# LAURENCE STERNE'S RELATIONSHIP

# TO

# THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By

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PREFACE

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate how Laurence Sterne's two novels, Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, react against each other, and to do this it is first necessary to place Sterne in the perspective of his own age. The first chapter on the modernity of Sterne seems unavoidable because of the strong tendency among contemporary critics to dwell on this aspect of his writing. Chapters two and three serve to place Sterne in a historical perspective, and deal mainly in generalities. The final two chapters reveal the duality of Sterne's vision, and how his ideas alter from one novel to the other.

Sterne began writing in a period in which the sensibility of the eighteenth century was moving from the premises of neo-classicism to those of romanticism, and his writing reflects this change. Chapters two and three of the thesis trace the change in such areas as the view of man, wit and judgement, reason and the imagination, and sentimentalism from the beginning of the age to the romantic era. Sterne's place in this period of transition is also established, and it will be seen that Sterne combines most of the theories on each subject mentioned which were prevalent in the eighteenth century.

The fourth chapter on Tristram Shandy analyses the book to formulate an idea of just what Shandeism means to Sterne. Shandeism with its spirit of gaiety, nonsense,

and fun has its focal point in the hobby-horse, the only refuge from harsh, inexplicable reality. Shandeism itself finds its dominant traits in the freedom and energy of wit and imagination, which create a Shandean world which can be compared to Lewis Carroll's Wonderland. Like Carroll's fantastic land Sterne's book exhibits the spontaneity and seemingly makeshift rules, and the implicit humour which removes the sting from reality. But Sterne's book, although delightfully nonsensical in its way, is firmly grounded in reality, and the point of departure is always a human one. *Tristram Shandy* is also seen to look forward to the romantic era. Mankind is never, for Sterne, either good or bad, but in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne lays more stress on man's innate benevolence and goodness which is manifested in sentimentalism. Swift, at this point emphasizes the importance of right reason to understand the real world and its order. Reason, however, becomes powerless when confronted with the irrationality of reality. It is incapable of controlling judgement and even unnecessary in a world which has moved from dominant reason to dominant feeling. Again in *Tristram Shandy* Sterne's concept of the imagination looks forward. For Sterne the imagination is not as important as it is for the romantics, but neither is it to be suberged by reason and common sense.

The norm in *Tristram Shandy* is Yorick, and Chapter five, "The Two Faces of Yorick", examines the changes in

Yorick from Tristram Shandy to A Sentimental Journey, and the significance of this change. In A Sentimental Journey feelings become suspect, the hobby-horse becomes dangerous, and mankind is more likely to err unless guided by reason. Thus Sterne moves closer to the Augustan age in temperment in his second and last novel.

I would, at this point, like to express my thanks to Mr. Graham Petrie whose guidance and patience, and also understanding, has been instrumental in the completion of this thesis. Mr. Petrie's time and interest, despite a busy summer, were invaluable to me. I would also like to express my gratitude to Suzanne whose help and encouragement have facilitiated the work done.

## A KEY TO THE TEXTUAL REFERENCES

References to both *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey* are incorporated into the text. The abbreviated titles are as follows:

*TS* - *Tristram Shandy*

*ASJ* - *A Sentimental Journey*

For the editions used see the Bibliography.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## IS STERNE A MODERN?

> After all, why has a novel to be planned? Cannot it grow? Why need it close, as a play closes? Cannot it open out?....... The plot is exciting and may be beautiful, yet is it not a fetish, borrowed from the drama, from the spatial limitations of the stage? Cannot fiction devise a framework that is not so logical yet more suitable to its genius?
> Modern writers say that it can. - E. M. Forster

Laurence Sterne presents us with a perplexing problem. It is not merely that his work appears, on first impression, to be capricious, amorphous, and perversely difficult, because these criticisms become invalid on a deeper analysis of the novel. But Sterne's excellence and precocity in handling his work create more problems as a path is being cleared into the books. Given the critic's penchant for classifying works of literature, the question arises: Where does the writing of Sterne best belong? Several recent critics dwell on the modern aspects of Sterne's work,[1] while another, Arthur Cash,[2] sees Sterne as an eighteenth century moralist whose moral temperament is very

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[1] See Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, (New York, 1961).
Benjamin H. Lehman, "Of Time, Personality, and the Author", from Laurence Sterne, edited by John Traugott (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1968), pp. 21-33.
Ernest H. Lockridge, "A Vision of the Sentimental Absurd: Sterne and Camus", in Sewanee Review, LXXII (1964), 652-667.

[2] Arthur Hill Cash, Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments (Pittsburgh, 1966).

close to that of the Augustans, and there are also those who view Sterne as one of a group of writers who precede the romantic movement and foreshadow its sensibility.[3]

The problem is that each of these views is, to some extent, true, while, paradoxically, each is also false. Sterne's genius lies in the fact that while straddling two periods in which the tastes and sensibilities were changing he was able to produce two unified and consistent novels, both of which reflect the tendencies of the changing age, while, at the same time, offering so much to modern taste and ideas. Sterne's awareness of the fundamental unreality of the novels of his day lead him to seek a form which would be true to actual reality, and this, in turn, lead him into the realm of the human mind. It is this which associates Sterne with the modern novel. But Sterne's ideas can be set firmly in the context of the eighteenth century, and his attitude toward his work is personal and humorous, rather than objective and serious. In both technique and subject matter Sterne may offer "premonitions of the future of the novel",[4] but premonitions they remain, not direct parallels.

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[3] Ernest Bernbaum, Guide Through the Romantic Movement (New York, 1930).

[4] Lehman, p. 21.

## a. TECHNIQUE

Looking back from the standpoint of the twentieth century reader Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, with its deceptively frivolous structure and techniques, appears to be drastically out of joint with its own age, and to have a closer affinity with the modern novel. The great novelists before Sterne can be read in terms of the interest and suspense which arise from the plot and action. The plot of Moll Flanders falls into a series of episodic actions, and this episodic action is unified and tightened in such later novels as Tom Jones and Clarissa. The action of these novels is patterned on the old Aristotelian concept of a beginning, middle, and end. But with Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey the plot and action of the conventional novel are discarded. Earlier novels, such as The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews, dealt with the adventures of the hero in the exterior world of deception and danger, but Sterne's novel The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy Gentleman shifts the focus from action or adventures to character and the character's state of mind. Fielding had called himself an historian, and Sterne's book too is a history.

> A history! of who? what? where? when? Don't hurry yourself. - It is a history-book, Sir, (which may possibly recommend it to the world) of what passes in a man's own mind. (TS, p.107)

Thus character becomes of prime importance, and action, as in the novels of Henry James, is only of interest in its effect on character. The action surrounding Tristram's birth is funny by itself (some of the action is pure slapstick), but its only importance lies in its relevance to Tristram's development and personality.

The novel, then, takes the shape of the pattern of mind, a fact which leads many modern critics to call Sterne the first stream-of-conscious writer.[5] Sterne, however, knew nothing of the sub-conscious which is of singular importance in modern psychology and fiction, and his starting point is Locke's theory of the association of ideas which Sterne playfully ridicules in the person of Tristram. Locke himself apparently added the chapter on association to his Essay Concerning Human Understanding to point out a flaw of the human mind, since the habit or chance of association hinders the more natural reason.[6] This Locke called madness and can be seen operating most clearly in Toby Shandy. Yet this association must be based on sense experience according to Locke, and Tristram, in defiance of Locke's theories, manages to relate events and ideas which derive from a time

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[5] See Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel (New York, 1960), p. 83.
Ralph Freedman, The Lyrical Novel (Princeton, N.J., 1963), p. 11. Dorothy Van Ghent, p. 26.

[6] Arthur Hill Cash, "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy" , ELH, XXII (1955), 126-127.

before his birth, Tristram, then, is the very opposite of one who lacks self-control in his associations, but rather his associations are conscious and calculated, and despite the fact

> that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in Great Britain; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence. (TS, p. 94)

Toby is simple and Tristram is complex in respect to their associations,[7] but both of them take their "character" from the cast of their minds. "Character" involves one's figure in life and should not be confused with the inner "self" or the inner, "spiritual" man lurking behind the projection of "character". The "self" is rarely seen in Sterne, and what remains is "art" or the image of one's personality or character. Uncle Toby on his bowling-green is all "character", but his "self" appears suggestively

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[7] The type of association evident in Toby and Tristram is different. (a). The association of ideas, by which certain ideas, either by accident or because they have some particular significance, become so closely linked in a man's mind that he cannot think of any one of them without inevitably calling up all the others as well, in the same order as he had previously experienced them. This is the case with Toby. (b). The Train of ideas, which is a more general concept of the mind as being constantly in motion, with the result that one idea automatically suggests another in some way similar to it, which in turn leads on to something else. Sterne uses this to explain the eccentric behaviour of Tristram, and his great transitions of time and space.

See note to page 39 of the Penguin edition of Tristram Shandy, edited by Graham Petrie.

in Tristram's description of Uncle Toby's trip from London to set up his armies at Shandy Hall. While recovering from a nasty wound in his groin it seems quite possible that Uncle Toby's sexual drives have been displaced from women to fortifications.[8] Tristram describes Uncle Toby in terms of a heated lover about to lay siege upon his beloved:

> Never did lover post down to a beloved mistress with more heat and expectation than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy this self-same thing in private; - I say in private; - for it was sheltered from the house, as I told you, by a tall yew hedge, and was covered on the other three sides, from mortal sight, by rough holly and thick-set flowering shrubs. (TS, p. 118)

And at times Tristram, the jester, and supreme artist allows a momentary glimpse of the pathetic or even the tragic.

Tristram, the narrator, is well aware of his attempt to "record the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall."[9] The thoughts do not "stream" from the unconscious part of a mind affected by present events as in Joyce and Faulkner. Instead Tristram is both narrator and author relating and fashioning events repeated to him, and which are more or less related to the Tristram of the past

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[8] The Freudian aspects found in Tristram Shandy are discussed in A. R. Towers, "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story," ELH, XXIV (1957), 12-29.

[9] Virgina Woolf, "Modern Fiction", from The Common Reader: First Series (New York, 1925), p. 155.

either before his birth or soon after. Sterne's characters, then, differ from those in the modern stream of consciousness novelists, who deal first of all with the "self" and the evolution of the "self". Tristram and his characters often surprise, but never change. We are not overhearing or listening in on the thought currents of a mind as in Mrs. Dalloway or The Sound and the Fury, but rather we are being guided, lured, and manipulated by the ultimate in omniscient authors, who all the time maintains a dialogue with the reader. Tristram as omniscient narrator is also omnipotent with powers to secure help from a nearby "day-tall critic" for getting "my father and my uncle Toby off the stairs" and into bed(TS, p. 285). This is blatant manipulating beyond even the powers of Fielding.

Using the technique of the association of ideas, which as I have noted ultimately stems from Locke, Sterne destroys the chronological time sequence of the conventional novel. Playfully confusing various time levels is part of the fun for Sterne, and this again derives from Sterne's knowledge of Locke and the idea of duration. Following Locke who states that we can never know the absolute reality of existence beyond ourselves and our own minds, Sterne makes a distinction between objective time which can be measured by the calendar or the clock and subjective or psychological time. For Sterne the most important time is that of the mind, and duration is therefore subjective. The sense of

duration results from the mind's own observation of its own succession of ideas. As Locke says:

> It is evident to anyone who will but observe what passes in his own mind, that there is a train of ideas which constantly succeed one another in his understanding as long as he is awake. Reflection on these appearances of several ideas one after another in our minds, is that which furnishes us with the idea of succession, or between the appearances of any two ideas in our minds, is what we call duration.[10]

The speed of the succession of ideas in the mind is the controlling factor in duration. If the flow of ideas is rapid then two hours and ten minutes can seem "almost an age" (TS, p. 199).

The important point, however, is Sterne's juxtaposition of chronological time with psychological time, since it is from this very confrontation between objective (chronological) time and subjective duration that the modern novel derives its novelty. But there is a difference between Sterne and the moderns, who were influenced not so much by Sterne as by Bergson and Freud. Henri Fluchère points out that "with a completely different technique which owes nothing to proliferation by association, but all to a rigorous organization of themes and incidents of Time, Joyce, under a mask of impersonality, will turn twenty-four hours into a total symbol of all consciousness...... Joyce succeeds in the

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[10] Quoted in Henri Fluchère, Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick, translated and abridged by Barbara Bray (London, 1965), p. 163. From the Essay Upon Human Understanding.

paradoxical enterprise of inserting the time of the moment, perceived with all the sharpness of something pulsatingly present, into an immense a-temporality that acknowledges no limits in any direction."[11]

William Faulkner, in such novels as The Sound and the Fury and Absalom, Absalom! is obsessed with the destroying power of objective time and its effect on the subjective approach to time on the part of characters whose minds are chained to a dead past. The present is never sharply defined by Faulkner, but rather it is an incomprehensible event which comes upon us and then disappears into the past. Beyond this irrational present is nothing, since the future does not exist. One present merely emerges from the unknown to replace another present. Yet the present does not contain in itself the future we expect. As each present is named and grasped it has become past. In The Sound and the Fury everything is in the past and nothing actually happens in the present. The past here becomes more real than the present, and the past is forever encroaching upon the present. Quentin Compson's obsession with the past is so strong that the past even displaces present events. Quentin relives a quarrel with Dalton Ames in his mind, and this experience of the past is so overwhelming that Quentin is unaware of the reality and

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[11] Ibid., p. 96.

presence of his fight with Bland. The present, then, when it becomes recognizable must be related to Quentin by Shreve. Events in the present are obscure and only take on solidity as history.

For Faulkner time is that which isolates the individual, and his problem is to reconcile chronological time with psychological time. Man's life is a continuous struggle against time, a struggle which cannot be solved by tearing the hands from a watch in denial of time:

> I went to the dresser and took up the watch, with the face still down. I tapped the crystal on the corner of the dresser and caught the fragments of glass! in my hand and put them into the ashtray and twisted the hands off and put them in the tray. The watch ticked on.[12]

The only solution for Quentin, and the only fixed present, is in the infinitesimal moment of death. Another solution is suggested in the person of the Negro servant Dilsey who submits to the natural flow of time, subconsciously realizing that any victory over time is "an illusion of philosophers and fools."(93)

Another twentieth-century novelist, Virginia Woolf, is less absorbed in the struggle to reconcile the time which is no longer chronological with actions succeeding one another in the march of time. Her main interest and focal

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[12] William Faulkner, The Sound and the Fury (New York, 1956), pp. 98-99.

point is an actual consciousness in the present, from which she radiates out to explore the past and the future, as well as other consciousnesses, with a final return to the initial point. Given this overriding concern for the mind Virginia Woolf never really considers time objectively. She ignores it in _Orlando_ where the hero (or heroine) can have "(at a venture) seventy-six different time schemes in the mind at once"[13] while spanning over three centuries of chronological time without aging significantly. In most of her novels, however, Virginia Woolf merely submits to the actual flux of time as it exists. She often suspends clock time so that at one point time will halt on a London street (_Mrs Dalloway_) to allow a look into the consciousness of a variety of people, while at another moment the clock stops at five (_Jacob's Room_) to allow several simultaneous events to be related. Time in these instances is used as a unifying factor making a significant pattern out of a seemingly chance situation. But we are never allowed to forget the ultimate fact of time and its impersonal and implacable nature. Time is inevitably an agent of death, and Virginia Woolf's novels repeatedly emphasize this fact in the constant imagery of water and waves, or by such reminders as the sheep's skull in _Jacob's Room_, the intermittant tolling of Big Ben in

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[13] Virginia Woolf, _Orlando_ (New York, 1963), p. 201.

_Mrs Dalloway_, and the tremendous vision of the reality and power of the flux of time over the individual segments of human experiences in the section "Time Passes" in _To the Lighthouse_.

What becomes clear is that with the modern novel time assumes a structural function as well as a thematic value, arising from an awareness of the fundamental hostility of time to life. Sterne sees this hostility, but he prefers to dwell upon the ludicrous and comic aspects to be derived from a contrast between the levels of time. And as Benjamin H. Lehman points out[14] it seems doubtful whether Sterne was conscious of the problem of significant form like many writers since Henry James. But as Lehman and others have noted,[15] in Sterne form and content are one. With his great interest in the working of the mind, his knowledge of Locke's theories of association and duration Sterne saw the possibilities of projecting the past into the present consciousness of a character and infusing it with the character's emotions and personality. Using this pattern Sterne was able to write a book that was a fragment of life illustrating that

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[14] Lehman, p. 30.

[15] Edwim Muir, _Essays on Literature and Society_ (London, 1949), p. 50.

> Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider-web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind.[16]

And at the same time the book itself is a finished whole.

But most of all Sterne is intent on fending against the ills and mischances of life "by mirth", and his playing with the various levels of time and marking the discrepancy between duration in terms of chronological and psychological time is part of the planned confusion calculated to make the reader laugh.[17] Tristram's adeptness at juggling the various

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[16] Henry James, "The Art of Fiction", from _The Portable Henry James_, edited by M. D. Zabel (New York, 1963), p. 401.

[17] Only once does Sterne overtly reveal the tragic aspect of time which passes too quickly:

> 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 - everything presses on - whilst thou are twisting that lock, - see it grows grey. (_TS_, p. 582)

Here Sterne presents us with the futility of trying to live in a present which has passed before we are able to grasp it. But the crucial point to be made is that this serious note comes in the last volume of _Tristram Shandy_, published in 1767. Sterne, with death imminent, and criticism of his book mounting begins to see more clearly the solemn side of life. And, indeed, it is not long before Shandeism itself breaks down, the hobby-horse goes wild, and sentiment sours in _A Sentimental Journey_.

time levels[18] is evident in the following extract:

> It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my uncle Toby rung the bell, when Obadiah was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr Slop, the man-midwife; - so that no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency too, both to go and come; - though, morally and truly speaking, the man, perhaps, has scarce had time to get on his boots.
>
> If the hypercritic will go upon this; and is resolved after all to take a pendulum, and measure the true distance betwixt the ringing of the bell, and the rap at the door;- and, after finding it to be no more than two minutes, thirteen seconds, and three fifths,- should take upon him to insult over me for such a breach in the unity, or rather probability, of time: - I would remind him, that the idea of duration and of its simple modes, is got merely from the train and succession of our ideas, -- and is the true scholatic pendulum, -- and by which, as a scholar, I will be tried in this matter, - abjuring and detesting the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever.
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> I would, therefore, desire him to consider that it is but poor eight miles from Shandy Hall to Dr Slop, the man-midwife's house; - and that whilst Obadiah has been going those said eight miles and back, I have brought my uncle Toby from Namur, quite across all Flanders, into England: - That I have had him ill upon my hands near four years; - and have since

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[18] The various time levels are discussed in A. A. Mendilow, "The Revolt of Sterne", from Laurence Sterne , edited by John Traugott, pp. 90-107. Also Eugene Hnatko, "Tristram Shandy's Wit", Journal of English & Germanic Philology, LXV (1966), 47-64.

> travelled him and Corporal Trim in a chariot and four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire: - all put together, must have prepared the reader's imagination for the entrance of Dr Slop upon the stage, - as much, at least (I hope) as a dance, a song, or a concerto between the acts. (*TS*, pp. 122-123)[19]

Here Tristram is correlating the time it takes the reader to read with the length of time needed for events in the novel to take place, and contrasted with this is the reader's subjective sense of the passage of time. Tristram also correlates the time it takes the writer to write with the time elapsed in the sequence of events that have taken place, and this latter time is again related to the space taken to record them in pages, chapters, and volumes. The nonsense arising from such calculations is obvious since Tristram

> having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume - and no farther than to my first day's life - 'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it - on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back - was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this - and why not? - and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description - And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write. (*TS*, p. 286)

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[19] Barbara Hardy has pointed out the error which Sterne makes in this passage, since it is actually only one or two pages since Uncle Toby rung the bell. See "A Mistake in *Tristram Shandy*", *Notes & Queries*, IX (1962), p. 261.

By dwelling mainly on the time as perceived by the mind, Tristram is able to move backwards and forwards in time disregarding chronological logic, and whatever action he deals with (even in the past) is presented as happening in the present. This offers great scope for Tristram's buffoonery. Within the mind of Tristram there is no future and no past in time, only before and after in narration, and Tristram, harassed by fifty things he has to relate and little time to accomplish this, speaks of events from one point in the past (which are presented as if they were actually immediate in time) only to jump ahead to another misadventure:

> — a cow broke in (to-morrow morning) to my uncle Toby's fortifications, (TS, p. 240)

Here is a future time which is already in the past.

This network of varying time sequences is enjoyable for its madcap quality, but there is another side to Sterne's use of time. Unlike the modern tendency to strive for an intense illusion of reality in the novel, Sterne delights in emphasizing the artificial quality of art. His novel, Tristram Shandy, reveals in Tristram's attempts to overtake himself and in Walter's inability to complete the various sections of the Tristra-paedia in time for them to be of use to Tristram, the impossibility of man to order or control time. Yet through the medium of fiction time can be

ordered and cast into a manageable form, and through this ordering the form and content of the novel become one. This is of central importance to the moderns, but for Sterne in Tristram Shandy laughter is the prime objective, And the order and unity created by the mind of Tristram results from Tristram's task of reconciling dissorder and unity. He does this by integrating the disorder into his own identity. But a more important point to remember is Sterne's constant concern to reveal the artificiality of artistic representation.

