tones of affability that characterised the feigned indifference with which Tristram cheated Death, but, ‘like mother like son,’ it is the means by which she too successfully evades an encounter with the metaphorical ‘death’ to be met with in Walter’s monthly embraces. And while the reader, like the clock pendulum, continues to go ‘backwards and forwards’, the corresponding motion of Walter’s sexual activity on the first occasion is now replaced by his repeatedly turning

505 Bobby’s enrollment (determined by the Academic year) and hence Walter’s absence between ‘Lady-day’ and the second week in May, must have been planned and long expected.
506 VI. xviii. 528
507 XI. xviii. 529
508 New, op. cit. p. 101
towards, and away from his wife. Even Faurot, it seems, was not aware of the full extent of 'Mrs. Shandy's skill in the art of frustration' - and indeed, there is more.

In the five years that have elapsed since Elizabeth's original 'unseasonable' question, we have moved from an unsatisfactory sexual encounter, to a sexual encounter that involves no sex at all. Things are worse still however when we next meet Walter and Elizabeth in the same situation, and find that Walter is now entirely passive, and Elizabeth is the one to introduce amorous discourse:

I have an article of news to tell you, Mr. Shandy, quoth my mother, which will surprise you greatly.——

Now my father was then holding one of his second beds of justice, and was musing within himself about the hardships of matrimony, as my mother broke silence.——

“——My brother Toby, quoth she, is going to be married to Mrs. Wadman.”

When one recalls Walter's proposed adaptation of the Goths' original formula, one can no longer miss the heavy irony in Tristram's voice as he describes the travesty to which Walter's 'second bed of justice' has now been reduced - an internal soliloquy, (with pitiful innuendo) on 'the hardships of matrimony'. Once again it is difficult to resist the idea that we have just witnessed the whole of Walter's 'second bed of justice' in which both sexual activity and the ensuing debate have now been reduced to Walter's silent 'conversation' with himself. Furthermore, and just as she did on that first occasion, Elizabeth again interrupts Walter, this time to introduce the subject of Toby's 'amours' - a topic that only serves to emphasize the stillness and silence that constitute their own.

Elizabeth Shandy Reconsidered

The only precise information we find concerning Elizabeth's appearance is a detailed description of her eye. Since this is her only notable physical attribute it deserves close consideration:

...a thin, blue, chill, pellucid chrystal with all its humours so at rest, the least mote or speck of desire might have been seen at the bottom of it, had it

---

509 The accident with sash window happened when "I was five years old." (V. xvii). The conversation happens "about a month before" that time. See also Appendix 1, '1723'.

510 VI. xxxix. 568
existed—it did not—and how I happen to be so lewd myself, particularly a little before the vernal and autumnal equinoxes—Heaven above knows—My mother—madam—was so at no time, either by nature, by institution, or example. A temperate current of blood ran orderly through her veins in all months of the year...  

One would note immediately that Elizabeth’s eye - ‘thin, blue, chill’ - lacks any sign of maternal warmth, but perhaps this is because, in the moment Tristram describes it, Elizabeth is looking at Walter. However, this ‘mote-free’ eye also closely resembles that of another character whom we have become accustomed to regard as the very opposite of Elizabeth: “Widow Wadman’s left eye shines lucid as her right—there is neither mote, or sand, or dust, or chaff, or speck, or particle of opaque matter floating in it...” Actively courting Toby, Widow Wadman’s eye is a powerful weapon in her sexual armoury, as Tristram also reminds us: “An eye is for all the world exactly like a cannon...”, although when Elizabeth looks at Walter through it, one might think more literally of the phrase ‘if looks could kill.’ In the absence of “Momus’ glass,” we might consider Tristram’s other comment - that the eye is the window to the soul:

...the eye (for I absolutely deny the touch, though most of your Barbati, I know, are for it) has the quickest commerce with the soul,—gives a smarter stroke, and leaves something more inexpressible upon the fancy, than words can either convey—or sometimes get rid of...

When one looks into Elizabeth’s eye, and then into Widow Wadman’s, one can only note that the view in both cases is disconcertingly similar, and it is difficult to ‘get rid of’ the impression that Elizabeth and the Widow Wadman might actually be very similar characters. Obviously, once again, we must ‘weigh our observations’ with Tristram’s and consider more closely what ‘madam’, on this occasion, is required to deduce. Like Elizabeth, the widow has no physical characteristics except for one precisely evoked eye, and, also like her, she has no name other than her (late) husband’s, who, like Walter, was also afflicted with “a sciatica.” Her more familiar designation ‘widow’ - along with her house - also indicates that, like

---

511 IX. i. 736
512 VIII. xxiv. 707
513 VIII. xxv. 707
514 “...had the said glass been there set up, nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man’s character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptical beehive, and look’d in.—view’d the soul stark naked...” (I. xxiii. 82, 83)
515 V. vii. 432
Elizabeth, there is 'a fortune to be got' by marriage to her. And with regard to her 'amours' with Toby, "Mrs. Wadman had, some moons before this, made a confident of my mother." Lunar chronology, as well as their 'confidential' relationship, pulls the two figures closer together, as does their preference for snuff. While Walter, Toby and Trim are all associated with pipes, Elizabeth, the 'lewd' Tristram and the sexually active Widow Wadman, all take snuff, and the habit is also strongly associated with the Yorick of A Sentimental Journey.

While comparison with the Widow Wadman seems to augment our understanding of Elizabeth's character, more interesting is the latter's close alignment with Yorick. We have seen the ease with which Elizabeth can defeat Walter verbally, and Yorick evidently has the same ability, but he rarely seems to use it: "...though [Yorick] would often attack [Walter]—yet he could never bear to do it with all his force." Elizabeth, however, also uses non-verbal communication very effectively. In response to Walter's annoyance over the matter of the false pregnancy, "she did nothing but laugh and cry in a breath" in the coach back from London. When Walter casually suggests "incipison of the abdomen and the uterus", Elizabeth turns "pale as ashes at the very mention of it", but whether this indicates fright, or rage, is difficult to determine. On another occasion, with "the slight fall of her finger against my father's hand" Elizabeth has Walter reaching for his "almanack" but the chronological information his book contains is conveyed more directly to Walter by her 'sighing cadence of personal pity' - a powerful utterance of 'sentimental' discourse - as its effect upon Walter demonstrates:

"...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 almanack; but before he could untie it, Yorick's

---

516 IX. xxvi. 791
517 IX. xxxii. 804
518 "...if a pinch of snuff, or a stride or two across the room will not do the business for me..." IX. viii. 763
519 "...the marks of a snuffy finger and thumb, which there is all the reason in the world to imagine, were Mrs. Wadman's..." VIII. xvii. 679
520 "...my mother took a pinch of snuff." VIII. xxxiii. 719
521 Snuff and snuff-boxes are particularly associated with Yorick in ASJ, but there is no indication of this in TS.
522 VIII. xxxiv. 722
523 I. xvi. 48
524 II. xix. 179
525 c.f. I. ii. Walter keeps track of time in the "pocket-book" which Tristram uses as a source for dates, but with Elizabeth present, Walter reaches for an 'almanack' which contains lunar information, tides and other natural cycles, as well as a calendar of months and days.
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 in little doubt, as to the other part...  

Although their conversation is apparently brought to a conclusive end with no less than three ‘Amens’, by means of her additional ‘sighing cadence’ Elizabeth, in effect, introduces and carries on an entirely different conversation, which operates so powerfully upon Walter that he is ‘discomfited in every fibre’. The sigh has Walter reaching for his book to check the date, but Yorick’s congregation tells him that it is a Sunday, and this is enough to leave him ‘in little doubt, as to the other part.’ The ‘other part’ is obviously the sigh - which signifies, as Walter suspected, that it is ‘the first Sunday in the month’, and the reference is not to the church calendar, but to their own personal ‘sacrament day’. Once again chronology is Elizabeth’s ally, again she is powerful in the discourse of sexuality, and again the shadowy figure of Yorick comes to her aid, represented this time by a crowd of his (as ever) elusive associates - his congregation - who make their single, silent appearance to add the perfect flourish to Elizabeth’s own silent ‘rhetoric’.

There are very few physical objects in the text associated with Elizabeth, but we do know that she has her own horse, and, in the ‘hobby-horsical’ world of Tristram Shandy, this is a particularly significant detail. It seems highly significant then, that the only time we hear about Elizabeth’s horse is when, at Walter’s invitation, Yorick has occasion to ride upon it: “...so if you please you shall ride my wife's pad—and as you are to preach, Yorick, you had better make the best of your way before.” She also has an extensive, even a sumptuous wardrobe. In addition to the ‘green sattin nightgown’ already discussed, Susannah also covets, “...her red damask,—her orange tawny,—her white and yellow lute-strings,—her brown taffeta,—her bone laced caps, her bed gowns, and comfortable petticoats...” These expensive gowns may denote something of the life she left behind when she married Walter, but they more strongly suggest that Elizabeth still retains social connections that extend somewhat beyond the confines of Shandy Hall - and the interests of Walter.

526 IX. xi. 760
527 Christopher Ricks assumes the same in his comments on the opening chapter: “Mr. Shandy, in his way, was creating a world - and later in the novel we hear, again with the same double entendre, that the first Sunday of the month was always ‘a sacrament day’.” ‘Introduction’ (1967) p. 19
528 IV. xxv. 347
529 V. vii. 430
On a rare occasion that Elizabeth is seen to be engaged in independent activity, we might also assume that she is ‘creative’ - albeit in a fairly mundane way:

...for in my grand tour through Europe, in which, after all, my father (not caring to trust me with any one) attended me himself, with my uncle Toby, and Trim, and Obadiah, and indeed most of the family, except my mother, who being taken up with a project of knitting my father a pair of large worsted breeches—(the thing is common sense)—and she not caring to be put out of her way, she staid at home, at Shandy Hall, to keep things right during the expedition.530

In any other text, Elizabeth’s activity, knitting, especially knitting a warm garment for her husband, would be enough to suggest that she is a dutiful, ‘good’ wife.531 But the significance of such activity in Tristram Shandy is more complex, especially, as we have seen, when the discourse concerns ‘breeches.’ It is only when Elizabeth - ‘not caring to be put out of her way’ - has chosen to be absent from her husband, that she is portrayed as a being dutiful towards him. The superficial resemblance to Penelope, weaving in the absence of Ulysses and secretly undoing her work by night in order to frustrate her suitors, only serves to highlight their differences. Elizabeth’s activity of ‘ravelling threads’ into a complex system of knots which are intended to be wrapped around Walter’s genitals, appears more closely akin to Tristram’s practice of ‘weaving a tangled web’ - and keeping it tangled. This is an activity she practices when Walter is abroad, in preference to accompanying him, and this is in keeping with Elizabeth’s strong desire to be absent from Walter on other significant occasions. Again, we can compare the harmonious voices of Yorick and Elizabeth who, when they first speak with each other (which is not until the closing pages of the eighth volume) they do so to unite their voices against Walter, who is differentiating between two types of ‘love’: “The first, which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic... to the desire of philosophy and truth...” Walter compares - or contrasts - this ‘first’ kind of love, expressed in grandiloquent terms, with “…the second, [which] excites to desire, simply—”532 Here, Yorick interrupts and speaks out evidently on the side of ‘desire’: “I think the procreation of children as beneficial to the world, said Yorick, as the finding out the longitude...” and to this Elizabeth almost seems to coo her approval: “To be sure, said my mother,

530 VII. xxvii. 617
love keeps peace in the world—” Even at this point, one should note, Yorick is actually speaking to Walter, and Elizabeth merely joins in. Yorick and Elizabeth do not directly address each other until the very final lines of the last volume. Once again, it is the absence of things (in this case the absence of any sign elsewhere in the text that Elizabeth and Yorick have ever met) that gives significance, and the significance of the transition, already noted, from Elizabeth’s first unsatisfactory ‘conversation’ with Walter to her final ‘conversation’ with Yorick in the last chapter can not be understated.

As for Walter, although thwarted in this at the time of her ‘lying in’ with Tristram, Elizabeth did manage to absent from him at the time of Bobby’s birth which occurred while “my father happen’d to be at Epsom,” but let us rather now return to her “strong wish and desire” to be in London at the time of the false pregnancy. We have already noted Tristram’s uncharacteristic reluctance to comment upon ‘whether she was deceived or deceiving’ in this matter, and his modest evasion - ‘it no way becomes me to decide’ - is an open invitation to the reader. During the period that Walter was in business, Elizabeth would have become used to his absences: “[he] had been three or four different times in the Levant, in one of which, he had stayed a whole year and a half at Zant,” but the ‘lying-in clause’ - the result of some hard-nosed bargaining on Elizabeth’s part from the time before their marriage - reveals the astonishing extent of the independence she claimed during the period of her fruitless ‘lying in’. In addition to “the sum of one hundred and twenty pounds… paid into the hands of the said Elizabeth Mollineux to defray incidental costs, Elizabeth claimed an extraordinary degree of personal liberty: “…it shall moreover be lawful to and for the said Elizabeth Mollineux … to live and reside in such place or places, and in such family or families, and with such relations, friends and other persons within the city of London, as she, at her own will and pleasure, notwithstanding her present coverture, and as if she were a femme sole and unmarried,—shall think fit.” In a narrative that tends to stay close to the activities

532 VIII. xxxiii. 721
533 I. xix 62
534 I. xv. 46
535 V. iii. 423
536 I. xv. 44
537 I. xv. 44-45 This adds weight to my earlier assumption that Elizabeth did not return to Shandy Hall before the full six weeks of her expected stay in London had elapsed.
of Walter and Toby, Elizabeth’s extended absences from the text might simply be a result of her own marked preference for absence from her husband.

Finally, we must also question Tristram’s claim that his mother was ‘careless’ about ‘everything else in the world which concerned her’ and ‘indifferent whether it was done this way or that’, since there is one occasion in particular when she is ‘absolutely determined’ that things will be done her way, that is, in having the female midwife attend at the time Tristram’s birth: “…my mother, I say, was absolutely determined to trust her life and mine with it, into no soul’s hand but this old woman’s only.” Her triumph over Walter in the ensuing dispute is impressive in view of the combined force of Walter’s passionate belief in his theories, his patriarchal authority, and his notably persuasive rhetoric: “he was certainly irresistible, both in his orations and disputations;—he was born an orator … Persuasion hung upon his lips.”

Surprisingly then, despite bringing the whole force of his powers to bear upon his wife, his attempts at ‘persuasion’ are to no avail:

My father begged and intreated … He was almost at his wit’s end;——talked it over with her in all moods;—placed his arguments in all lights;—argues the matter with her like a christian,—like a heathen,—like a husband,—like a father,—like a patriot,—like a man:—My mother answered everything only like a woman; which was a little hard upon her;—for as she could not assume and fight it out behind such a variety of characters,—‘twas no fair match;—‘twas seven to one.——What could my mother do?——She had the advantage (otherwise she had been certainly overpowered) of a small reinforcement of chagrin personal at the bottom which bore her up, and enabled her to dispute the affair with my father with so equal an advantage,—that both sides sung Te Deum.

Although no side can claim a complete victory, for Walter this is certainly a defeat. His almost limitless powers of persuasion are as nothing when pitted against his wife’s ‘small reinforcement of chagrin personal.’ Elizabeth’s indifference to words was in itself “an eternal source of misery to my father” and although we may receive the impression that Elizabeth is ‘a woman of few words’, it is a mistake to assume, as Toby did, that Elizabeth’s participation in their debates was in any way less vocal than her husband’s — as Walter explains to Toby at a later time:

---

538 I. xviii. 50-1
539 I. xix. 59-60
540 I. xviii. 55
541 IX. xi. 759
What a teazing life did she lead herself, and consequently her foetus too, with that nonsensical anxiety of hers about lying in town? I thought my sister submitted with the greatest patience, replied my uncle Toby—I never heard her utter one fretful word about it—She fumed inwardly, cried my father; and that, let me tell you, brother, was ten times worse for the child—and then! what battles did she fight with me, and what perpetual storms about the midwife—

‘Battles’ with Walter and ‘perpetual storms’ reveal a character quite at odds with the ‘passive’ and ‘phlegmatic’ character Elizabeth is too often taken to be, and this is also evident on another occasion, when a dispute between them concerning “Ambrose Paraeus his hypothesis” (which recommends wet-nurses with large, soft breasts) became so heated that it “overthrew the system of peace and harmony of our family; and for three days together, not only embroiled matters between my father and my mother but turn’d likewise the whole house and everything in it ... quite upside down.”  Certainiy, at least as far as her relationship with Walter is concerned, when Tristram describes his mother as ‘truest of all poco-curantes of her sex’ and tells us that ‘a temperate current of blood ran orderly through her veins in all months of the year,’ his opinions are revealed to be thoroughly unreliable.

---

542 IV. xix. 355
543 III. xxxviii. 277.
Chapter Thirteen
Two Midwives

‘...and what perpetual storms about the midwife’

After Susannah, the figure most closely associated with Elizabeth is the “thin, upright, motherly, notable, good old body of a midwife,”\(^{544}\) who is introduced in a detailed portrait early in the first volume. Before coming to consider the midwife however, it is useful to consider the strong and emotive contrast that emphatically differentiates her from Dr. Slop, the man-midwife preferred by Walter in the debate over who should officiate at Tristram’s birth.

Immediately, we can see the stark physical differences between the ‘thin’ midwife and the “little, squat, uncourtly figure of a Doctor Slop, of about four feet and a half perpendicular height, with a breadth of back, and a sesquipedality of belly, which might have done honour to a Serjeant in the Horse-Guards,”\(^ {545}\) and we soon find, in equally emphatic contrast, that he is also a Catholic. Dr. Slop is the most grotesque figure in the text, and it is almost a caricature that waddles, bloated and bespattered, into the parlour on the day of Tristram’s birth. Traditionally, the figure of Dr. Slop is supposed to have been based upon the real Dr. Burton of York, although Cash mentions the “curious distortion of Dr Burton’s physical appearance” but his further remarks are scarcely credible: “A tall well-made gentleman armed with murderous instruments for destroying unborn children would have been hateful. By rendering him as the ‘little, squat, uncourtly figure’ who waddles through

\(^{544}\) I. vii. 10
\(^{545}\) II. ix. 121
*Tristram Shandy*, Sterne made him funny.546 But Dr. Slop is made monstrous in appearance, further besmeared by the unnatural innuendo in his collision with Obadiah, and by profession, is perhaps the most terrifying creature that it is possible to imagine. If he had not been able to use his forceps, Yorick’s curate would have been required to baptise the visible part of the Tristram’s head (although he would not have needed the squirt), and Dr. Slop would have been left with only his crotchet, hook and *tire-tete* to assist him any further in his work. And although many modern readers are no doubt first made aware of the full significance of those “gruesome instruments” by Cash himself,547 Sterne himself knew precisely what they were, as he also knew that Dr. Slop’s ‘green-baize bag’ contains little else that is funny - in 1751 Sterne wrote of his reason for remembering having made a gift of money to his mother:

“If she could forget such a Summ I had reason to remember it; for when I gave it I did not leave myself with One Guinea in the House to befriend my Wife, though then within One Day of her Labour & under an apparent Necessity of a Man Mid-wife to attend her.”548

However one tries to envisage the figure of the ‘traditional’ man-midwife as he existed well into the eighteenth century, he is the most terrifying and truly horrific character that it is possible to imagine. This is in no way an exaggeration and the absolute values attached to the words ‘terrifying’ and ‘horrific’ are used with care, for this is one figure, if any could really be said to, who ‘out-Herod’s Herod’; who will slaughter a living child within the body of its mother and tear it out, by brute strength, very often in several pieces; who will plunge the ‘tire-tete’ through the top of the child’s head, open out its screw mechanism in order to get a firm grip on the inside of the skull, and, if the head becomes detached with the tugging, who will rake out the remaining pieces of the child with his hook and his crotchet. The only possible way to render the figure of Burton more ‘hateful’ would be to transform him from ‘a tall well-made gentleman’ into ‘a little, squat, uncourtly figure, who waddles’ and this is certainly not the reason that Dr Slop is ‘funny’.

