

VOCABULARIES OF IDENTITY IN *TRISTRAM SHANDY* AND *EVELINA*

THE VOCABULARIES OF IDENTITY
IN STERNE'S *TRISTRAM SHANDY* AND BURNEY'S *EVELINA*

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Abstract

The sense of personal identity is one that has developed historically with relation to language. Expression of self, in order to be accurate, must involve non-verbal articulation to some extent. Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759 - 1767) and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1783) are exemplar texts in this kind of enquiry: both texts are very much concerned with the accuracy of self-expression and the relationship between self and other(s). Criticism, especially of *Tristram Shandy*, has tended to focus on his text as unique and incomparable; for this reason, I have chosen to examine it in comparison with another (perhaps more conventional -- at least in style) text. Criticism of Burney's work has tended to focus on the comparison of the author (through reference to her diaries) with that of her fictional heroines; I will focus here on *Evelina*.

The limitations of linguistic expression are hampered by misinterpretation in these two texts; both seek to redress the limitations of language by expanding the possibilities of expression to include the variations of gesture, by imbuing words with feeling and by otherwise incorporating into the textual format of the novel a sense of identity -- not only the identity of the characters in the fiction but also, to some extent, of the actual readers who are required to participate in the fiction through the act of reading itself.

The notion of the division between mind/soul and body is reflected in the concern regarding the discrepancy between words and meaning. In this sense, creating a vocabulary of identity consists of assembling both words and gestures to reflect both mind and body more accurately: the ideal of the "proper balance" between reason and feeling in all areas of consciousness can thus be seen to mirror the ideal of identity itself, which is the marriage of complementary forces within an indivisible consciousness.

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Introduction

Both Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759 - 1767) and Frances Burney's *Evelina* (1783) display a concern for identity and the problems of articulating and communicating "selfhood" to others, whether it be among the characters in the novel or between writer and reader. That this concern for identity is described through language and in relation to the "other" focuses the problems clearly: in isolation, the anxiety of self-definition can never be resolved; in conversation, the ambiguities of language make resolution very difficult. Raymond Williams, in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1983), sets out to discuss the historical evolution of certain words and their associated meanings: "When we come to say 'we just don't speak the same language' we mean something more general [than semantic or linguistic technicalities]: [we mean] that we have different immediate values or different kinds of valuation, or that we are aware, often intangibly, of different formations and distributions of energy and interest" (11). He goes on to define vocabulary as "a shared body of words and meanings in our most general discussions ... of the practices and institutions which we group as *culture* and *society*" (15). This vocabulary, centering on culture and society,

is significantly not the specialized vocabulary of a specialized discipline, though it often overlaps with several of these, but a general vocabulary ranging from strong, difficult and persuasive words in everyday usage

to words which, beginning in specialized contexts, have become quite common in descriptions of wider areas of thought and experience. This, significantly, is the vocabulary we share with others, often imperfectly, when we wish to discuss many of the central processes of our common life. (14)

Both *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina* develop what I will call a “vocabulary of identity”, that is, a set of particular words or phrases which become, over the course of reading the texts, associated with ideas of character and singularity. Singular identity can exist only within a context of plurality or society, however, as without that context singularity itself could not make sense: “The complex of senses [of the word culture] indicates a complex argument about the relations between general human development and a particular way of life, and between both and the works and practices of art and intelligence” (91). Herein lies the paradox of identity in the particular: the inscription of private identity upon a public persona, while yet retaining the integrity of private selfhood.

The stylistic differences between *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina* are perhaps what make the similarities in theme so interesting to explore: Sterne and Burney, from very different and distinct perspectives, approach the idea of identity and the concern for accuracy in self-expression in ways that complement and enhance the understanding of eighteenth-century notions of language and the self in its context of society. It is precisely because their methods seem so antithetical that I have chosen these two novels as examples to illustrate my thesis: my approach to the study of identity and language in the later third of the eighteenth century seeks to be as broadly applicable as

possible within the limitations prescribed. For this reason, I have chosen two works which initially seem quite disparate; upon closer examination, however, I will demonstrate that the central issues are strikingly similar in their intense concern for a balance between private self and public persona without compromising either.