### b. THEMES

The subject matter as well as the technique of Sterne's novels reveals an affinity with the twentieth century writers, but again there are significant differences between Sterne, writing in a period in which metaphysical order was still relatively easy to find, and modern novelists imbued with the philosophy of Nietzsche and the existentialists. Sterne, following Locke's lead, is fascinated by the intangibility of the real, and by the fact that everyone gives reality his own personal colouring.[20] Walter Shandy

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[20] Jean-Jacques Mayoux, "Laurence Sterne", from Laurence Sterne, edited by John Traugott, p. 116.

irritated at not finding abstruse argumentation in a book by Erasmus, but only "the bare fact itself", endows the book with a hidden mystic and allegoric sense to satisfy his own fancy. Each mind renders reality in its own vision. Thus the trouble in discerning objective truth becomes, on the surface, as difficult as in novels by Henry James or William Faulkner. The Slawkenbergius story is the most obvious treatment of the problem of truth.[21] The word "truth" appears repeatedly in the tale, as does the word "fancy", and this gives an indication of the story's import. The centre of interest in the tale is Diego's nose and the question as to whether it is a real nose or a false nose. The nose, then, becomes a symbol for truth (it does, of course, take on a rather more obvious and prurient meaning) which is defended by Diego's "naked scymetar." The truth of the matter remains hidden, but the people of Strasbourg allow their own imaginations to decide whether the nose

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[21] This is not the only interpretation which can be applied to the Slawkenbergius story. John Traugott writes

> the Slawkenbergius story represents by all these allegorical levels a kind of fantasy world in which one of the principal facts of existence is that we live in a whirl of incoherent and contradictory shards of all the ages' learning.

*Tristram Shandy's World* (Los Angeles, 1954), pp. 18-19.

is true or false. At the end of the story the truth remains elusive and unrevealed.

But the reader of Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey is more obviously guided by an omniscient narrator than in modern novels, and he can orientate himself without difficulty. In Tristram Shandy this subjectivism becomes part of the comedy with Toby misinterpreting any word remotely related to the jargon of warfare, and Walter using every excuse to expound his personal theories. In A Sentimental Journey this subjectivism, while still humorous, becomes more serious in Yorick's selfish benevolence.

The isolation of the individual (solipsism) in a world of his own creation, a world in which a "man cannot dress, but his ideas get cloathed at the same time" (TS, p. 588), creates problems in communication. Words are part of this difficulty as witnessed in the confusion over the "bridge" after the crushing of Tristram's nose. Uncle Toby's hobby-horse receives its start from this failure of words to communicate meaning accurately. Uncle Toby had a wealth of ideas, but "his life was put in jeopardy by words" (TS, p. 108). Once again Sterne uses Locke as a spring board for his ideas. For Locke communication was impossible without determinate ideas signified by definitive words. But in Sterne words come to mean "outer forms that conceal

reality,"[22] and are inadequate by themselves for communication. This is reflected in the very typography of the book where Tristram is forced to use black and marbled pages, and twirling lines, as well as other devices to convey his meaning. This is definitely part of the comedy, but it is also a sign of the difficulty an author finds in communicating his ideas. A modern analogy can be found in the work of such dramatists of the theatre of the absurd as Eugene Ionesco and Samuel Beckett whose plays rely heavily on visual rather than verbal effect to convey meaning. Beckett, and also Virginia Woolf deal extensively with the isolation of the individual and the struggle for communication between people. The characters in Sterne's works, Yorick and La Fleur for example, remain separated from each other on a rational plane, and without a higher kind of communication through feelings (sentimentalism) their isolation would be as complete as that of Meursault, Camus's stranger.

This vision of man and his isolation from those around him can also be expanded into a relation between Sterne and the modern vision of the absurd. One recent critic, Ernest H. Lockridge, attempts to relate Sterne's vision of the absurdity of existence to that of Albert Camus as

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[22] Ronald Paulson, _Satire and the Novel in the Eighteenth Century_ (New Haven, 1967), p. 260.

expressed in Camus' The Myth of Sysiphus.[23] Camus' philosophy of the absurd states that

> Man is eternally Dissociated from Reality, Death is Our Final and Inescapable Destiny.[24]

These ideas are to be found in Sterne's works, but they do not reflect the metaphysical anguish of the modern concept of the absurd. Sterne's vision is comic, and not, as Lockridge says, "devoid of hope."[25] One of the main tenets of the absurd is the idea that human reason is woefully inadequate, and that the universe is irrational. The essential thing here is the vision of a world where everything goes wrong, where the best intentions are thwarted by the event, and where the most subtle and learned constructions of the mind are ridiculous when confronted by the hard facts of reality. The universe stoutly resists man's desire to enslave it, as in William Golding's Pincher Martin, and also man's attempt to mould it for his own use. In Tristram Shandy this absurdity manifests itself in a world governed by fortune rather than reason in the person of Tristram,

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[23] Ernest H. Lockridge, "A Vision of the Sentimental Absurd: Sterne and Camus", Sewanee Review, LXXII (1964), 652-667.

[24] Ibid., p. 652.

[25] Ibid., p. 665.

whose life has been a series of constant misfortunes from the time before his conception when the legal document, concerning Mrs. Shandy's right to bear her children in London, was drafted. Cause and effect become ludicrous in Sterne's zany world, and Tristram's life and personality become the sport of untimely questions, cut thumbs, door hinges, crushed noses, forgetful servants, and sash windows.

But in his vision of the absurd Sterne is not "out of step with his age."[26] Despite the fact that "even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every cranny of nature's works" (TS, p. 292), Tristram is willing to look for the good beneath the "riddles and mysteries" of the universe. A. E. Dyson states that

> In Swift's world, Reason and Nature rule on the surface, but there is a predictable rottenness at the core. In Sterne's world, this order is precisely reversed. The surface is odd and erratic, but the underlying realities are good.[27]

Tristram is prepared to accept Voltaire's view of the universe as baneful and ludicrous. He invokes the moon, the power which controls mutability:

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[26] Ibid., p. 653.

[27] A. E. Dyson, "Sterne: The Novelist as Jester", Critical Quarterly, IV (1962), pp. 310-311.

> Bright Goddess
> If thou art not too busy with Candide and Miss Cunegund's affairs, -- take Tristram Shandy's under thy protection also, (TS, p. 46)

Acceptance is important for Sterne whose ultimate conclusion is similar to that of Voltaire. Voltarie's Candide finds contentment when he learns to accept the universe. He renounces the futile search for truth and happiness, accepts the vanity of human wishes, and retires to his cottage to "take care of our garden."[28] This vision of an absurd world which must be accepted despite its cruelties is echoed in both Johnson's Rasselas and Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield. Johnson's characters, on their quest for a "choice of life" are left with a reduced image of life's possibilities, but unlike Candide and his companions the characters in Rasselas still cling to their fantasies. They do learn, however, that "human life is everywhere a state in which much is to be endured, and little to be enjoyed."[29] The complexity of life eludes rational choice, and the tale ends with each character dreaming of an impossible happiness. The Vicar of Wakefield, like Candide, contains a hero who is carried from disaster to disaster in an absurd world where evil triumphs

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[28] Voltaire, Candide (New York, 1962), p. 207.

[29] Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas, in Shorter Novels of the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1963), p. 25.

and virtue goes unrewarded. But as in Candide this descent into disaster is comic, and despite the many catastrophes the vicar responds with faith in a justice beyond this world. The pain, wretchedness, and imperfection of the world "never can be explained", and "to religion then we must hold in every circumstance of life for our truest comfort."[30] All three of these works have one thing in common; rejection of a trust in metaphysical speculation, and especially such speculation that presents a vision of a rational order. Such a vision turns attention away from the local duties and charities, and from the commitments of the heart that make a human order.

Like Candide's garden, Rasselas' desired "little kingdom", and Dr. Primrose's faith, Sterne's hobby-horse, when divorced from the world, is a certain refuge against the caprices of that outside world.[31] But the obsession each character displays for his hobby-horse raises the dangerous possibility of the individual becoming mechanized,

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[30] Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield (New York, 1965), p. 156.

[31] Sterne's own hobby-horse is writing, but as the voices of malice from the outside world mount against his book Sterne begins to view the hobby-horse and Shandeism in a different light. A Sentimental Journey is a serious look at the elements of Shandeism. See chapter five below.

and responding by "stock responses" which arise from his own personality. Walter Shandy best exemplifies this tendency in his mechanistic approach to sex as something done "out of principle", and in his reaction to his son Bobby's death. But this is not allowed to become serious (at least not in Tristram Shandy). In Tristram Shandy Walter's irritable reactions are part of the humour, and they are always redeemed by sentimentalism. Uncle Toby, engrossed in his bowling-green warfare would literally not hurt a fly, and Walter is constantly upbraiding himself for insulting "this worthy soul" Toby, more. Sterne's hobby-horse, then, is similar to Pascal's "divertissements", and serves to make one happy and content.

Man himself is not tragic for Sterne, and this marks another difference between Sterne and the moderns. Time is a problem for the moderns, while in Sterne it is merely part of the entertainment. Today man is a being overpowered by mysterious inner struggles and forces which are lost from view in the unconscious mind. To understand one's motives takes a long and arduous effort of analysis. Sterne, however, knew nothing of the unconscious, and Tristram can easily delve into his own past to discover the reasons he is like he is. Thus the seeming disorder of his life, and the twisted patterns of the past are all brought into an order by Tristram the artist.

Sterne's novels, although extremely relevant in connection with the modern novel, are not such a revolutionary departure from their own age as may at first appear. In satirizing various modes of learning Sterne is writing in what D. W. Jefferson has called the tradition of learned wit,[32] which derives from scholastic ideas, and such writers as Rabelais, Burton, and Swift. He also draws many of his ideas from Locke, Hobbes, and other thinkers of his own day as well as from contemporary novelists. Tristram as narrator is far more omniscient than Fielding's narrator, and _A Sentimental Journey_ is obviously, in part, a reaction against the travel books of the eighteenth century.

The genesis of Sterne's novels also follows a pattern prevalent in his own day when the novel was first becoming popular. Like his predecessors, Sterne's books are an outgrowth of his own vocation. The eighteenth century novelists were not primarily novelists. Defoe's work is close to journalistic writing, while Smollett's own journalistic style comes from his experiences aboard English naval vessels. Richardson's novels take the form of letters and are an outgrowth of his previous employment, while Fielding's novels, with their dramatic plot structure, are the work of a playwright forced to find a new medium. Sterne's

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[32] D. W. Jefferson, "_Tristram Shandy_ and the Tradition of Learned Wit", from _Laurence Sterne_, edited by John Traugott, pp. 148-167.

own technique is close to that of the pedagogue teaching his readers how to read:

> ---How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter?..............
> and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again. (TS, p. 82)

But, like the preacher in his sermons, this is a kindly pedagogue who will chastise himself as well as his readers. Sterne's sermons display the same humanity and familiar tones of speech as his novels, and they also contain the same dash of wit and humour as found in the novels. The sermons served as background experience for Sterne as the familiar letter had for Richardson, or the stage for Fielding. Sterne's background, then, is firmly in the eighteenth century, and it now remains to judge his works against their own times.

## CHAPTER TWO

## STERNE AND THE HISTORY OF IDEAS

In chapter one Sterne's modernity was discussed with a view to revealing the narrow scope of such an emphasis, since Sterne remains, in his own eccentric way, a moralist with basic eighteenth-century concerns for benevolence, the right use of reason, and the faculties of the mind commonly known as wit and judgement, and the imagination or fancy. As the eighteenth century progressed there was a movement away from the earlier stringent reliance on reason and judgement to a morality based on feelings, and a literature concerned with the freedom of the imaginative aspect of the creative talent, and Sterne, writing just after the middle of the century, reflects these changing ideas of his time. Before analysing Sterne's two novels to examine the difference in the focus of their ideas, it is necessary to take a broader look at the ideas of the eighteenth century and Sterne's relation to them. As Chapter three deals with the history of sentimentalism in the eighteenth century, this chapter confines itself to the changing concepts of wit and judgement, and imagination and reason from Hobbes and Locke to the time

of Sterne and after.[1] A division of these concepts simplifies the handling of elusive terms, but is admittedly somewhat arbitrary since such words as wit, fancy, raillery, and imagination, or reason, judgement, and wisdom become confused and often several of these become synonymous.

(a) WIT AND JUDGEMENT

One of the most often used and abused of literary terms in the eighteenth century is the word wit. John Locke had the greatest influence in shaping the fortunes of the notion of wit and judgement, two faculties of the mind, one of which, wit, discovers similarities between things, deals in analogies, and similarities of ideas, while the other, judgement, is the analytic process seeking out the differences between ideas. Wit is the tool of jesters, and judgement the area of philosophers seriously engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. For Locke wit lies

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[1] The survey of the several ideas in this chapter and the next will be necessarily brief. The space and length of this thesis does not allow for an exhaustive study, but what is more important is to see Sterne in relation to his own age. Once the ideas current in the eighteenth century have been examined, and a general look taken at Sterne's place in this history, it will be easier to look closer at the change which takes place in Sterne's own ideas as he grows older. By completing Tristram Shandy and embarking on something entirely new Sterne was reacting against the reception of his ideas in Tristram Shandy. Older, sicker, and worried by debts and family relations Sterne becomes disillusioned with Shandeism and all that it represents.

> mostly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting these together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblence or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy.[2]

And, conversely, judgement is concerned with "separating carefully one from another ideas wherein can be found the least difference."[3] Judgement, then, is directly opposed to the use of metaphor and allusion, and Locke, the rationalist, condemns imaginative flights as part of that faculty called wit. The superior faculty, for Locke, is judgement since it accords with the use of the reason.

Thomas Hobbes, in his book Leviathan, takes a slightly different position in respect to wit and judgement. To see clearly where Hobbes differs from Locke it is necessary to be extremely careful with Hobbes' terms, since what he calls "Good Fancy" or "Good Wit" is a creative faculty, a part of the mind which discovers similarities between things, and is thus the same as Locke's conception of wit. For Hobbes, as for Locke, "good Judgement" is that aspect of the mind which observes "differences, and dissimilitudes" between "thing and

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[2] Quoted in John Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World (Los Angeles, 1954), p. 68.

[3] Ibid., p. 68.

and thing."[4] Judgement is "commended for itself, without the help of Fancy", but fancy "without the help of Judgement, is not commended as a vertue."[5] It now grows more difficult to follow Hobbes' logic since wit and judgement appear to become synonymous in the following passage:

> So that where Wit is wanting, it is not Fancy that is wanting, but Discretion. Judgement therefore without Fancy is Wit, but Fancy without Judgement not.[6]

What is clear, however, is that wit is a separate faculty from either Fancy or Judgement. Wit is a natural virtue which consists of two things, "Celerity of Imagining" (fancy), and "steady direction to some approved end" (judgement).[7] These two, fancy and judgement, are later combined by Hobbes to form wit, an indespensible ingredient in works of literature, and in works of literature, fancy, the imaginative quality, "must be more eminent; because they (poems) please for the Extravagancy, but ought not to please by Indescretion."[8]

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[4] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, edited by C. B. MacPherson (Middlesex, England, 1968), p. 135.

[5] Ibid., p. 135.

[6] Ibid., p. 137.

[7] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[8] Ibid., p. 136.

For Hobbes, then, wit differs in degree from Locke's conception of it by containing as one of its ingredients judgement, although judgement is essential in the "rigourous search of Truth."[9] Wit and judgement, for Hobbes, are mutually agreeable, whereas Locke censures the use of wit.

Despite the liberal attitude of Hobbes towards wit, judgement became accepted as the superior faculty. This was due, in large part, to the influence of Locke, and also because of the fact that wit lent itself easily to vicious purposes. In 1690 Sir William Temple extended the differences between wit and judgement in his essay Of Poetry. In this work Temple states that the goal of man is pleasure and profit. The faculty of the mind that deals with profit is wisdom (judgement), and the faculty that deals with pleasure is wit. Wisdom is the faculty responsible for "the inventions or productions of things generally esteemed the most necessary, useful, or profitable to human life",[10] and wit is responsible for "those writings of discourses which are the most pleasing or entertaining to all that read or hear them."[10] Temple does not completely denigrate wit, but it is clear that it is merely a game to dazzle the eyes.

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[9] Ibid., p. 136.

[10] Sir William Temple, Of Poetry, from Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose (New York, 1956), p. 128.

Worse than this, however, is the fact that wit became connected with immorality and sacrilege. It could easily be used in an ill-natured manner to ridicule sex, religion, and morality. The basis for the hostility towards the dangers of wit are stated by Malebranche who writes

> that which is most opposite to the efficacy of the Grace of Christ, is that which in the Language of the World is call'd Wit; for the better the Imagination is furnished, the more dangerous it is.[11]

The man of profane wit throughout the Restoration period was thought of as a Hobbesian type "who thought good nature itself a foolish thing and used his wit to make it seem so."[12] His immorality stemmed from a lack of judgement, the quality of discretion. Such censure of wit, however, was levelled more at the abuse of wit than at the faculty itself. John Tillotson was able to see the two sides of the question:

> Wit is a very commendable quality, but then a wise man should always have the keeping of it. It is a sharp weapon, as apt for mischief as for good purposes if it be not well manag'd.[13]

But the emphasis remains on the aptness of wit for mischief,

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[11] Quoted in Edward Niles Hooker, "Pope on Wit: The Essay on Criticism", from Eighteenth Century English Literature (New York, 1959), p. 44.

[12] Quoted from Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humourist (Chicago, 1960), p. 13.

[13] Quoted from Tave, p. 13.

and Sir Richard Blackmore, as late as 1716, in his Essay Upon Wit, argues in a similar fashion to Tillotson by first stating the uses of wit, and then revealing that wit is "to apt to be abus'd and perverted to ill-purposes."[14]

The association between wit and ill-nature became stronger in the early eighteenth century, but Steele and Addison, who saw good nature as the primary value of man, attempted to temper wit with morality, as well as enliven morality with wit. Addison is most concerned with the idea of wit, and he begins his redefinition of wit by referring directly to Locke. In Number 62 of The Spectator he qualifies Locke's definition of wit with the aim of restoring the specific aesthetic effects of wit by showing that wit in revealing the resemblance of ideas "gives delight and surprise to the reader."[15] Addison also distinguishes between "true wit", "false wit", and "mixed wit". True wit in Addison's account is not comic, but it merely discovers, beyond an obvious resemblance, "some further Congruity" between two ideas. False wit is just the opposite, a resemblance and congruity of words, single letters, syllables,

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[14] Ibid., p. 14.

[15] Joseph Addison, Spectator Number 62, from English Prose and Poetry: 1660-1800 (New York, 1961), p. 112.

or "sometimes of whole sentences or poems cast into the figures of eggs, axes, or alters."[16] False wit, unlike true wit, may be deliberately comic as in certain puns. The conclusion could be drawn that the more incongruous a comparison was the more comic the wit. Wit is beginning to move away from satire and raillery to something more impersonal, a spirit or quality of a literary work.

In the Essay on Criticism in 1711 Pope was quick to come to the defence of wit, since he saw the strong connection between wit and literature. To undermine wit was to sap literature of its vital power, since wit and art are inextricably interwoven.

True Wit is Nature to advantage dressed. (line 297)

Wit is not simply the odd metaphor, epigram, or allusion, but rather the quality of the finished product:

> In wit, as Nature, what affects our hearts
> Is not th' exactness of peculiar parts;
> 'Tis not a lip, or eye, we beauty call,
> But the joint force and full result of all.
> (lines 243-246)

For Pope wit is part of the Poet's genius, but it must be controlled and tempered by judgement:

> Some, to whom Heaven in wit has been profuse,
> Want as much more to turn it to its use;
> For wit and judgement often are at strife,
> Though meant each other's aid, like man and wife.
> (lines 83-86)

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[16] Ibid., p. 113.

Here we are moving back to a position similar to that of Hobbes, where wit is an essential part of any literary product. For Pope it was obvious that if literature were entirely controlled by the rational faculty then whatever was valuable in it could be better conveyed another way. Wit and judgement must go hand in hand to impart "Life, Force, and Beauty" to art. But wit carried another asset; it was seen by some to be an instrument for understanding nature unlike the rational method advocated by Locke and even Pope. La Rochefoucauld suggested this aspect of wit while arguing that there was no difference between wit and judgement:

> Judgement is nothing else but the exceeding Brightness of Wit, which, like Light, pierces into the very Bottom of Things, observes all that ought to be observed there, and discovers what seemed to be past any bodies finding out.[17]

In 1757, two years before the first volumes of _Tristram Shandy_ appeared, Edmund Burke published his essay on the _Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful_, in which he states there appears to be "no material distinction between the wit and the judgement, as they both seem to result from different operations of the same faculty of comparing."[18]

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[17] Quoted in Hooker, pp. 54-55.

[18] Edmund Burke, _A Philosphical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful_, from _English Literary Criticism_ (New York, 1963), p. 248.

In reality, however, Burke says that there is rarely a union of the two faculties. It is only when distinct objects have a resemblance that the imagination is affected and we are pleased. Man's natural tendency, furthermore, is to relate objects in the imagination, and judgement is "for the greater part employed in throwing stumbling - blocks in the way of the imagination, in dissipating the scenes of its enchantment, and in tying us down to the disagreeable yoke of our reason."[19] Burke is preoccupied with the irrational in art, the sublime is completely irrational, and the perception of the beautiful and the sublime is removed from the realm of judgement. In speaking pejoratively of reason Burke was moving away from standards of Locke and Augustan art, and his insistence that art affect the imagination is closer to later romantic art. Burke's idea of wit and judgement is close to the position which Sterne takes in _Tristram Shandy_.[20]

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[19] _Ibid._, p. 255.

[20] Since _Tristram Shandy_ is the longer and more influencial of Sterne's two novels, and also the work in which he overtly alludes to this subject, his position in respect to wit and judgement and the other ideas discussed here will be taken from that novel. It will be seen, however, in chapters four and five below that Sterne's ideas become more conservative in his later novel, _A Sentimental Journey_.