These emotive terms do not do justice to Dr. Slop however, unless one recalls Saintsbury’s comments on the transformation of Dr. Burton: “Dr. Slop, who is

546 EMY, p. 290; see also pp. 180, 202-3
547 i.e. in Cash, ‘The Birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr. Burton’ (1968)
known to have been drawn (with somewhat unmerciful fidelity in externals, but not at all unkindly when we look deeper) from Dr. Burton..."549 Indeed, other than the unflattering physical transformation, Dr. Burton could have little reason to feel insulted by being portrayed as the man who saved Tristram’s life. Indeed, the only reason that the figure of Dr Slop is in any way sufferable, whether in the pages of Tristram Shandy or indeed, as Dr. Burton upon the face of the earth, is because their skills are necessary, and what is more, and with an exquisite irony, there is a sense in which it is Dr Slop, rather than Toby, who represents the supreme example of benevolence and human kindness. What more could one do, to relieve the suffering of a fellow creature, than to perform the vile and truly obscene duty that Dr. Slop must be willing to perform, and that his real-life counterparts like Dr. Burton were no doubt very often begged and implored to perform? Seen in this light, Tristram seems guilty of great ingratitude. He never directly acknowledges that he owes his life to Dr. Slop, much less that after Yorick’s Anglican midwife failed to deliver the child, and that without Dr. Slop and his forceps, Tristram and Elizabeth almost certainly would have died in a horrible and prolonged agony. Although these things are perfectly obvious, Tristram generally seems only ready to blame Dr. Slop (and the clause in his mother’s marriage articles) for the crushing of his nose. If we begin afresh, rid our minds of ‘preconceived ideas’, and try to distinguish between the ‘real’ Dr. Slop and the anti-Catholic stereotype that Tristram urges upon us, as with Elizabeth, we can once again almost completely invert the traditional figure.

Having said this much of Dr. Slop, let us now return to the midwife, whose credentials seem quite adequate enough: she comes equipped with “a little plain good sense, and some years full employment in her business, in which she had all along trusted little to her own efforts, and a great deal to those of dame nature.”550 She is legally authorised to practice by virtue of the necessary “ordinaries license” obtained for her by Parson Yorick and his wife, who also ensured that before being issued with a licence the widow had been “a little instructed in some of the plain principles of the business.” Having “three or four small children” of her own, we need not doubt her personal, practical experience of childbirth, and in addition to the recommendation already implied by Yorick’s assistance, her suitability is further reinforced by Tristram’s own personal affirmation of her good character - she was “a

549 Saintsbury, Introduction to TS (1912), p. xxiii.
550 I. vii. p.10-11
person of decent carriage,—grave deportment,—a woman moreover of few words, and withal an object of compassion, whose distress and silence under it call’d out the louder for a friendly lift.”

After various digressions, the midwife’s tale is resumed on the page immediately following Yorick’s funerary black page, so that Yorick’s extended portrait is ‘framed’ by the less detailed but still substantial description of his protégé, and this further reinforces their connection. Tristram returns to the midwife at this point to remind us of the importance of this figure in his story: “...when she is wanted we can in no way do without her.”

He continues to reinforce the favourable impression of “this good woman” who was “a person of no small consequence throughout our whole village and township”; whose “fame” also extended into “…two or three of the adjacent hamlets in the skirts of the next parish”; and who was, furthermore, “…very well looked on at one large grange-house and some other odd houses and farms within two or three miles, as I said, from the smoke of her own chimney.” We also understand that she was no less ‘well looked on’ at Shandy Hall, at least by Elizabeth. The narrow range of the midwife’s fame seems to do no real harm to a reputation founded in ‘some years full employment’ in the intimate circle of a small rural community where the history of her practice and the details of her reputation would be freely circulated, and her competence would have been assessed at first-hand by many of the local women. Indeed, when he returns to the figure again we further learn that, “the old midwife had really some little claim to be depended upon... having, in the course of her practice of near twenty years in the parish, brought every mother’s son of them into the world without any one slip or accident which could fairly be laid to her account.” Of course, with its final qualification, this would still have been true had Tristram and Elizabeth both died.

The reference to the smoke from the midwife’s chimney however, returns us to Chapter 8 and the “small circle described upon the circle of the great world, of four English miles diameter, or thereabouts, of which the cottage where the good old woman lived, is supposed to be the centre”, and which marks the extent of the

551 I. vii. 39
552 I. xiii. 40
553 I. xviii. 51
midwife’s “reputation in the world”\textsuperscript{554}. Tristram is most particular and precise in the delineation of this ‘small circle’, adopting the language of the geographer or the cartographer to create the image. At the close of Chapter 13 the midwife fades from view once again, but just as she does, and prompted by ‘the smoke from her own chimney’, Tristram returns to cartography and makes an intriguing and, as it turns out, an unfulfilled promise:

—But I must here, once and for all, inform you, that all this will be more exactly delineated and explain’d in a map, now in the hands of the engraver, which, with many other pieces and developments to this work, will be added to the end of the twentieth volume,—not to swell the work,—I detest the thought of such a thing;——but by way of commentary, scholium, illustration, and key to such passages, incidents or innuendoes as shall be thought to be either of private interpretation, or of dark or doubtful meaning, after my life and my opinions have been read over, (now don’t forget the meaning of the word) by the whole world...\textsuperscript{555}

One is forced to wonder what ‘dark or doubtful incidents and innuendoes’ need clearing up by such elaborate means, and since ‘there’s no smoke without fire’, one must again suspect that ‘the subtlest hints and sly communications of science’ are perhaps escaping unnoticed, although without the promised map the science of cartography seems of little use. However, we may adjust the scale of our own view and draw away from the close detail and the small circle of the midwife’s local reputation to consider more generally the reputation of midwives in ‘the world at large’ during the eighteenth century.

Adrian Wilson asks the question “Who were the midwives?”, but his answer only serves to raise more questions:

If it is difficult to generalise about who midwives were, there is one important respect in which we can now say who they were not. Historiographic tradition has long suggested that in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England there was some association between midwives and witches... Such a connection had certainly existed in the fantasies of the two fifteenth-century Dominican authors of the \textit{Malleus Maleficarum}, who produced elaborate theories linking the activities of supposed witches with those of allegedly infanticidal midwives. But in early modern England, as David Harley has recently shown, there is no evidence for any such connection... The supposed link ... has been the product of historians’ imaginations.\textsuperscript{556}

\textsuperscript{554} I. vii. 10
\textsuperscript{555} I. xiii. 39-40
\textsuperscript{556} Adrian Wilson, \textit{The Making of Man-Midwifery: Childbirth in England 1660-1770}. (London 1995) p.30-1
Notwithstanding the unreliability of historian’s imaginations, from the following description of the terms of the oath that midwives were required to swear in order to gain the kind of licence procured by Yorick, it is clear that such fears were clearly manifest in eighteenth century Anglican thinking:

Midwives were required to swear an oath which bound them to ensure that no false charges of paternity were brought, no babies swapped, hidden or killed and not to assist at secret confinements... to make sure that babies were properly baptised according to Anglican ceremonies, and not to use witchcraft or other devilish arts themselves; and to provide their expertise equally for rich and poor, not using a woman’s pain in childbirth to extort money from her that she would not have given freely.557

Landry and Maclean begin their study of Tristram’s birth with the blunt assertion that: “...the figure of the midwife in Tristram Shandy represents, among other things, a nexus of crucial position in the early-modern debates about obstetric authority in general and licensing in particular, debates which clearly indicate a strong and persistent male fear of what these women might get up to if left to manage childbirth on their own.”558 However, Wilson more usefully goes on to identify the probable site of these of these predominantly male anxieties when he reminds us of a fact that Landry and Maclean, and others, seem to overlook: “...the activities of midwives were not restricted to childbirth but extended outwards into a wide and unbounded sphere...”559

...Nor were midwives’ activities confined to healing, for it seems that in times of great personal distress women reposed a special trust in their midwives... [there are] various indications – from episcopal accusations to the tales in Defoe’s Moll Flanders – that midwives assisted to unmarried mothers to cover up their lapses. Most of the new-born babies left at the London Foundling Hospital, when its doors were opened in the late 1750s, were probably brought not by their mothers but by other people, and it is tempting to speculate that midwives performed this role...

...The management of childbirth stood at the centre of her activities, but represented a starting-point rather than a boundary of practice. The midwife was the woman’s doctor, and perhaps the woman’s confidante, of early-modern England.560

558 ibid. p.522
559 Wilson, op. cit. p.36
560 ibid p.38
However, as well as being ‘the woman’s confidante of early modern England’, the midwife could in certain circumstances turn into the woman’s inquisitor, especially if a fatherless child looked liable to become a burden on the community. According to Stone, it was “…common practice …for the midwife and some local women to cross-question the [unmarried] mother during labour, refusing to come to her help in her agony until she revealed the name of the father. Indeed the midwives’ ‘oath of 1726 imposed this duty upon them.”

These considerations throw a significant light on the qualities of the midwife that Tristram mentions, and a greater insight into the reasons why Elizabeth and others perhaps among the local women might well have found such qualities particularly desirable in a midwife: she was “a person of decent carriage,—grave deportment,—a woman moreover of few words….” Certainly the figure of the midwife in Tristram Shandy is represented as ‘a woman of few words’, she speaks only seven words in the whole book, and makes only one other reported speech. One might also note that the midwife’s ‘grave deportment’ is not obviously a good thing, since, according to Yorick himself: “…the very essence of gravity was design, and consequently deceit.”

The midwife is only available for the type of analysis provided by Landry and Maclean if, like them, one uncritically accepts Tristram’s description of this ‘good old body of a midwife’ - although few critics have found reason to call this judgement into question. According to New, through the figure of the midwife, “…Sterne enters the ongoing debate in his age regarding midwives and male doctors, clearly on the side of the former,” while Cash describes this almost invisible figure as a “delightful character.” Robert A. Erickson, despite recognising that “…there are perhaps even more links between midwives and bawds than between midwives and witches,” also looks no further than “the affectionate tone of Sterne’s

561 Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800, p.401
562 I. vii. 11 (italics mine)
563 Susannah reports that the midwife desires to speak with Slop in III. xiii. The midwife says “Not you.” in III. xvi., and “Tis most certainly the head.” in III. xvii.
564 I. xi. 28
566 Cash, LY, p.217
567 Robert A. Erickson, Mother Midnight, p.22
traditional picture of the country midwife” before deciding that Tristram’s midwife “...seems an entirely good creature.”\textsuperscript{568}

For her part, and for her own reasons, Elizabeth was “…absolutely determined to trust her life and mine with it, into no soul’s hand but this old woman’s only.”\textsuperscript{569} Toby’s simple explanation for her vigorously defended preference was that she “does not choose to let a man come so near her *****\textsuperscript{570}, obviously suggesting that female modesty determined her preference. This is a false assumption. At the time of Tristram’s birth, Elizabeth is constrained by the terms of the lying in clause to remain in Yorkshire, but given an entirely free choice there is no doubt she would still opt for ‘the famous Dr. Manningham’ or some such other ‘fashionable accoucher’ in preference to the local midwife, as she did at the time of the false pregnancy. That Toby should jump to the most obvious conclusion is fully in keeping with his general ignorance of women. Elizabeth, however, may have other motives.

There is another version of the ‘traditional figure’ of the midwife, who appears in various literary incarnations throughout the century, most notably as Mrs. Mandrake in Farquhar’s \textit{The Twin Rivals}. Mrs. Mandrake seems especially relevant to \textit{Tristram Shandy} since, in contrast to Toby’s famous ignorance of the “Right end of a woman”\textsuperscript{571}, she is introduced as one “famous for understanding the right side of a woman, and the wrong side of the law”\textsuperscript{572}, and more so when she demonstrates her thorough understanding of the mysteries of childbirth, particularly the chronological mystery associated with Tristram’s conception (in March) and birth (in November):

\begin{quote}
MANDRAKE: Has any message been left for me today?
MAID: Yes, madam. Here has been one from my Lady Stillborn, that desired you not to be out of the way, for she is expected to cry out every minute.
MANDRAKE: How! Every minute! Let me see.
\textit{Takes out her pocket-book}
Stillborn—ay—she reckons with her husband from the first of April; and with Sir James, from the first of March. Ay, she’s always a month before her time.\textsuperscript{573}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{568} ibid. pp.212, 214.
\textsuperscript{569} I. xviii. 50-1
\textsuperscript{570} II. vi. 116
\textsuperscript{571} II. vii. 117-18
\textsuperscript{573} ibid. I. ii. 3-10. (p.94)
Mandrake’s role is a complex one; not only does she act as a midwife but also, as she explains, she acts as a bawd: “I have delivered as many women of great bellies, and helped as many to ‘em, as any woman in England”; and at other times, as after Mr. Moabite’s visit, when “the child was left with me”, she will discreetly dispose of unwanted infants, although perhaps not always as generously as she maintains. Finally, when asked by Young Wouldbe to assist in “dressing up a handsome cheat” she further demonstrates her familiarity with ‘the wrong side of the law’ when she replies, “I defy any chambermaid in England to do it better.”

Certainly then, Mandrake’s activities as a midwife ‘extended outwards into a wide and unbounded sphere’, and most significantly, she is at her most dangerous when she speaks and reveals her specialised knowledge:

MANDRAKE: ...You Benjamin Would be with the crooked back, art the eldest-born, and true heir to the estate and dignity

...None, my lord, can tell better than I, who brought you both into the world.

While one would not at first assume that Tristram’s midwife is anything like the type of ‘stage villain’ represented by Mrs. Mandrake, the part was traditionally played by a man – a prototypical pantomime dame - perhaps because the profession itself was persistently thought disreputable throughout the century. The midwife - “truest friend to Lechery” - in Rochester’s ‘Tunbridge Wells’ colludes with a wife against her husband and, as Harold Love notes, “A midwife in [Thomas Rawlin’s] ‘Tunbridge Wells; or, a days courtship’ [1678] is praised for ‘the politick management of a baudy intrigue.” Indeed, in literary representations, the ‘traditional’ figure of the ‘good old body of a midwife’ probably begins with Sterne, and certainly, for his early readers, any representation of a midwife would not evoke such homely connotations. That is - were it not for Tristram’s repeated reassurances about this particular figure who is, at the same time, anonymous, strangely silent and carefully wreathed in shadow. One might note immediately that the midwife offers no sign of surprise at the early onset of Elizabeth’s labour, nor at her somewhat overdeveloped ‘premature’ child; even more surprising is the rapidity with which Elizabeth consulted with the midwife at the very outset of her pregnancy with Tristram; and

574 ibid. II. ii. 10-11. (p.102)
575 ibid. IV. i. 208-10, 213 (p.134)
most remarkable of all is the fact that the midwife should be discussed in the ‘second bed of justice’ that immediately followed Tristram’s supposed conception - the quiet prelude to a long series of ‘battles’ and ‘perpetual storms’:

...nor was it till the very night in which I was begot, which was thirteen months after [Elizabeth’s return from London], that she had the least intimation of his design: when my father, happening, as you remember, to be a little chagrin'd and out of temper,—took occasion as they lay chatting gravely in bed afterwards, talking over what was to come,—to let her know that she must accommodate herself as well as she could to the bargain made between them in their marriage-deeds.\(^{577}\)

On the occasion that Walter was ‘chagrined and out of temper’ by having his sexual activity interrupted by the silly question - a literal \textit{coitus interruptus} - if anything seems premature, it must be a discussion of Elizabeth’s lying-in in terms of ‘what was to come’. Further to this, we know that Elizabeth was not happy with the conditions stipulated by the lying-in clause, but, railing at Walter and ‘fuming inwardly’ she nevertheless rapidly - rather too rapidly - came to terms with situation, and “took her measures accordingly…”

...when [my mother] was three days, or thereabouts, gone with child, she began to cast her eyes upon the midwife … and before the week was well got round … she had come to a final determination in her mind.\(^{578}\)

Even if we assume that Elizabeth’s monthly cycles were as regular as Walter’s routines, it is straining the imagination to believe that she could have known with any certainty that she was pregnant within ‘three days, or thereabouts’ of conceiving Tristram; and surely, after the upset caused by the false pregnancy of the year before, when Walter was “whistled up to \textit{London}, upon a \textit{Tom Fool’s} errand”\(^{579}\), one would have expected that on this occasion she would have waited until she was entirely sure before making such firm decisions. It is also well to remember that Tristram refuses to discuss his mother’s role in this affair: “…whether she was deceived or deceiving in this matter, it no way becomes me to decide.”\(^{580}\) This therefore leaves only the reader, who must necessarily decide whether Elizabeth was ‘deceived or deceiving’


\(^{577}\) I. xvii. 49

\(^{578}\) I. xviii. 50

\(^{579}\) I. xvi. 47

\(^{580}\) I. xvi. 56
in this, and perhaps in other matters also, but few - other than Faurot - seem to have looked very closely at the evidence before having decided. In the next chapter I will suggest that there is a great deal of evidence to suggest, like Mrs. Mandrake and Lady Stillborn - who 'reckons with her husband from the first of April; and with Sir James, from the first of March' – Elizabeth and the midwife keep a similar dishonest reckoning with Walter.
Chapter Fourteen
The ‘nine months’ Problem

“...and right glad I am, that I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done; and that I am able to go on tracing everything in it, as Horace says, *ab ovo.*”  

Although the fragment of conversation at the end of the first chapter might be thought of as the opening ‘scene’, it is actually the conclusion of Tristram’s introductory preamble, tracing his own misfortunes back to parental negligence at the time of his conception. “I wish either my father or my mother ... had minded what they were about when they begot me.” Having introduced the notion of the “animal spirits” and their importance in the first chapter, in the second, Tristram describes the unfortunate consequences of his mother’s ‘unseasonable question’: “...it scattered and dispersed the animal spirits, whose business it was to have escorted ... the HOMUNCULUS, and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception.” Indeed, other than his parents’ brief conversation, the bulk of the first two chapters is devoted to Tristram’s discussion of the ‘homunculean’ theory of generation. However, as Judith Hawley has observed, Tristram’s ‘explanation’ lacks credibility even by the terms of a theory that, by the latter half of the eighteenth century, was itself largely discredited. Tristram’s ‘HOMUNCULUS’ is a particularly bizarre hybrid, derived in equal measure from Rabelais, from the ‘natural

---

581 I. iv. 5
582 I. i. 1
philosophy' of John Keill, and from John Locke's *Essay upon the Human Understanding*:

Sterne combines Rabelais' description of trees on the Island of Tools (or genitalia) with the description of animalcula which the 'minute philosopher' Keill used to prove the infinite divisibility of matter. Sterne has taken over a completely inappropriate anatomy for his innocent little man... Sterne may have enjoyed bringing Keill's subtle matter down to earth by confusing it with Rabelais' tools.583

Tristram describes the unalterable mechanism by which the motions of the animal spirits come to determine "a man's sense and nonsense": "...when they are once set a-going ... [they] go cluttering like hey-go-mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and smooth as a garden walk."584 By this, as Hawley remarks, "Tristram implies that an individual's character is largely determined at birth. Indeed, the animalcule is an embodiment of predestination in medical theory." At the same time, however, the activity of the 'animal spirits' is easily recognised as "a playful adaptation of the contrary argument that the mind at birth is a sheet of blank paper yet to be written on." And thus, Hawley concludes:

We are caught in a web of conflicting theories. The texture of Tristram's prose further entangles us: he speaks conversationally about scientific matters, and scientifically about common experience; he muddles the spiritual and material by treating animal spirits as real animals with hair that can be 'ruffled' and feet that can sheepishly tread a path in the brain. Tracing Tristram back to his first springs leaves us with just as many riddles and mysteries.585

The riddles and mysteries are made more profound by the fact that the discussion also gestures strongly towards a passage from Pierre Charron's *De la sagesse*.586

However, 'tracing back to first springs' is exactly what Tristram aims to do: "I have begun the history of myself ... tracing every thing in it, as Horace says, ab Ovo,"587 and this is precisely where the mystery arises - for in telling his preposterous tale of the fortunes of the HOMUNCULUS, Tristram is pointedly

584 1. i. 2
585 ibid.
586 NOTES, pp. 39-41
587 1. iv. 5
telling a tale without an egg. However, if the tale told is according to more modern scientific theories, and if we abandon the ridiculous ‘little man’ and seek instead to understand Tristram’s story ‘from the egg’, then it becomes possible to view these matters rather differently.

I was begot in the night, betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was. — But how I come to be so very particular in my account of a thing which happened before I was born, is owing to another small anecdote known only in our family, but now made public for the better clearing up this point.\(^{588}\)

...what follows in the beginning of the next chapter puts it beyond all possibility of doubt.\(^{589}\)

On the fifth day of November, 1718, which to the æra fixed on, was as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected, —was I, Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours.\(^{590}\)

One must wonder - what is the ‘doubt’ beyond which Tristram wishes to set this matter, and what needs ‘clearing up’ so thoroughly? Chronologically, it is clear at once that Tristram’s ‘nine kalendar months’ is inaccurate – early March to early November is only eight months. It seems odd, at first sight, that this discrepancy went unnoticed for so long,\(^{591}\) especially since we are told that Walter set out on his journey to London “on Lady-Day, which was on the 25th of the same month in which I date my geniture” - this reference to the liturgical calendar should have alerted some readers to the discrepancy since Lady-Day, the feast of the Annunciation, falls exactly ‘nine kalendar months’ before Christmas Day. Obviously though, the fact is easily overlooked, especially since the reader is not immediately informed that Tristram was born in early November. The two dates are separated by several paragraphs and a chapter division, and the first is given with an emphatic certainty based in part upon the documentary evidence of “…my father’s pocket-book, which now lies upon the table…”\(^{592}\) and in part upon an anecdote of Toby’s. The second date is heralded at the end of chapter four as a fact that will dispel ‘all possibility of doubt’, and is then announced in chapter five with the added assurance

\(^{588}\) I. iv. 6
\(^{589}\) I. iv. 7
\(^{590}\) I. v. 8
\(^{591}\) First noted by ‘HRPC’ in Notes and Queries, 1895. See Hay, (1973) p. 80
that the difference between the two is ‘as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected’. When faced with such a barrage of assurance, the reader is given little incentive to turn back the page and to perform even a simple mental check. However, the fact that one is discouraged by Tristram from pursuing this matter seems incentive enough to pursue it instead with some vigour.

After Tristram’s convoluted opening preambles, the formal announcement of his birth-date which opens chapter five almost carries the weight of the ‘real’ beginning of Tristram’s life story, and the reader may feel relieved to be offered this plain statement of fact as something that, at last, does not need to be puzzled over. And of course the date of Tristram’s birth – the fifth of November – has a significance that none of his early readers would have been able to overlook, nor the numerous other later references to Tristram’s thoroughly Protestant heritage and birthright. Unlike birthdays, there is no special significance attached to one’s ‘conception-day’ other than the risible and bawdy connotations that Sterne quite openly exploits, and so the unspecified date in March, one may well assume, is just a convenient date which happens to fall ‘nine kalendar months’ before the date which carries the actual significance. But eight months are not nine, which is perhaps why Tristram’s announcement his date of birth is followed immediately with his second wish: “I wish I had been born in the Moon...”\footnote{593}, since it is only by counting lunar months that he can accurately count a nine months gestation.

Lunar chronology, as already noted, is particularly associated with Elizabeth, and her nocturnal influence at the start of Tristram’s life - and her ‘twilight’ existence thereafter - is analogous to the role of the “Bright Goddess” to whom the book is dedicated, and who has most influence over Tristram’s progress in the world: “…the Moon, who, by the bye, of all the Patrons or Matrons I can think of, has most power to set my book a-going, and make the world run mad after it.” The remaining parts of the dedication, those dealing with hobby-horses, are for sale to any gullible ‘Sir’ who would be foolish enough to pay for such a shoddy distinction; but what is retained - the ‘non-hobby-horsical’ material - is not to be had from such a debased transaction. When considering the ‘Patrons and Matrons’ presiding when Tristram himself was first ‘set a-going’, one might choose to be led ‘a merry dance’ by

\footnote{592} I iv. 7
\footnote{593} I. v. 8
Walter’s ‘hobby-horsical’ homunculus which, “cluttering like hey-go-mad,” dominates the text, but in so doing, distract attention from the subtler discourse of Elizabeth’s shadowy silences, and the influence of the ‘Bright Goddess’.

There are a number of serious critical works that have been devoted wholly to the subject of Tristram’s dubious parentage, most of which seem to agree with New’s opinion that this chronological uncertainty is merely “…the first of several playful, and probably meaningless, hints in Tristram Shandy that Walter may not be Tristram’s father.” But New’s ‘probably’ merely seems to echo the complacency of Tristram’s breezy assertion that eight months are, ‘as near as can be expected’, equal to nine, although among the most persistent of Tristram’s many pleas, hints and admonitions to the reader are those demanding careful attention to detail. While it is an unwary critic who would dismiss any detail in Tristram Shandy as ‘meaningless’, such a significant detail should not be dismissed without thorough and careful scrutiny.

John A. Hay’s study, ‘Rhetoric and Historiography: Tristram Shandy’s First Nine Kalendar Months’, is a well researched and perceptive work which I will quote at length, but which concludes, surprisingly, in general agreement with New. Hay begins by discussing the various ways in which Sterne uses classical rhetoric, and distinguishes between the dramatic and often frustrated rhetoric of Walter’s oratory, which he compares with Tristram’s own use of rhetorical devices in his role as historian, quoting Tristram’s own words to illustrate the difference:

—My way is ever to point out to the curious, different tracts of investigation, to come to the first springs of the events I tell;—not with a pedantic Fescue, —or in the decisive Manner of Tacitus, who outwits himself and his reader;—but with the officious humility of a heart devoted to the assistance merely of the inquisitive;—to them I write,—and by them I shall be read...

In the text, this passage follows several intriguing observations by Tristram, who begins by repeating his first wish that “the æra of my begetting, as well as the mode

---

594 I. i. 2. OED cites Sterne, and defines ‘hey-go-mad’ as “expressive of a boisterous excitement”, but without having noted that the ‘Hey-go-mad’ is a dance. Further to this see my review ‘Gastripheres, Mundungus and the ‘Hey-go-mad’, The Shandean 12, 2001, p. 121
595 TS (1997), p.547, n.1. In the Florida NOTES (1984) New and his co-editors acknowledge that: “...there are, to be sure, a good many hints of Tristram’s illegitimacy throughout the work, some of which are gathered by [John A.] Hay.” I quote from the later Penguin edition.
597 ibid. p. 75; TS, I. xxi. 74
and manner of it, had been a little altered"598, and then, after observing a characteristic "singularity" imparting a strong family-likeness among the Shandy family, he remarks on the odd fact that even Walter finds it difficult to recognise any Shandy family characteristics in him: "...upon his observing some tokens of eccentricity in my course when I was a boy, —should never once endeavour to account for them in this way; for all the SHANDY FAMILY were of an original character throughout."599 He then recalls Aunt Dinah’s scandalous affair with the coachman and observes that “nothing ever wrought with our family after the ordinary way”.600

The whole passage derives its significance from the accumulating uncertainties Tristram introduces regarding his ‘begetting’, but Hay, with little justification, merely asserts at this point that it is “one of the ironies of the book that ... Tristram’s instrument is, often, the Fescue, and his manner that of Tacitus.”601 Later however, after discussing “the finely wrought pattern of calendar time within the novel” and the “labyrinthisne structure Tristram makes of his history”602, Hay goes on to catalogue several of Tristram’s other directions to the reader:

He continually demands of the reader prodigious caution, and a liveliness to the subtlest innuendo ... the reader is warned of the many ‘nice and ticklish discussions’ in the book ... sent back to re-read the chapter in which Mrs. Shandy is shown to be no Papist; allowed half a day to guess at certain procedural grounds; admonished ... to ‘read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read’; warned that ‘we live among riddles and mysteries’; and advised ... of the need to understand certain things ‘cum grano salis’603.

This is hardly a suitable response to ‘the pedantic fescue.’ However, heeding these ‘continual demands’, one should always be alive to the ‘subtlest innuendo’, and recollect ‘the need for prodigious caution’, particularly at those moments when Tristram adopts the fescue, and seems to allow no other reading. Hay, unwisely accepting Tristram’s declaration at face value, continues to be alive to the innuendo but fails to provide a convincing argument when he goes on to discuss the significance of Tristram’s brief period in utero.

598 I. xxi. 72
599 ibid. p. 73
600 ibid.
601 Hay, op. cit. p.75
602 ibid. p.76
603 ibid. p.79
Hay rightly dismisses the notion of a simple error in dating on Sterne's part by first discussing the elaborate “sequence of interrelated evidences which locate his exact time of conception, and which justify [Tristram’s] emphatic exclamation concerning this.” He then develops “the latent suggestion that Walter is not Tristram’s father”, noting Walter’s familiarity and sophisticated understanding of “obstetrical and gynecological controversies”, and his “concern with the calendar arithmetic of pregnancy” displayed in his marriage settlement and elsewhere. Hay then goes on to compare the evidence for what he calls “the ‘nine months’ problem” with a similar instance of apparent misdating, when Tristram measures of an interval of thirteen months, for a period that should only have been five. According to Hay, this is no more than a simple “arithmetical error, proceeding in all probability, from the accidental interchange in the narrator’s mind of the respective dates of Tristram’s conception and birth.” This seems plausible, but relatively speaking, amid ‘the finely wrought pattern of calendar time’ that Hay himself describes, the mistake seems too glaring an error to have escaped Sterne’s meticulous control. I do not think it unreasonable to suggest, that this ‘error’ may well be intentional, another misleading device intended to suggest that the time-scheme is nothing but a jumble. Even among those intrigued by Tristram’s original discrepancy, few readers would feel encouraged to pursue the matter much beyond this second ‘error’, which seems to confirm that the chronological details of Tristram’s history are just a ‘muddle.’ If this one ‘mistake’ was not there, one feels, the world might not have had to wait so long for an inquisitive critic like Baird to pursue the matter any further.

Hay goes on to describe numerous other instances of Tristram’s ‘unaccountable obliquity’ and the recurrent implication “that illegitimacy might account for them”, before finally coming to recognise that it is Yorick who “bears a closer physical resemblance to Tristram than does the short Walter Shandy”. But Hay then finds himself simply unable to accept the implications:

…it has been] suggested to me that, rather than merely teasing the reader with the possibility that Yorick is Tristram’s father, Sterne makes out a subtle proof that he is Tristram’s father. I find it difficult to imagine Yorick with Mrs. Shandy, and prefer to take the suggestion as another of the strands in the

---

604 I. xvii. 49. Tristram claims “the very night in which I was begot” was “thirteen months after” the trip to London of 1717. See further note in Appendix 1.
605 ibid. p. 83; TS, I. xvii. p.49
curious, cobweb structure in which both Tristram and his reader are enmeshed.606

Hay seems to refute the evidence of his own research simply because the consequences are 'difficult to imagine'- as indeed they are. For what is suggested is that Walter is a cuckold, Elizabeth an adulteress, and Tristram is the bastard offspring of Parson Yorick.

It cannot be denied, however, that Tristram (who also virtually disappears from his own life story at the age of five) and the elusive Yorick share certain distinctive characteristics:

Instead of the cold phlegm and exact regularity of sense and humours, you would have look’d for, in one so extracted;--he was, on the contrary, as mercurial and sublimated a composition,----as heteroclite a creature in all his declensions,-----with as much life and whim, and gaité de cœur about him, as the kindliest climate could have engendered and put together.607

Applied to either, this description fits perfectly, while perhaps rather pointedly illustrating their mutual dissimilarity to Walter. As well as both being taller than Walter, Tristram is also “lean”608 like Yorick, and given the significance of the hobby-horse (and, by extension, all other horses) in *Tristram Shandy*, on one of the rare occasions when Tristram mentions his own, he swears “by the trotting of my lean horse.”609 When mounted then, Tristram bears an even closer resemblance to Yorick. But here, once again, preconceived ideas seem largely to determine the reader’s response to this physical similarity. The simple inference is obvious when, in one of Hall-Stevenson’s *Crazy Tales*, “...all six of the Squire’s children turn out to look like [his wife’s] cousin,”610 but when the Squire’s child in *Tristram Shandy* turns out to look like the local parson, even those critics who pursue the theme seem to find the same possibility ‘difficult to imagine’, and very few of them are willing to speculate on the possibility of the inference being true.

In the final volume of *Tristram Shandy*, according to Hay, we see Sterne “summarily disentangling the intricate cobweb of evidence of Tristram’s illegitimacy” - the key to the riddle being Dr. Slop’s remark in the final chapter that

---

606 ibid. p.87.
607 I. xi. 27
608 “...as lean a subject as myself”, III. iii. 188, “...these two spider legs of mine” VII. i. 575; “Now I (being very thin)...”VII. xiii. 593.
609 II. xxxiv. 264
610 see ‘Mr. Noddy’, I. xi. 26; & NOTES, p. 68
Obadiah’s wife “may have come before her time naturally enough.” Hay elaborately, but unconvincingly, interprets this (in keeping with his theory) as Sterne’s rhetorical use of “the device of paramologia, or joint concession,” which he describes with a quotation from John Holmes’ *The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy* (1739): ‘...when we grant many things to our adversaries, and at the last bring in the one thing that overthroweth all that were granted before.’ Hay acknowledges, but dismisses, the fact that this single remark was made “some five years before Tristram was born,” before reaching the following conclusion:

The *one fact* unaccounted for in the case for Tristram’s illegitimacy is, of course, the possibility that he was premature. ...Prematurity, then, can be seen as the first instance of Tristram’s obliquity, thwarting as it does his father’s arithmetical speculations.

This, of course, could easily seem typical of Sterne – *A Sentimental Journey* ends by breaking off in mid-sentence, and conspicuously fails to deliver an ending – but in the *Journey* the joke works, whereas in Hay’s reading of *Tristram Shandy*, it doesn’t. Hay’s conclusion, instead of ‘disentangling’, simply sweeps away ‘the intricate cobweb of evidence’ that his study uncovers. And furthermore, while the evidence he presents to support Tristram’s illegitimacy is compelling, his conclusion, based on ‘one fact unaccounted for’, and, ‘the one thing that overthroweth all that were granted before,’ is demonstrably flawed, and totally inadequate to ‘overthrow’ the suggestion of Tristram’s illegitimacy.

If, as he claims, Tristram was conceived in the night between Sunday the second, and Monday the third of March, it follows that he lay thereafter in the womb, reckoning the third of March as the first full day and the fifth of November as the last, for 249 whole days together, or 35 weeks and 4 days. A full term being roughly forty weeks, it is clear that at his birth Tristram was obviously significantly premature, and this presents a problem.

The earliest evidence for this is revealed upon Dr. Slop’s arrival on the evening of Tristram’s birth. Walter is surprised at Slop’s sudden and unexpected appearance at Shandy Hall, but, Tristram tells us, “...it is certain, one moment’s reflection in my father might have solved it; for he had apprized Dr. Slop but the

---

611 Hay op. cit. p. 89
613 ibid. p.89
week before, that my mother was at her full reckoning." One must assume that Walter's information was based either upon Elizabeth's informing him that she was so, or at least upon his own observation of her condition; certainly it could not have been based upon arithmetical calculation. More compelling perhaps is the evidence described in Arthur Cash's commentary on the events leading up to the moment of Tristram's birth.

...Susannah runs downstairs: "Bless my soul!—my poor mistress is ready to faint,—and her pains are gone,—and the drops are done,—and the bottle of julap is broke,—and the nurse has cut her arm,—(and I, my thumb, cried Dr. Slop) and the child is where it was ... the midwife has fallen backwards upon the edge of the fender, and bruised her hip as black as your hat". Perhaps she was tugging hard at a fillet when it slipped off. (A fillet is a linen sling placed over the head.) ...

...From these few hints we can know exactly Mrs. Shandy's condition. Her labour has been short, stopping two hours and ten minutes after it began. It was a critical labour from the first, as evidenced by Susannah's sudden, fearful flight for the old midwife. The short, violent labour indicates that Mrs. Shandy's waters had suddenly broken. Consequently, the baby has moved well down towards the pelvis. The head presents, as the midwife well knows, for she has been attempting some sort of manual extraction and has had a grip, which did not hold, on the head. The difficulty is clear: Tristram's head is too large for the opening.

At eight months, with a premature child, no such difficulty could reasonably be expected, and the idea that Tristram was premature, the 'one fact' that Hay produces to unravel the 'nine months problem', is therefore far from satisfactory – Tristram's head is obviously fully developed, and his was undoubtedly a full term delivery. One should also recall that this is not Elizabeth's first child, and Walter himself alludes to the notion that second children are born more easily child than the first: "...it accounted for the eldest son being the greatest blockhead in the family. —Poor devill, he would say,—he made way for the capacity of his younger brothers."  

The conclusion that one is forced to arrive at is that Tristram was a full-term baby, and is telling the reader 'as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing', that he is not Walter's son, and that Elizabeth is not only 'no Papist', but she is also an adulteress. Such inference is reinforced by (or provides a

614 II. x. 124  
616 II. xix. 177
gloss upon) Elizabeth’s reaction on the first occasion that the ‘nine months problem’ is raised:

...But alas! continued [Walter], shaking his head a second time, and wiping away a tear which was trickling down his cheeks, My Tristram’s misfortunes began nine months before he ever came into the world.

——My mother, who was sitting by, look’d up, —but she knew no more than her backside what my father meant, - - but my uncle, Mr. Toby Shandy, who had often been informed of the affair, —understood him very well.617

To relate this to the ‘silly question’ asked by Elizabeth in chapter one, as Toby seems to do, is to be drawn in to Tristram’s ludicrous tale of the homunculus, and to assume that Tristram is accurate in his estimate of his mother’s ignorance. On the other hand, Walter specifically mentions nine months and, therefore, either he too is making an arithmetical mistake - which is uncharacteristic - or he is suggesting that Tristram’s misfortunes began before he was conceived - which is equally unlikely. The third option, that Walter is fully aware of what he is saying is perhaps supported by his uncharacteristic tear. Elizabeth’s quick response also readily suggests that she, by guilty reflex, and without need of mental arithmetic, is well aware of what occurred nine months before Tristram came into the world, at the time that Walter was ‘afflicted with a Sciatica’. The rarity of Elizabeth’s gesture enhances its significance, as does its echo when she later takes snuff as Walter pronounces the word “month”. 618

Let us return now to the ‘complex set of allusions’ identified by Hay as seeming to substantiate Tristram’s illegitimacy

...allusions to illegitimacy, cuckoldom, and impotence which pervade the novel. Perhaps the wittiest of these is Yorick’s observation that no one has erased the bend sinister of illegitimacy which was accidentally painted across the field of the Shandy coat of arms when Walter married Elizabeth Mollineux. 619

This is slightly inaccurate, since it is Walter who inquires, and Obadiah who informs him that the bend sinister has not been erased, while Yorick, who is present, merely distances himself from the discussion by claiming, “Of all things in the world, except

617 I. iii. 4
618 VIII. xxxiii. 719
619 Hay, op. cit. p. 84
politicks, the clergy know the least of heraldry.”620 Later, however, in his
Sentimental Journey, Yorick publishes his own coat of arms and obviously
understands the significance of its heraldry in some detail.621 Walter is most reluctant
to ride in the coach, which he blames for the attack of sciatica he suffered around the
time of what (we must now assume to be) Tristram’s actual conception, and as Hay
also notes, “…it is sciatica … which gives the Widow Wadman cause to complain of
her first husband.”622 When Walter announces his intention go on horseback instead,
he once again mentions Aunt Dinah, a further reminder of his conscious effort to
distance himself from the shame she brought to the Shandy family. Like Toby,
Walter is continually discomforted at the mention of his aunt’s indiscretion, perhaps
because it reminds him so strongly of the contemporary situation.