For Sterne the word wit has two significances. It is, on the one hand, the first quality of the mind, a natural agility of fancy, a dash of madness, or touch of genius, that is opposed to the slower, more methodical judgement. Yorick expresses it well when he says "that brisk trotting and slow argumentation, like wit and judgement, were two incompatible movements" (TS , p. 49). The Preface in volume three would seem to belie the superiority of wit over judgement, where Sterne, installing his critics in the respectable Lockean camp by separating inferior wit from superior judgement, counters by returning to a more Hobbesian view. He defends both wit and judgement here as equal endowments offered to man by God. Wit and judgement must be balanced within the mind, and this Sterne illustrates by his example of the two knobs on the top of the back of Tristram's chair. Still, it is interesting to note that Sterne never does define either word, and from the number of times the word "wit" appears in the novel it is obvious that it is one of the essential qualities of Tristram Shandy. Even the Preface is itself a work of wit, and its central argument is not based on reason, but rather it is argued by analogy. The book is above all the product of a lively wit, the faculty that conditions inspiration and displays freedom of improvisation. And despite Locke's dictum against the use of metaphor, Tristram's thoughts pass "gummous" through his

pen when he momentarily lacks wit, and he laments

> I am got, I know not how, into a cold unmetaphorical vein of infamous writing, and cannot take a plumb-lift out of it 'for my soul', so must be obliged to go on writing like a Dutch commentator to the end of the chapter, unless something be done- (TS, p. 587)

And we know from the nonsense word, Blonederdondergewdenstronke, what Sterne thinks of Dutch commentators. Judgement, the faculty which follows the reason and the artistic rules, can only confine wit, and impair genius and inventiveness. And critics, those whose duty it is to exercise their judgement to decide the worth of literary works, are continually exhausting the patience of Tristram. The heads of these critics, Tristram says, are "stuck so full of rules" that "a work of genius had better go to the devil at once, than be pricked and tortured to death by 'em" (TS, p. 192).

Yorick's sermons, mentioned several times in Tristram Shandy, are also praised for their form and gaiety, rather than their content. The sermon on Good Conscience in volume two is praised by Walter for its dramatic quality, and the sermons discussed in volume six marked "moderato" have "seventy times more wit and spirit in them" than those marked "so, so" (TS, p. 414). The ideas, or the element of judgement in the sermons are not part of Tristram's criterion for grading the excellence of the sermons. The quality of wit is even prized by Walter, who had "a thousand

little sceptical notions of the comic kind" which he would sharpen his wit upon (TS, p. 79), and he is convinced that a man's wit should be original, that "an ounce of a man's wit, was worth a ton of other people's" (TS, p. 162). Walter's wit comes into play in his funeral oration after the death of Bobby. His speech proceeds, Tristram says, by metaphor and allusion, and he strikes the fancy "(as men of wit and fancy do) with the entertainment and pleasantry of his pictures and images" (TS, p. 354). Tristram goes on to say that the corresponding oration, that of Trim in the kitchen, is "without wit or antithesis" and "goes straight forwards as nature could lead him". But surely Sterne could not be unaware that Trim's oration is, in fact, a triumph of wit since it strikes the heart not by the force of its reasoning, but by the effective comic comparison between death and the dropping of Trim's hat.

Wit, then, is a spritely freedom of the mind, and it begins to be associated with the energy, freedom and the romantic idea of the imagination, while judgement becomes associated with reason, a faculty which is necessary, but one which is also prone to error. This aspect of wit is similar to what Johnson believed was Pope's definition of wit, and Johnson criticized Pope for reducing wit "from strength

of thought to happiness of language."[21] Johnson conceived of wit as that "which is at once natural and new, that which though not obvious is, upon first production, acknowledged to be just."[22] Wit here, a clear and fresh understanding and expression of truth, is close to the second idea which lies behind Sterne's conception of wit.

Throughout Tristram Shandy Sterne's statements concerning wit show that he also thought of wit as a means for communicating intuitive conceptions of reality, which differed from the rational analysis and school logic which is attached to judgement. Judgement, like reason, is often shown to be inadequate in understanding the world. Tristram writes that "so often has my judgement deceived me in my life, that I always suspect it, right or wrong" (TS, p. 361). The other mask for Sterne, Yorick, is "a man of weak judgement" (TS, p. 48), and lively wit. There is nothing of dullness in Yorick, who found many occasions in his life to scatter "his wit and his humour" (TS, p. 56). Reason and judgement often run aground against the hard facts of an absurd reality, and in a moment of extreme lucidity and insight Walter makes the point that

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21 Samuel Johnson, "The Life of Cowley", from Samuel Johnson, edited by Bertrand H. Bronson (New York, 1958), p. 470.

22 Ibid., p. 470.

> Every thing in this world ... is big with jest, - and has wit in it, and instruction too, - if we can but find it out. (TS, p. 384)

And it is Corporal Trim who provides the example how this intuitive quality works when, not understanding a word of the Catechism, he yet proves to be, in the words of Yorick, "the best commentator on that part of the Decalogue" (TS, p. 385).

For Sterne in Tristram Shandy the idea of wit is beginning to blend with the changing attitude towards the imagination, and both of these, in turn, reflect the growing emphasis on feelings and sentiment. The artist must be a creative genius who overcomes the fact that "Fancy is capricious," and who realizes that "Wit must not be searched for" (TS, p. 585). True genius will be endowed with these qualities, while "the theological virtues of faith and hope" will be of no avail to those who are not born writers (TS, p. 586). In Tristram Shandy, as well, man is no longer the Hobbesian man whose overriding self love is manifested in an ambitious and aggressive lust for power and material gains. The inner feelings, the imaginative flights, and man's creative energy can all be treated without suspicion or restraint. The connection between wit and judgement, and reason and the imagination, then, must be the next topic.

(b) REASON AND IMAGINATION

French writers of the seventeenth century were advancing neo-classical ideas which were to have a great influence on English critics such as Dennis and Temple. Boileau, in his influencial verse essay, L'Art Poétique, censured extravagances and baseness in literature, and advised writers to "Aimez donc la raison."[23] Later La Bruyère criticized Rabelais for his obscenity, Theophile for his exuberance of wit, and he praised Malherbe for his simplicity:

> Ils ont tous deux connu la nature, avec cette difference que le premier (Malherbe), d'un style plein et uniforme, montre tout a la fois ce qu'elle a de plus beau et de plus noble, de plus naif et de plus simple ... L'autre (Theophile), sans exactitude, d'une plume libre et inegale, tantot charge ses descriptions, s'appesantit sur les details.[24]

In England, as early as Hobbes the word wit is associated with fancy or the imagination, and judgement is associated with reason, the faculty that is used to prevent man from being misled. Later Locke, in attempting to show the errors of dogmatism, emphasizes Bacon's point that there is a dichotomy between external reality and the reality which the mind perceives. Man measures reality from his own

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23 Boileau, L'Art Poetique, line 37.

24 La Bruyere, Les Caracteres (Paris, 1935), pp. 14-15.

perceptions of the universe, not from the actual measure of the objective world. This viewpoint is not pessimistic, however, since, for Locke, man can know himself and his relation to reality through his sense impressions. The body is thus not separate from the mind, as Walter Shandy argues when he divides man into two parts, the Animus and the Anima (the rational soul and the animal spirt). The mind and body are one in nature, or "the soul and body are joint-sharers in everything they get" (TS, p. 587), and, for Locke, man must observe carefully and record honestly what goes on in his mind as his mind receives sense impressions from the body. Reason alone can lead to truth, and it "must be our last judge and guide in everything."[25] From Locke's influence, wit, fancy and imagination fell into disfavour, and were denied any didactic rights in literature. What was important was the subject itself, and its truth. No longer could poetry be true unless judgement and reason predominated, unless poetry engaged in direct didactic expression. Truth became one and not divisible, and any conception that was formulated must have a degree of truth in the world. Hence the sense of plausibility in Gulliver's Travels or Robinson Crusoe, their plainness of style, and the Augustan idea that you can never be sure that there is any real difference

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[25] Traugott, p. 25.

between art and life.

This, in part, accounts for the Augustan dependence on reason. For Pope "Reason is here no guide, but still a guard."[26] Reason must guard against all excesses in mind and body, but what is to guard against an excess of reason? Swift is obsessed with man's misuse of reason, the faculty that should be alone "sufficient to govern a rational creature."[27] The imagination is to be rigidly controlled by the principles of judgement, and since all forms of art are public they must be lucid rather than clever and must impart a moral as well as provide pleasure. Even Fielding is concerned about the proper relationship between beginning, middle, and end in art, and about the depiction of general types. Fancy and the imagination are looked upon with suspicion. In the first sentence of Rasselas, Johnson warns those to beware who "listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy, and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope."[28] Even Joseph Addison, while writing of the pleasures of the imagination in number 411 of The Spectator, is quick to point out that the pleasures of the understanding are "more preferable, because they are founded on some new knowledge

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[26] Essay on Man, line 162.

[27] Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels (Boston, 1960), p. 209.

[28] Samuel Johnson, Rasselas, p. 505.

or Improvement in the Mind of Man."[29] Judgement must always be at hand to "see distinctly all its (the object's) particular Beauties."[30] And, for Addison, following Locke's lead, the imagination can only be activiated by sense impression which the mind receives, and he restricts this even more to the sense of sight. The imagination is not autonomous, but is bounded by nature perceived by the eye.

As the century progressed, however, the imagination becomes a more important concept, and at the same time, through the influence of Shaftesbury, the morality of reason is replaced by the morality of feeling. In 1744 Mark Akenside published his poem The Pleasures of Imagination, a verse essay based on Addison's essays on the same topic. Sublimity, like imagination, was becoming an important critical notion at this time, and may tend to confuse the issue, but the terms are related and may be discussed together. For Akenside there is an affinity between the spirit of man and the vastness of nature, and this affinity is a symbol of man's divine origin. Nature itself is sublime,[31] and has the power to lift man's imagination beyond

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[29] Joseph Addison, Spectator Number 411, from English Literary Criticism, p. 185.

[30] Ibid., p. 190.

[31] This differs from the earlier concept of the sublime. For Boileau the sublime was related to thoughts which awaken emotions in the reader. See Samuel H. Monk, The Sublime (1960).

the limits of his senses:

> Say, why was man so eminently raised
> Amid the vast creation, why ordained
> Through life and death to dart his piercing eyes,
> With thoughts beyond the limit of his frame.
> (lines 151-154)

And two years later, in 1746, Joseph Warton's poem Ode 1. To Fancy praised fancy as an inspirational power that "breathes an energy divine" into every line of poetry. Akenside had spoken of Fancy, Truth and Liberty in one breath, and Warton denegrates the "cold critic's studied laws" (line 118). Here is a movement away from the order and rules advocated by earlier spokesmen for literature. This new emphasis on freedom is repeated vehemently by Laurence Sterne.

In his inquiry into the Origin of Our Idea of the Sublime and Beautiful in 1757 Burke retains the old idea that sublimity in some way depends on qualities residing in the object, and that the "power of the imagination is incapable of producing anything absolutely new, it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses."[32] Burke does not refer beauty and sublimity to the perceiving mind alone, but he does concentrate most of his attention on the effect the object

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32 Edmund Burke, p. 248.

produces rather than on the quality of the object. Any object, even the small and ugly, may be regarded as sublime if it creates terror. Thus Burke's opinions represent a certain awareness of the importance of the individual impression, and he moves away from the cold, objective consideration of literary judgements.

But even more important in the progression of these ideas is Edward Young whose essay, Conjectures on Original Composition, written two years after Burke's Inquiry, is a direct challenge to the neo-classical tradition. As early as 1745 in The Complaint Young hinted at the power of the mind to rise above the bodily senses. In that poem the mind is

> Active, aerial, towering, unconfined,
> Unfettered with her gross companion's fall.
> (lines 100-101)

In the later essay Young scoffs at the "meddling ape Imitation", and speaks of original genius as that which "inspires and is in itself inspired."[33] "Genius is from heaven" and thus the artist is a creator in the image of the divine creator. At this stage Young is far in advance of

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[33] Edward Young, Conjectures on Original Composition, from Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, p. 1151.

Locke's view on innate ideas. For Young

> Learning is borrowed knowledge; genius is knowledge innate and quite our own.[34]

The novelty of Young's essay lies in his emphasis, and in his refusal to hedge original genius with the restriction of the literary rules and good sense:

> Genius can set us right in composition, without the rules of the learned.[35]

Young's Conjectures draws more strongly the relation between art and the freedom, originality, and individuality of the artists and makes all these aspects of the unfettered imagination part of genius. Young's essay, it may be noted, appeared in the same year that Sterne's wild and original imagination was beginning to create the idiosyncratic world of Tristram Shandy. But Young's ideas go beyong the eccentricities of Sterne and look toward the later romanticism. For Young:

> so boundless are the bold excursions of the human mind that in the vast void beyond real existence it can call forth shadowy beings and unknown worlds,as numerous, as bright, and perhaps as lasting as the stars, such quite original beauties we may call paradisaical.[36]

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[34] Ibid., p. 1150.

[35] Ibid., p. 1149.

[36] Ibid., p. 1154.

Such beauties can be found in the poetry of the romantics, whose imaginations went far beyond anything envisaged by the Augustans. William Blake's doctrine of the imagination is the culmination of the change in the eighteenth century idea of the imagination. Although holding violent antipathy for Locke and his ideas, Blake does agree with Locke in one respect. Both agree in the primary reality of the mind. But Blake goes much farther than Locke:

> Mental things are alone real: what is called Corporeal, Nobody knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, & its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought?[37]

But instead of reason Blake sees imagination as the primary reality of the mind, and his imagination is higher than the world of the senses:

> Man's perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception; he perceives more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.[38]

For Blake, there is no difference between subject and object, existence and perception. Man is born with imagination, a divine quality, and thus man in his creative acts is God. Blake also adds the idea of energy and freedom which is cast

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[37] William Blake, A Vision of the Last Judgement, from Blake, edited by Geoffrey Keynes(London, 1966), p. 617.

[38] Blake, "There is no Natural Religion", from Blake, p. 97.

into form by the imagination so that works of art "are more concentrated and unified than sense experience."[39] The imagination, then, is a powerful creative force and not chaotic or dangerous as earlier theorists had maintained. It now remains to see Sterne's place in this tradition.

## (c) STERNE: A TRANSITIONAL FIGURE

Of the many roles Sterne assumes in his writing one is the pedagogue teaching his reader how to read his book and all books. He is constantly advising the reader to read closely. As early as chapter four in Volume 1 he complains that the majority of readers lack perspicacity, and throughout the book he continues to exhort the reader to

> Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader. read, -- or by the knowledge of the great saint Paraleipomenon - I tell you beforehand, you had better throw down the book at once. (TS, p.232)

Sterne does not rest content with continual warnings to be on guard, but he helps the reader on his way by repeating similar incidents, and using several words repeatedly to prompt the unwary reader. The countless number of times the words imagination, fancy, and wit appear in *Tristram Shandy* signal the importance of these qualities in an understanding

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39 Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Boston, 1967), p. 26.

and appreciation of the novel. It is Sterne's use of these words, often in the context of the idea of genius, that reveals how essential they are for the novel Tristram Shandy.

Essentially Sterne is a transitional figure straddling the two eras, the neo-classic and the later romantic. In the Preface of Tristram Shandy Sterne argues for a balance between wit and judgement, while at the same time one of the main features of Tristram Shandy is the insistency with which Sterne emphasises the inadequacy of reason, and one of Tristram's constant pleas is for the reader to exercise his imagination. Time after time in the novel Sterne includes incidents which reduce Locke's rationalism to confusion. Walter's continuous run of theories and hypotheses in which he expends every ounce of his reason come to no purpose. In every day practicalities Walter's reason, and Walter is "master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature" (TS, p. 161), fares no better since the parlour-door hinge never does receive the little blob of oil it creaks out for. All the heights of reason are scaled in the great debate as to whether "the mother is not of kin to her child" (TS, p. 324), and the idiocy of reason is manifested here by the conclusion reached. Reason in man serves merely "to sharpen his sensibilities, - to multiply his pains, and render him more melancholy and uneasy under them" (TS, p. 212).

The Preface in Volume 111 is a concentrated discussion of wit and judgement, and a similar discussion on

the subject of reason occurs in the sermon in Volume 11. In this sermon reason and judgement are equated as faculties which can be tricked by the passions when reason is not supported by religion. One critic, Arthur Cash, reads this sermon as a statement of Sterne's ethic and makes it carry the weight of interpretation for Tristram Shandy.[40] From his reading of this sermon as well as Sterne's other sermons Cash sees him as an advocate of "right reason."[41] But, although Sterne's other writing including A Sentimental Journey would bear this out, it is not necessarily the case in Tristram Shandy. As Lansing Hammond has pointed out in his study of Sterne's sermons[42] all but one of Sterne's published sermons were written in some form before 1751, and, as has often been noted, Sterne's inclusion of his sermon on Conscience into Tristram Shandy may merely have been to promote sales of his upcoming edition of sermons.

However that may be, there is more important evidence which tends to discount the doctrine of reason which the sermon outlines. The sermon, like the articles of excommunication used as a curse and the frivolous discussion

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[40] Arthur H. Cash, "The Sermon in Tristram Shandy", ELH, XXXI (1964), 395-417.

[41] Ibid., p. 404.

[42] Lansing Van Der Heyden Hammond, Laurence Sterne's Sermons of Mr Yorick (New Haven, 1948).

of wit and judgement, is a solemn matter made the occasion of a jest. We are made to look at the sermon with a critical eye because of the sport made of it. Corporal Trim's posture is placed before our eyes meticulously before he begins, the sermon is interrupted several times by the inane comments of the audience, and at the height of the oratory Corporal Trim breaks down and cannot continue. Still the most important point is the fact that the two most sympathetic and Christian characters in the book, Corporal Trim and uncle Toby, fail to understand a word of the sermon. In fact they even mange to misunderstand a good part of it because their hobby-horse is forever under them effectively dispelling "cool reasn and fair discretion" (TS, p. 113). Several times both the Corporal and Toby are led astray by the association of such words as "entrenched," "fortified", and "tower," with warfare. It is not their misunderstanding and lack of reason which is important, however, it is their intuition and inherent goodness.

Just as it is unfair to confine the interpretation of Sterne's use of the words wit and judgement to the Preface, so it is also narrow to confine his discussion of reason to the sermon. The reactions of Toby and Trim to the sermon are informative. These two reason through feelings, and are controlled entirely by their fancy. Tristram tells us that "in superior classes of beings" reason is conducted

"by Intuition" (TS, p. 242), and in another place he tells us that "Reason is, half of it Sense" (TS, p. 472). And despite the example given in the characters of Toby and Trim, Sterne also proves his point by working directly on the intuition and imagination of the reader. Tristram many times calls for the reader to use his imagination to fill in blank pages, or information. As he says, he does "all in my power to keep his (the reader's) imagination as busy as my own" (TS, p. 127). Walter Shandy's reactions to the several misfortunes which befall his son Tristran need explanation, Tristram says, but unless the reader "has a great insight into human nature" (TS, p. 291), he will expect similar reactions from Walter in every catastrophe. But Tristram is unable to supply an explanation, he cannot "reason upon it." Walter's mind, now a mystery, becomes clear as the book progresses, and as Tristram teaches us to understand it purely from a context of situations. Gesture, too, plays a part in allowing the reader's imagination to consider events in the book without being told what to think or feel.

Reason, then, and judgement do not work by scientific objectivity, but are governed by our feelings. Sterne, although moving from the rationalism of Locke, still adheres to a view of the imagination which Addison stated earlier in the century. Words, or reason do not affect the fancy as

well as the sense of sight which "has the quickest commerce with the soul" (TS, p. 356). What we see governs our imaginations, and imagination governs us. Tristram says that when

> the judgement is surprised by the imagination... I defy the best cabbage planter that ever existed... to go on cooly, critically, and canonically, planting his cabbages one by one, in straight lines and stoical distances, especially if slits in petticoats are unsewed up. (TS, p. 515).

And Phutatorius' judgement too was mislead by "the sallies of the imagination" (TS, p. 319) when he received the piping hot chestnut. In such instances wit and imagination can help in understanding the chaos of existence, and at worst they can render living more enjoyable. Imagination, wit, and feeling (sentiment) are uppermost in Tristram Shandy. The spirit of the book is controlled by the lively play of wit, and the content deals with humour and feeling.[43] And the imagination itself is part of a work of genius. Like Edward Young, Sterne hates the rules with which the learned stifle works of original genius and imagination, and he announces at the outset of his novel that he "shall confine myself neither to his (Horace) rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived"(TS, p. 38). Sterne, throughout

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[43] See Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist, pp. 220-225.

the novel, stresses his right to break the rules when he wishes, and he exhorts the reader to "let me go on, and tell my story my own way" (TS, p. 41). He shows the foolishness of rushing "into the middle of things, as Horace advises" by explaining that he lives three hundred and sixty-four times faster that he writes, and consequently he can never overtake himself (TS, p. 286). Using one of the little hands, which underline the importance of what he is saying, Sterne expresses his contempt for those who measure all things according to rules:

> ☞ A dwarf who brings a standard along with him to measure his own size - take my word, is a dwarf in more articles than one - (TS, p. 313).

And by using this little hand Sterne adequately displays his own independence from all rules. He writes by no rules, and if he had one, he says, he would "twist it and tear it to pieces" since he does "all things out of all rule" (TS, p. 282). Sterne's proclamation of freedom is evident at every turn, with his missing chapters and comic lines. Everything can be turned to reveal this freedom, from chapters that do not end to Corporal Trim's flourish with his stick:

> Whilst a man is free, - cried the corporal, giving a flourish with his stick thus -

> A thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms could not have said more for celibacy. (TS, p. 576).

And it might be added that nothing could express Sterne's freedom as a writer more accurately either. Wit and a lively freedom of expression, then, are the components of Tristram Shandy. As John Stedmond points out in discussing Tristram Shandy, "the judgement may well be implicit, but if it becomes explicit gaiety disappears."[44] And gaiety is the supreme intent of Tristram Shandy.