Yorick is also the originator of the next allusion identified by Hay when he
claims that in publishing Yorick’s sermon, “Tristram unwittingly provides a text to
head this catalogue of evidence”, and he cites the text mentioned in the sermon from
Mathew 7:20, “By their fruits ye shall know them.” Walter, regularly shaking his
head and puzzling over Tristram’s ‘obliquity’, certainly finds it difficult to recognize
Tristram as his own ‘fruit’, and this text, according to Hay, also “seems to lie beneath
the amusing inference in Walter’s remarks concerning the cruelty which was
Commodus’ particular obliquity: ‘I know very well that Commodus’s mother was in
love with a gladiator at the time of her conception, which accounts for a great many
of Commodus’s cruelties when he became emperor’…’” Hay fails to mention that this
comment is addressed to Yorick, as is Walter’s further observation that there are,
“…a thousand unnoticed openings…which let a penetrating eye at once into a man’s
soul.”623 Hay seldom seems to notice that Yorick, despite his infrequent appearances
in Tristram Shandy, is seldom far away on those occasions when Tristram’s
legitimacy is called into question. At the end of “MY FATHER’S LAMENTATION”, as
Walter catalogues the series of misfortunes and misadventures which have befallen
Tristram, when he comes the crushing of Tristram’s nose he cries out, “O Licetus!
Licetus! had I been blest with a foetus five inches long and a half, like thee—fate
might have done her worst.”624 Had Tristram been obviously premature, like Licetus’

620 IV. xxi. 373
622 Hay, op. cit.
623 Hay, op. cit. p.85; TS, VI. v. 496
624 IV. xix. 355
son, there would have been no need for Slop’s forceps - and Walter could have been more certain that the child was his own. A line and a half later, after Walter has also lamented Tristram’s misnaming, Toby offers a remedy: “We will send for Mr. Yorick.” Yorick has not been seen for two volumes, but his name rings out almost inevitably at this point. Later, when Walter complains that there has been “the duce and all to do in some part or other of the ecliptic, when this offspring of mine was formed...”, it is Yorick who offers the reassuring reply, “That, you are a better judge of than I.” But Yorick, at this point, while seeming to concede that Walter has a more certain understanding of the events surrounding Tristram’s conception, may just as well be merely deferring to the superstitious Walter’s superior ability to determine the possibility of diabolic astrological interference at that time.

Hay goes on to note that “Walter is the object of constant, derisive insinuations of sexual inadequacy”; he mentions the “exquisite irony” in Kysarsius’ claim ‘that the mother is not of kin to her child’; and he suggests that another one of Yorick’s observations “might well be accurate”:

—-and as the mother’s side is the surest side—Mr. Shandy, in course, is still less than nothing—In short, he is not as much akin to him, Sir, as I am—
—That may well be, said my father, shaking his head.

But perhaps the most revealing exchange, which is often overlooked, is that which occurs just as Walter is about to read a section of his Tristapaedia to Yorick and Toby:

...the foundation of the natural relation between a father and his child; the right and jurisdiction over whom he acquires these several ways—
1st, by marriage.
2d, by adoption.
3d, by legitimation.
And 4th, by procreation; all which I consider in their order.
I lay a slight stress upon one of them; replied Yorick—the act, especially where it ends there, in my opinion lays as little obligation upon the child, as it conveys power to the father.—You are wrong,—said my father argutely, and for this plain reason * * * ...

---

625 IV, xix, 356
626 V. xxviii. 461
627 Hay, op. cit. p.86; TS, IV. xxx. 393
628 V. xxxi. 467

169
This crucial exchange between Tristram’s two potential fathers, phrased in the legal language of rights and jurisdiction, of obligation and power, makes Tristram’s position clear. Walter is married to Elizabeth, and he accepts Tristram as his son. Indeed, it is technically wrong to describe Tristram as illegitimate – he was born in wedlock and is recognised by Walter (after Bobby’s death) as the only legal and legitimate heir to the Shandy name and estates. Hay notes that Walter gives “legitimation a higher place than procreation” in his list. Walter, although his extensive knowledge of obstetrics must tell him otherwise, desperately clings to the belief - or carefully maintains the illusion - that he is Tristram’s biological father. While his brother Toby is famously ignorant of ‘the right end of a woman’, Walter’s concentrates his specialised, penetrating, scientific gaze on the wrong end of a pregnancy - the birth. On the other hand, Yorick’s only objection to Walter’s outline of paternal jurisdiction particularly emphasises the insignificance of the act of procreation itself, ‘especially where it ends there’, by which, given the terms of the discussion, he can only mean casual, disinterested sex.

Hay concludes with the general observation that “Yorick, who bears a closer physical resemblance to Tristram than does the short Walter Shandy, is introduced soon after the first references to Tristram’s conception and birth are announced, and the encapsulated history of Yorick occupies a significantly large proportion of Volume I.” Hay sees little that is sinister or unusual - like the details discussed above - in the portrait of Yorick, and despite all the evidence he presents (and because he failed to notice the impossibility of Tristram’s birth being premature), Hay entirely dismisses the whole issue for no better reason than his own admission that he finds it ‘difficult to imagine Yorick with Mrs. Shandy’.

As we have seen, on the rare occasions Yorick and Elizabeth are portrayed together, they are depicted as being in complete agreement, particularly on matters of sexuality. The first occasion is when the news that Toby is in love with Mrs. Wadman first breaks: “Everybody, said my mother, says you are in love, brother Toby—and we hope it is true.” This is the subject Elizabeth also introduced to Walter in his ‘second bed of justice’ Elizabeth, which increases the irony of Elizabeth’s later comment: “—To be sure, said my mother, love keeps peace in the

---

629 Hay, op. cit. p. 84.
630 VIII. xxxii, 718
world—". On the other occasion when the two meet, at the very end of volume nine, Walter is again holding forth before Yorick — "notwithstanding my mother was sitting by" — on the iniquity of women. On this occasion he is interrupted by Obadiah, who raises the problem of the apparently impotent Shandy bull. The volume ends with the famous lines:

L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?—
A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick—and one of the best of its kind, I ever heard.632

As noted earlier, in contrast to her opening question to her husband, Elizabeth's final question receives an amiable answer from Yorick, although such bawdy punning might seem improper between a clergyman and one of his parishioners. More, perhaps, than a mere coterie would have noted the allusion to 'My Cousin Shandy's Tale of a Cock and a Bull' in Hall-Stevenson's *Crazy Tales*,633 but the imagery evoked by the text is of two contrasted figures of male sexuality, one of which — the Shandy Bull — has been revealed to be impotent. The 'Cock' may be a further reference to the 'invisible cock' celebrated by 'the Reviewers of his Breeches'634 and hence a further slur on Walter's virility, or — in the presence of Tristram's two potential fathers - it seem to be a final hint that Yorick (who is himself largely invisible) is the Cock — a virile figure who stands opposed to Walter, whose Bull has failed. In either case, Yorick's presence is significant, and the innuendo against Walter is present in the very last words that Sterne wrote of *Tristram Shandy*.

William Bowman Piper, whose work, as was noted earlier, also flies in the face of many readers' responses to the 'obviously joyous qualities' of the book, explored the same theme. Piper begins by describing the readers of *Tristram Shandy* as a jury, whose "suspicious attention holds Tristram continuously in the defensive attitude of a witness", (which is a poor metaphor, but it is thoroughly appropriate to be suspicious of Tristram) and he proceeds with a thorough examination of "Tristram's deep devotion to the Shandy family" and the way in which Tristram

631 VIII. xxxiii. 721
632 IX. xxxiii. 809
633 Editors are reluctant to honour Hall-Stevenson with their final footnote, and most simply ignore Sterne's compliment (and 'plug') in these closing words. On Hall-Stevenson's tale, see Hartley, 'Sterne's Eugenius as Indiscrete Author', *P.M.L.A.* (1971) p. 432
634 see p. 135, above
“holds the pose of dutiful Shandy heir and dedicated memorialist.” Piper is forced to concede that there are, “...surprisingly, a number of hints that this pose is phoney, that Tristram is not a Shandy,” and he mentions, in addition to several of the points discussed above, “the whole business of Walter’s age, debility and continence around the time of Tristram’s begetting, ...Walter’s generally bad luck in breeding ventures, [and] ...Walter’s shaking his head at the mention of genitals in Ernulphus’ curse.” Similarly, one might add, in ‘Slawkenbergius’ Tale’ we learn that in Martin Luther’s horoscope, “five planets were in coition all at once with scorpio (in reading this my father would always shake his head)” – Scorpio being the zodiacal sign ‘governing’ Tristram’s birth. Piper also notes the frequent instances of Walter’s apparent suspicion and mistrust of his wife: “The laws of nature will defend themselves;—but error—(he would add, looking earnestly at my mother)—error, Sir, creeps in thro’ the minute holes, and small crevices, which human nature leaves unguarded.” It seems hardly necessary, given Walter’s pointed glance towards his wife, to recall the innuendo of the ‘two paths’ Eugenius detected in the word ‘crevice’.

Once again, despite all, Piper’s conclusion is particularly unsound: “…this whole complex of hints at Tristram’s bastardy, which are only hints after all, is countered by the certainty of his mother’s purity” but this ‘certainty’ is based only on the evidence of Tristram’s own “virtually univocal assertion of his mother’s purity” which accompanies his description of the her eye. This settles the matter, for Piper, beyond any doubt: “It certifies, once and for all, Tristram’s Shandeism, about which Tristram’s vast jury, I believe, has always been satisfied. Tristram, then, is the true and responsible heir of Walter and all the Shandys. That much is clear…” In view of what he have seen, Piper’s conclusions are clearly not based upon a particularly close observation of Elizabeth.

According to Piper, the key to Tristram’s dalliance with the suggestion of his own illegitimacy and of his impotence (a theme he also examines) lies in the nature

---

635 William Bowman Piper, ‘Tristram Shandy’s Tragicomical Testimony,’ Criticism, 3, iii, (Summer 1961) p.171
636 ibid. p.175
637 TV. ‘Slawkenbergius’ Tale’, p.311. Sterne quotes from Bayle’s Dictionary: “...five planets being in conjunction with Mercury ... made him [i.e. Luther] a sacrilegious Heretic, a most bitter and profane enemy of the Christian faith ... he dies without any sense of religion, his soul steeped in guilt.”
638 II. xix. 171
639 Piper, op. cit.
of Tristram’s ‘tragical comical testimony’ as sole and ailing survivor of the Shandy line: “If Tristram’s life is tragic ... his testimony, as every one knows, is comical” and Tristram describes his life “not in the dreadful terms of decay and desolation but in the risqué and titillating terms of suspected sexual impotence...”

The reader frowns (or blushes) at Tristram’s conversational daring and chuckles (or giggles) at his verbal dexterity and equivocal escapes; or perhaps he laughs at Sir or Madam who seem always just tumbling into an inference Tristram has primed and avoided; and thus from laugh to laugh he follows the sorrows of Tristram’s unhappy life.640

But this whole conclusion is based, rather like Hay’s, upon the acceptance of Elizabeth’s ‘purity’ which, for the reasons already discussed, is unacceptable. Neither is the suggestion that Tristram’s ‘inferences’ are there merely for the sake of whatever delight there is in avoiding them. If the bemused Sir and Madam seem to be just on the point of ‘tumbling’, their fall is only broken by the lifeline of ‘charm’ and ‘innocence’ that is continually dangled within their reach, and by their own reluctance to recognise what is being offered to their imaginations.

There are other studies that deal with this issue, and which accept the possibility of Tristram’s illegitimacy. Firstly, and in contrast to the critics discussed above, Richard Macksey,641 after two pages of irrelevant introduction, notes ‘the nine month problem’ and asserts, “I have been unable to discover...why the simple arithmetic was hid under a veil for more than two centuries.” – completely disregarding the work of Hay, Piper, Parish642 and indeed ‘HRPC’ – who first noted the discrepancy in 1895. Most of Macksey’s argument is mere assertion, although occasionally he happens to be right, as when he claims, without presenting any evidence, that “the point is made that Tristram was a term baby.”643 He also informs us that there is “another character who in terms of appearance, temperament, and status as author has a larger claim on the role of Tristram’s natural father...[and] like his precursor in Shakespeare’s play, [Yorick] presides over much of the action of the

640 ibid. p.184
642 Charles Parish, ‘The Nature of Mr. Tristram Shandy, Author’ Boston University Studies in English, 5, ii. (1961) pp.74-90. Parish introduces Tristram as “the credible and legitimate (if sometimes anomalous) offspring of Mr. and Mrs. Shandy, and the nephew of Mr. Toby Shandy,”(p.74) but goes on to note the ‘nine-months problem’ in a footnote: “Are Tristram’s figures wrong? On the other hand he does say that many things went awry in the matter of his begetting.” (p.89 n.9)
643 Macksey, op. cit. p. 1006
narrative from the grave." This may perhaps be true of Parson Yorick, but Macksey presents very little evidence to support the claim, while the suggestion that Yorick the jester ‘presides over the action’ in *Hamlet* seems no more than a shot in the dark. Annoyingly, Macksey claims, in a footnote, that “the impossibility of Walter’s being [Tristram’s] natural father and of Yorick’s implied paternity was developed at length in [an unpublished paper]. However...Ronald Paulson generously summarized my argument ... in ‘A Chapter from Smollett’ in *Bicentennial Essays Presented to Lewis M. Knapp*, pp.75-77.” Macksey manages to misquote the title of the essay and of the volume containing it, and the promised three page ‘summary’ is actually a footnote on p.76 referring the reader back to the two passages discussed by Macksey in his ‘Sterne Thoughts’. At which point one must abandon Macksey.

Peter Nockolds recently returned to the theme in his short paper, ‘Conceived in Heaven: The Astronomy and Astrology of *Tristram Shandy*’ which provides another interesting gloss on the ‘backwards and forwards’ motions of Sterne’s work by considering the ‘direct’ and ‘retrograde’ motions of the planets. After noting the ‘eight-months problem’ Nockolds boldly states that “Tristram is mistaken solely in assuming Walter to be his biological father, but correct in all other details regarding his conception...” even going so far as to suggest an alternative date for Tristram’s conception: “…around midnight between Sunday the 2nd and Monday the 3rd of February, 1718.” But such a date would only seem plausible had Walter been absent on the first Sunday in February (as we know he was in April), and clearly, an attack of sciatica does not suggest this. Nor is it convincing to suggest that Elizabeth was absent from the marital bed and from the second ‘bed of justice’ scheduled for that particular night, as there is nothing else to suggest that Walter’s monthly routine was interrupted by anything other than his sciatica. Elizabeth’s absence, one feels, would have been recorded in Walter’s pocket book. Although Nockolds’ attempt to “determine the time of Tristram’s conception by reference to the heavens” seems

---

644 ibid. p. 1008  
647 ibid, p 119
flawed, his discussion of the numerous astrological references in *Tristram Shandy* is certainly enough to justify the arousal of his suspicions.

John Allen Stevenson pursues the theme more interestingly, while attempting a broad general survey of eighteenth century novels based on the idea that, "...we can usefully generalize about the whole by scrutinizing a small part."648 In concentrating solely on the first few chapters of *Tristram Shandy*, he too notes the incongruous dates and other details, while also mistrusting Toby’s suitability as a ‘source’: “Any story about the origin of a child that comes from Toby has all the authority of a tale about storks or cabbage patches.”649 However, overlooking Yorick entirely, Stevenson finds family resemblance enough to settle any doubts: “...circumstantial evidence suggests that Walter may not be Tristram’s father ... what we must concede, on the other hand, is how thoroughly like old Walter Tristram is... ...some discernable part of the spirit that animates Tristram did originate in his father and that this speculative old man has reproduced himself in a way that we can recognize.”650 This may well be so - but any such similarities are not physically apparent and might therefore be just as well be due to nurture as nature. Stevenson seems to have drawn his conclusions from the sources he cites in his bibliography, and it is to be regretted that the broad task he was engaged upon prevented him looking beyond the first few chapters, and following more closely the theme that he thought the most relevant aspect of *Tristram Shandy* to record in his ‘critical history’.

J. Paul Hunter’s ‘Clocks, Calendars and Names’651 lays great stress on the ‘uncertainty’ that Tristram’s narrative engenders and, after reviewing John Hay’s argument, Hunter denies that “Tristram’s birth is ‘demonstrated’ to be premature”, claiming instead that “Sterne leaves the careful reader in doubt for nine volumes and several long years.”652 Hunter rightly mistrusts the ‘fescue’ Tristram adopts in his explanation of “…what went wrong on the night of the clock”, and recognizes that Tristram “is uncharacteristically too anxious to offer finality here.”653 He also notes

649 ibid. p. 80
650 ibid.
652 ibid. p.183
653 ibid. p.179
that numerous “hints of Tristram’s illegitimacy are scattered throughout the text.”\textsuperscript{654} and eventually concedes that “Tristram may have probable cause to think himself someone other than Walter’s son ... perhaps Mrs. Shandy for once in her life did something adventurous, with Yorick, or my uncle Toby…” even going to the point of considering the possibility that Trim – “the only one with a known (or strongly suspected) capacity to copulate” - could in fact be Tristram’s father.\textsuperscript{655} An even more extraordinary suggestion is made by New, whose own “favorite candidate” is the curate who gives Tristram his own name, “the primary ‘fathering act’ from a legal standpoint.”\textsuperscript{656} However, New only makes this suggestion in order to dismiss it in his next paragraph.

The case to be made for Yorick, whom Hunter recognizes as “a shadowy figure”, is, he concedes, “rather different”, but Hunter barely seems to take the idea seriously, and his argument is as weak as the suggestion that “[Yorick’s] idea of a good joke might just be to beget a Tristram Shandy.” Finally he concludes that “the textual evidence is taunting but scant ... We cannot father the deed on Yorick with any certainty. Yorick would make a lovely grandfather to the text, but he can be linked to it only circumstantially. There is no smoking gun ... The text seems to hold a secret but refuses to deliver.”\textsuperscript{657} Hunter weakens his argument slightly with other occasional lapses, the worst – a very significant error – being his claim that at Tristram’s birth, Dr. Slop was “called in only to clean up the mess”;\textsuperscript{658} but it is the ‘uncertainty’ which Hunter finds fundamental to the book, with which I take issue.