Sterne, in his reliance upon imagination, refuses to adhere rigidly to the Augustan ideal of copying nature.

> -Writers of my stamp have one principle in common with painters.- Where an exact copying makes our pictures less striking, we choose the less evil; deeming it even more pardonable to trespass against truth, than beauty. (TS, p.111).

Sterne is well aware of the radical nature of such remarks, but he stands firm, not caring "whether upon any other score the reader approves of it or not." In laying such stress on the imagination of both author and reader Sterne shifted the attention from the embodied work to the energy of the artist, from the creation itself to the immanent creator in the act of creating. What comes to mind here is

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[44] John M. Stedmond, The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne (Toronto, 1967), p. 98.

Coleridge's theory of the esemplastic power of the imagination. The imagination is the faculty which dissipates and disolves experience in order to recreate it, and this is essentially what Tristram is doing with his past. The novel growing out of Tristram's mind also reminds us of Coleridge's ideas of art as an organic growing thing. Sterne is not, however, this far in advance of his age, but both of his novels reveal the changing emphasis from literature as product to literature as process. In Tristram Shandy the reader is asked to bring a willing suspension of disbelief to the world of the novel. He is to "give up the reins of his imagination into his author's hands" (TS, p. 192), and the reader then enters into the work as an emotional companion with the author. Reader and writer are bound together psychologically, not separated aesthetically as in earlier Augustan literature.[45] Even something like Pope's Eloise to Abelard is a study of passion rather than an experience in passion.

And energy, a quality which Blake later attached to the imagination, is evident in Sterne's scorn of rules and

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[45] Northrop Frye discusses the change from the Aristotelian to the Longinian views of literature which took place in the eighteenth century in his essay "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility", in Fables of Identity (New York, 1963), pp. 130-137.

his spontaneity. He would have us believe that his novel grows organically, that his pen rules him, and not the other way around. He begins with writing the first sentence "and trusting to Almighty God for the second" (TS, p. 516). When writing "full" his "pen takes its own course"(TS, p. 422).

> -A sudden impulse comes across me - drop the curtain, Shandy - I drop it - Strike a line here across the paper, Tristram - I strike it - and hey for a new chapter! (TS, p. 282).

This impulsive way of writing is his only rule, and he has only scorn for planning and ordering.

> Now consider, Sir, what nonsense it is, either in fighting or writing, or anything else (whether in rhyme to it, or not) which a man has occasion to do - to act by plan. (TS, p. 549).

Thus Tristram Shandy looks forward in its ideas and spirit to the romantic era when art was directed to the emotions, not to the reasoning power of man. But Sterne's second novel, A Sentimental Journey, moves back to a more Augustan stand in respect to these ideas. Fancy and imagination are decidedly dangerous in this book, and so is feeling, while reason is much more important. Before this can be discussed, however, Sterne's sentimentalism must be placed in context.

## CHAPTER THREE

## "A QUIET JOURNEY OF THE HEART"

The previous chapter analysed the extent to which Sterne departed from the neo-classic anti-imaginative bias of extreme rationalism. The history of this neo-classic rationalism was traced back to the British empiricist, John Locke, yet, strangely enough, the ultimate direction of this empiricism is almost directly opposed to that of classicism. To the empiricist knowledge is derived wholly from sensations, or from reflection upon sensations. It is subjective and particular (that is opposed to the universal), and essentially anti-rationalistic. Truth, then, is less to be found in the general or ideal than through the particular, and this truth is to be realized by the response to that particular of some faculty in man which is imaginative or emotional rather than rational. British empiricism and associationism ultimately break down the barrier between thought and feeling by considering thought and conviction as an intricately related series of feelings and responses on the part of humans to external stimuli.[1]

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[1] Walter Jackson Bate, From Classic to Romantic (New York, 1961), p. 130.

Such ideas were congenial to the Shaftesburyan conception of the innate "moral sense". The most important point, however, is the function of feeling which became more significant as the century progressed. Laurence Sterne is an integral part of the history of the cult of feeling in the eighteenth century, but, as is the case with most of Sterne's ideas, there is a change in his advocacy of feelings in Tristram Shandy, to A Sentimental Journey which reveals a suspicion of the motives of man's feeling. This chapter briefly traces the rise of the cult of feeling in England and shows the influence of sentimentalism upon Sterne, and his own special uses of feelings and sentiment. Most of the attention will be directed towards Tristram Shandy, since a broader look at Sterne's second novel will be taken in the final chapter to see just how his ideas evolved.

## (a) MAN: GOOD OR EVIL?

It was the contention of Thomas Hobbes that the fundamental characteristic of man is selfishness, that all natural human actions spring from a self love which is more likely to be aggressive and acquisitive than tenacious. Mankind has "a perpetuall and restless desire of Power

after power,"[2] and a strong authority is necessary to force every man to make a contract compromising some of his natural lust for power and material gain in return for a safe peaceful life. This natural man of Hobbes is motivated by a self love which is expressed in ambition and aggression. But this view of mankind was offset by another school of thought which saw man's essential selfishness as less thoughtless then the Hobbsian view allows. In the seventeenth century a group of thinkers, the Cambridge Platonists, believed that "the nature of man, even though sinful, shares in some degree with the Divine nature."[3] Later, the Earl of Shaftsbury extended this view and built a philosophic system on his belief in the goodness of the heart. In 1709 Shaftesbury wrote

> The Truth is, as notions stand now in the world with regard to morals, honesty is like to gain little by philosophy or deep speculation of any kind... Man's first thoughts in this matter are generally better than their second: their natural notions better than those refined by study or consultation with casuists.[4]

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[2] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, p. 161.

[3] Louis I. Bredvold, The Natural History of Sensibility (Detroit, 1962) p. 9.

[4] Earl of Shaftesbury, "Letter to a Friend, 1709", from English Prose and Poetry: 1660-1800 (New York, 1961), p. 82.

Innate feelings are a better guide than abstract reasoning. Shaftesbury's term "moral sense" became the foundation of the Moral Sense School who placed their trust in "feeling as the evaluator of virtue," and in the "irrational intuition by which man is prompted."[5] The "Head and the Heart" dichotomy so often repeated in the eighteenth century, is also used by Shaftesbury:

> tis not a head merely, but a heart and resolution which must complete the real philosopher.[6]

Shaftesbury's ideas of virtuous and moral feelings and benevolence were picked up later by such thinkers as Hume, Adam Smith, and Richard Cumberland. For Hume "morality is more properly felt than judged of,"[7] and for Smith moral judgements involved a sympathetic participation with those affected by an external consequence.[8]

This transition from dominant reason to dominant feeling goes hand in hand with the changing attitudes towards the imagination, and is an integral part of the view that

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[5] A. R. Humphreys, "The Friend of Mankind: As Aspect of Eighteenth Century Sensibility", in Review of English Studies, XXIV (1948), p. 205.

[6] Bredvold, p. 12.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 22-23.

[8] Bate, p. 134.

man is basically good. But, as Erik Erametsa has pointed out,[9] there is a great difference between the feelings which Shaftesbury advocated and the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" which Wordsworth described. Shaftesbury's feelings were moral feelings, begun in the heart, but passing through the head where they are tempered by reason. And reason itself now becomes associated with an inner light, differing only "in intensity of realization"[10] from feeling. The head and the heart, then, represented "not the two opposite faculties of man, the Reason and the Feeling, but rather the reverse and the obverse side of the same capacity."[11]

The word "sentimental", which becomes part of this movement, first appeared in 1749, in a letter by Lady Bradshaigh,[12] and it was not until after the publication of A Sentimental Journey that the word attained a great vogue. Erik Erametsa has punctiliously traced the meaning of the word "sentimental" in the eighteenth century, and he illustrates its connection with the idea of thought,

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9 Erik Erametsa, A Study of the word Sentimental and of other Linguistic Characteristics of Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism in England (Helsinki, 1951), p. 15.

10 Bate, p. 139.

11 Erametsa, p. 16.

12 Ibid., p. 18.

judgement, as well as "moral, virtuous thought."[13] From this he infers the similarity of thought and feeling mentioned previously. Early in the century thought (the head) is the most important component, but after the middle of the century the heart is looked upon as the principal guide to virtue, and sentimentalism, as opposed to intuitive natural feelings, came to be defined as a mode of sympathy with other persons activated by "sensory apprehension of the behavior of other persons, and by comparing that behavior by an association of ideas with our own."[14] But this, in itself, did not necessarily mean that sentimentalism was accepted as a good by everyone. Sentimentalism itself is both an artifical cover, a mask for hypocrites to hide their perfidies behind, and also a true manifestation of man's innate benevolence.

The former of these two views is obvious in such works as Tom Jones, A School for Scandal, and She Stoops To Conquer. Tom Jones, Charles Surface , and Young Marlow are all young men who indulge in drinking, wenching, and brawling, and each lacks prudence. Yet each of these characters acts

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[13] Ibid., p. 32.

[14] John Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World, p. 73.

from a genuine benevolence and a generous hearted nature. But in Tom Jones and A School for Scandal the actual men of sentiment are Young Blifil and Joseph Surface, the two smooth talking villains who, "with a very gross affectation of good nature and benevolence,"[15] use the forms of sentiment for their own ends. These books, in effect, do not satirize sentiment at all, but only sham sentimentalism. Behind the portraits of the natural man and the artificial man lies an appeal to reason, or prudence, or common sense which must direct the natural impulses and reveal the folly of hypocrisy. This is a long way from the extreme sentimentalism of Henry Mackenzie. Mackenzie's book, The Man of Feeling, reveals its hero, Harley, in a variety of emotional experiences in which his reactions are always benevolent and praiseworthy. Harley is continually doing good, restoring a prostitute to her father, sympathizing with the inmates of Bedlam, and helping beggars and old friends. The ultimate effusion of feeling comes when Harley discovers that his love, Miss Walton, returns his affection. As she expresses her love, Harley

> seized her hand - a languid colour reddened his cheek - a smile brightened faintly in his eye. As he gazed on her, it grew dim, it fixed, it closed. He sighed and fell back on his seat.[16]

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[15] Richard Sheridan, School for Scandal (New York, 1958), p. 59.

[16] Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling (New York, 1958), p. 90.

Harley dies from an excess of feelings. Here sentimental means an arousing of delicate sensations which lead to good and benevolent acts, rather than moral reflection. These, then, are the two attitudes towards sentimentalism, and both of these views can be found in Sterne. Both attitudes have one thing in common, that is, they both posit a natural goodness in man which is corrupted by society. This natural goodness goes deeper than the mere forms of sentiment, which are either an external manifestation of goodness, or an external artifice covering real inner selfish motives. It is this natural goodness of man, beyond rational explanation, that Sterne expresses in the characters of Tristram Shandy, and which he grows more doubtful of in A Sentimental Journey.

With the rising emotionalism in the eighteenth century, and the move away from reason, the bitter satire of the Augustan age gave way to the sentimental vein of writing, but both satire and sentiment have a moral purpose. The sentimentalist begins by advocating a positive ideal, while the satirist begins by attacking a false ideal.[17]

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[17] Both of these positions merge in a hybrid form of irony, which is best exemplified in such works as Book IV of Gulliver's Travels, A Sentimental Journey, and Jean-Luc Godard's film Weekend. Here the satirist or sentimentalist, in the case of Sterne, deliberately causes the reader difficulty in orientating himself, by denying the reader an ideal, or by showing a possible ideal to be false, as in the case of the Houyhnhnms in Gulliver's Travels, the revolutionaries in Weekend, and Yorick's sentiment in A Sentimental Journey. Without a norm to guide him the reader is forced to look into himself and criticize his own motives, since he is faced with a work of art which effectively destroys all ideals presented.

The satirist points to evil and declares an evil act to have a powerful metonymic effect, while a good act remains relatively meaningless unless it is related to a lifetime of orderly behavior. The sentimentalist, on the other hand, sees a man's true character in a momentary, and perhaps careless act of charity, as in the case of La Fleur's reaction to the news of Yorick's passport.

> The master of the hotel retired three steps from me, as from an infected person, as I declared this - and poor La Fleur advanced three steps towards me, and with that sort of movement which a good soul makes to succour a distressed one - the fellow won my heart by it. (ASJ, p. 79)

For the sentimentalist society and reason can be a corrupting force tainting the natural inner goodness of man. For a satirist such as Swift, however, mankind's follies arise from his fallen state where passion and self-love dominate a feeble and misused reason. The protagonist shared by the sentimental novel and satire is a man of feeling confronted by a hostile society, but the sentimental novelist begins with a thesis about virtue, while the satirist reveals the lack of virtue. Virtue in a sentimental novel is always equated with benevolence and sensibility. It remains to see in what manner Tristram Shandy is a sentimental novel, and how A Sentimental Journey evolves from the first novel.

## (b) "A SENTIMENTAL HEIGH HO"

Sterne's contemporaries, although often scandalized by his ribald humour, were exceedingly excited by the sentimental touches in Tristram Shandy, and this may offer a clue to why he abandoned the book to write an entirely sentimental novel.[18] But if this were true that Sterne was merely catering to his audience the sentimentalism of Sterne second novel, A Sentimental Journey, would doubtless not pose the critical problem that it does to-day. Sterne's sentiment is never an artificial social mask as in the case of Sheridan, nor does he indulge his feeling to the extent of Henry Mackenzie. In fact, a large part of the time Sterne's sentiment is allowed to rise to a pitch only to be undercut glibly, with a heigh ho, and it collapses into ridicule. This has led several critics to declare that Sterne's sentimentalism is inescapably absurd. Rufus Putney, in 1949, stated that we are misled if we see Sterne as a sentimentalist, and that his sentimentalism was actually "a hoax by which he persuaded his contemporaries that the comedy he must write was the pathos they wished to read,"[19] and

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18 This point is discussed by Henri Fluchère in Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick, (London, 1965), pp. 354-367.

19 Rufus Putney, "Laurence Sterne, Apostle of Laugher", from Eighteenth Century English Literature (New York, 1959), p. 282.

Ernest Dilworth echoes this when he writes that Sterne wrote a "highly inventive... mockery of Pity and Fellow-Feeling."[20] Sterne never mocks benevolence or sentiment, but he finished Tristram Shandy, in part, because the Shandean system and principles in general have begun to break down by Volume nine of that novel. Sterne's Shandeism proves inadequate beyond the confines of Shandy Hall, and the sentiment of Yorick, as he travels through France, is not a hoax, but a realistic look at the nature of sentiment and the motivation of feeling. Feeling are suspect, and Sterne illustrates that the feelings of the heart must be guided by reason.

A hint of Sterne's changing attitude is evident in the ninth and last volume of Tristram Shandy, which, it must be remembered, appeared just one year before the publication of A Sentimental Journey, and, what is more important, it was published two years after volumes seven and eight. Sterne, harassed by debts, illness, and domestic problems, inevitably begins to glimpse the darker side of life more clearly, and a distinct moral tension is now evident here in respect to uncle Toby's character than

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[20] Ernest N. Dilworth, The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne (Morningside Heights, N.Y., 1948), p. 98.

anywhere else in the novel.[21] Corporal Trim asks his master why battles as well as marriages can not be seen as endowed with divine sanction. Uncle Toby is stumped.

> Religion inclined him to say one thing, and his high idea of military skill tempted him to say another; so not being able to frame a reply exactly to his mind - my uncle Toby said nothing at all.
> (TS, p. 580)

Uncle Toby, lacking the power of reason, is now unable to make the right choice. No longer are his feelings sufficient to exonerate him from the fact that he is a soldier whose duty and profession it is to kill his fellow man. Toby can claim to love mankind more than glory and pleasure, but the discrepancy between this love of mankind and his "knowledge of arms" now becomes more apparent than elsewhere in the novel. Sterne is looking closer at man's basic motives, and he sees that these are not necessarily selfless.

For the most part, however, sentimentalism in Tristram Shandy is admirable, the glory of human nature, and the only resource against the imperfection of this world. The most obvious illustration of this is the power of feelings to bring the two Shandy brothers momentarily together.

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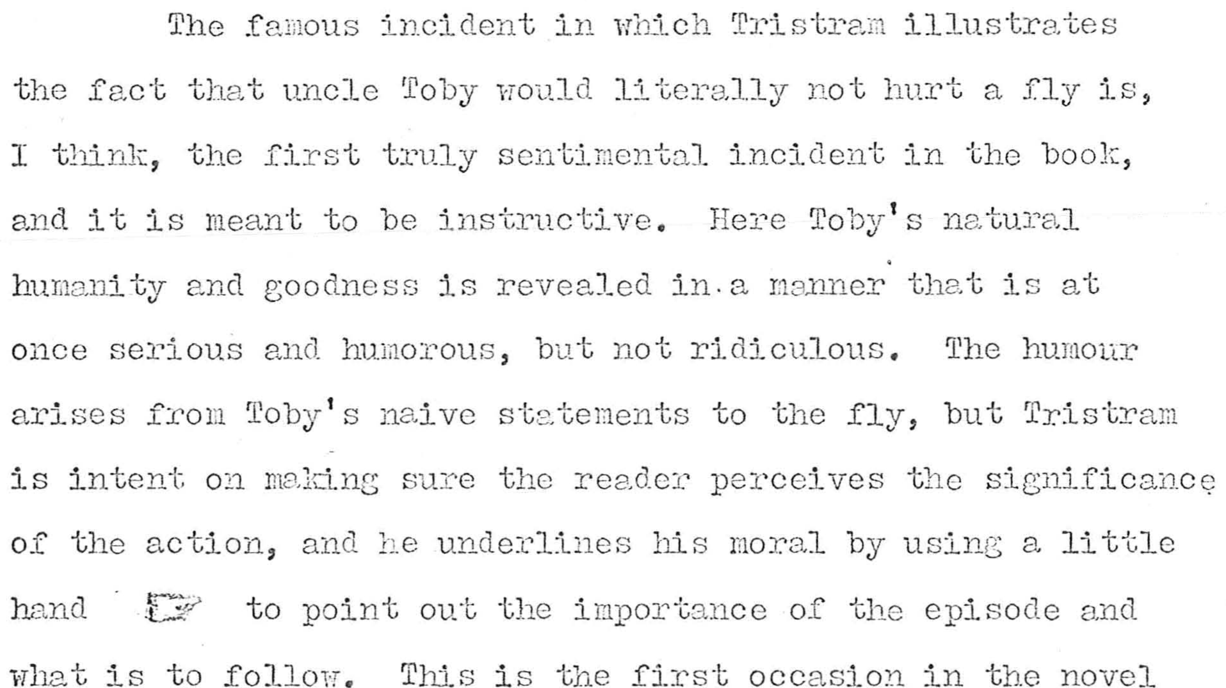
[21] It will be remembered that in volume nine the tragic view of time is made explicit for the first time in the novel.

It is only through feelings that they can communicate, and it is only their feeling which reveal their true worth. Despite the many insults which Walter directs at Toby, Toby's endearing manner never fails to "cut my father through his reins, for the pain he had just been giving him (Toby)" (TS, p. 219). This sentimentalism resembles that of Mackenzie since it is manifested in pity, love, fellow-feeling, loyalty, generosity, and tolerance on the part of one character towards another character. Yet this is not the extreme sentiment of Mackenzie where feelings eventually become a mechanized force which run out of control, and, as a consequence, become ridiculous. True sentiment, for Sterne, is not ridiculous.

The famous incident in which Tristram illustrates the fact that uncle Toby would literally not hurt a fly is, I think, the first truly sentimental incident in the book, and it is meant to be instructive. Here Toby's natural humanity and goodness is revealed in a manner that is at once serious and humorous, but not ridiculous. The humour arises from Toby's naive statements to the fly, but Tristram is intent on making sure the reader perceives the significance of the action, and he underlines his moral by using a little hand  to point out the importance of the episode and what is to follow. This is the first occasion in the novel

that Sterne uses his little hand with the extended forefinger, and despite the obvious comic effect, it also serves to shock the reader into attention. It serves as another reminder that the reader must read closely and intelligently if he is to understand the novel.

Once Sterne has signalled the importance of this episode he goes on to make a crucial point about his conception of sentiment in Tristram Shandy. The point to be noted concerning Toby's kindness to the fly, Tristram says, is that this humanity on the part of his uncle Toby has nothing to do with Toby's hobby-horse. Toby's feelings are "a part of his moral character" (TS, p. 132). Morality, then, is more felt than reasoned, and immediately after this introduction to the working of feeling and morality Tristram provides another example of the goodness of feelings in Walter's reaction to Toby. Walter, the ultimate man of reason, has insulted his brother in front of Dr. Slop, but his heart cannot remain unmoved by the expression on Toby's face, an expression which revealed "so much good nature" and sincerity. Thus a look or gesture has proved to be enough to bring the two brothers together.

Sterne, who actually was fairly accomplished in painting and music, clearly understands the emotive power of these two arts, and it is precisely in terms of sound and his sketching of gesture and movement that Sterne reveals

and conveys feeling. Feelings are aroused not by reasoning, but by a delicious harmony of sensations in the body.

> The moment I pronounced the word, I could perceive an attempt towards a vibration in the strings about the region of the heart.- The brain made no acknowledgement, (TS, p. 275)

That the heart responds in a similar manner to music is made explicit later in the book. Tristram can sit for a day on end and listen to that musician

> whose talents lie in making what he fiddles to be felt, - who inspires me with his joys and hopes, and puts the most hidden springs of my heart into motion. (TS, p. 365)

The sound of a voice, then, has the power of music in its ability to evoke strong emotions. Tristram feels "the kindliest harmony vibrating" within him as he hears the notes from Maria's pipe, but the postillion's voice is also capable of touching Tristram. The postillion relates the story of Maria "with an accent and a look so perfectly in tune to a feeling heart" that Tristram immediately decides to reward him (TS, p. 600). And Toby Shandy, soldier and innocent, is also enraptured by the soft whispering voice of the Widow Wadman, who knows enough not to speak "like the trumpet stop of some ill made organ" (TS, p. 552).

The gesture is like music in that it calls forth sympathetic feeling. It is clearly connected to what one

critic calls the "artistry of the heart,"[22] and is best exemplified in the untutored gestures of Corporal Trim. It has been noted that a look, or careless word dropped by Toby can touch Walter's heart, but Corporal Trim's intense sympathy for other leads him into an eloquence of gesture which far surpasses that of his compatriots, and exceeds his own verbal powers. In his funeral sermon upon the death of Bobby, Trim accompanies the sentence, "Are we not here now, - and gone in a moment?" by dropping his hat upon the ground. As Tristram says, "There was nothing in the sentence," and Trim's words would have had no effect if he "had not trusted more to his hat than his head" (TS, p. 356). Corporal Trim's gesture was exactly what was needed at that precise moment to throw the company into a fit of tears, but the gesture had to be perfect and only Trim was equal to the task.

> Now- Ten thousand, and ten thousand times ten thousand (for matter and motion are infinite) are the ways by which a hat may be dropped upon the ground, without any effect. - Had he flung it, or thrown it, or cast it, or skimmed it, or squirted it, or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under heaven.- or in the best direction that could be given to it, - had he dropped it like a goose - like a puppy- like an ass- or in doing it, or even after he had done, had he looked like a fool,-

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[22] Martin Price, To the Palace of Wisdom (Garden City, N. Y. 1964), p. 332.

> like a ninny- like a nicompoop- it had failed, and the effect upon the heart had been lost. (<u>TS</u>, p. 357)

Only Trim of all the characters present has a heart free from selfish thought and self interest. Susannah thinks of the green satin night-gown which Mrs. Shandy will turn over to her, the fat scullion is glad that she is still alive, and Obadiah worries about the extra work he will have in the Ox-moor. But Trim's gesture strikes the hearts of all those present, and, at the same time, it reveals the quality of Trim's own heart. Walter Shandy states the significance of gestures when he says "that a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room, - or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him" (<u>TS</u>, p. 401-402). The gesture, every bit as much as the hobby-horse, serves as a Momus glass to penetrate into the soul of a man. In the case of uncle Toby "there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner" which attracted the unfortunate (<u>TS</u>, p. 412).

Thus eloquence of both gesture and voice arises from the heart, and is seen to be an infallible guide to the inner man. As Corporal Trim prepares to read the sermon upon Conscience out loud, he assumes the exact posture that depicts Hogarth's "line of beauty," and his complete posture is meticulously outlined. Again Sterne uses the little hand to signify the importance of the underlying meaning. When

he writes that he recommends the Corporal's stance to be copied by painters and orators, what he is really recommending is the basic feelings behind the Corporal's assumption of the stance. Orators and painters must be infused with the Corporal's humanity if their work is to be successful. Trim's reading of the sermon is no less eloquent than his gestures, and he remarks after that "I should have read it ten times better, Sir... but thay my heart was so full." Walter replies that this is the very reason "which has made thee read the sermon as well as thy hast done" (TS, p. 156).

The spontaneous and natural feelings, then, of both uncle Toby and Corporal Trim are proof of their humanity, kindness and generosity and although their traits are depicted humourously, like all else in the book, Tristram never pokes fun at them viciously. Indeed, Tristram is sincerely moved when he comes to remember the deaths of both master and servant, and his emotion reaches its apogee with the cry: "O Toby! in what corner of the world shall I seek thy fellow?" Tristram pays tribute to his uncle and Trim several times throughout the novel, and in each case the style and quality of the writing indicates the sincerity of his sentiments. In an early tribute to Toby's goodness Tristram reverts to an archaic, more stilted style of expression.

> Thou enviedst no man's comfort, - insultedst no man's opinion.- Thou blackendst no man's character,- devourest no man's bread: gently, with faithful Trim behind thee, didst thou amble round the little circle of thy pleasures, jostling no creature in thy way;- for each one's sorrows, thou hadst a tear, - for each man's need, thou hadst a shilling. (TS, p. 230)

And later Tristram's deep affection for his uncle is evoked in a simple, but emotive description of how Toby's swearing is received in heaven.

> -The ACCUSING SPIRIT, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in; - and the RECORDING ANGEL, as he wrote it down dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out forever, (TS, p. 411)

Yet there is another aspect to Sterne's sentilmentalism which is often confused with the genuine feelings of sympathy and moral humanity discussed above. This is the pathos which Sterne depicts in such episodes as the Le Fever Story or Tristram's encounter with Maria in Volume nine. In each of these instances the pathos is raised to a great height and then denied to us by being undermined by the author. This does not mean, however, that Sterne is making idiots of anyone who will respond to a truly pathetic situation. Rather Sterne is trying to make the reader aware of the tragi-comic situation that is life. At the death of Le Fever, uncle Toby's compassion is of intrinsic worth as a human attitude, but, at the same time, it is useless in the face of death. Tristram, who

is always in command of his own feelings and his readers', catches himself up by a self-consciousness which saves him from dwelling on the tragedy of existence. This is "one of the vilest worlds that was ever made" as Tristram well knows, but to dwell on this will only make one miserable. The pathos is presented to the reader, and he has a choice whether to indulge in tears or laughter. Tristram himself will always choose to laugh.

> Nature instantly ebbed again, -the film returned to its place, - the pulse fluttered - stopped - went on - throbbed - stopped again- moved- stopped - shall I go on? No. (TS, p. 413)

Man must choose between laughter and tears, the tragic view of lie or the comic.[23]

As Tristram thinks of his uncle Toby's amours, he is "in the most perfect state of bounty and good-will" imaginable, and it is in this state of mind that he comes upon Maria "sitting upon a bank playing her vespers upon her pipe, with her little goat beside her." Her love affair had been cruelly destroyed by the curate of the parish, and the trauma of the experience drove Maria insane. Tristram,

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[23] In a letter to Robert Foley in 1762 Sterne states his own position in respect to how he views life.

> "I am got pretty well, and sport much with my uncle Toby in the volume I am now fabricating for the laughing part of the world - for the melancholy part of it, I have nothing but my prayers - so God help them.

See Curtis, p. 189.

feeling the full force of "an honest heart-ache", jumps from his carriage to sit beside her and sympathizes with her. As he sits between Maria and her goat, the girl's eyes look alternately at Tristram and at the goat prompting Tristram to remark, "Well, Maria... What resemblance do you find?" (TS, p. 600-601). Here again Sterne has dropped the pathos into the ludicrous, but in doing so he again illustrates the dichotomy between tragedy and comedy in life. The pathos set forth in Maria's heartbroken vespers is not denigrated. It does, to some extent, act as a palliative for the pain of Maria's existence, but an alternative is offered in the laughter and jest of Tristram, or in the joy of the peasant dance in the seventh volume of Tristram Shandy. This peasant dance contains another aspect of what Sterne conveys in his sentimentalism.

### (c) A PLEASANT PHILANDERING OF THE HEART

The seventh volume of Tristram Shandy is the closest in form to Sterne's second novel, A Sentimental Journey, but, in spirit, it is vastly different. In Tristram's flight from Death, his trip to the Continent, the apparent spontaneity of uncontrollable feelings is stronger than elsewhere in the novel. The closeness of Death makes Tristram acutely aware of life, and, for Tristram, life is "so much of motion" and "so much of joy" (TS, p. 471). Tristram's

zest for life makes everything from a lovers' tomb to a heavy laden ass a catalyst for his eager emotions, but his emotions are more often attracted to women. At Montreuil he refuses to sketch the architectural monuments, but instead his attentions are drawn to the daughter of the inn-keeper, Janatone. Edith Birkhead has written that to Sterne "'sentiment' suggested a pleasant philandering with emotion,"[24] but it goes much deeper than mere trifling of emotions. Tristram's sensibility manifests itself in a joy which he creates himself. The climax of the volume comes when Tristram joins the peasant dance in Languedoc. He is approached by a peasant girl, Nannette, who gives him a piece of string to tie up her hair. Her innocence and candour teach Tristram "to forget I was a stranger." The dance then begins with the roundelay

> Vivia la joia!
> Fidon la tristesse!

Tristram is happy, and he is entirely conscious of the inner drive which keeps his mind returning to "that cursed slit" in Nannette's petticoat. But his joy is real, and his awareness places him at a distance from the self-deceiving Yorick of

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[24] Edith Birkhead, "Sentiment and Sensibility in the Eighteenth Century Novel", Essays and Studies of the English Association, IX (1925), p. 85.

<u>A Sentimental Journey</u>.

> Why could I not love, and end my days thus? Just disposer of our joys and sorrows, cried I, why could not a man sit down in the lap of contentment here - and dance, and sing, and say his prayers, and go to heaven with this nut-brown maid? (<u>TS</u>, p. 512)

Sterne carefully delineates the innocence of Tristram's joy, and its stands in relief to the anxious questioning of the Widow Wadman concerning Toby's wounded groin in volume nine. The Widow Wadman deceives herself when she tells Bridget that she wishes to know the extent of Toby's would merely "for his sake," and Yorick in <u>A Sentimental Journey</u> continually deceives himself in a similar manner.

In his second novel Sterne moves to a position which is close to that of Jane Austen in her novel, <u>Sense and Sensibility</u>. Jane Austen's novel does not completely condemn sensibility, nor does Sterne condemn Yorick, the man of feeling in <u>A Sentimental Journey</u>. But both authors think that in life sensibility will flounder and go astray if not firmly directed by sense or reason. <u>Sense and Sensibility</u> contrasts two sister, Elinor and Marianne. Of the two Elinor is the one endowed with common sense, but she also has "an excellent heart." Her feeling are strong

"but she knew how to govern them."[25] Marianne, on the other hand, is similar to Yorick in the intensity of her feelings. Like Yorick, her feelings are exaggerated, and she indulges in emotions for their own sake. After losing her love, Willoughby, she nourishes her grief every day at her pianoforte "alternately singing and crying" and in books too "she courted the misery which a contrast between the past and present was certain of giving."[26] But Marianne's indulgence in feelings, like Yorick's sympathetic reaction to Maria, is selfish and even insensitive. Yorick's treatment of the caged starling reflects the momentary quality of his feelings, and Marianne is so wrapt up in her own suffering that she has little time for those of her sister. Such indulgence is dangerous, since it may result in a parasitical exploitation of others. Yorick nearly takes advantage of Madame R****'s 'fille de chambre', and Marianne does actually force Elinor to take over all the unpleasant tasks of practical life.

In A Sentimental Journey Sterne becomes less of a

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[25] Jane Austen, Sense and Sensibility (New York, 1961), p. 6.

[26] Ibid., p. 66.

romantic than in Tristram Shandy, and he returns to a more classical view of man. Like Jane Austen, Sterne now sees individual life as a set position to be maintained against the forces of selfishness, unreason, and emotional excess. The lesson Yorick learns is to bridle his feelings with his reason, and it is this same lesson which Marianne Dashwood learns.[27]

In Tristram Shandy, then, the general tenets of the moral sense philosophers, with Shaftesbury's idea of an innate and spontaneous ethical sense, are incarnated in uncle Toby and Corporal Trim, as well as the other Shandys. Toby Shandy, without an ounce of reason to manipulate against the question, still feels compelled to argue that a negro has a soul, and he is even prepared to take a negro girl "and her brethern with her" under his protection if the occasion should arise. This is in direct contrast to the Yorick of A Sentimental Journey, who spurns a poor Monk at Calais merely because of the monk's religion. Yorick has changed immensely from the unselfish and generous parson who frequented Shandy Hall. But Yorick's fall from Shandean grace will be discussed at length in a later chapter.

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[27] See chapter five for the discussion of Yorick's fall from Shandean grace.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ELEMENTS OF SHANDEISM

It should be evident by now that *Tristram Shandy* is an extremely precocious novel, but, at the same time, it is a novel which is deeply immersed in its own age. It is a novel in which wit abounds, and in which sentiment and human goodness are the ultimate realities. These ingredients of *Tristram Shandy* are an integral part of what Sterne labels Shandeism, but there is much more to be said for this concept than its frivolity and its faith in human goodness. The genesis of the book is succinctly stated in the dedication to the first two volumes:

> for it (*Tristram Shandy*)is written in a bye corner of the Kingdom, and in a retired thatched house, where I live 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, it adds something to this Fragment of Life. (*TS*, p. 33)

Sterne, the country parson, sequestered in a northern section of England and beseiged by sickness, debts, and domestic troubles finds, at the age of fourty-seven, a means of coping with the vexations of a world "best on all sides with mysteries and riddles" (*TS*, p. 596). As Parson Yorick Sterne had a commission in life, a responsibility to lead his congregation along the path of virtue and goodness.

This task is best prosecuted by teaching, as he does in the sermon on good Conscience in Tristram Shandy, the law which "God and reason made." But a change takes place in Sterne when he discovers his creative talents.[1] Early in his London success, Sterne came to be known as Tristram Shandy, and he was the exempler of Shandean wit and good humour. It must be noted, however, that Tristram became Sterne as a result of Sterne's literary and social celebrity. Sterne had found a means of sheltering himself from the misfortunes of this life. He finds, in other words, a hobby-horse.[2] Soon after the publication of the first two volumes of Tristram Shandy Sterne wrote to his friend, John Hall Stevenson, to admit that he had mismanaged his miseries, and to admit that

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[1] "It is interesting to note that it was with the success of Shandy that Sterne suddenly seemed to 'find himself'. From the time that the first volumes of his book took London by storm, he seemed to recognize the role he henceforth had to play as Shandy-Yorick, he found in life a meaning which it had never held when he was merely Yorick." John M. Stedmond, The Comic Art Of Laurence Sterne, (Toronto, 1967), p. 25.

[2] "I shall write as long as I live, 'tis, in fact, my hobby-horse." Letter to Lady ---, Coxwold, Sept. 21, 1761, Letters of Laurence Sterne, edited by Lewis Perry Curtis (London, 1935), p. 143.

> If God, for my consolation under them, had not poured forth the spirit of Shandeism into me, which will not suffer me to think two moments upon any grave subject, I would else, just now lay down and die - die -[3]

Shandeism, then, is a spirit which infuses a man and makes him see the gaiety and joy in all things. It will not allow a man to dwell on the evil which pervades "this vile, dirty planet of ours." This is not to say that it closes its eyes to the evils of the world, but rather Shandeism chooses to laugh at these. Sterne himself explains Shandeism in a letter to Robert Foley in 1764:

> In short we must be happy within - and then few things without us make much difference - This is my Shandean philosophy. [4]

Shandeism as a philosophy of life, attractive as it is, must not be presented to the public by parson Yorick, since his is a serious vocation. Instead Sterne develops another character, Tristram Shandy, to unfold the gaiety of the Shandean way of life.

### (a) TRISTRAM AND HIS WORLD

*Tristram Shandy* purports to be the autobiography of

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[3] Curtis, Letter 77, p. 139.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 234.

Tristram Shandy, relating the circumstances of his birth, the "pitiful misadventures" of his life, and also his opinions. Early in the novel Tristram reveals that he has been "the continual sport of what the world calls fortune" all of his life, and it becomes obvious that Tristram, like Sterne, seeks to escape from the melancholy thoughts of his misfortune by setting then comically down on paper for the enjoyment of the world. Tristram, then, is a mask for Sterne, who is involved in the task of writing as a means of tempering his grief and misfortune in this life. But it is easy to over-simplify matters here, and it must be noted that, as well as the Tristram-Sterne connection, there is an added dimension in the fact that there are two Tristrams, Tristram as narrator and Tristram as a character in the novel. This confusion is once again compounded by the inclusion of Yorick in the novel, and Sterne's own effort to relate himself with Yorick lends another mask to the author. In <u>Tristram Shandy</u>, Yorick is a disguise for Sterne which seems designed to draw attention away from the Sterne-Tristram comparison, and thereby avoid any scandal which may arise by seeing Sterne behind the foolish and often bawdy Tristram. The inclusion of parson Yorick in the novel allows a greater freedom to Tristram, which is essential to the book.

Tristram the narrator is the most important of Sterne's personae in <u>Tristram Shandy</u>, for it is through

Tristram that the Shandean world exists. The attitude which Tristram adopts is that of the ancient court jester, the misfit set apart from the rest of the world by his infirmity. Tristram is conscious of the importance of this role, and the job of the jester to restore just proportions in the world. He early warns that if he

> should seem now and then to trifle upon the road - or should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along, - don't fly off, - but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears on my outside. (TS, p. 41)

The lesson of wisdom, then, is to be taught by a fool. Tristram as narrator is an entertainer with a tireless liveliness of mind. His reality consists in the fiction he generates, and this fiction is his picture of a hypothetical world where nothing happens except that which he desires. This is not to say, however, that nothing happens. Tristram delights in confusion, praising and scolding his characters, setting traps for them, dropping the curtain on them, conversing with the reader, going forwards and backwards in time, inserting stories, and juggling events, ideas and characters with consumate skill. His characters may sleep, but Tristram never does. It is his task to reconcile all the contrary motions and matter in the book, and he thoroughly delights in his task:

> one would think I took pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em. (TS, p. 520)

Tristram's tireless manipulation of his material, and his intellectual gaiety are never defeated by any vexation which may arise. Neither the "vile asthma" caught while "skating against the wind in Flanders," bleeding lungs, nor irritation at not finding the lover's tomb in Lyons can deter Tristram from his story. Nor is his story merely a demonstration of Tristram's virtuosity meant only to entertain the reader, but rather Tristram "sat down to write my life for the amusement of the world, and my opinions for its instruction" (TS, p. 223). Tristram, like the Duchess in Alice in Wonderland, tends to find a moral in everything. He tells us that his book will do the reader's heart good, and his head too, "provided you understand it" (TS, p. 422). The Duchess, too, believes that "Everything's got a moral, if only you can find it."[5] Tristram makes his moral obvious by the role he chooses to play. By wearing the cap and bells of the court jester Tristram issues a warning to dogmatists that at any moment they may be confronted with the arbitrariness of chance and

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[5] Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland (New York, 1965), p. 79.

fortune. He emphasizes the mysteries and riddles of the universe, which man cannot comprehend, and he relentlessly reminds the reader of the state of the world:

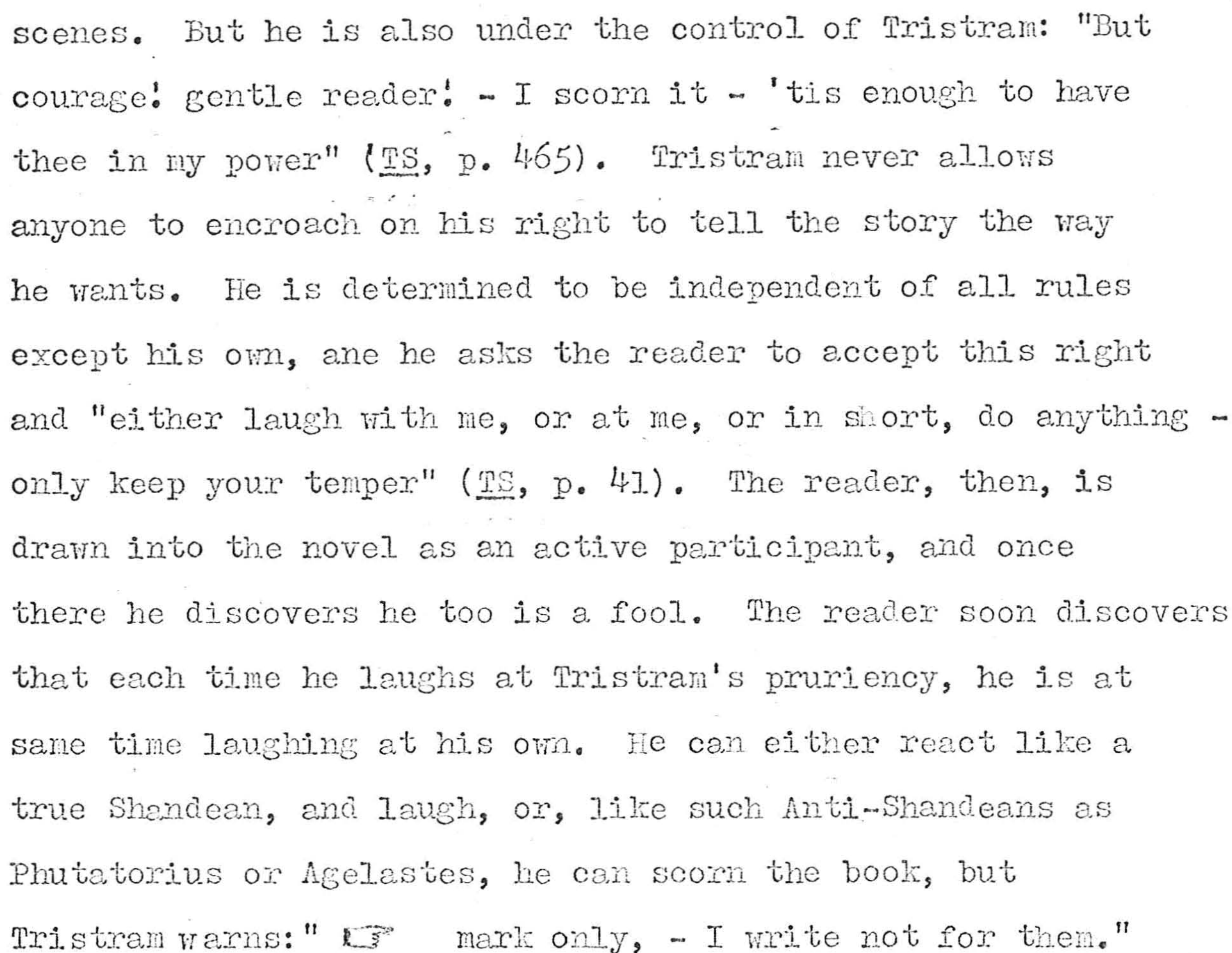
> What a jovial and merry world would this be, may it please your worships, but for that inextricable labyrinth of debts, cares, woes, want, grief, discontent, melancholy, large jointures, impositions, and lies! (TS, p. 418)

Tristram triumphs over life's humiliations and misfortunes by laughing at them. He laughs at his own insignificance, but he is clever enough to do this in such a way that the reader's failings are revealed as well. The reader finds himself laughing at himself at the same time as he laughs at Tristram.