What is certain, even in the confusing and disordered world of \textit{Tristram Shandy}, in which philosophers try to explain away the obvious, is that Tristram is his mother’s son... she is finally the figure of the novel’s subversive creative imagination that begets without regard to linear or patrilineral order. ... Tristram...celebrates his embodiment in her spirit of uncertainty and disorder.\textsuperscript{659}

It has never been doubted that Tristram is his mother’s son, and the uncertainty, one feels, is Hunter’s, as he tries himself to explain away what elsewhere seems obvious, and to ignore the facts that Tristram reveals ‘as plain, at least, as words, by direct

\textsuperscript{654} ibid. p.186
\textsuperscript{655} ibid. p.188
\textsuperscript{656} New, \textit{Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits}, (1994) p. 100
\textsuperscript{657} Hunter, op. cit. p.192
\textsuperscript{658} ibid. p.188. Hunter also unjustifiably refers to Slop’s “arrogant incompetence”, p.180. Clearly, since the midwife hands over responsibility to Dr. Slop, it is she who is incompetent

176
inference, could tell you such a thing'. Although Hunter recognizes Elizabeth’s ‘disregard for patrilinear order’, and he recognizes the strong case to be made for Tristram’s illegitimacy, he can not finally bring himself to accept what seems an inescapable conclusion, preferring to dismiss Elizabeth as a rather futile ‘spirit of uncertainty and disorder’ rather than accept the plain fact that Tristram is, in one of his own phrases, the ‘son of a whore’. Obviously, this is of huge significance in many ways, but there is one point that is particularly worth mentioning. Having noted Walter’s infrequent sexual activity with his wife, we can now understand why it was vitally important that he did have sex with his wife on the night of the silly question, for without it, Elizabeth’s pregnancy would be very difficult to explain.

\[\text{ibid. p. 196}\]
Chapter Fifteen
Walter

I was my father's last stake—he had lost my brother Bobby entirely,—he had lost, by his own computation, full three-fourths of me—that is, he had been unfortunate in his three first great casts for me—my geniture, nose, and name.\(^{660}\)

Having seen that Walter was indeed unfortunate in the matter of Tristram's geniture, it seems appropriate to look closely - and now with a wholly sceptical eye - at Walter's other misfortunes. We will come shortly to consider two of the episodes mentioned by Tristram - Walter’s reaction to the death of Bobby and, initially, his disappointment in the matter of Tristram’s name, with particular reference to the moment depicted in the second of Hogarth’s illustrations. Before doing so, however, it is useful to review the many events of the day leading up to the moment of Tristram’s christening, events which are described in surprising detail, and ordered - with a high degree of ‘durational realism’ - around a very carefully planned timescheme. Because this is intrinsically interesting I have charted the whole day at this point, although obviously, such detail is not wholly necessary introduce the matter in hand; and the following pages should also be considered as part of the chronological table appended to this study.

\(^{660}\) V. xvi. 445
On the fifth day of November, 1718 ... was I Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disastrous world of ours...

According to Baird, “the most wonderful scene in the novel covers a space of nine hours, beginning with the conversation in the back parlour, and ending when Mr. Shandy calls out... to ask Susannah how her mistress is doing.”  This is inaccurate, and seems to stem from a careless reading of the text at the point where Walter and Toby retire for the night, and at which point, Tristram tells us, “…except for a short nap …which…did my father no sort of good …they have not else shut their eyes, since nine hours before the time that Dr Slop was led into the back parlour in that dirty pickle by Obadiah.” Nothing is given to indicate the time that Walter arose that morning, and the only point of comparison we have is when we find Toby stepping out at “ten o’clock, which was half an hour later than his usual time.” We can work from an estimated time however – and I use eight o’clock as a reasonable possibility, which places Dr. Slop’s arrival at five – from that point on we are able to produce a relative chronology for the events of the day in quite precise detail.

During the morning, Walter had been “reading, but not using” the gigantic curse of Emulphus to Toby. During the afternoon, “after an hour and a half’s silence” Walter is disturbed by “all that noise and running backwards and forwards ...above stairs,” referring to the noise again – “What can they be doing, brother?” - when he and Toby begin the discussion that first reveals Toby’s ignorance of ‘the right end of a woman’. The arrival of Dr. Slop is announced by “the devil of a rap at the door” which causes Walter to snap his pipe.

5.00 p.m. After Dr. Slop’s collision with Obadiah: “Obadiah had led him in as he was...” We are able to account for the time spent in explanations, and in cleaning-up. “Let the reader imagine then, that Dr. Slop has told his tale... Let him...
suppose, that *Obadiah* has told his tale also... let him imagine the doctor washed,—rubbed down, and consoled,—felicitated,—got into a pair of *Obadiah*'s pumps..."669

In view of Dr. Slop’s extreme condition, probably a full half-hour elapses before he re-enters the parlour. At this point, Obadiah is dispatched to retrieve Dr. Slop’s bag.670

5.30 p.m. Dr. Slop’s sudden arrival brought “*Stevinus*” into Toby’s head671, but it is not until shortly after his second appearance672 that Trim is sent to retrieve the volume in question.673 Dr. Slop listens to a discussion of fortifications until Trim returns with the book that also contains Yorick’s sermon, which he is then invited to read. The reading of the sermon, with its numerous false starts, is followed by Dr. Slop’s reading of the gigantic curse of Ernulphus, the undoing of Obadiah’s knots, and the crushing of Walter’s knuckle in the demonstration of the forceps. At some time during the evening, probably at this point, Toby asks Dr. Slop about the “blind gut”.674 Finally the midwife comes down to consult with Dr. Slop, and he then goes to attend to Elizabeth.

7.10 p.m. Walter says to Toby, “It is two hours and ten minutes, —and no more... since Dr. *Slop* and *Obadiah* arrived.”675 After their short discussion of duration, which takes perhaps ten minutes, the two brothers fall asleep for ‘a short nap’ (III. xx.), from which they are soon awakened by Trim. (III. xxii.) Since the nap did Walter ‘no sort of good’, he probably sleeps for only five or ten minutes.

Note: Trim assumes this is Walter’s regular “after-dinner nap”, but there nothing to indicate a time when the two brothers might have eaten.

7.30 p.m. While Walter is sleeping, Tristram is born, and when he awakes, Dr. Slop is now to be found in the kitchen making a ‘bridge’ for Tristram’s damaged nose. (III. iii.) Perhaps ten minutes pass while Walter laments the destruction of his jack-boots and then lectures Toby on his extravagance, but when he learns about the crushing of his son’s nose, he retires to his room and strikes an attitude across his bed “for a full hour and a half” (IV. ii.)

---

669 II. xi. 126
670 ibid. 127
671 II. xii. 127; II. xiv 134
672 II. xii. 127
673 II. xvi. 134
674 VIII. xv. 674
675 III. xviii. 222
9.10 p.m. Walter begins to rouse himself, but collapses again. (IV. iii) Toby summons Trim, and they discuss the grenadier that was whipped at Bruges, (IV. iv.) and Trim leaves again before Walter finally gets up. (IV. vi.) A discussion with Toby ensues (IV. iv-viii) At least another twenty minutes in all.

9.30 p.m. After finally resolving that his son shall be christened Trismegistus, Walter begins to return downstairs with Toby (IV. xi) but they stop at the landing to talk. Walter is ignored by Susannah (IV. xii.) before the two finally retire again for the night, having ‘not else shut their eyes’ since nine hours before Dr Slop’s arrival. Allowing for their long conversation on the stairs (IV. ix, x, xi.), and their preparations for bed, Walter probably does not return to his bed much before 10.00 p.m.

Tristram’s misnaming

To return now to our main theme, the very final act of this eventful day takes place after Walter has slept for an unspecified period, during which the curate has arrived at Shandy Hall. The ‘relative chronology’ is now lost, which suggests a transition from ‘clock time’ (which is set in motion by Walter) and ‘night time’ – associated with the shadowy, lunar chronology of Elizabeth. Associated with this, a particularly interesting figure appears at this time, but even later in the night, after the christening and when the rest of the household have finally fallen asleep, and this is the only occasion we meet with an easily overlooked member of the Shandy household. When all else are asleep, “my mother’s nurse” remains awake, and in her we find another of Elizabeth’s shadowy associates, an association made most notable by the fact that she only has a single eye, the symbolism of which invites comparison with the single eye of Elizabeth’s confederate, Mrs. Wadman, and with the single eye of Elizabeth herself, both of which are described elsewhere. As we have seen in the three ‘beds of justice’ scenes, Elizabeth is powerful at night, and obviously, ‘my mother’s nurse’ stands in relation to Elizabeth much as Trim does to Toby – the closest of allies. To find such a figure alone and vigilant in the dead of night, especially on this particular night, again reinforces the idea of a female

---

676 IV. xv. 345 It is possible this is also the ‘old woman’ that Toby mentions when he considers caring for Le Fever: “Thou art an excellent nurse thyself, Trim,— and what with thy care of him, and the old woman’s and his boy’s, and mine together, we might recruit him again at once, and set him upon his legs.”
confederacy working to ensure that Walter is 'baffled and overthrown in all his little systems and wishes.'

Perhaps we can best say then, that it is in 'the dead of night' when Walter is awakened by Susannah, and the name demanded of him a few moments before Tristram is christened. This notable example of 'carelessness', although not directly attributable to Elizabeth, takes place when her maid, Susannah, meets Yorick's curate, Tristram, and it is particularly significant this elusive curate has now displaced Walter's agent, Dr. Slop. To find the influence of Elizabeth and Yorick aligned, and both in opposition to Walter, must certainly increase our doubts, and indeed, in view of the fact that Walter had gone so far as to write a treatise on the name Tristram - hence his views on that very name must surely have been widely known – the curious negligence displayed at the time of his son's christening begins to seem impossible to understand as mere accident.

Will not the gentle reader pity my father from his soul?—to see an orderly and well-disposed gentleman, who tho’ singular,—yet inoffensive in his notions,—so played upon in them by cross purposes;—to look down upon the stage, and see him baffled and overthrown in all his little systems and wishes; to behold a train of events perpetually falling out against him, and in so critical and cruel a way, as if they had purposely been plann'd and pointed against him, merely to insult his speculations.—In a word, to behold such a one, in his old age, ill-fitted for troubles, ten times in a day suffering sorrow;—ten times in a day calling the child of his prayers TRISTRAM!—Melancholy disyllable of sound! which, to his ears, was unison to Nincompoop, and every name vituperative under heaven.—By his ashes! I swear it,—if ever malignant spirit took pleasure, or busied itself in traversing the purposes of mortal man,—it must have been here.677

It is not until long after this that Tristram actually describes the circumstances of his christening, but when he does, and if these words are then recalled, they seem in some way prophetic, and it becomes difficult indeed to believe that there is not a malignant influence at work. Tristram being christened with that name, of all names, is too improbable to be mere accident, and if one begins to suspect a conspiracy, and Susannah and the curate are plainly the agents, then Susannah seems to say enough to indicate its source:

And what's the matter, Susannah? They have called the child Tristram—and my mistress is just got out of an hysterick fit about it.678

---

677 I. xix. 63-4
678 IV. xvi. 348
Just as in the face of Walter’s ‘chagrin’ in the coach back from London, Elizabeth “did nothing but laugh and cry in a breath”\(^{679}\), on this occasion, despite the pain of the ordeal she has undergone, the prospect of hearing Walter repeat that ‘melancholy dissyllable’ for years to come, and knowing full well that ‘the thing can not be undone’, \(^{680}\) once again has Elizabeth in ‘an hysterical fit’. In both cases these reactions looks suspiciously like paroxysms of mirth.

It is most striking to note the very precise chronological order that precedes Tristram’s misnaming falters eventually after Tristram finally manages to get “my father and my uncle Toby off the stairs, and put to bed...”\(^{681}\) but the ‘durational realism’ continues. It is clearly late in the night, and Susannah has obviously been sent to rouse Walter from sleep, and thus Elizabeth is influential despite being, as ever, strangely absent. Walter awakes to find that the curate has arrived and been admitted to the house while slept, and that all preparations for the christening have been made. Earlier in the evening, after having decided upon the name Tristram and evidently intent upon announcing this decision, Walter encountered Susannah on the stairs and was annoyed when she answered him only briefly and in passing - “…tripping by, but without looking up.” When he asked after Elizabeth he received only the terse reply “As well… as can be expected”, and when he asked after the child he received “—No answer”. Susannah was clearly ignoring Walter at that point, for it was not until he finally asked about Dr Slop that we are told, “Susannah was out of hearing.”\(^{682}\) At the time when Walter wanted to announce the name, nobody was available to hear him, but now, when Susannah awakens Walter to ask for it, the matter has suddenly become terribly urgent: “There’s no time to dress you, Sir... the child is ... black in the face... Bless me, Sir... the child’s in a fit.”\(^{683}\) At first, Walter resists this pressure and attempts to rise and assess the situation for himself: “No, no,—said my father to Susannah, I’ll get up...”, but Susannah is most insistent, “…There is no time, cried Susannah, the child’s as black as my shoe.”\(^{684}\)

\(^{679}\) I. xvi. 48

\(^{680}\) This is made clear in the service laid down in the *Book of Common Prayer*: “And let them not doubt, but that the child thus privately baptized either by the Minister of the Parish, or by some other Minister, or by one of them that be present, is lawfully and sufficiently baptized, and ought not to be baptized again.”

\(^{681}\) IV. xviii. 341, repeated, p. 343.

\(^{682}\) IV. xii. 339

\(^{683}\) IV. xiv. 343

\(^{684}\) ibid. p. 343-4
Cash suggests ‘fit’ was the medical term “used to describe the convulsions in the new-born, often fatal…”\(^6\) and the Florida Notes also quotes from C. H. G. Macafee’s article ‘The Obstetrical Aspects of *Tristram Shandy*’: “This description would fit in with either the cyanotic attacks frequently seen in the twelve to twenty-four hours following delivery of a premature baby, or might be ... the result of injury.”\(^6\) Indeed, having the child baptised at home is exceptional, and only permissible in cases of “great cause and necessity”\(^6\) — usually if the child’s life is in danger, and indeed, this is also the most obvious explanation as to why the curate should be summoned to Shandy Hall in the dead of night. Certainly there is no doubt that Walter — and the reader - receive the impression that Tristram’s life is in grave danger.

On the other hand, Tristram has by now been alive for several hours, and at the time of his birth Dr. Slop seemed only concerned with his damaged nose, so the urgency is not perhaps all that desperate, while the blackening of Tristram's face might well be expected in a child whose nose had been crushed some hours earlier. One can easily begin to suspect that Tristram, like his mother, is ‘as well as can be expected’ - all appearances, including Hogarth’s illustrations\(^6\), conspire to add weight to this suspicion. This is most strongly reinforced - both in the text and in the illustration - by Susannah’s actions After obtaining the name “*Trismegistus*”, Susannah rushes out of Walter’s room, “shutting the door” behind her, and this leaves Walter “bouncing out of bed in the dark, and groping for his breeches.”\(^6\) One can hardly doubt that Susannah is actively trying to impede Walter, the timing at this point is split-second and the very typography reflects the narrator’s staccato report on the progress of what is certainly a race:

> **Susannah** ran with all speed down the gallery.

> My father made all possible speed to find his breeches.

\(^6\) Cash, ‘The Birth of Tristram Shandy’ (1982) p. 219 Cash is very hostile to Dr. Slop, whom he variously describes as ‘bungling’, ‘haughty’, ‘foolish’, and a ‘medical clown’. He admits that “Dr. Slop did save the life of the Shandy heir,” but qualifies this, for no good reason, with “but not because his ideas were sound or his inventions clever. ... Not Reason, but Fate, gave to Tristram Shandy his life...” Cash’s grasp of the timing of events is also very tentative. (see esp. pp. 218-9)

\(^6\) Notes, p. 311, n. 343.6-11


\(^6\) Ravenet’s engraving, after Hogarth, appeared in the first London editions of 1760, but was replaced in the second edition by another copy by J. Ryland. (See TS, p. 182, & facing p. 344). In the first, Tristram appears to be bawling vigorously, but this detail is modified in the second version to show a more placid expression.

184
Although he is only a few steps behind Susannah, when Walter arrives upon the scene - the very moment depicted by Hogarth - he is already too late and Tristram has been christened with his unfortunate name. It is clear that the curate must have completed the preliminary rites, said the Lord’s Prayer, and paused at exactly that moment in the service when the child’s name is wanted, and what is more – and most odd – both parents are absent at the moment of the christening. It is also very interesting to note that Walter is not made aware of the misnaming at the time, and the dialogue concerning this runs perfectly from left to right across Hogarth’s illustration: “She has not forgot the name, cried my father… —No, no, said the curate, with a tone of intelligence…” but before Walter can confirm that she remembered the right name, Susannah intervenes with some particularly interesting information: “—And the child is better, cried Susannah.” In just a few short moments it seems that Tristram has made a remarkable recovery from his apparently life-threatening ‘fit’, and this certainly makes it easy to suppose that Walter’s confusion is strategic and has indeed been ‘purposedly plann’d and pointed against him’, while Susannah’s urgency and rapid departure have nothing to do with Tristram’s chances of survival and seem designed to catch Walter - and escape from him again - while he is still befuddled from sleep.

I have already suggested that Hogarth was working under specific instructions from Sterne in the composition of these prints, and the figure of Susannah adds weight to this supposition, particularly when we consider her strange posture. She is turning away from the baptism and clinging to the back of a chair, which would seem to be a superfluous detail, were it not for the chair that is closely related to the episode in question. During Walter’s sleep earlier in the evening, as well as getting himself born, Tristram also took the opportunity to write his ‘Author’s Preface’, which makes the chair he describes there not only central to the episode, but central to the whole text.
Here stands *wit*,—and there stands *judgement*, close beside it, just like the two knobbs I'm speaking of, upon the back of this self-same chair on which I am sitting.\(^{692}\)

Tristram speaks at length on the importance of both, and invites the reader to consider the insufficiency of either one on its own "...answer this plain question, Whether this one single knobb which now stands here like a blockhead by itself, can serve any purpose on earth, but to put one in mind of the want of the other..."\(^{693}\)

With this in mind, the chair depicted by Hogarth gains greatly in significance, particularly when we notice that one of the 'knobbs' is not depicted at all (in keeping with the 'things omitted' from the text) while Susannah seems to be making an physical effort to obscure the other from view, thus seeming to ensure that this chair - Walter's chair - does not 'put him in mind' of either his wits or his judgement at this point. If one does bring wit (connecting together the disparate strands of evidence) and judgement (discerning between Tristram's opinions and 'actual' events) to this scene, then once again one must to choose between 'one road or another', or more specifically, one must decide whether Elizabeth is 'deceived or deceiving' here as elsewhere – and one must accept that there is strong reason to think the worse: Elizabeth is not only an adulteress, but she is also actively malicious in her relationship with Walter.

When Tristram finally concludes this long day, he deepens one’s suspicions by introducing a chapter on sleep with the words, “I wish I could write a chapter on sleep.”\(^{694}\) This seems to suggest that the chapter he *does* write is not the chapter he *could* write, but nevertheless the chapter is still highly suggestive. After pointing out that there is “...[no] difficulty, pass’d, present, or to come, that the imagination may not pass over without offence, in that sweet secession”\(^{695}\), Tristram concludes with a quotation that now seems to be the broadest of hints: "de la *La Vraisemblance... n’est pas toujours di Cotè Verité.*"\(^{696}\) Finally, one’s suspicions are not eased in any way when, the following morning (after the curate has conveniently disappeared) an anguished Susannah breaks the news to Walter: "They have called the child

---

\(^{692}\) III. xx. 236
\(^{693}\) ibid.
\(^{694}\) IV. xv. 345
\(^{695}\) ibid. p. 346
\(^{696}\) ibid. p. 347 – The quotation is from Adrien Baillet’s *Des enfans célèbres* (1722): “...it is necessary to grant that everything which is incredible is not always untrue, and that appearance is not always on the side of truth.” NOTES, p. 309-310
Tristram…” One must wonder who ‘they’ are since we have been led strongly to believe, as Toby assumes, that “‘twas Susannah’s and the curate’s folly betwixt them…”⁶⁹⁷, and therefore either ‘we’ or, since Susannah denies responsibility, ‘he’ would be the only appropriate terms. It simply will not do to suggest, as is so often done with troublesome details, that this is yet another ‘careless mistake’ by Sterne, and far more compelling to believe that Susannah is, as Walter describes her, ‘a leaky vessel’. When observed closely – in both text and print – she seems to ‘leak’ crucial pieces of information, and Susannah’s slip of the tongue on this occasion seems most clearly to implicate Elizabeth.

Mourning Bobby

If other relationships within the family group seem strained, the case of Bobby is decidedly strange. It might seem natural enough that the death of a brother who died while the narrator was still in his infancy, would not feature significantly in the reminiscence of a middle-aged man, but the detailed history of the family in the year of Tristram’s birth is not a hazy reminiscence, it the work of Tristram ‘the Shandy historian’, who reconstructs a minutely (and in fact impossibly) detailed account of the events of that year. Nevertheless, all we learn about Bobby is that he was “a heavy lad”,⁶⁹⁸ “the greatest blockhead in the family”⁶⁹⁹ and “a lad of wonderful slow parts”⁷⁰⁰ – even his name is enough to suggest ‘booby’. When Tristram suggests that Bobby might have been ‘improved’ like the Ox-moor, we find that even Obadiah does not agree: “…every tittle of this was true with regard to my brother Bobby—let Obadiah say what he would.”⁷⁰¹ We know that he set out with Walter for Westminster School on March 25th 1718/9, was alive at ‘Whitsontide’⁷⁰² in 1719, and he died early in the December of that year. That is all there is of ‘my brother Bobby’. The only significant thing about him is the fact that he is dead, a fact that is extremely significant for Tristram and also, one must admit, extremely convenient: “From this moment I am to be considered as heir-apparent to the Shandy family…”⁷⁰³

⁶⁹⁷ IV. xvii. 351
⁶⁹⁸ IV. xxxi. 396
⁶⁹⁹ II. xix. 177
⁷⁰⁰ II. xix. 179
⁷⁰¹ IV. xxi. 398
⁷⁰² V. vii. 431
⁷⁰³ IV. xxxii. 400
It is worth emphasising the fact that Bobby was present at Shandy Hall during the whole of 1718, a fact easily overlooked because he is barely mentioned and he never seems to be present – although he undoubtedly is. In this we can recognise another of the shadowy, ‘barely present’ figures that seem closely associated with Yorick - Mrs. Yorick, the midwife, the curate, and Elizabeth. Like Yorick, Bobby is absent when he should rightly be present, but once dead he figures strongly in two simultaneous scenes as the ‘presence’ of death. But if Yorick seems to embody death, Bobby is a strange reduction of his figure. Bobby’s strange absence makes him seem dead even when he is alive and present, and in further contrast, and unlike the skeletal Yorick, Bobby is a ‘fat hog’. Bobby is not ‘death’ – he is simply ‘dead’. The strange relationship of these two figures, if nothing else, must make one wonder what killed him. It might have been any number of things of course – disease or accident, it might even be that a ‘blockhead’ would not survive the brutal regime at Westminster school, although even under the notorious Busby, it was not common for pupils to be flogged to death. But none of these things will explain the ominous parallels that link Yorick so closely with Bobby; and although it might be contentious, one cannot help observing at this point that when the cuckoo lays an egg in another’s nest, it takes care to dispose of any other eggs that it finds there in order that its own offspring will get the best chance of survival. Of course there is no actual suggestion, much less any evidence of foul play in Bobby’s death, and even if there were, rather than Yorick, suspicion would probably fall on Walter – and this, despite his murderous ideas about his wife, is not at all likely. Nevertheless, his reaction to the death of Bobby still bears some scrutiny and, as ever, the scene is best approached from a position of extreme scepticism – and such a position is perfectly delineated by the questioning voice of Marvell’s poem ‘Mourning’:

You that decipher out the Fate
Of Human Off-springs from the Skies,
What mean these Infants which of late
Spring from the Starrs of Chlora’s Eyes?704

In deciphering out the fate of Walter’s ‘Off-springs’, we might note immediately that there are no tears accompanying Walter’s grief, and we can only ask ‘What mean these words that spring from his lips?’

Many people have been introduced to this scene by Christopher Ricks in his influential introduction to *Tristram Shandy*, in which he describes Walter's eloquence on the occasion: “When [he] learns of the death of his son Bobby, it is not long before the exhilaration of making a flowing speech on death has allowed him to forget the actual death.” Ricks is sympathetic, and he describes Walter’s response to be “a necessary resilience” that cushions him from the full the impact of his intolerable grief at the death of his child. And with this discussion coming at the conclusion of his introduction, Ricks is obviously speaking of more than just this particular scene when he explains: “Sterne does not snicker at the ability of the human mind to behave in that way – on the contrary, he finds it something to admire and to be grateful for.”  

This is all very well, but it is not at all convincing. Making an eloquent speech upon death by merely repeating the well-rehearsed words of a few ancient writers actually disguises Walter’s complete lack of emotional involvement in Bobby’s death. The ‘exhilaration’ noted by Ricks, is derived from Walter’s pleasure at being given an opportunity to display his eloquence, and his pleasure increases as the full implications of Bobby’s death become clear to him.

Bobby’s death releases Walter from the prolonged mental turmoil induced by the legacy he received after Aunt Dinah’s death: “My father would certainly have sunk under this evil if he had not been rescued out of it by another – my brother Bobby’s death.”  His dilemma – whether to spend the money on his plan to “inclose the great Ox-moor,” or to “send out my brother Bobby immediately upon his travels” is occasioned by the pull of custom and propriety on the one hand, and Walter’s own personal preference on the other. The continental tour had “ever been the custom of the family”, and so,

> “... to deprive him of it, without why or wherefore,—and thereby make an example of him, as the first Shandy unwhirl’d about Europe in a post-chaise, and only because he was a heavy lad—would be using him ten times worse than a Turk. On the other hand, the case of the Ox-moor was full as hard.”

Walter strongly favours the Ox-moor project, especially when he “set about calculating... the certain profit it would bring him... you would have sworn the Ox-

---

706 IV. xxxi. 399
707 ibid. p. 395
708 ibid. p. 398
moor would have carried all before it.” He positively gloats as he imagines the prospect of “…a hundred lasts of rape, at twenty pounds a last, the very first year—besides an excellent crop of wheat the year following—and the year after that, to speak within bounds, a hundred—but in all likelihood, a hundred and fifty—if not two hundred quarters of pease and beans—besides potatoes without end…” But his dreams of such a cornucopia are dashed by an unpleasant consideration: “—But then, to think he was all this while breeding up my brother like a hog to eat them—knocked all on the head again…” Even denied his Grand Tour, Bobby’s very existence is enough to spoil Walter’s plan, but the dilemma of the Ox-moor threatened even his health: “My father had certainly sunk under this evil … had he not been rescued out of it by a fresh evil—the misfortune of my brother Bobby’s death.”

Certainly, Walter has good reason to be relieved by the news of Bobby’s death, and when the same news reaches the kitchen, Obadiah is immediately aware of the real significance of the event to Walter: “I heard the letter read with my own ears, answered Obadiah, and we shall have a terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the ox-moor.” In addition to this, Walter is also relieved of the wasteful expense of having ‘a blockhead’ educated at Westminster school, and so, upon hearing the news, Walter is not prostrated, nor does he walk to the fish pond, nor does he shed a tear—as he does at other times of lesser crisis. On this occasion, we are told: “My father managed his affliction … differently from most men either ancient or modern,” and the phrase itself may be deceptively simple when Tristram tells us, “—He got rid of it, however.”—and he did so by making a speech.

Walter’s speech describes the reaction of a number of men in just such a situation, and all show copious signs of grief. Walter differs from these and most other men, however, by showing his distinct pleasure. As he proceeds with his oration upon death there is no indication that he feels any grief at all — no sigh escapes him, no words catch in his throat, his lip never trembles, he does not suddenly break-off and hurry from the room — and nor do we see any of the other devices that are the hallmark of ‘sentimental’ writing in such a situation. The fact is,
if we observe those ‘little openings that let a penetrating eye at once into a man’s soul’, then one must notice that Walter, understanding that both of his problems are settled, is clearly enjoying himself. His composure is unwavering; before very long we see him “…smiling, for he had absolutely forgot my brother Bobby,”714 and eventually, “…proceeding from period to period, by metaphor and allusion, and striking the fancy as he went along, (as men of wit and fancy do) with the entertainment and pleasantry of his pictures and images.”715 After the ‘entertainment and pleasantry’ of this one brief speech (‘full of sound and fury – signifying nothing’) Walter never mentions the subject of Bobby again.

Honour thy father and mother

If Walter’s response to the death of first son is unemotional, we may also note that his relationship with his living son is not marked by any particular sign of ‘natural’ parental affection. After restoring his humour by making his speech, his next action after Bobby’s death - “The first thing which entered my father’s head, after affairs were a little settled in the family…”716 – is to begin the writing of his theoretical Tristra-pedia. Having been ‘unfortunate in his three first great casts for me’, this is Walter’s fourth, but we find that this is the merely the means by which, for some years, he contrives to have virtually nothing at all to do with his living son. The work is not even half completed after Walter has been, “three years, and something more, indefatigably at work”, revealing a dedication to the task that Tristram can only count as yet another of his own misfortunes: “The misfortune was, that I was all this time totally neglected and abandoned to my mother; and what was almost as bad, by the very delay … every day a page or two [of the Tristra-pedia] became of no consequence”717 Walter’s educational theories prove to be of no practical benefit to Tristram, who develops faster than the work itself, but this misfortune is only ‘almost as bad’ as that of being ‘totally neglected and abandoned to my mother’. The phrase conveys little sense of filial affection or respect, and at this point we might ask of Tristram, the question that Walter put to Trim, concerning the second commandment:

714 V. iii p.425
715 V. vi. p.429
716 V. xvi. 445
717 V. xvi. 448
"Prythee, Trim, quoth my father, turning round to him,—What do'st thou mean, by 'honouring thy father and mother'?" 718

Trim’s practical demonstration of ‘honouring thy father and mother’ — by “allowing them 3d per week...” — is a stroke of eloquence that terminates the inquisition to which Trim is being subjected, and a pleasing enough example of practical ‘goodness’ to quash any doubts that may have been engendered by his woeful ignorance of the simplest tenets of faith. It might be churlish to suggest that ‘3d per week’ - which amounts to a mere 13 shillings per year - is extremely meagre, but when compared to this ‘exemplary’ behaviour Tristram’s actions are monstrous - treacherously revealing his mother’s infidelity and betraying his father’s cuckoldry in such a ‘sly and chuckling manner’ is a studied dishonour to them both. Lawrence Stone reminds us that Walter lived in an age in which “the concept of honour had a very clearly defined meaning”, and to call a man a liar might well lead to a duel or a brawl, but, as Walter was no doubt fully aware,

...the honour of a married man was also severely damaged if he got the reputation of being a cuckold, since this was a slur on both his virility and his capacity to rule his own household. He became the joke of the village, or at a higher level of his associates, and was defamed and thought unfit for public office. 719

Tristram’s narrative, as we have seen, does not simply break the second commandment, but makes a mockery of it, and if Trim draws attention to this when he recites his catechism, the mockery is even more pronounced when he reads the sermon. To appreciate this, one need only remember Tristram’s remarks on his narrative strategy:

“...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” 720

If one does keep the story ‘all tight together’ then one must consider Elizabeth’s suffering as she struggles through a difficult labour, and we are told, quite plainly, that her cries are clearly audible in the parlour below. That this is an intentional device has clearly seemed so unimaginable to critics that the fact is generally

718 V. xxxii. 470
719 Lawrence Stone, The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800 ‘Upper Class Attitudes and Behaviours’
ignored, although there is absolutely no doubt that sounds from the bedroom can be heard downstairs as Walter’s remark to Toby shows: “...my wife is this moment in the pains of labour, and you hear her cry out...”\textsuperscript{721} It is understandable, of course, that critics have been unwilling to give this idea any serious consideration. Walter mentions this to Toby early in the evening, soon after Dr. Slop’s arrival, and there is no doubt that, during such a difficult labour, over the next two hours Elizabeth’s cries would surely have risen to screams – even Dr. Slop reflects upon the fact “that Mrs. Shandy has had so bad a time of it.”\textsuperscript{722} The problem arises if one holds this fact in mind as Trim reads the sermon.

...go with me for a moment into the prisons of the Inquisition. [God help my poor brother \textit{Tom}.] ...Hark!—hark! what a piteous groan! [Here Trim's face turned as pale as ashes.] ...Behold this helpless victim delivered up to his tormentors,—his body so wasted with sorrow and confinement—[Oh! 'tis my brother, cried poor Trim in a most passionate exclamation, dropping the sermon upon the ground, and clapping his hands together—I fear 'tis poor \textit{Tom}...]

If, as one is reading this, one does bring to mind the ‘piteous groans’ and the agony of Elizabeth’s ‘confinement’ then the effect is no doubt comic, but grimly so, and for an Anglican clergyman to make such a joke during the reading of the sermon is, to put it mildly, in extremely bad taste.

\textsuperscript{720} IV. xxxiii. 557-8
\textsuperscript{721} II. xii. 130; see also, “...what’s all that noise, and running backwards and forwards for, above stairs” I. xxi. 70; “...a sudden trampling in the room above, near my mother’s bed” III. ix. 197; “The trampling over head near my mother’s bed side increased.” III. ix. 198
\textsuperscript{722} III. ix. 197
\textsuperscript{723} II. xvii. 161-2
Chapter 16: Conclusion
Toby

As we have seen, there are indeed 'two roads' to follow through *Tristram Shandy*, and it is only if one is willing to be led by the narrator that one will tread the familiar path that leads to the 'joyous qualities' of Sterne's work. In acknowledging the choice however, Tristram confirms the existence of the other path, which is dark and obscured, but nevertheless coherent and often surprisingly well-defined. If one is mistrustful of Tristram (who actually leads the reader into a labyrinth rather than to a simple junction), and if one looks for the alternative sense when one comes to the word 'Crevice' - or 'breeches', or 'noses', or 'horn-works' or a hundred other similar terms - then one can still detect 'the foul satyr's eyes' leering out from the shadows. Obviously then, it is difficult to bring this study to full completion, since the process of re-reading and re-assessment of Sterne's work that I have outlined above is clearly only a beginning and there are a great many 'dirty paths' yet to be explored, not only in the labyrinth of *Tristram Shandy*, but also in Sterne's other writings. This study would certainly be unfinished however, without some reference to Tristram's uncle Toby, and what follows therefore, although only a short outline of Toby's character, will serve at least to 'de-familiarize' a figure generally thought to be Sterne's most 'amiable' character; to demonstrate that the process of re-reading *Tristram Shandy* is a cumulative process; and most importantly, to demonstrate that the process is consistent throughout the text.
Initially then, having already noted the two extremely different versions of Toby that were described by Thackeray and Hazlitt, we will first consider the notion that Toby might be seen as a ‘callous debauchee’, before considering the irony of seeing in Toby any sort of ‘compliment to human nature’.

Tristram professes a high regard for his uncle Toby, although his almost exclusive use of military terminology is another seemingly inexhaustible source of ribald ambiguity, and there is no doubt that one has always had to suspend a considerable amount of disbelief to accommodate Toby’s bloodthirsty history with Tristram’s protestations of his unparalleled virtue. The problem is resolved however, when we come to realize that Tristram himself is the “RECORDING ANGEL” responsible for the “tear” that famously blotted out (or perhaps ‘tore’ out) Toby’s sins.⁷²⁴ Among Toby’s other oddities, his name is a slang term, equivalent to the modern ‘arse’, and while this is often noted and duly dismissed, the Slawkenberg illustration suggests that there might be more to it.

Fig. 9: ‘Right end of a Woman’

Methinks brother, ...you might, at least. know the right end of a woman from the wrong.⁷²⁵

---

⁷²⁴ VI. ix. 511
⁷²⁵ II. vi. 117 Walter’s broken pipe is visible, lower right, in the shadow near the urn.
Walter’s surprise, the snapping of his pipe, and this remark all come in response to Toby’s remark concerning Elizabeth’s preference for the female midwife, and his assumption that she “...does not choose to let a man come so near her ****”\textsuperscript{726} Several ‘roads’ are available at this point and, as is often the case, the most obvious is the least satisfactory.

It is easy to take the ‘clean road’, and to assume that simple modesty determined Elizabeth’s choice, and although this is strongly urged upon us by the narrator it does not in any way account for Walter’s dramatic reaction to Toby’s remark, and such a reading simply makes the text at this point incomprehensible. There is also another fairly obvious ‘road’ by which one also finds oneself nudged, rather more slyly perhaps, but no less invitingly, to supply another ‘four-letter word’, and it easy to think that this might have been the passage that provoked Cleland to compare Sterne to a ‘pupil who wrote C—— on the wall’. Although this does perhaps make Toby sound more like an eighteenth-century soldier, nevertheless the text remains no more than a very elaborate vehicle for a poor joke that would barely amuse a schoolboy. Nor do these possibilities explain why Toby is so clearly puzzled: “Right end,—quoth my uncle Toby, muttering the two words low to himself, and fixing his two eyes insensibly as he muttered them, upon a small crevice...”\textsuperscript{727} - the very ‘crevice’ noted by Eugenius for its ‘two roads’. Tristram, however, makes the matter clearer – in place of the four asterisks, he suggests, “…write Backside,—‘tis Bawdy.—Scratch Backside out, and put Cover’d way in,—‘tis a Metaphor;—and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle Toby’s head, that had he been left to have added one word to the sentence,—that word was it.”\textsuperscript{728} In suggesting that Elizabeth would not let a man so near her ‘backside’, Toby demonstrates that his ignorance of women is absolute, and he clearly has no knowledge of even basic female anatomy. Indeed, Tristram observes that, “…it is said …‘that when a man doth think of any thing that is past, ---he looketh down upon the ground; ---but that when he thinketh of something which is to come, he looketh up towards the heavens.’ My uncle Toby, I suppose, thought of neither, ---for he look’d horizontally.”\textsuperscript{729} This suggests that Toby has no experience of females in the

\textsuperscript{726} II. vi. 116
\textsuperscript{727} II. vii. 118
\textsuperscript{728} II. vi. 116
\textsuperscript{729} II. vii. 117-8
past, and nor does he anticipate any in the future — and hence he is in need of the 'anatomy lesson' fancifully depicted in the illustration above.

This absolute ignorance in Toby must therefore prompt one to further consider the distinction drawn in the preface to *The Fruit-shop*, where the 'right end' of a woman is described as being 'the use of woman as nature intended her to be used - as a source of pleasure and a means of propagating the race', with the alternative, to continue in the same terms, being 'those who refuse thus to use her, either celibates, masturbates, or - in Toby's case perhaps - sodomites'. Throughout the whole work, and with a most immoderate interest, Tristram focuses the reader's attention upon the condition of Toby's genitals, but this leading innuendo - the uncertainty concerning of 'the very place' where Toby received his wound - like many of Sterne's more obvious devices, leads the unwary reader away from the 'unnatural' innuendo that has disquieted other critics including, remarkably, both Coleridge and New. Toby's name means 'arse', his ignorance of women is absolute, and his relationship with Trim is the only successful relationship in the book. Although perhaps distasteful to many, the suggestion also provides a possible solution to the collapse of the affair with Mrs. Wadman, which is after all the "choicest morsel of my story!" 730 and yet still one of the greatest unsolved 'riddles and mysteries' of the text. Tristram often takes note of the widow's great beauty, but on one occasion he poses a difficult question: "— Was ever any thing in nature so sweet! — so exquisite! — Then, dear Sir, how could my uncle Toby resist it?" 731 If the damage to Toby's genitals was not catastrophic, why did their courtship fail?