As early as the sixth chapter of volume one Tristram begins to make friends with the reader.

> 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.

From the outset Tristram wants to make sure of the friendly collaboration and understanding of the reader. He does this by never losing sight of the reader, and by drawing the reader into the novel as his companion and equal. The reader is curious: "Pray, what was your father saying?" He can interrupt the narrative, he can assist in the writing, and also in the manipulating of the characters and



scenes. But he is also under the control of Tristram: "But courage! gentle reader! - I scorn it - 'tis enough to have thee in my power" (TS, p. 465). Tristram never allows anyone to encroach on his right to tell the story the way he wants. He is determined to be independent of all rules except his own, ane he asks the reader to accept this right and "either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do anything - only keep your temper" (TS, p. 41). The reader, then, is drawn into the novel as an active participant, and once there he discovers he too is a fool. The reader soon discovers that each time he laughs at Tristram's pruriency, he is at same time laughing at his own. He can either react like a true Shandean, and laugh, or, like such Anti-Shandeans as Phutatorius or Agelastes, he can scorn the book, but Tristram warns: " ☞ mark only, - I write not for them."

Tristram the jester is a unique oddity, as are all the Shandys, but it is his very uniqueness that makes him more universal and the brother of all men "because every man is a unique oddity."[6] Each reader is unique in his responses to Tristram's book, and yet each is part of the ridiculousness which the book exposes. Tristram and those who partake of the Shandean spirit, then, become friends,

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[6] Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humourist (Chicago, 1960), p. 172.

and enter upon a prolonged conversation.

> Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure mine is) is but a different name for conversation. (TS, p. 127)

He seems aware of the truth that is evident in the question, "what is the use of a book... without pictures or conversations?"[7] The conversational tone serves to gain the intimacy of the reader, and to keep his attention, while the little hands, crosses, stars, black, blank, and marbled pages, and twirling lines serve to amuse the reader. But these comic devices also have a serious intention, for it is always Sterne's practice "to pass from the gay to the serious and from the serious to the gay." Tristram's continuing dialogue with the reader, and his little drawings are part of his struggle to communicate his ideas. He is ostensibly concerned to leave no room for misunderstanding, such as when he takes elaborate pains to make it clear that when he uses the word "nose" he means "a Nose, and nothing more, or less" (TS, p. 225). But truth, as every good Shandean knows, is shut up in an "impregnable fastness", and what Tristram is communicating is not fact or truth, but a cast of mind which will serve anyone well in coping with harsh reality. This is the way of being that Tristram called Shandeism.

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[7] Carroll, p. 3.

Tristram's special mode of thinking is presented in the form of his remembrance of what has been told him concerning his birth and upbringing, and the lives of his immediate family. It has been well proved that Tristram's digressive artistry is strictly controlled and self-conscious,[8] but this does not necessarily mean that Tristram wants his reminiscences to appear planned. It is more obvious that Tristram wishes the reader to take his book as the product of a spontaneous, whimsical fancy reflecting on his past. The wit, playfullness, and impulsiveness of Tristram's mind are an essential feature of the novel. His wit and whimsy are tempered, however, by his genuine sentimentalism. He will just as impetuously praise his uncle Toby or Corporal Trim, or sympathize with an ass, as he will throw a "fair sheet" into the fire instead of a foul one, or lock his study door and throw the key into the draw well, or tell "Madam" to reread the previous chapter more carefully. This narrator is at one and the same time possessed of a mercurial and emotional temper, and in complete control over his own mind. He can at one point state that "I have

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[8] See Arthur H. Cash, "The Lockean Psychology of _Tristram Shandy_", _ELH_, XXII (1955), pp. 125-135, and William Bowman Piper, "Tristram Shandy's Digressive Artistry", _Studies in English Literature: 1500-1900_, I (1961) pp. 65-76.

a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter nonsensically, and I will not baulk my fancy" (TS, p. 96), while later, when his inspiration momentarily wanes, he tells us that by merely shaving he can revew his inspiration.

> ...for consider, Sir, as every man chooses to be present at the shaving of his own beard (though there is no rule without an exception) and unavoidably sits over-against himself the whole time it is doing, in case he had a hand in it - the Situation, like all others, has notions of her own to put into the brain. - (TS, p. 587)

This is the type of mind which leads us through the world of Shandy Hall. All that we meet there is a reflection of Tristram's mode of being.

The subject matter of the novel, then, is Tristram's consciousness and, as Dorothy Van Ghent says, Sterne's artistry lies in "the 'objectifying' of this 'subjective' material in its own right and for its own sake, so that the 'subjective' becomes an object to be manipulated and designed and given aesthetic form according to laws inherent in it; and each (Proust and Sterne) creates an Alice in Wonderland world that is unique and inimitable because the individual consciousness is itself unique and inimitable."[9]

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[9] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1961), p. 86.

Tristram allows free rein to his imagination in the creation of his Shandean world. The point has been made that Sterne's imagination effects surprise by making abstract ideas concrete,[10] but it is not Sterne who creates this surprise, it is Tristram, the self-conscious narrator. While sleeping, Alice's mind unconsciously creates a play world where communication breaks down, and where Alice visualizes the Mouse's tale in the shape of his tail, and where such abstract ideas as Mock turtles, Mad Hatters, and playing card people all come vividly alive. Tristram is much more aware of his fantasies, and he is in complete control over them, but nonetheless his world has many similarities with Alice's Wonderland. The "humours and dispositions" uppermost in Mr. and Mrs. Shandy at the time of Tristram's conception are called by Tristram, the "animal spirits," and this metaphor becomes concretized in a picture of unharnessed horses which "go clattering like hey-go-mad." The Homunculus becomes a little gentleman traveller, and the Animus and Anima, Walter's two souls of man, become little tadpoles dabbling in a puddle. Such concretization of abstract notions also applies to one of the novel's most important concepts. The hobby-horse becomes a rollicking, frisky animal that may inadvertently splash people with mud. And as a final example,

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[10] *Ibid.*, p. 89.

there are Tristram's own spirits endowed with an independent life and the power to mount Tristram upon a long stick to play the fool with him. This type of nonsense is constantly occurring in the book, and at times, Tristram, like Alice, finds his own play world confusing.

Alice, not in control of her fantasies, has a hard time adjusting to her surroundings, and her various changes in size. She becomes so confused that she replies in answer to the Caterpillar's question: "Who are you?", that "I hardly know, Sir, just at present."[11] Tristram never loses control of himself and his world in this way, although at times he would have us believe otherwise.

> And who are you? said he. - Don't puzzle me said I. (TS, p. 500)

Tristram is not one to be badgered, and he knows the effect to be gained by such an inanity. In continual motion, juggling his material and characters, he refuses to be pinned down. He is the jester - "Pray reach me my fool's cap" - who very carefully calculates the effect he wants by seeming to lose his way. He will delineate the personalities of the other characters, but he himself must remain an enigma. The speed of his trip through Europe offers him an opportunity to make it appear that he is carried away, like a cartoon

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[11] Carroll, p. 37.

character, by the speed of his ideas.

> Still - still I must away - the roads are paved - the posts are short - the days are long - 'tis no more than noon - I shall be at Fontainbleau before the King -
> - Was he going there? not that I know - (TS, p. 480)

But Tristram, unlike Alice, is always in control of his thoughts and remembrances, and his world, although fantastic, is always tightly linked to the real world.

The dream world of Alice is a world in which time is important and also unimportant. The White Rabbit is pressed for time, and mutters constantly about how it is getting late, but the Mad Hatter is on excellent terms with time, since he realizes that time "won't stand beating."[12] Thus we are in the magic world of dreams where time, whether important or unimportant, does not really cause any difficulty. In Tristram's world, too, time is part of the fantasy and under Tristram's control.[13] Tristram can suspend time, leaving his mother standing "for five minutes" and eight chapters outside the parlour door, and he can also move backwards and forwards in time at will. Early in the novel Tristram can describe the time and

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[12] Ibid., p. 62.

[13] There is, of course, the aspect of chronological and historical time in Tristram Shandy which is beyond the power of anyone, even Tristram.

circumstances of Yorick's death, bury him under a black page, and then introduce him again later into the narrative. Tristram's power of manipulation can even surerimpose several periods of historical time.

> Now this is the most puzzled skein of all - for in this last chapter, as far at least as it has helped me through Auxerre, I have been getting forwards in two different journey's together, and with the same dash of the pen - for I have got entirely out of Auxerre in this journey which I am writing now, and I am got halfway out of Auxerre in that which I shall write hereafter... for I am at this moment walking across the market place of Auxerre with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner - and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broke into one thousand pieces - and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello. (TS, p. 492)

The land of the Shandys, then, is a fantasy land with certain similarities to Alice's Wonderland. In both of these marvellous worlds nothing can shatter the gay and comic mood. Somehow the terrible court of the Queen of Hearts where "They're dreadfully fond of beheading people,"[14] never does become seriously a place to fear. The Queen is really harmless, and she and the rest of her court can be easily shuffled off like the pack of cards they are. In Tristram Shandy such a catastrophe as the death of Bobby or Tristram's circumcision are divested of any serious import

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[14] Carroll, p. 74.

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by the comic manner in which Tristram handles them. Bobby is never an actualized character and when Toby tells Walter that he is dead, Walter's comic reply is to utter surprise that he had died "without being ill," and the occasion of his son's death merely offers Walter an opportunity to display his oratorical talents. The episode of Tristram's circumcision is also rendered comically, with little stars and bawdy double entendre.

> I was five years old - Susannah did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family. (<u>TS</u>, 369)

Death can also come knocking at Tristram's door, but this only serves to give rise to the madcap chase across the continent. Thus both Tristram's world and Alice's are happy places in which the tragic elements of life have been carefully tempered. But Alice's world is a child's world of pure nonense and unreality, while Tristram's world is firmly rooted in the actual world of man. Tristram's created world of the Shandys is a comic vision that implies acceptance of the real world, not as an ideal, but as necessary, and Tristram's attempts to impart the Shandean attitude to his reader is his obsession in life. It is his hobby-horse. But before discussing this element of Shandeism, the equation of Shandeism with <u>Alice in Wonderland</u> is instructive in another sense. Just as Alice's world is a dream world, so Tristram's world is a mental creation, It is

a way of thinking that is dangerous if not controlled, as Yorick in A Sentimental Journey was to find out. While Tristram writes, however, he finds life enjoyable. His writing is his hobby-horse, an animal that is of utmost importance to all Shandeans.

### (b) THE HOBBY-HORSE

The hobby-horse is the refuge of the Shandy characters against the outside world. Each one has his own hobby-horse, and this independence of mind and behaviour serves as a means of revealing the personalities of the several characters. Just as he announces all his themes and interests in the opening pages of the book, so Tristram, early in chapter seven of volume one, begins to delineate the workings of the hobby-horse.

> Sir, have not the wisest of men in all ages, not excepting Sodomon himself, - have they not had their Hobby-Horses; - their running horses, - their coins and their cockle-shells, their drums and their trumpets, their fiddles, their pallets, - their maggots and their butterflies? - and so long as a man rides his Hobby-Horse peaceably and quietly along the King's highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him, - pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it. (TS, p. 43)

The hobby-horse is a harmless toy that cannot become old, and cannot be broken by the fortunes of the world. It necessitates a withdrawal from the real world into a personal world of bowling green soldiers or exaggerated hypotheses.

As long as each character remains within his own imaginary world he cannot know disappointment. Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim are marvellously happy in their play world of toy soldiers, and they can be seen marching up to the ramparts with "intense pleasure swimming" in their eyes. After the war in which they have vicariously participated for so many years is over and Toby and Trim are threatened with inactivity, they merely prepare to reproduce the last campaign, the demolition of Dunkirk, in their own terms. Uncle Toby's whole existence and his interests and ideals are centered on his hobby-horse, and if anyone disturbs his pastime he resorts to a few bars of Lillabullero. Later when Toby's interests and ideals are transferred to the Widow Wadman after the treaty of Utrecht, they are confronted and destroyed by the hard fact of the Widow's true motives. He instantly retreats to his hobby-horse. Walter Shandy, too, has his hobby-horsical theorizing to turn to in all confrontations with reality. His disappointments, arising from Tristram's baptism and circumcision, are tempered by his delight in the discussions which these misfortunes give rise to. As for Tristram, his hobby-horse, which is the very writing of his life, is his refuge from the absurd chain of misfortunes which have plagued him from birth. There is no harm in these hobby-horses, and they prove to be an advantage to all who get astride their own particular

hobby-horse. Tristram keeps reminding the reader of the fact that his own hobby-horse is in no way a nasty animal.

> For my hobby-horse, if you recollect a little, is in no way a vicious beast; he has scarce one hair or lineament of the ass about him - 'Tis the sporting little filly-folly which carries you out for the present hour - a maggot, a butterfly, a picture, a fiddlestick - an uncle Toby's seige - or an 'anything', which a man makes shift to get astride on, to canter it away from the cares and solitudes of life - 'Tis as useful a beast as is in the whole creation - nor do I really see how the world could do without it. (TS, pp. 557-558)

The hobby-horse, then, is an example of what Pascal had earlier called man's "divertisements."

But the hobby-horse has another social effect; that is, it tends to isolate the individual from those around him, who cannot communicate in the individual's hobby-horsical terms. When this happens the hobby-horse has become the ruling passion, and the difficult problem of communication that it raises can only be solved by an emotional bond. Even Tristram has trouble communicating, and besides using pictures, and diagrams he often becomes emotional to explain his feelings towards his uncle Toby, Yorick and the others.

The hobby-horse is also a key to personality, and Tristram bluntly declares, "I will draw my uncle Toby's character from his HOBBY-HORSE" (TS, p. 98). By giving a detailed picture of uncle Toby and his hobby-horse, Tristram

reveals his uncle to be a man of child-like innocence, who is engrossed in his own play world, and who fervently admires the heroic role of the warrior fighting on the side of liberty. Walter Shandy, whose hobby-horse is his tendency "to force every event in nature into an hypothesis," is shown to be a man who looks on every activity in life with a cold and abstract expression. He fulfils his "little family concernments" out of principle, and when Aunt Dinah leaves him one thousand pounds he is plagued by the weight of the choice he must make between enclosing the Ox-moor and sending Bobby upon his travels. He is so given to argumentation that he cannot reach a simple solution. The hobby-horse, however, is not the only means by which character is revealed. The hobby-horse and "'les egarements du coeur',"[15] are the exact things which mark and distinguish a man's character. Thus Sterne's sentimentalism, meaning the inherent goodness of a man's heart, and the hobby-horse are necessary ingredients in Shandeism. The hobby-horse, for Sterne, illustrates the tendency on the part of the mind to dwell on some subject, which may cause a disruption in normal relations between things and people. It is not contemptible for this, but it is amusing and even desirable, especially when tempered by sentimentalism and emotional ties.

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15 Curtis, p. 88.

The hobby-horse, however, can cause difficulties of a more serious nature if it "grows headstrong", or if it comes in conflict with the real world. Walter's reasoning leads him to a reliance on Dr. Slop, the man midwife, who crushes Tristram's nose with his deadly forceps, and, later, Walter's great work, the Tristra-paedia, is always several years behind schedule, and, as a consequence, it is rendered useless for Tristram's upbringing. When uncle Toby's hobby-horse stretches into the real world, the result is apt to be the ill-timed dropping of the sash window. Early in the novel, Tristram warns against complete abandonment to one's hobby-horse:

> when I see such a one, my Lord, mounted, though it is but for a minute beyond the time which my love to my country has prescribed to him, and my zeal for his glory wishes, - then, my Lord, I cease to be a philosopher, and in the first transport of an honest impatience, I wish the Hobby-Horse, with all his fraternity, at the Devil. (TS, p. 44)

This warning, given to others, is unheeded by Sterne himself, and his hobby-horse begins to get out of hand. Despite Tristram's assertion that "I'll not hurt the poorest jack-ass upon the King's highway" (TS, p. 297), his horse "throws dirt" and splatters several dignitaries.

> see you've splashed a bishop - I hope in God, 'twas only Ernulphus, said I - But you have squirted full in the faces of Mess Le Moyne, De Romigny, and De Marcilly, doctors of the Sorbonne. (TS, p. 297)

Tristram's reckless manner bodes ill for the future.

> he'll break his neck - see! if he has not galloped full among the scaffolding of the undertaking critic! - he'll knock his brains out against some of their posts. (TS, p. 296-297)

Criticisms of Tristram Shandy mounted as each successive publication appeared. After the appearance of volume nine a petition was sent to the Archbishop of York asking him "to deterr this wanton Scandal to his Cloth from proceeding in this Lewd Ludicrous manner as he has long done to the shame & Disgrace of his Sacred Order & the detriment of Society."[16] The hobby-horse is firmly entrenched in the mind, and, although Tristram cannot say that a man and his hobby-horse "act and re-act exactly in the same manner in which the soul and body do upon each other! Yet doubtless there is a communication between them of some kind" (TS, p. 98). The hobby-horse is ingrained in a man's mind, and like the mind and body "are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining; rumple the one - you rumple the other" (TS, p. 174).

That Sterne-Tristram felt the sting of criticism is evident on several occasions in the novel.

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[16] Ibid., p. 300-301.

> -You Messrs the Monthly Reviewers! - how could you cut and slash my jerkin as you did? - how did you know, but you would cut my lining too? (TS, p. 175)

Later, the metaphor changes, and the critics, now attacked more brutally by Tristram, become Jack-asses. Tristram, at one point, laments: "O ye critics! will nothing melt you?" (TS, p. 354). Tristram even attempts to placate his critics by pleading innocent to the charges of ill-nature attached to his work:

> in the story of my father and his Christian names, - I have no thoughts of treading upon Francis the First - nor in the affair of the nose - upon Francis the Ninth - nor in the character of my uncle Toby - of characterizing the militiating spirits of my country... or that my book is wrote against predestination, or free will, or taxes - If 'tis wrote against anything,- 'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen. (TS, p. 299)

But the subtle juxtaposition of this plea with the opening words of the following chapter reveal the extent of Tristram's fall from critical grace.

> -But can the thing be undone, Yorick? said my father - for in my opinion, continued he, it cannot. (TS, p. 299)

The hobby-horse, Tristram finds, can have its drawbacks, and disillusionment with his own hobby-horse,

coupled with debt [17] and illness, ultimately brings an end to Shandeism. But while Tristram continues to write Shandeism triumphs over the vexations of life.

> -But for heaven's sake, let us not talk of quarts or gallons (of blood) - let us take the story straight before us. (TS, p. 521)

Tristram's impatience to keep his story going, and his refusal to be disheartened by any misfortune are part of his Shandean spirit. Shandeism, for Tristram, is the means to a happy and joyful life, and the hobby-horse is only one of its elements.

### (c) SHANDEISM - "THERE IS SUCH A GREATNESS OF GUSTO"

Shandeism is a spirit, a cast of mind, a mode of expression, and a way of confronting life. It is a nonsensical, good-humoured way of approaching life, and one of its principal traits is its spontaneous gusto. The realization that truth, whether it be knowledge of the

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[17] "It is not enough thou art in debt, and that thou hast ten cartloads of thy fifth and sixth volumes still - still unsold, and art almost at thy wit's end, how to get them off thy hands? To this hour art thou not tormented with the vile asthma that thou gattest in skating against the wind in Flanders? and is it but two months ago, that in a fit of laughter, on seeing a cardinal make water like a quirister (with both hands) thou brakest a vessel in thy lungs?"(TS, p. 520-521)

universe or correct understanding of the data of experience, is elusive and unattainable is central to Shandeism, but so is the acceptance of this situation. The Shandean man is the true 'sentimental' man, moral and good-natured, and able to understand and come close to his fellow man through a look, or a gesture. There is, in Shandeism, a mental climate of amused tolerance where laughter is all important. Tristram's novel is written to counteract the spleen, "to drive gall and other bitter juices from the gall-bladder, liver, and sweet-bread of his majesty's subjects" (TS, p. 333). Shandeism is a mixture of wit, sentiment, nonsense, and affable good-humour "which will do all your hearts good - and your heads too, - provided you understand it" (TS, p. 422).

This last statement of Tristram's is important, for Tristram Shandy is difficult to understand, as Tristram constantly reminds us. The marbled page is the "motley emblem" of Tristram's novel. It is a book that does its running and makes its points not on its feet, as other books normally do, but upside down, on its head to attract attention. The Shandean world is a "clear climate of fantasy and perspiration, where every idea, sensible and insensible, gets vent" (TS, p. 515). Often Tristram's points are made in a nonsensical manner with his missing chapters, little hands, and other typographical tricks. But even more reminiscent of Alice in Wonderland is Tristram's use of nonsense words that foreshadow Lewis Carroll's Jabberwocky.

At one point Tristram addresses the critic Mynheer Vander Blonederdondergewdenstronke (Super-dull-dunderhead), an obvious nonsense word which conveys Sterne's contempt for the dullness and pedantry of Dutch critics. Later, his alphabetical listing of the traits of love descends into nonsense. Love, he says, is one of the most

A gitating
B ewitching
C onfounded
D evilish affairs of life - the most
E xtravagant
F utilitous
G alligaskinish

of all human passions. This by no means exhausts Tristram's list, but the rest just becomes more nonsensical.