Considered in these terms, the 'anatomy lesson' provided by the Slawkenberg illustration also provides a possible gloss to other riddles, particularly the equivocation when, later that same day, Walter disburdens himself to Toby on the vexations of married life:

Of all the puzzling riddles of a married life ... there is not one that has more intricacies than this—that from the very moment the mistress of the house is brought to bed, every female in it, from my lady's gentle-woman down to the cinder-wench, becomes an inch taller for it...

I think rather, replied my uncle Toby, that 'tis we who sink an inch lower. 732

---

730 IV. xxxii. 401  
731 V. xxxviii. 568  
732 IV. xii. 340
Toby and Walter, as ever, speak at cross-purposes as is so often the case, but in this, Tristram tells us, "Never did two heads shake together, in concert, from two such different springs." Walter’s meaning is clear, having just then been rudely ignored by Susannah on the night that Elizabeth was ‘brought to bed’ with Tristram, but Toby’s still seems caught up in the train of thought induced by his ‘anatomy lesson’, in which, as it is depicted above, Walter seems to be making it clear that one need only “sink an inch lower” to differentiate between the ‘wrong end’ and ‘the right end’ of a woman.

Similar material recently forced a “chastened” New to “approach Uncle Toby somewhat differently” and to evoke the shades of Coleridge’s ‘debauchees’ in his discussion of ‘the right end of a woman’ scene. His comments, from Tristram Shandy: A Book For Free Spirits, are usefully condensed in a review by W. G. Day:

...arguing that ‘failure to make certain discriminations can ... discontinue the species, and echoes of anal intercourse (and perhaps of a certain tendency to homoeroticism and violent penetration) reverberate not only in this passage, but throughout Tristram Shandy’, [New’s] final point is yet more contentious: ‘in the appeal Toby has so successfully made to so many readers, we may be justified in believing he is far the more dangerous threat to morality that is Walter.’...

...One footnote points out that the wavy line in volume 9 which purports to show the movement of Trim’s stick ‘looks like eighteenth century representations of spermatozoa under the microscope’. The detail at first sight appears redundant, but it supports and continues the thrust of the chapter as a whole: the reader must always be in active engagement with the argument.

New’s discussion is derived, like his title, from Nietzsche’s Human, All Too Human, returning particularly the idea that Tristram Shandy “‘signifies one thing and at the same time another’.” Clearly, there are ‘two roads’ to consider in Toby’s case. Unwisely, however, New ignores Tristram’s advice to choose one or the other, and instead he attempts to blend the two, so that ultimately, for New, Toby remains a “compounded being”, seemingly well intentioned, but morally short-sighted – and clearly just as paradoxical as ever. However, if one is willing to consider two distinct

733 ibid.
735 On Toby, see ibid. esp. Chapter 8, ‘Hearts’
737 New, (quoting Nietzsche), op. cit. p. 114
738 ibid. p. 88
figures, as Coleridge suggested, then one can indeed begin to recognize Toby as something of a ‘callous debauchee’.

One final example of this dual signification must suffice to illustrate this effect, and in such short measure the discussion may appear tentative, but the process is cumulative, and there are numerous other passages, including those discussed by New and Brady, that seem to ‘reverberate’ with the same innuendo. It is difficult to understand such material in terms of the ‘Anglican orthodoxy’ that is supposed to inform the text, but if one is in ‘active engagement’ and willing to supply ‘half of the entertainment’, then by understanding Toby’s military terminology in the manner of the ‘wiseacres’ of Boswell’s acquaintance, it often becomes difficult to overlook the innuendo:

Bless your honour! cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, does a man think of his christian-name when he goes upon the attack?—Or when he stands in the trench, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking firm.—Or when he enters a breach? said Trim, pushing in between two chairs.—Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up, and pushing his crutch like a pike.—Or facing a platoon? cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock.—Or when he marches up the glacis? cried my uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.—

Having noted New’s suggestion that when Trim flourishes his stick it produces something resembling spermatozoa, the innuendo spreads and begins to infect other, apparently innocuous passages. With Toby ‘looking firm’ and ‘pushing his crutch like a pike’ and Trim ‘presenting his stick like a firelock’, we can only assume that Sterne is once again actively encouraging the smirks of the ‘wiseacres.’

Finally then, let us consider Hazlitt’s version of Toby – a seeming paragon of virtue - but that the practical consequences of Toby’s much vaunted benevolence are not all that could be desired. Indeed, for all his protestations, other than his constant kindness to Trim, Tristram records very few other instances of Toby’s benevolence, and of those he does mention, the famous sparing of a fly’s life counts for little. Tristram, however, milks the occasion for all it is worth in order to foist upon the reader an obvious but nonetheless unsupportable association between the action, and the general idea that Toby – a professional soldier - ‘wouldn’t hurt a fly’.

When viewed impartially, Toby can only be described a ragged and impecunious creature, chastised by Walter for squandering his wealth, who seldom

\[739\] IV. xviii. 352
says anything sensible, who drinks nothing but brandy, and who has done nothing for
two decades but celebrate slaughter by squandering what little means remain to him
on futile war-games, while his servant plunders Walter’s house – having exhausted
Toby’s - to the same ends. When considered thus, the paradox of Toby’s character
can be resolved, and Tristram’s portrait of Toby, for all his protestations, can be seen
as a deception that becomes more apparent the closer - and the more sceptically - one
looks. His one notable – and undeniable – act of benevolence is his involvement at
the time of the death of Le Fever, but the consequences of this sentimental tale are
worth observing. Certainly, the education he provided for young Billy Le Fever is a
generous act, although undeniably ‘hobby-horsical’ and more than a little quixotic.
But in projecting his militarism on this young and evidently sensitive boy, Toby
leads the him to ruin, as we learn when the letter arrives to say that he has lost his
health and fortune abroad:

...a series of unmerited mischances had pursued him... and trod close upon
his heels for four years together after; he had withstood these buffetings to the
last, till sickness overtook him at Marseilles, from whence he wrote my uncle
Toby word, he had lost his time, his services, his health, and, in short, every
thing but his sword.740

In a few years, young Le Fever has come to occupy exactly the position his father
was in when Toby first met him - except that Le Fever is abroad, and has no son of
his own to comfort him. Shortly after this we hear the last of him when - with a
‘careless indifference’ that seems typical of so many aspects of the text- Tristram
says: “Leave we poor Le Fever to recover, and get home from Marseilles as he
can.”741 After this, nothing more is heard of ‘poor’ Billy Le Fever.

Finally then, we have seen that there is much to support Coleridge’s opinion
that a ‘callous debauchee’ might be substituted for the traditional figure of Toby, and
there is also much to undermine Hazlitt’s contrary opinion. Elsewhere, I have
described the problems associated with Toby’s passionate, but nevertheless
oxymoronic ‘Apologetical oration’ for the continuance of war.742 I will conclude
with the suggestion that one can approach Toby more readily if one considers ‘the
ludicrous light’ in which the idea of war as “the getting together of quiet and

740 VI. xiii. 519
741 VI. xx. 533
742 See my Two Sentimental Novels, (1998) pp. 57-9
harmless people, with their swords in their hands" might have appeared to some of Sterne’s personal – and textual – acquaintances, in order to suggest the texts and contexts that seem to shed most light on the ‘riddles and mysteries’ of Sterne’s work. D’Holbach’s

In all parts of our globe, intoxicated fanatics have been cutting each other’s throats, lighting funeral piles, committing, without scruple and even as a duty, the greatest crimes, and shedding torrents of blood. For what? To strengthen, support, or propagate the impertinent conjectures of some enthusiasts, or to give validity to the cheats of some impostors, in the name and behalf of a being, who exists only in their imagination, and who has made himself known only by the ravages, disputes, and follies, he has caused upon earth.

Toby’s ‘apologetical oration’ is not the only place where Toby’s idea of a benevolent deity is also revealed to be impossibly paradoxical:

How came priests and bishops, an’ please your honour, to trouble their heads so much about gun-powder? God knows, said my uncle Toby—his providence brings good out of every thing.

- and again, one might feel that the ironies of Toby’s character would not have been lost on a sceptic like Blount:

The Souldier, (if he goes to Fire a Town, batter a Castle, force a Religious House, storm a Fort or enter a city that would not surrender, to put Man, Woman and Child to the Sword, or any such villanous act) before he would attempt it, prayeth to God for his assistance, though his intentions and hopes are full of nothing but Cruelty, Murder, Covetousness, Luxury, Sacrilege, and the like.

Indeed, in the closing pages of Tristram Shandy, Sterne turns to Charron to draw a stark contrast between sexuality and militarism – and the two forms of ‘death’ that these ‘two roads’ - the ‘dirty’ and the ‘clean’ - will lead to:

...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 parts thereof—the congredients—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?

743 VI. xxxii. 557
745 VIII. xix. 690
746 Blount, Life of Apollonius, (Lib. 1, Chap 8, note 1, p. 37)
—The act of killing and destroying a man, continued my father raising his voice—and turning to my uncle Toby—you see, is glorious—and the weapons by which we do it are honourable—We march with them upon our shoulders—We strut with them by our sides—We gild them—We carve them—We in-lay them—We enrich them—Nay. if it be but a scoundril cannon, we cast an ornament upon the breech of it—747

Even at its worst, the libertine agenda of impiety and promiscuous sexuality - mimicked and celebrated in Tristram Shandy - comes to seem almost wholly innocent when compared to the atrocities committed in the name of religion on the battlefields of Europe - mimicked and celebrated on Toby’s bowling green.748 Sterne’s work, as I have described it, might seem vile and distasteful, but nevertheless, when read as a ‘Mackaroni fable’, an assault upon ‘the canons of bourgeois respectability’ and the bewildering ‘moral standards’ that could be blind to such a paradox, then one might also begin to feel that the libertinism of Tristram Shandy places the text at the very heart of the ‘Enlightenment’.

747 IX. xxxiii. 806-7

748 While in the very final stages of printing this thesis, I received the latest edition of The Shandean, containing Madeleine Descargues’ ‘Tristram Shandy and the Appositeness of War’. (The Shandean 12, 2001, pp. 63-77). This is a particularly interesting study which adds greatly to my discussion of Toby’s ‘apologetical’ militarism, both here and in my earlier work, and is therefore included in the bibliography, although not otherwise discussed.
Appendices

i) Chronological Table

ii) The 'Slawkenberg' Illustrations
## Chronological Table

Though in one sense, our family was certainly a simple machine, as it consisted of a few wheels; yet there was thus much to be said for it, that these wheels were set in motion by so many different springs, and acted one upon the other from such a variety of strange principles and impulses—that though it was a simple machine, it had all the honour and advantages of a complex one.—and a number of as odd movements within it, as ever were beheld in the inside of a Dutch silk-mill.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1509-47</td>
<td>At time of Harry 5th, ‘Shandy family rank’d very high’ (III. xxxiii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1644</td>
<td>Sir Roger Shandy at Marston Moor. (III. xxii)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1652</td>
<td>Birth of midwife. (aged 47 in 1699)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1662</td>
<td>Birth of Yorick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1663</td>
<td>Birth of Walter (i.e. ‘somewhere between’ 1658 and 1668)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hay twice describes Walter as being “fifty-six years old” in March 1718, but gives no reason for such precision. (‘Rhetoric and Historiography’ pp. 82, 85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1685</td>
<td>Hammond Shandy involved in Monmouth’s affair (III. x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1688</td>
<td>James II in ‘flight to France’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Nov. 5th William of Orange lands at Torbay.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c.1688</td>
<td>Yorick ‘sets out’: “he was utterly unpracticed in the world; and, at the age of twenty-six…” [he was] “…first setting out.” (I. xi.); also, “In the first years of this gentleman’s life, and about the time when the superb saddle and bridle were purchased … [he] loved a good horse.” (I. x) Henceforth, Yorick rides well mounted, but has “every nine or ten months a bad horse to get rid of,—and a good horse to purchase in his stead.” Situation continues “for many years.” (I. x.) (see 1694)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1689</td>
<td>- Coronation of William I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Phutatorius writes his “filthy and obscene treatise” (2nd edition 1718)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Trim enlists (Siege of Limerick being in “the year after I went into the army” V. xi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1690</td>
<td>- August 17th - 30th: Siege of Limerick Toby and Trim present (V. xxxvii.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1692</td>
<td>- July 24th Battle of Steinkirk (Trim “run over by a dragoon in the retreat” V. xxi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1693</td>
<td>- July 29th Battle of Landen Trim wounded in knee (V. xxi; VIII. xix; II. v.) and nursed by ‘the fair Beguine’.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1694</td>
<td>- Death of Mr. Wadman. (by 1701 Mrs. Wadman had endured “a seven year widowhood.”)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. 1694</td>
<td>- From “about five years before the date of the midwife’s license” Yorick rides poorly mounted. (I. x)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1694 or ’95</td>
<td>- Young Le Fever born. (‘about eleven or twelve years of age’ in 1706; (VIII. ix)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1695</td>
<td>- Siege of Namur. Toby wounded (July 27th)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1697</td>
<td>- Treaty of Ryswick ends War of League of Augsburg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Toby returns to London (summer)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1699 - Yorick assists midwife who is in 47th year (I. vii) (Baird says 1698 but “near [i.e. almost] twenty years” (I. xviii) from Nov 1718 most comfortably gives early 1699.
- Walter sets up in business as “Turkey merchant.” (I. xxv)
- August, “Towards the beginning of [Toby’s] third year [in London] which was in August, ninety-nine”. (II. iii)
- “…my great aunt Dinah, who, about sixty years ago, was married and got with child by the coachman (I. xxi); dated from narrative ‘present’ identified as “March 9, 1759” (I. xviii)
- Widow establishes ‘corking pin’ routine. (VIII. ix.)

1699 - 1713
- Walter runs his business: “…whilst [Walter] was concerned in the Turkey trade, had been three or four different times in the Levant, in one of which he had stayed a whole year and an half at Zant.” He also marries Elizabeth sometime between these dates (see ‘marriage articles’) and if, like Sterne, Bobby was sent to school at about the age of ten, he would have been born around 1708.
- Summer: ‘latter end of Toby’s third year’ (II. iv.)
- War of Spanish Succession (1701-1713)
- May: After ‘four years melancholy imprisonment’ with his wound, “my uncle Toby embarked for Shandy-Hall” (I. xxv; II.iv, v). Given elsewhere as (a problematic) seven years before Dendermond was taken in 1706 (VI. vi.)
- Widow Wadman kicks out ‘corking pin’. (XIII. viii, ix)
- Toby begins fortifications.

1700 - Toby acquires 4 draw-bridges, 2 gates, sentry box. Recreates Leige and Ruremond. (VI. xxii)

1702 - Spring: Toby paints sentry-box, etc. white. (VI. xxii) (see Watt)
- Marlborough victorious at Blenheim.

1704 - Walter’s lawsuit over ox-moor happened ‘about fifteen years before’ the death of Bobby.

1706 - Death of Le Fever.
- Dendermond taken by allies. (7 years after Toby left London, & 7 years before Walter retired.) (VI. vi.)

1710 - on Toby’s unsound military history concerning ‘the year ten’. (III. xiii) and other examples of Sterne’s ‘carelessness in his treatment of calendar time’, see Baird (p. 810, p. 818-9)

1712 - Walter, ‘the year before he left of trade’, writes Life of Socrates (V. xii; VIII. xxvi; VI. xxi)

1713 - Walter retires to Shandy Hall ‘seven years after Dendermond’ (VI. vi.) and 14 years after setting up in business.
- 28th April Treaty of Utrecht. (VI. xxxi)
- Demolition of Dunkirk (Sept-Nov). (VI. xxxiv).
- Toby’s hobby-horse deserts him: “He had no occasion for him from the month of March to November, which was the summer after the articles were signed, except it was now and then to take a short ride out, just to see that the fortifications and harbour of Dunkirk were demolished, according to stipulation. (VI. xxxiv.)
- The final demolition of Dunkirk was delayed, and Toby’s reference to “the stipulation” which has “lain there these six weeks” (VIII.
(See Florida NOTES, p. 435-6, n. 559.20ff)
- November: Elizabeth introduces Toby’s ‘amours’ to Walters in a ‘second bed of justice’, having made a “confident” of Mrs. Wadman “some moons before” this.
- Note: the amours of Toby & Mrs. Wadman begin after “an armistice ... of almost eleven years” (VIII. x). [From May or June 1701 this gives early 1712, not Nov. 1713] Everything else firmly indicate that the date of the demolition of Dunkirk must hold. (e.g. “…the shock I received the year after the demolition of Dunkirk, in my affair with widow Wadman” II. xii. (see also VI. xxxiv; VI. xxxv, VII. xviii.)
- Walter & Slop, Toby & Trim, Elizabeth & Yorick all come together ‘when the blister broke’. (VIII. xxxii.) Dr. Slop is also present when Elizabeth and Yorick meet again in the Spring of 1714. Both occasions seem to be social visits...
- Walter & Elizabeth watch Trim & Toby as they approach Widow Wadman’s house.
- Spring. End of Toby’s amours.
- Last scene of book.
1716
- Walter writes dissertation on the name Tristram “in the year sixteen” which is “two years before I was born.” (I. xix)
- Aug 5th Billy Le Fever joins army and arrives in time for the defeat of the Turks before Belgrade. (VI. xii, xiii)
- “latter end of September”. Elizabeth and Walter set out for London. (I. xvi) six weeks before “her full reckoning.” (I. xv) (Like Tristram, the child would have been due early in November)
- Tristram confusingly claims that “the very night in which I was begot” was “thirteen months after” the argument in the coach back from London (I. xvii) which makes no sense. If we assume this is simply an error – the ‘accidental interchange of the dates of Tristram’s conception and birth’ suggested by Hay (see above, p. 151), then the thirteen month interval before November 5th places the return journey in early October, which makes it a very short trip. However, as I have argued above, this ‘error’ seems designed to confuse the reader and is therefore doubly unreliable, and best ignored.
- November: Walter and Elizabeth travel to York, via Lincoln and Grantham.
- “all December.” Walter is ‘afflicted with sciatica’.
1718
- Jan & Feb Walter’s sciatica persists.
[Peter Nockolds claims – unconvincingly - that Tristram was conceived “around midnight, 2nd/3rd February.” ‘Conceived in Heaven’, p. 119]
- Night between Sunday March 2nd and Monday March 3rd Tristram claims “I am sure I was” begotten. The Sunday night is one of Walter’s ‘second beds of justice’ and the ‘lying in clause’ is discussed as they “lay chatting gravely in bed afterwards.” (I. xvii.) One would assume that this takes place on the Sunday evening, rather than after midnight.
- Walter is between 50 and 60 years old at this time. (I. iv.)
- c. Wednesday March 5th “three days, or thereabouts, gone with child, [Elizabeth] began to cast her eyes upon the midwife. (who is now 65).
- c. March 8th “before the week was well got round ... she had come to a final determination” (in favour of the midwife).
- mid-May, Walter returns – ‘he did not get down to his wife and family till the second week in May following’ (I. iv)
- September: Trim and Bridget crush bridge. [Dated by “cardinal Alberoni’s intrigues at that time being discovered” see Baird]; also because Trim broke his ‘truce’ with Bridget which lasted “from the demolition of Dunkirk in the year 13, to the latter end of my uncle Toby's campaign in the year 18, which was about six or seven weeks before the time I'm speaking of.” – i.e. the time of Tristram’s birth early in November.
- Late October. “…the week before” Tristram’s birth, Walter informs Dr. Slop that Elizabeth is “at her full reckoning”. (II. x.)

**- Wednesday November 5th Discussed pp. 179-187, above**

- Wednesday/Thursday (around midnight). Walter is roused from his sleep and Tristram is christened.
- Thursday November 6th Susannah admits that “they” have misnamed Tristram. Yorick is summoned to Shandy Hall.
- Friday Nov. 7th Visitation dinner and incident with Phutatorius, whose ‘de Concubinis retenidis’ (2nd ed.) was published “that identical week” (IV. xxvii.)
  (N.B. Toby “leap’d up without feeling the pain upon his groin” – it is 23 years since he was wounded.)
- Death of Aunt Dinah.
- April: Patriot is sold. (V. ii)
- Walter is counting on money from ‘the Mississippi-scheme’ (IV. xxxi)
  - Walter receives legacy from Aunt Dinah.
  - Whitsun (7th Sunday after Easter) Bobby still alive.
  - before Dec 4th Death of Bobby - letter bearing news arrives “within three weeks of Christmas” (V. ix).

**1719**

- Walter begins ‘Tristra-paedia’ “when matters were a little settled.” (V. xvi)

**1720**

- A problem: “four years” after joining army (in 1717), Le Fever’s letter arrives “about six weeks” before the accident with the sash window. (IV. xxxi). One might perhaps follow this date in the story of Le Fever and his son, but the evidence for 1723 as the date of the sash-window episode is otherwise very strong.

**1723**

- “In about three years, or something more, my father had got advanced almost into the middle of his work.” (V. xvi. pp.445, 448) places accident with sash window in 1723.
- One month before accident with sash window, Walter and Elizabeth discuss ‘breeches’ in 2nd bed of justice.
- Accident with sash-window when, Tristram says, “I was five years old.” (V. xvii) and “old enough to have told the story myself” (V. xxvi).
- Decision to put Tristram into breeches, one week after accident (IV. xiv, xv)
- 1728 - Toby lets fly escape when Tristram “was but ten years old.” (II. xii)
- 1741 - Tristram’s tour with Mr. Noddy’s eldest son. (I. xi)
- 1743 - The Unknown World published (Gentleman’s Magazine, July)
- 1748 - late April or early May, Death of Yorick. (aged approx. 86) i.e. “two years and three months” (I. xi) before Sermon on Conscience is preached (see below), and “about ten years ago” from 1759. (I. x)
- 1750 - Yorick’s Sermon on Conscience found and published. (I. x.)
- 1759 - Rev. L. Sterne preaches Sermon on Conscience at York (July 29, 1750)
- 1760 - Tristram Shandy I & II published in York (December).
- 1762 - Yorick’s A Sentimental Journey congruous with Sterne’s first visit (before ‘the peace’).
- 1764(?) - Tristram’s ‘dialogue with death’ and flight to France. (dated by allusion to suppression of French Jesuits. (VII. xl; see Florida NOTES.) Made doubtful however, in ASJ, when Yorick recalls Tristram’s earlier visit to Maria.
- 1759-67 - Adult Tristram’s authorial comments:
  - “March 9, 1759” (I. xviii); (Tristram aged 40 years and 5 months)
  - “March 26, 1759” (I. xxi); (Dates Aunt Dinah’s affair.)
  - “August the 10th 1761” (V. xvii);
  - “12th day of August”, 1766 (IX. i)
  - Also note: “I have been at it these past six weeks and am not yet born” (I. xiv)
- 1768 - A Sentimental Journey published.
- Death of Sterne
Appendix 2
The Slawkenberg Illustrations

This appendix contains the remaining illustrations from the three volumes of the Slawkenberg edition of *Tristram Shandy* - those already reproduced and discussed are omitted. Page references indicate volume and page in the Slawkenberg edition, followed by the standard reference to the Florida edition. Reproduction is not good, and the brief accompanying notes sometimes describe details that are more easily observed in the originals. These images have been prepared from photocopies made by staff at the British Library - clearer copies might have been obtained, but the process would probably have damaged what is perhaps the only remaining copy of this edition. This consideration also resulted in the slight cropping of several of these images during photocopying.
The most disturbing of the Slawkenberg illustrations. A kneeling priest baptizes an unborn child ‘by means of a little squirt’. Another figure reads from what is presumably a bible, while Dr. Slop (identified by squat figure, ‘sesquipedality of belly’ and forceps) stands by. Since the ‘squirt’ is in use, this is clearly not a scene from *Tristram Shandy*, although a clear understanding of this procedure is required if we wish to understand how Tristram informed us “as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing” that Elizabeth “was not a papist.” This is all part of the “deep knowledge and erudition which a book of this cast, if read over as it should be, would infallibly impart” and that is demanded of (or foisted upon) the hapless ‘Madam’ when she is required to re-read chapter xix, while Tristram, with colossal irony, rebukes the “vicious taste” of his readers and the fact that “nothing but the gross and more carnal parts of a composition will go down.” (p. 66)

By the standards of the time, when strong taboos surrounded pregnancy, the female figure makes this image most shockingly obscene, and indeed, the presence of the man-midwife must indicate that this woman is in great pain, fear, and mortal danger. To find entertainment in such a scene is in very poor taste, but to find eroticism in such distress is extremely sadistic, and abhorrent even to modern ‘permissive’ standards.
Walter arrives at this conclusion after "(smiling mysteriously) and giving a nod" as he listened to Trim’s account of "the affair of the bridge". The image reinforces the idea suggested by New, that Sterne is playing with the slang expression ‘to break a leg’, meaning ‘to give birth to a bastard.’ (NOTES, p. 258)
Diego, the “courteous stranger” who enters the town of Strasbourg “mounted upon a dark mule, with a small cloak-bag behind him, containing a few shirts, a pair of shoes, and a crimson-sattin pair of breeches.” (p. 289) In this he is somewhat similar to the Yorick of ASJ, who sets out with “half a dozen shirts and a black pair of silk breeches.” (ASJ, p. 65) With him are the “bandy-legged drummer” (barely visible in the shadows to the right) and the “trumpeter” – who claim the stranger’s nose is false. The female figure is the “trumpeter’s wife” who says “I’ll know the bottom of it... for I will touch it with my finger before I sleep.” (p. 293) Another wife later repeats the phrase: “‘Tis a live nose, and if I am alive myself, said the innkeeper’s wife, I will touch it.” (p. 297) There is no doubt that the artist assumed that Sterne was playing on the “extraordinary anatomical myth, which establishes a size-relationship between the nose and the penis” mentioned by Boucê. (see p. 104, above)
Diego, the ‘courteous stranger’ finally meets his Julia “alone in her chamber”. Slawkenbergius’ Tale is placed before the opening chapter of a new volume, and therefore stands ‘outside the text’ in a sense. However, this final episode of the tale, which is “overwritten, The INTRICACIES of Diego and Julia” is mentioned, but not translated, in the first chapter of volume IV. This is very like the unfinished ‘Fragment’ that Yorick translates (ASJ, p. 251) shortly before describing ‘The Act of Charity’ in ASJ. The discussion of Yorick’s various ‘translations’ throughout my Two Sentimental Novels is very pertinent at this point.

The page reference at bottom left reads “Vol. IV. P. 75” and therefore seems to refer to another edition, presumably the artist’s reference edition. A similar discrepancy appears on “—I will touch it—” (fig. 11). It might well be possible to discover from this which edition the artist was working with.

Fig. 13: ‘The Intricacies of Diego and Julia.’ (II. facing p. 58; IV. i. p.326)
Tristram promises a chapter upon whiskers but eventually admits, “—A chapter upon whiskers! alas! the world will not bear it——‘tis a delicate world.” (V. i. p. 409) The artist seems to suggest that the term signifies both male and female genitalia, and the suggestion is carried over into the similar ‘Take hold of my whiskers’ (fig. 14, below).

Partridge records the gender-specific “Whisker-splitter: A man given to sexual intrigues”, and a more intriguing use of ‘Whisker’: “…(occ. wisker); Something excessive, great, very large; esp. a notable lie.” Appropriate then that Rowe’s ‘armour clad’ narrator (p. 47, n. 160 above) should call himself ‘a Monster’ and ‘a Whisker of hideous mien’. Sterne however, placed ‘Whiskers’ in the court of de Valois, (see the companion-piece, ‘Take hold of my whiskers.’ fig. 14, below) where it seems to have signified something far more occult.
The Lady Baussiere approached by a “decayed kinsman” who begs for alms, without success. The lady Baussiere abruptly says “Take hold of my whiskers” at which, “The page took hold of her palfrey” As with Yorick riding on Elizabeth’s ‘pad’, this is clearly a ‘hobby-horsical’ passage. The scene, as noted (p. 75-6, above), is set in the libertine court of Navarre.
Fig. 16: ‘Widow Wadmari’ (II. facing p. 401; V. xxxviii. pp. 566-568)

The illustration is inserted into the text at the blank space – “here’s paper ready to hand” – which is left vacant for such a portrait, and is followed Tristram’s difficult question: “— Was ever any thing in nature so sweet!— so exquisite!— Then, dear Sir, how could my uncle Toby resist it?” (p. 568)
The female figure is Janatone, who Tristram attempts to "draw ... with as determine'd a pencil, as if I had her in the wettest drapery." This is somewhat improper, as New notes, "As Sterne probably knew, the use of wet drapery, the practice of the ancient sculptors, was not recommended for painters." (Notes, p. 457)

Like Maria, there is something of Marvell in Janatone: "...but he who measures thee, Janatone, must do it now—thou carriest the principles of change within thy frame; and considering the chances of a transitory life, I would not answer for thee a moment." If Janatone were in any way 'coy' this might put one in mind of Marvell's poignant urgency when caught between his own 'coy mistress' and the thought of 'Time's winged chariot'. Very similar ideas are also evoked by another fleeting female character, 'my dear Jenny':

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—while thou art twisting that lock—see! it turns 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!
Tristram is again represented in clerical garb and although this is unusual, it does not seem entirely unreasonable. Tristram mentions (seemingly in passing) "the two bad cassocks I am worth in the world" and critics have only rushed to point out yet another of Sterne's 'careless mistakes', although there is really nothing else to suggest that this is a mistake. Furthermore, in 'The Author's Preface', the adult Tristram mentions the names of a group of his own acquaintances; the list includes, "Kysarcius, my friend;—Phutatorius, my guide; [and] —Gastripheres, the preserver of my life." These, and others who appear, are all clergymen who also appeared with Yorick at the Visitation Dinner, which indicates that the adult Tristram moves comfortably in ecclesiastical circles. It has often been noted that, like Yorick and Sterne, Tristram's language is overflowing with Biblical phrases and allusions, and Sterne is clearly very aware of the linguistic range of his characters — as is most obviously seen in Toby. As Tristram very obviously resembles Yorick (and Sterne) in so many other ways, there really seems little reason to suppose that he is not a clergyman.
The scene that J. J. Mayoux had in mind when he wrote: "...one realizes with astonishment that the author has invited [the reader] to witness a scene of masturbation." (see above, p. 39) Fluchère, is rather reluctant to state the case plainly, but recognized the innuendo which he described as "a disturbing challenge to the reader." Trim's tale he sees as "a halting confession, rudely (or fortunately) interrupted by the captain, [and] thus left suspended on the brink of what might have been a purification" (Fluchère, p. 229), which is probably more difficult to decipher than the text in question. More usefully, Fluchère does point out that Diderot closely reproduced the scene at the conclusion of *Jaques le Fataliste*, where the narrator acknowledges that it is "copied from *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*." (Denis Diderot, *Jaques le Fataliste*, Harmondsworth, 1986, p. 252) The duplicated passage is also notable for the narrator's ironic denial of the suggested possibility that "the good minister Sterne" could have been the original plagiarist of the passage.
Fig. 20: ‘Tom’s had more gristle in it’ (III. facing p. 250; IX. vii. p. 752)

Another blatant innuendo, much like ‘I seiz’d her hand’. Note the couple are observed by the “poor negro girl” mentioned by Trim. (IX. vi. p. 747)
Bibliography

Anon.  
*The Fruit Shop, a Tale*, London 1765.

Anon.  

Anon.  
*Tristram Shandy in a REVERIE to which is added The Litera Infernalis of Poor Yorick*.  London (1760)

Anon.  
*Yorick's Sentimental Journey Continued*. London (1764)

ALTER, Robert.  

ASHBEE, Henry Spencer (‘Pisanus Fraxi’)  

ASHE, Geoffrey  

AUGARDE, Tony  

BAIRD, Theodore.  

BANDRY, Anne  

BATTESTIN, Martin.  

BERTHOUD, Jaques  

BLOUNT, Charles  

_____, (trans.)  
*The two first Books of Philostratus, concerning the life of Apollonius Tyaneus, published in English, with notes*, London 1680
BOSCH, René


BOSWELL, James.

BOUCE, Paul-Gabriel

BRADY, Frank.

BRAUDY, Leo.

BUDICK, Sandford
Dryden and the Abyss of Light, New Haven and London, 1970

BURTON, Robert

CASH, Arthur.

——— Laurence Sterne: The Early and Middle Years, London 1975

——— Laurence Sterne: The Later Years, London 1986

CHADWICK, Joseph.

CHIBKA, Robert L.

CLARK, Carol
The Vulgar Rabelais, Glasgow 1983

CLELAND, John
Fanny Hill or Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure, (1748-9) ed. Peter Wagner, London 1985

COCKSHUT, A. O. J.

COLERIDGE, Samuel Taylor
‘Sterne’s Wit and Humour’ (1818), Tristram Shandy: An Authoritative Text; The Author on the Novel; Criticism, ed. Anderson. 1980 pp. 485-8
CREASER, John

CROSS, Wilbur L.
The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne. London & New York 1909

DAVIDSON, Elizabeth.
‘Toward an Integrated Chronology for Tristram Shandy’, English Language Notes, Vol. 29, No. 4, June 1992. (pp. 48-56)

DAVIES, Richard A.
‘The Fragment in Tristram Shandy, V. i.’, English Studies 57, 1976. (pp. 522-3)

DESCARGUES, Madeleine

DIDEROT, Denis

ERASMUS

ERICKSON, Robert A.
Mother Midnight: Birth, Sex, and Fate in Eighteenth Century Fiction. New York 1986

FARQUHAR, George.

FAUROT, Ruth Marie.
‘Mrs. Shandy Observed’, Studies in English Literature 10; 1970; pp. 579 - 89

FERRIAR, John
Illustrations of Sterne; with other Essays and Verses, (1798) repr. London 1812

FITZGERALD, Percy

FLUCHÈRE, Henri

FOSTER, James R.
History of the Pre-Romantic Novel in England, New York (1949)

FRANK, Judith.
‘“A Man Who Laughs is Never Dangerous”: Character and Class in Sterne’s A Sentimental Journey’, English Literature & History 44; 1984. pp. 97-124

FRISCHHERTZ, Eric J.
‘Laurence Sterne’s Treatment of a New Mode of Discourse’, The Age of Johnson 8; 1997; pp. 255-278

FRYER, Peter.

GAY, Peter
GÉLIS, Jacques.  

GENETTE, Gérard.  

GOULMOT, Jean Marie.  

GREGORY, Jeremy.  

HALL-STEVENSON, John.  
*Works*, London 1795

HARTLEY, Lodwick.  

HAY, John A.  

HAZLITT, William.  

HOLTZ, William V.  

HOWES, Alan B.  

HUNTER, J. Paul.  


ISER, Wolfgang


JONES, Louis C.
*The Clubs of the Georgian Rakes*, New York, 1942

KEYMER, Tom


KORS, Alan Charles.

KRAFT, Elizabeth.


KRAMNICK, Isaac (ed.)

LANDRY, Donna and MACLEAN, Gerald.

LEMPRIERE, J.
*Lempriere’s Classical Dictionary: Proper Names cited by the Ancient Authors* (1850) repr. London 1984

LEVY, Leonard W.
*Blasphemy: Verbal Offence against the Sacred, from Moses to Salman Rushdie*, University of North Carolina Press, 1995

LOUNSBERRY, Barbara

LOVERIDGE, Mark

MACKSEY, Richard.
"'Alas, Poor Yorick': Sterne Thoughts', Modern Language Notes, 98, v. 1983; pp. 1006-20

MALTZHAN, Nicholas von,

MANDEVILLE, Bernard
The Fable of the Bees, ed. Phillip Harth, Harmondsworth, 1989

MARVELL, Andrew
Andrew Marvell: The Complete Poems, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno, Harmondsworth (repr.) 1985

MAYOUX, Jean-Jaques

———

McKILLOP, Alan Dugald

McMASTER, Juliet

MELVILLE, Louis

MENDILOW, A. A.

MORE, Thomas

NÉRET, Gilles
Erotica: 17th - 18th Century, From Rembrandt to Fragonard. Cologne, 2001

NEW, Melvyn
Laurence Sterne as Satirist: A Reading of Tristram Shandy Florida (1969)

———

———

———

———

---


---

(, ed.)


---


Nockolds, Peter


Oates, J.C.T.

*Shandyism and Sentiment, 1760–1800*, Cambridge (1968)

Parnell, Tim


Parish, Charles.


Partridge, Burgo


Partridge, Eric.


Patrick, D. W.


---

‘Gastripheres, Mundungus and the ‘Hey-go-mad’, *The Shandean* 12, 2001, pp. 119-121

Paulson, Ronald.


Pellan, Francoise


Perry, Ruth


Petrie, Graham.


Piper, William Bowman.

*Laurence Sterne*. New York 1965

POPE, Alexander

PORTER, Roy


REDWOOD, J. A.


ROBERTSON, J. M.
A Short History of Free Thought, (2 vols.) London. 1915

ROCHESTER, John Wilmot, second Earl of,

ROSS, Ian Campbell

ROWE, Thomas

SALLÉ, Jean-Claude.

SEMLER, L. E.

SHAKESPEARE, William.

SICHEL, Walter.
Sterne: A Study. London 1910

SIMMS, Norman


STERNE, Laurence.


The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Graham Petrie, Harmondsworth 1967

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Ian Campbell Ross, Oxford 1983

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Ian Watt, Boston 1965

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Introduced by George Saintsbury, London, 1912

Tristram Shandy: An Authoritative Text; The Author on the Novel; Criticism, ed. Howard Anderson, New York 1980

Project Gutenberg’s Etext of Tristram Shandy, Prepared by Sue Asscher (1997)


A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, Introduced by Virginia Woolf, Oxford, 1928 repr. 1951

A Sentimental Journey and Other Writings, ed. Tom Keymer. London, 1994


STOVEL, Bruce

SULLIVAN, Robert E.
John Toland and the Deist Controversy, (London, 1982)

SWIFT, Jonathan
A Tale of a Tub and Other Works, eds. Angus Ross and David Wooley, Oxford 1986

TAVOR, Eve

THACKERAY, William Makepeace
The English Humourists and The Four Georges. London, 1949

THACKERAY, William Makepeace

TOWERS, A. R.

TRAUGOTT, John. (ed.)

TURNER, James Grantham

VETH, Cornelis
Comic Art in England. London 1930

WAGNER, Peter.

WEATHERLY, Edward H.
The Correspondence of John Wilkes and Charles Churchill, New York, 1954

WILSON, Adrian.