These 'insensible' ideas and tricksare the substance of the book. When Tristram again seems to get carried away with himself, suggesting that he leave his mother, Dr. Slop, Le Fever, and himself behind, he quickly checks himself with: "But 'tis impossible, - I must go along with you to the end of my work" (TS, p. 427). Here Tristram is doubtless being silly, but, at the same time, he is emphasizing the artificality of the work of art, and the fact that it cannot be purely objective. Such are Tristram's ways of explaining his ideas.

It is through Tristram that Shandeism comes alive. He is well aware that at any moment man may become the victim of

a catastrophe in the normal order of things, caused by some mere trifle, such as thinking of the grandfather clock at the wrong time, or tying knots in an obstetrical bag to subdue the rattle of the instruments. Man is an isolated creature who is mocked by events. Tristram himself is a living example of fortune's vagaries: "child of wrath! child of decrepitude! interruption! mistake! and discontent! " (TS, p. 295). But Tristram chooses to face the world with a profound sense of comedy, expending all the wit possible, as well as an equal amount of sympathy for his fellow man. The true Shandeans, like Tristram and Yorick, laugh at misfortune, at others, and also at themselves. Both Tristram and Yorick, in Tristram Shandy, share between them a vision in which the absurdity of the world does not result in despair. They both are possessed of a great love and zest for life, and are continually mocking hypocrisy and the pretentiousness of social snobbery and prudery. Tristram's tendency to become bawdy merely reflects his conviction of the goodness of life, since women are desirable and good health a divine blessing. Tristram, like the rest of his family will not wear the social mask.

> to wear a mask which was bald, or which would be half seen through, was as bad as having no no mask at all. (TS, p. 517)

Tristram tells us that his Aunt Dinah wore the mask before she was got with child by the coachman, and here he rests his moral.

An openness of heart and a gaiety of mind, Shandeism is the secret to a long and joyful life:

> True Shandeism, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely through its channels, and makes the wheel of life run long and cheerfully round. (TS, p. 333)

It is interesting to note that even as Tristram is describing his Shandean system, he chooses his metaphor carefully to remind us of the arbitrariness of life. Shandeism makes "the wheel of life" run smoothly, but in saying this we are reminded that life is controlled by that medieval lady, Fortune, as she blindly winds her wheel.

Tristram Shandy is the record of Shandeism which was to "be kept a-going at that rate (two volumes a year) these forty years" (TS, p. 459). But Sterne abandons Tristram at the end of his ninth volume; he leaves Shandy Hall and finally adopts the pseudonym Yorick as his only mask. That Shandeism had infused Sterne as much as Tristram is evident from the figure Sterne cut in London and in Europe, and in his letters. In 1762 Sterne revealed his own Shandean bent in successive letters to the actor David Garrick. In one letter he wrote

> I Shandy it away fifty times more than I was ever wont, talk more nonsense than ever you heard me talk in your days.18

And later from Paris he wrote

> I laugh 'till I cry, and in the same tender moments cry 'till I laugh. I Shandy it more than ever, and verily do believe, that by mere Shandeism sublimated by a laughter-loving people, I fence as much against infirmities, as I do by the benefit of air and climate.19

But by 1766 a different note sounds in Sterne's correspondence. In a letter to John Hall Stevenson he writes:

> -So Tristram goes on busily - what I can find appetite to write, is so so. - You never read such a chapter of evils from me - I'm tormented to death and the devil, by my Stillington Inclosure. 20

It has been noted many times before in this thesis that debts, domestic difficulties, ill-health, and harsh criticism of his work mounted as Sterne grew older. The effect of these difficulties must now be made clearer. Early in 1767 Sterne wrote his daughter Lydia that he had "a plan for something new, quite out of the beaten track."[21] This is his second novel, A Sentimental Journey, and, as

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[18] Curtis, p. 157.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 163.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 291.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 311.

he later says, this book is of "a subject which works well, and suits the frame of mind I (Sterne) has been in for some time past."[22] Sterne's romantic vision is tempered, and he realizes that we do not love our fellow creatures as well as _Tristram Shandy_ would intimate. The wit of _Tristram Shandy_ and the exuberance of Shandeism are now shown to be suspect, and Sterne can write, just a few months before his death that

> The world has imagined, because I wrote _Tristram Shandy_, that I was myself more Shandean than I really ever was. 23

A look at the role Yorick plays in both novels will illustrate the change that has taken place in Sterne's thought.

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[22] _Ibid._, p. 400-401.

[23] _Ibid._, p. 402-403.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## THE TWO FACES OF YORICK

The change that is evident in _A Sentimental Journey_ can be most quickly viewed in the character of Yorick. He holds this novel together, as Tristram holds _Tristram Shandy_ together, since each novel is a memoir of the respective characters. _Tristram Shandy_, however, is a playful autobiography that is, in some respects, a retreat from the world, while _A Sentimental Journey_ is the work of a parson reviewing the errors of his past in order to enlighten his reader, and show him the mistakes to avoid in life. Where Tristram Shandy had exalted the imagination, the hobby-horse, and the emotions, Yorick, while still possessed of a sharp wit, reveals the dangers of excessive imagination, obsessive riding of one's hobby-horse, and feelings that are not substantiated by reason. This Yorick is the Yorick of the sermon in _Tristram Shandy_, the Yorick buried under the black page, but not the Yorick who walks and rides in the vicinity of Shandy Hall. The Yorick of _A Sentimental Journey_ is older and wiser, and he reflects on the follies of his youth, follies which arise when the very elements of Shandeism are brought into contact with the world outside Shandy Hall.

## (a) YORICK OF SHANDY HALL

Shandy Hall is essentially the creation of Tristram's mind, and he can have things there exactly as he wishes. When he describes uncle Toby's attire as Toby prepares to visit Widow Wadman, Tristram allows his imagination to range far beyond the episode, for the simple reason that the incident in question took place before Tristram was born.[1] Yorick, too, is a creation of Tristram's mind, and he is given all the qualities of Shandeism, wit, benevolence, innocence, gaiety, and also a hobby-horse. His early death, before Tristram brings him back to life, may be the hand of Sterne behind Tristram giving, in a sense, an account of his own career and character at the moment he decides to become a writer. He buries his former self under the black page, that is the part of him that already belongs to the past.[2]

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[1] Tristram conceives of Toby in the following manner: "Nature had moreover wrote GENTLEMAN with so fair a hand in every line of his countenance, that even his tarnished gold-laced hat and huge cockade of flimsy taffeta became him; and though not worth a button in themselves, yet the moment my uncle Toby put them on, they became serious objects, and altogether seemed to have been picked by the hand of Science to set him off to advantage." (TS, p. 573)

[2] See Henri Fluchère, Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick (London 1965), p. 350.

Tristram traced Yorick's genealogy as far back as Horwendillus, King of Denmark, in whose court an ancestor of Yorick's was a jester, and a very special jester too, for Hamlet's Yorick "was certainly the very man" (TS, p. 53). This places Yorick beside Tristram with the cap and bells of the fool, and both are, in Hamlet's words, fellows of infinite jest and excellent fancy. Tristram, like Yorick, "loved a jest in his heart," and both see themselves "in the true point of ridicule." Yorick and Tristram differ from Hamlet in that the latter needed bitter experience to open his eyes, while the former two are never taken in. Hamlet is the sombre, tragic hero, the man who has seen his ideals crumble before his eyes, and turns to destructive contempt and ridicule of the world around him. Yorick, however, has all the qualities of Shandeism, a benevolent confidence in man, wit, and an antipathy for gravity. The hobby-horse which the Shandean Yorick rides is his irrepressible love of gaiety and merriment. His character is every bit as volatile as Tristram's:

> 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 'gaite de coeur' about him as the kindliest climate would have engendered and put together. (TS, p. 55)

Here is another genuine wit who, like Tristram, is not above "the temptations of false wit" (TS, p. 49). He is innocent of the ways of the world, and it is this very

innocence and opposition to gravity which causes Yorick to run "foul ten times in a day of somebody's tackling." It is Yorick's innocence and goodness which get him into trouble. Sterne and Tristram have the highest regard for Yorick, but, as Tristram the sentimental moralist says, "this is not the moral of my story" (TS, p. 51). The significance of Yorick's downfall lies not in his gaiety, but in the "temper of the world." Tristram is making a comment on society, not on the wit and spirit of Yorick. Even the gossip and deceit which breaks Yorick's heart cannot subdue his Shandean spirit entirely. His final breath, in true Shandean spirit, is uttered "with something of a 'Cervantic' tone" (TS, p. 60).

After his death, early in the first volume of Tristram Shandy, Yorick is resurrected by Tristram to play the unobtrusive, but important role, of observer rather than actor in the action at Shandy Hall. In this role Yorick acts as a norm for the characters in the novel. He is modest and unselfish, refusing to allow the truth concerning his horse to be revealed since the story "might seem a panegyric upon himself" (TS, p. 51). He is the genuine sentimental man, who is tormented by one of his own sermons since it came from his head instead of his heart. Music is one of the most emotive arts, and musical terms are used by Sterne in connection with sentimental feeling.

Yorick, significantly, grades all his sermons with musical terms. He also delights in another Shandean pastime, the discussion of abstruse learning. Yorick reads Stevinus, and also advises Walter to consult Didius concerning Tristram's baptism. But Yorick is also a man of simple, heart-felt common sense, and in this regard he is attracted to Corporal Trim. Trim, the epitome of the man of feeling is also the voice of sanity, when he refuses to allow uncle Toby to believe that Le Fever will live. He combines common sense and feeling, or rather his sense seems to emanate from his feelings, and it is this which attracts Yorick. In answer to Walter's question as to what Trim means when he quotes the section of the Catechism which tells us to honour our father and mother, Trim replies:

> Allowing them, an' please your honour, three half-pence a day out of my pay, when they grew old. - And didst thou do that, Trim? said Yorick. - He did indeed, replied my uncle Toby. - Then, Trim, said Yorick, springing out of his chair, and taking the corporal by the hand, thou art the best commentator upon that part of the Decalogue; and I honour thee more for it, Corporal Trim, than if thou hadst a hand in the Talmud itself. (<u>TS</u>, p. 385)

Yorick triumphantly praises simple ideas and generous sentiments, and he gently mocks the exaggerated learning of Walter. When Walter seems about to carry his opinion too far, Yorick is always ready to temper Walter's excesses:

> Yorick foreseeing the sentence (of Walter's) was likely to end with no sort of mercy, laid his hand upon my father's breast, and begged he would respite it for a few moments, till he asked the corporal a question. (TS, p. 390)

Yorick, in deference to Walter, is completely indifferent to the opinions of others:

> 'The son ought to pay her respect', as you may read, Yorick, at large in the first book of the Institutes of Justinian, at the eleventh title and the tenth section. - I can read it as well, replied Yorick, in the Catechism. (TS, p. 383)

Yorick carries this unconcern to great lengths, as the story of Phutatorius and the chestnut illustrates.

Yorick is always present as a listener who can be depended on to enliven a conversation with his sense and wit. Walter outlines the nonsensical traits he wishes his son's governor to have, and Yorick is the first to interrupt with the common sense question, "and why not humble, and moderate, and gentle-tempered, and good" (TS, p. 402). These, incidentally are all traits which exemplify himself. Yorick's goodness is externalized by his treatment of others. Although he would often contradict Walter, Yorick "could never bear to do it with all his force" (TS, p. 561). Love, for the Yorick of Shandy Hall, is absolute.

> I know there were two RELIGIONS, replied Yorick, amongst the ancients - one - for the vulgar, and another for the learned; - but I think ONE LOVE might have served both of them very well - (TS, p. 560)

This, however, is not the Yorick we meet in A Sentimental Journey. The change that takes place in Yorick's character is prefigured in the well-known ending of Tristram Shandy.

> 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. (TS, p. 615)

These are the last words of the novel, and they are spoken by Yorick. Here is Yorick, the innocent parson, with a bawdy joke upon his lips, the type of joke usually left to Tristram or Walter or Dr.Slop, all of whom are present in this last scene (Tristram is present, as always, as narrator). But despite the many shades of meaning involved in Yorick's joke, there is also one meaning which, given A Sentimental Journey, may have been missed. Yorick is, in effect, saying that this novel has been a pure joke, and not to be taken seriously. The dangers of approaching life in a Shandean manner are revealed by the Yorick of A Sentimental Journey.

### (b) YORICK THE CRITICAL MEMORALIST

In A Sentimental Journey Sterne gives Yorick a new role to play. From innocent bystander, Yorick now takes

over the pen to write a critical account of his travels through France and Italy. A Sentimental Journey, like volume of Tristram Shandy, is as much a travel book as a novel, since both are actually based on experiences Sterne had while on two trips to the continent in 1762-64 and 1765-66, but both are above all works of fiction. Unlike the practice in the usual travel books, the descriptions of buildings and cities are either parodied by Tristram or avoided altogether by Yorick, the narrators being more interested in the human contacts made along the way. Tristram, however, is much more erratic than Yorick, and the seventh volume of Tristram Shandy is a rollicking, witty account of Tristram's several adventures in Europe. He digresses many times to relate the story of the abbess of Andouillets, or to skip to a previous trip to the continent with his father and uncle. His spirit is gay, and his emotions always innocent and honest. Tristram is possessed by nothing other than merriment in his flight from death. Unlike Yorick, Tristram has no preconceived notions concerning his experiences in Europe. He recognizes that

> When the precipitancy of a man's wishes hurries on his ideas ninety times faster than the vehicle he rides in - woe be to truth! (TS, p. 467)

Vexations, such as the rough bouncing of a chaise, can tear Yorick's nerves to pieces and work him into "a foolish passion" (ASJ, p. 50), but Tristram takes everything coolly and considers

> that some tag, or rag, or zag, or bolt, or buckle, or buckle's tongue, will even be a-wanting, or want altering. (TS, p. 459)

Tristram is well aware of his own actions, and before entering Montreuil he openly bribes his postillion to go faster. Yorick, in Montriul, bribes the beggars, but with none of Tristram's candour and awareness. This is the most important difference between the two travellers. Tristram will submit to paying "six livers four sous," but not without saying "some smart thing upon the occasion worth the money" (TS, p. 502). He will stop a minute to save an ass from a drubbing. His own stories are of interest to him, and when telling of the abbess of Andouillets he becomes so involved that he declares that he wishes he had been there (TS, p. 482). Tristram, then, is writing to amuse, while Yorick's intent is to reveal his errors. Yorick is more earnest in his desire to teach the reader, and he rarely digresses to relate events in which he is not involved.

In the Preface to A Sentimental Journey, which is

misplaced as its counterpart was in Tristram Shandy.[3] Yorick suggests that his book will serve as an answer to the travel books of Tobias Smollet and Samuel Sharp. Unlike Smelfungus or Mundungus, Yorick intends to concentrate on the politeness, humanity, and sensibility of the French. Thus, in order to launch his work, Sterne contrasts the supposed moral sensibility of Yorick with the critical attitude of Smollett and Sharp, while in actual fact the comedy of the novel arises from Yorick's excessive zeal in seeking out "Love and Pity" (ASJ, p. 38). This is a new Yorick, one who consciously seeks to find benevolence in everyone he meets. But we must be careful not to fall into the trap that Sterne sets by his new way of introducing Yorick. Henri Fluchère is mistaken when he writes that in this Yorick "Sterne set sensibility above intelligence and established the supremacy of the heart."[4] Intelligence is necessary to temper the "seducing slut" fancy (ASJ, p. 25) and to guide the heart. Fluchère goes on to say that it is best to divest Yorick's sentimentalism

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[3] In Tristram Shandy this device is more of a surprise than in A Sentimental Journey, and it is thus a more genuine piece of wit. In A Sentimental Journey the Preface seems placed exactly where it belongs, and the trick lies more in telling the reader that this is the Preface being written inside a chaise, than in the Preface itself.

[4] Fluchère, p. 371.

of all moral connotations,[5] but this, it seems to me, is a complete denial of Yorick's intention. Yorick, looking back on his mistakes, is intent on making a moral fable of his journey. The uninhibited sentimentalism that is harmless at Shandy Hall becomes an invidious tool for the selfish when untutored by reason. This is what is revealed in the excessive sentimentalism of Yorick.

The method of humour, then, is the same in _A Sentimental Journey_ as in _Tristram Shandy_. The brunt of all the humour will be Yorick, and the key to his personality, as in the case of Walter and Toby Shandy, is his obsession or ruling passion, his habit of distorting reality by imparting to it a subjective, hobby-horsical version of order. Yorick's hobby-horse is his fanatical tendency to see benevolence in every act, even the amoral or immoral. The ludicrous nature of Yorick's sentimentality has helped to substantiate the critical opinion that Sterne's sentimentalism was a sham,[6] and it is quite true that the reader laughs at Yorick's exaggerated sentiment. But he does so, it must be remembered, by the direction of Yorick, the "critical memoralist".[7]

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[5] _Ibid._, p. 372.
[6] See Chapter Three.

[7] William Bowman Piper, _Laurence Sterne_ (New York, 1965), p. 107.

That Yorick is a pseudonym for Sterne is evident from Sterne's letters and published sermons, and with this connection drawn it is easy to discern Sterne's purpose. He is not merely laughing at sentiment and himself in the person of Yorick, but rather Sterne-Yorick is looking back genially, but critically, at his adventures on the continent, for the purpose of pointing to a moral failing which centered on his Shandean qualities. Yorick tells the reader frankly that he is relating his failings, not offering an apology for them:

> -But what were the temptations, (as I write not to apologize for the weaknesses of my heart in this tour, but to give an account of them) - shall be described with the same simplicity, with which I felt them. (ASJ, p. 24)

This is not to say that sympathy and good will are not real, but rather it illustrates how difficult they are to find. They must be discovered or taught to Yorick. He certainly does have genuinely good intentions, and he sincerely wants to be benevolent. The trouble is that Yorick does not realize the difficulty of exposing the truly benevolent side of human nature, and only later, in retrospect, does he come to a certain awareness of the ambiguity of his motives. For this reason, the journey, in some way, becomes a spiritual journey focusing on the comic vision of

concomitant idealism and carnality. But we must not condemn Yorick too strongly, for his aberrations are those of all humanity. He is subject to the same failings as every man. Yorick's own imagination may carry him beyond the bounds of morality, but, as he himself knows, the reader is possessed by similar human frailties. Yorick leaves the reader to devise the scene in which he and the Piedmontese Lady undress in the same room, but he protests that

> if it is not the most delicate in nature, 'tis the fault of his own imagination -- against which this is not my first complaint. (ASJ, p. 136)

Arthur Cash puts it this way:

> Sterne's book takes account of a common human experience, each man's hunger for sympathy and exchange of good-will which is frustrated by his own egocentricity.[8]

Yorick receives his first lesson in benevolence in the opening pages of the book, in his two confrontations with the Monk. Before Yorick has even arrived in France he has decided that the French are "a people so civilized and courteous" and "renown'd for sentiment and fine feelings" (ASJ, p. 12). His first generalization, with which the book

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[8] Arthur Hill Cash, Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments (Pittsburgh, 1966), p. 36.

opened, was questioned immediately, alerting the reader to Yorick's fallibility,

> -They order, said I, this matter better in France -
> -You have been to France? said my gentleman, turning quick upon me with the most civil triumph in the world. (ASJ, p. 11)

And his second generalization concerning the French peoples' civility is upset by a chance thought regarding the French law, the "Droit d'aubaine," which allows the king to confiscate all the possessions of a foreigner who happens to be so discourteous as to die on French soil. But a bottle of Burgundy eases Yorick's mind once again into thoughtless benevolence. Yorick, it is already evident, is infatuated by courtesy and sentimentality, though he has yet found no goodness in the French people or in himself. Without thinking, Yorick sees benevolence in all humanity, and in himself, as well. He is ready for his first lesson.

Yorick's smug and self-deceptive attitude is immediately contrasted with the candour and humility of the Monk at Calais. Yorick, affected by the wine, is in a generous mood, and he displays his purse theatrically while searching for an object upon which he can lavish his generosity. Then the jarring comic moment comes when Yorick eyes the Roman Catholic monk, and reacts mechanically, putting his purse away and predeterming "not to give him a

single sous" (ASJ, p. 13). But not only is Yorick ungenerous, despite his protestations earlier, he is also unnecessarily rude to the monk.

It is in the second meeting with the monk, however, that Yorick receives his lesson. Before they meet again Yorick meets the beautiful Madame de L***, whom he has seen talking previously to this same monk, and he imagines that the monk has told the lady about Yorick's rude treatment of him. He therefore plans how he can erase the bad impression the lady may have of him, as he watches the monk approach. The monk is now referred to as the "good old monk" (ASJ, p. 28). When the monk offers to exchange snuff, Yorick confesses his unkindness to the Monk, only to find that the monk had never entertained such thoughts of Yorick in the first place. As Yorick realizes the full import of his mistake he blushes in embarrassment, but leaves it up to the reader to analyze the actual significance of his blush. Yorick is ashamed at having misjudged a genuinely kind and humane person, and a moment of complete friendship follows, where silences are not strained and difficult, but rather serve as a means of genuine communication.

> We remained silent, without any sensation of that foolish pain which takes place, when in such a circle you look for ten minutes in one another's faces without saying a word. (ASJ, pp. 28-29)

The exchange of snuff boxes completes Yorick's first lesson in benevolence, and from the following scene, which jumps ahead in time to a period after the monk's death, the effect upon Yorick is made clear. While describing himself clearing nettles and shedding tears at the monk's grave, Yorick confesses his weakness and begs "the world not to smile, but to pity me" (ASJ, p. 29). But Yorick's weakness is not his tears. The narrator, Yorick, is relating the moral weakness of the protagonist Yorick in the affair with the monk.[9] His plea for pity reveals the frailty of Yorick's moral character, and also shows that Yorick sees himself as a fool. The reader may laugh, but he is asked to consider the importance of Yorick's weakness first.

So far Sterne has shown how benevolence can be mechanical, but he also illustrates how it can be vicious or even immoral. Yorick often confuses his supposed moral sentiments with sexual desire. The earliest example of this tendency in Yorick is in the episode with Madame de L***. The sermon on Good Conscience in volume two of Tristram Shandy deals with the manner in which the reason can be tricked by passon or by the imagination, when not supported by religion:

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[9] Ibid., p. 36.

> -and that passion never got into the judgement- seat, and pronounced sentence in the stead of reason, which is supposed always to preside and determine upon the case. (TS, p. 143)

And

> To have the fear of God before our eyes, and in our mutual dealings with each other, to govern our actions by the eternal measure of right and wrong: - The first of these will comprehend the duties of religion; - the second, those of morality, which are so inseparably connected, together, that you cannot divide these two 'tables', even in imagination (though the attempt is often made in practice) without breaking and mutually destroying them both. (TS, p. 150)

The sermon was discussed earlier (in chapter two) to point out the fun Sterne was having with it. Toby and Trim, the men of imagination and true feeling, cannot understand a word of it, and thus the sermon's central message is rendered ineffectual and unnecessary. But now Sterne does offer the message of this sermon in earnest. In the episode with Madame L***, Yorick fears the lady will withdraw her hand from his. He thinks that he would have lost it "had not instinct more than reason directed me to the last resource in these dangers - to hold it loosely, and in a manner as if I was every moment going to release it, of myself" (ASJ, p. 27). The actual moral to be imparted here is not to be found on the surface of Yorick's words. Yorick

subtly tells us that he was tricking the lady by making her believe that he was going to let her hand go, and the reader must realize that if reason had been employed to guide Yorick's instincts Yorick would have let the lady's hand go. But Yorick has a habit of fooling himself that is only slightly less dangerous than the Widow Wadman's.

Yorick's imagination is every bit as recalcitrant as his instincts, and Sterne seems to be echoing Dr. Johnson's warning at the beginning of Rasselas, where Johnson cautions those "who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy."[10] Yorick, it seems, wants his fancy to do the work of tricking his reason. He wants his servant La Fleur to appear elegantly dressed, but when it comes to providing money for the clothes his generosity, as usual, fails. He is later surprized at the excellent outfit that La Fleur manages to acquire, and is willing to allow his fancy to tell him that the clothes are new, but La Fleur shatters this illusion, and establishes that they are second hand. Yorick then confesses that "I would rather have imposed upon my fancy with thinking I had bought them new for the fellow" (ASJ, p. 111). And earlier in the novel, before he had even seen

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[10] Samuel Johnson, The History of Rasselas (New York, 1963), p. 1.

Madame de L***'s face "Fancy had finished the whole head," and after he does see her face, his aroused instincts again call the fancy into play as he imagines that the lady is a sad widow. Thus before actually knowing anything about the lady, other than her charming appearance Yorick "In a word... felt benevolence for her" (ASJ, p. 26).

At this point in the novel it is easy to miss the point. William Piper sees the struggle Yorick has with "Every dirty passion, and bad propensity" in his nature as proof of Yorick's awareness of a social problem in meeting the Flemish lady.[11] But this is simply one of Yorick's rationalizations to hide his real impulse. His fancy also convinces him that the lady is "of the better order of beings (ASJ, p. 31), and that she has suffered from an untold misfortune. Yorick, in short, thinks only that "which pleased me" (ASJ, p. 32), and he uncovers his real motive for his generous idea when he adds;

> -and had she remained close beside my elbow till midnight, I should have held true to my system, and considered her only under that general idea. (ASJ, p. 32)

Yorick had first kissed the lady's hand before deciding that he would ask her to accompany him in his chaise. His

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[11] Piper, p. 107.

desires, and only his desires, have served as a spur to his benevolence, pity, and charity. Benevolence is here equated with wantonness, both of which are instincts which are pleasant when acted upon, but may also be immoral.

That the imagination, benevolence, or love can all have their vicious aspects underlines Sterne's vision of the duality of man. In Tristram Shandy, Walter is a man of no affection, who takes a great interest in his own well being. He continually worries over money matters or insults his brother. Even Toby, it must be remembered, is a soldier whose profession is killing. Men here have their bad sides, but in the Shandean universe there is a deep natural goodness in each man which outweighs any bad that a man may reveal. Walter's goodness appears when he realizes his own ill treatment of Toby, and Toby is continually kind to those around him. Their benevolence is real, and is directed outward, but when benevolence is directed inward, as is the case with Yorick in A Sentimental Journey, it degenerates into self-love.

For the Yorick of Shandy Hall there was only one love, but love, too, has its bad side. Yorick, the sentimental traveller, continually confuses what the old French officer called "mutual love" with pure sexual passion. This duality in love is first described by Walter Shandy in volume eight of Tristram Shandy, when he replies to Yorick's

remark that "one Love might have served both of them (the vulgar and the learned) very well" (TS, p. 560). with a short discourse on the two Venuses.

> The first, which is the golden chain let down from heaven, excites to love heroic, which comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy and truth - the second, excites to desire, simply. (TS, p. 561)

The two loves are distinguised another way; one is natural and the other is rational. Yorick continually mistakes the first love for the second, that which merely excites to desire. When hearing that his newly hired servant, La Fleur, is always in love Yorick is "heartily glad of it" since he himself, he selfconsciously goes on to say, has been "in love with one princess or another almost all my life, and I hope I shall go on so till I die." But Yorick the narrator as usual, steps in to make the moral point.

> -But in saying this - surely I am commending the passion - not myself. (ASJ, p. 43)

Love does have the power to create "Friendship and Virtue" as it did in the town of Abdera, but it must be a true, selfless love governed by reason. Yorick takes his journey of the heart to learn to love others better than is common among men, but he finds this more difficult than he expected. He constantly finds himself in situations which

test his virtue. In his tumble with the 'fille de chambre' upon his hotel bed Yorick manages to govern his desires as a good man should. He catches himself in time, thinking of God, the "great Governor of nature" (ASJ, p. 105). Religion and morality are inextricably mixed as the sermon on Conscience showed, and in this episode reason reminds Yorick of his duty before his passions are allowed victory.

Yorick's desires perpetually fool him, and his passions rarely allow him to get beyond himself. Even the seeking of the lunatic girl, Maria, is ultimately a failure. The undertaking is frankly quixotic from the beginning.

> 'Tis going, I own, like the Knight of Woeful Countenance, in quest of melancholy adventures. (ASJ, p. 125)

And it is easily discerned that Yorick's celebration of his soul in this episode serves merely to hide the truth about his desires. Sterne teaches the attentive reader from the opening pages of his books to be aware of tone and innuendo of passages and repeated words. Yorick's sexual appetite has been evident in his encounters with Madame de L***, the 'fille de chambre' to Madame R****, the Grisset sent by the 'maitre d'hotel' in Paris, and the woman who sold him a pair of gloves, smartly taking advantages of Yorick's aroused passion for her. With this evidence to bring to the Maria episode it is easy to see the real implications as

Yorick describes Maria.

> Maria, though not tall, was nevertheless of the first order of fine forms - affliction had touch'd her looks with something that was scarce earthly - still she was feminine - and so much was there about her of all that the heart wishes, or the eye looks for in women, that could the traces ever be worn out of her brain, and those of Eliza's out of mine, she could not only eat of my bread and drink of my own cup, but Maria should lay in my bosom, and be unto me as a daughter. (ASJ, p. 128)

The reader, by now, is quick to suspect Yorick's sentiments, and can easily see how the very texture of the words Yorick's uses undercuts the sentiment of his thoughts. Yorick's words and phrases, such as "tall," "fine forms," "feminine," and "lay in my bosom," are physical and reveal Yorick's actual motives for sympathizing with Maria. This subtle use of language is a common technique in A Sentimental Journey to show the ambiguity of Yorick's feelings. When talking to the Count de B**** Yorick speaks of his interest, as a traveller, in women more than churches or statues. He unconsciously reveals his inner thoughts when he tells the Count that he conceives "every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself" (ASJ, p. 95). In connection with Maria, Yorick also says that she would be like his daughter if he could take her home, but earlier he had used a similar excuse

to cover his sexual attraction to Madame de R****'s 'fille de chambre', asking himself if we are not all relations (ASJ, p. 78).

The episode with Maria is followed by Yorick's apostrophe to "Dear Sensibility". Being at the height of his self glorification Yorick sees a vision of immortality which is merely the glorification of emotions which are tender and sympathetic. Filled with pomp and self satisfaction he feels that his own sensibility is Heaven's "divinity that stirs within" him (ASJ, p. 129). He envisages God as that "great Sensorium of the world which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation" (ASJ, p. 129). But here Yorick fails in his conception of God. From the first page where we see Yorick pack his "black pair of silk breeches" his role as cleric has been established. At Paris Yorick's black coat is coated with dust, a detail which adds a note of irony to Yorick's narration. This Yorick, then, is the preacher of sermons, and not the innocent eccentric of Tristram Shandy. Despite his Christian vocation, Yorick here sees God as only a God of love, forgetting God's justice and power. This is accentuated when in his apostrophe to sensibility Yorick echoes the words from Matthew 10:30 - "But the very hairs of your head

are all numbered". But on Yorick's lips the sense is quite different.

Yorick's sensibility and benevolence, then, are turned inward rather than outward. His view of mankind is severely limited by his ideals of love and God, and his instinctive reactions are reduced to particular objects of pity. Even more serious than this is the lack of stability of Yorick's feelings of charity. Both of these failings are illustrated in the starling episode. After easing his mind over the thought of confinement in the Bastille, Yorick is stopped short by the sound of a caged starling repeating the words "I can't get out." His immediate reaction is commendable as he attempts to free the bird, but when this fails Yorick falls back into his world of fine words and intentions. Yorick, caught in his own reveries, always fails to prosecute any definite action. He lapses into thinking about slavery, but he cannot remain affected by the general idea of slavery, and so he reduces his picture to one nearer himself, thinking of a single captive. Yorick, however, cannot even sustain this picture, which his fancy "had drawn." He is much too interested in his own sensations when feeling for others; he even, at one point, feels pity for a dilapidated old carriage, but this too is short-lived.

As for the starling, Yorick's ultimate treatment of it is as unfeeling and thoughtless as could be conceived. He gives the bird to Lord A, who in turn passes it on to Lord B, and so on through the alphabet, while all this time the bird remains in the bleak confinement.

Yorick's unconcern for animals, and his disregard of the poor reflects some lack of humanity on his part. This is revealed in his smug and self-conscious attitude to the beggars at Montreuil, as he literally buys their compliments. This is illustrated again when he and La Fluer encounter a dead ass on their way to Nampont. La Fleur's bidet is frightened by the carcass and throws his rider to the ground. The focus in this scene, it must be noted, is on the bidet, not on the dead ass. The picture is that of a terrified horse being mistreated by La Fleur, and Yorick, significantly, only adds to this mistreatment.

> What's the matter, La Fleur, said I, with this bidet of thine? - Monsieur, said he, c'est un cheval le plus opiniatre du mond.- Nay, if he is a conceited beast, he must go his own way, replied I - so La Fleur got off him, and giving him a good sound lash, the bidet took me at my word, and away he scampered back to Montsiul. (ASJ, p. 47)

Yorick then digresses on French curse words and laments the "lot" of those who find it necessary to use the superlative form. Later, after hearing the story of the dead ass and its master, Yorick, tries to contemplate the tale, but his

postillion gives his horse "an unfeeling lash" which sets the chaise off at a great speed. Yorick's meditation ends in irritation, not at the postillion's brutality, but because of the uncomfortable ride.

This technique of juxtaposing a scene in which Yorick appears greatly moved with one that reveals his true cast of mind is one of Sterne's constant devices, and it is by such a juxtaposition that the novel ends. The episode at the French peasant's shows Yorick a life of true harmony, benevolence, and religion, but this is immediately followed by the chapter entitled "The Case of Delicacy" with which the novel ends. This episode reveals all of Yorick's failings at one time; his ungenerous nature, his sexual desires, his twisted sentiment, and his limited religious outlook. The novel had begun with Yorick in a state of mild intoxication, and it ends in the same manner. Instead of sensibility coming to the rescue in an awkward situation, it proves an obstacle only to be removed by a little wine. Yorick, not wishing to relinquish his bed, and the Piedmontese Lady settle the matter of sleeping accomodations over a couple of bottles of burgundy, and decide to relegate the chamber maid to the "damp cold closet." In any case Yorick's benevolence here remains self-satisfying and false, and his desires again are prevalent as the book ends, leaving

the reader again to use his tutored imagination in deciding what happens as Yorick catches hold of the "fille de chambre's --."

Sterne's second novel, then, serves as a comment upon his first novel, Tristram Shandy, and it points out the dangers involved in Shandeism. While at the Count de B****'s in Versailles Yorick becomes involved in a discussion over his name. The Count could not bear "to look into sermons wrote by the King of Denmark's jester" (ASJ, p. 96). In other words, the Count feels that the role of jester is incompatible with the vocation of a cleric, and Yorick, agrees, saying that "there are two Yorick's." The Yorick sequestered in the land about Shandy Hall has the same qualities as the traveller Yorick in A Sentimental Journey. But the narrator Yorick is aware that these qualities are not as pure and innocent as the Shandean existence makes out. Sentiment which was honest and real in Tristram Shandy now may degenerate into mere preverse delight in the misery of others. Yorick gloats in the prospect of sharing vicariously in the miseries of Madame de L***:

> with what a moral delight will it crown my journey in sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer? to see her weep! (ASJ, p. 52)

It is true there is nothing wrong in sympathizing with the lady, but Yorick realizes that this is not the case with himself, and he "instantly reproaches" his heart. And later in the book Yorick finds melancholy amusement in finding "so many miserables" on the streets of Paris. With thoughts of deformed people on his mind Yorick goes to the theatre where he sees a dwarf being unfairly treated by a large German. His thoughts are noble, but, as in the case of the starling, Yorick does no further. It is left to the old French officer to come to the aid of the dwarf. This old French officer stands as a foil for the self-deceiving Yorick. Hearing the reason the crowd is shouting at an Abbé in an upper loge Yorick replies

> is it possible, that a people so smit with sentiment should at the same time be so unclean, and so unlike themselves. (ASJ, p. 71)

The words, of course, serve as an ironic comment upon Yorick himself, whose own sentiments are often unclean. The old French officer stands in direct relief to Yorick with his "candour and good sense." He realizes the necessity of acknowledging good and bad everywhere, and that only this knowledge can teach mutual toleration which is the first step towards mutual love. The old officer's words serve as a norm that Yorick again fails to live up to. First he feel that the officer's words were his "own way of

thinking," the difference being that he could not have expressed it so well, and secondly he shows that he completely misunderstands what the officer meant. The following scene relates how Madame de Rambouliet and Yorick are out for a drive when the lady asks for the carriage to be stopped so that she may relieve herself. Yorick takes this as an opporunity for him to show his toleration for the customs of others, but sincere as he may be, his vulgar error merely reveals his own inadequacy.

Yorick continually thinks of himself and takes pride in his own benevolent sentiments. Unlike uncle Toby whose deeds are as good as his sentiments, Yorick rarely acts except to give himself pleasure. Toby is kind and generous to his servant Trim, while Yorick is ungenerous and condescending to his servant, La Fleur. He places himself above La Fleur, and prides himself on his treatment of him. When La Fleur asks for time off, Yorick patronizingly thinks:

> But we must 'feel', not argue in these embarrassements - the sons and daughters of service part with liberty, but not with nature, in their contracts; they are flesh and blood, and have their little vanities and wishes in the midst of the house of bondage, as well as their task-masters - no doubt, they have set their self-denials at a price - and their expectations are so unreasonable, that I would often disappoint them, but that their conditions puts it so much in my power to do it. (ASJ, p.112)

Yorick, it would seem, has a geniune wish to be benevolent, but, like all men, he is faced with "mountains impracticable - and cataracts, which roll down great stones from their summits, and block his road up" (ASJ, p. 133). At nearly every turn Yorick's good intentions are frustrated by his egocentricity.

Yorick's Shandean way of approaching everything in life gaily is also shown to be self-deceiving. While still in England Yorick had laughed at the thought of being sent to the Bastille, but once in Paris without his passport, the event which he had "treated gaily" comes to pass. Even at this juncture Yorick can not bring himself "to think of it otherwise than" when he had spoken of it to Eugenius. Yorick delights in his ability to reduce all such disastrous prospects "to their proper size" (ASJ, p. 82). Then he comes across the caged starling whose chant overthrows all Yorick's "systematic reasonings upon the Bastille," and faces him squarely with the grim reality of imprisonment. And later the man of 'esprit' and sentiment is shown to be little more than a sycophant and a hypocrite in Parisien society. Yorick the narrator, as in most cases, realizes his own hypocrisy, and criticizes his actions:

> For three weeks together, I was of every man's opinion I met.... And at thus price I could have eaten and drank and been merry all the days of my life at Paris: but 'twas a dishonest reckoning - I grew ashamed of it. - It was the gain of a slave - every sentiment of honour revolted against it - the higher I got, the more was I forced upon my 'beggarly system' - the better the 'Coterie' - the mere children of Art - I languished for those of Nature; and one night after a most vile prostitution of myself to half a dozen different people, I grew sick - went to bed - order'd La Fleur to get me horses in the morning to set out for Italy. (ASJ, p. 124)

Yorick does not excuse his actions, but simply records them. His desire for success in Paris is an understandable human reaction, and his own awareness after the fact prevents the reader from condemning him. The reader comes to sympathize with Yorick, and understand his human frailty. Yorick's "quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of Nature" becomes a journey in which Yorick comes to a certain knowledge of his own human failings. His task as a writer, then, is to point out to the reader his own mistakes in the hope that the reader will use more caution and thought when he comes to the "sudden turns and dangers" in his own journey on the road of life (ASJ, p. 132).

Sterne's theme, then, is the duality of Yorick. He

is both good and bad, being tainted with "some of those little blemishes" that "raise our compassion rather than our abhorrence."[12] Sterne is never bitter; he may laugh at his characters, but always with an air of compassion, not distaste. A moral tension exists in everyone, and even Toby Shandy can be torn between his obsessive benevolence and his egocentricity. Man is constantly "frustrated by his own enthusiastic determination to seize upon his ideal."[13] Walter Shandy is possessed by hypothoses, but never finds the truth, while Yorick is obsessed with benevolence, but never finds virtue. The comedy arises by just these obsessions, and their failings. The difference is that such failings in the Shandean world are compensated by the goodness of the characters. Yorick, at Shandy Hall, is obsessed with merriment, but never out of self interest. Sterne, like the notary in the fragment which Yorick finds in Paris, has been "the sport of hurricanes" all his life, and the effect is now obvious. The notary may present us with an accurate picture of Sterne's mind at this point in his life.

> -to be born to have the storm of ill language levelled against me and my profession wherever I go - to be forced into marriage by the thunder of the

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[12] Henry Fielding, <u>Tom Jones</u> (New York, 1963), p. 442.

[13] Cash, p. 87.

> church to a tempest of a woman - to be driven forth out of my house by domestic winds, and despoiled of my castor by pontific ones. (ASJ, p. 116)

And the old man who is about to relate his history for the notary may be another aspect of Sterne, whose own book is written either to condemn him or aquit him. It is a story which will rouse the pity of the most heartless person, and the pity, we must surmise, is for the mistakes made in a life like the one depicted in A Sentimental Journey.

That Sterne was a moralist must never be doubted. He wrote to the Earl of -, in 1767, concerning A Sentimental Journey,

> If it is not though a chaste book, mercy on them that read it, for they must have warm imaginations indeed. [14]

The reader, like Yorick, can be tricked by his imagination. Sterne laughs at Yorick, but in doing so he laughs with him, and he is in a similar relationship to the reader. It is a tender laugh that recognizes man's difficult situation in this absurd world. Man is composed of instincts which trouble him, and override the reason, but reason must command.

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[14] Letters of Laurence Sterne, edited by Lewis Perry Curtis, (London, 1935), p. 403.

In _A Sentimental Journey_ Sterne shows that "When the heart flies out before the understanding, it saves the judgement a world of pains" (_ASJ_, p. 25), but it also may mislead even such a well meaning person as Yorick. In Yorick's case it is his heart, his excessive zeal for benevolence, that leads him into difficulty. It is true that Yorick's actions usually produce good results, such as his donations to the beggars at Montriul, but his motives are often rooted in self interest. Yorick's sentiments come straight from his heart without passing through his head. In writing to Mrs. William James in 1768, not long before his death, Sterne offers an apology for himself which may also be applied to the Yorick of _A Sentimental Journey_.

> If I die, cherish the remembrance of me, and forget the follies which you so often condemn'd-- which my heart, not my head betray'd me into.[15]

Through the character of Yorick, then, it is possible to see the change in emphasis between Sterne's two novels. In both novels Sterne's vision is essentially comic, but his romantic faith in the individual goodness of man is tempered by the time he comes to write _A Sentimental Journey_. In this novel Sterne does not explicitly hold up reason as the guide for man through life, but in

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[15] _Ibid._, p. 419.

showing the pitfalls of sentiment and benevolence he points out the deficiency of the heart when not guided by reason. This seems implicit in the novel, and it is left to the reader to reach the conclusion and find his own positive virtue in the novel. Through a succession of similar episodes Sterne teaches the reader to understand the failings of Yorick's judgement in controlling his feelings. With such tutoring Sterne can safely end his book ambiguously, in mid sentence, leaving the reader, as always, to reach his own conclusions and form his own judgements upon the action. One thing is certain, Sterne's fantasy land is gone. By leaving Shandy Hall Yorick has shattered the illusions of Shandean life. Life is not enclosed in Shandy Hall, but rather it is a journey beset with temptations, and temptations which can destroy even the best intentions. This is what Yorick learns, but like Tristram, he accepts his role as jester and continues to laugh at the foibles of man and his own misfortunes. His laughter, however, is not as boisterous as the Shandean merriment of Tristram, for Yorick has learned the sad truth that Shandeism is not everything.

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