As well, I wished to compare in two texts the intimate nature of conversation between reader and author: the epistolary form of *Evelina* and the direct address of *Tristram Shandy* allowed for such a comparison. Both novels, perhaps because of their conversational tone, also amplify the narrative with the mirroring presence of the actual reader and author against the fictional reader(s) and author(s). Thus the actual relationship of one to another is reflected in the fictional relationship of character to character within the narrative. Finally, Burney and Sterne both show a keen sense of language, and, in their fiction, are able to amplify words with meaning -- in effect, expression is only partly linguistic. This is not to say that other texts do not qualify for this kind of comparative enquiry; on the contrary, it is hoped that this thesis could be applied to any number of other texts (such as Defoe's novels, or Richardson's). I chose *Tristram Shandy* as one of a pair because it seems almost never to be considered in this manner (as if it were a text that one cannot consider in relation to any other); I chose *Evelina* because of its ostensible stylistic conventionality masks a spirit of humanistic consciousness which, in its own quiet way, is as controversial as *Tristram Shandy*.

Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977), says that "From being an art of unbearable sensations [i.e. physical torture] punishment has become an economy of suspended rights [i.e. prison]" (Foucault 11) and "the soul is [then] the prison of the body" (30). The notion of punishing the soul while maintaining the (relative) health of the body is a notion which Foucault connects with the "birth of the prison" in the eighteenth-century; it is also another way of describing the "body as text", as both views recognize that identity or self exists in the mind, and that the mind can feel (whether pain or pleasure) in deeper and more significantly lasting ways than the body. As such, self-expression originates in the mind or soul, and its reflection in the body is just that -- a reflection.

The notion of selfhood is one which Anne Ferry, in *The "Inward" Language* (1983), also examines in historical terms. She posits Hamlet

as an individual aware of having what a modern writer would call an *inner life* or a *real self*. Yet almost none of the terms now used to describe Hamlet as a figure displaying a distinctively modern consciousness existed in the sixteenth century. ... What means were in fact available in the English language to poets of the period for depicting what is in the heart will be the measure of their inventions. (Ferry 29 - 30)

How much and how little the English language had developed between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries with regard to the notion of selfhood is a question which calls to be addressed in this discussion of *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina*. Charles Taylor, in his monumental work *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989), suggests that "the language [in the latter half of the

eighteenth-century] needed to interpret the order of nature is not one we read off a publicly available gamut of correspondences; it has to take shape out of the resonances of the world within us. It is a 'subtler language'" (Taylor, 302). He goes on to associate the "new cult of sensibility" with a renewed appreciation for nature, both of which, he claims, signal a "profound cultural change". He quotes Sterne on the definition of sensibility as "the Eternal fountain of our feeling ... the divinity which stirs within " (from *A Sentimental Journey*). "This phrase", Taylor concludes, "... captures both the centrality of feeling and its link to the sense that our moral sources are within us, in an inner nature which marks what is significant for us" (302).

The "cult of sensibility", in which Sterne played so great a part, continues the development of articulating the notion of the self in the eighteenth century. The concern for linguistic self-expression is still quite problematic, especially in Burney's *Evelina*, where the problem of identity is complicated by social factors for the main character. (Sterne also shows concern with social factors, though his scope is somewhat more limited to one-on-one relationships). In the character of Evelina, and through her own words, the reader enters into a kind of understanding of the difficulties of existence and representation: Evelina is herself inscribed into a text, -- that is, she is personified as a text, as her expression is manifested in her face and her gestures, and others are expected to "read" her -- and as readers of her narrative we are also asked to "read" her directly. When she cannot speak (to Lord

Orville, or to Villars) she can write her meaning on her face (just as her parentage is recognized in the resemblance to her mother in her features); yet she is still misread. The limits of her expression of self are suffocating in the sense that she cannot use language to supplement her text in public; as the novel progresses, she learns how to manage "body-expression" more effectively.

Foucault's formulation that "the soul is the prison of the body", however, serves also to remind us that while self-expression originates in the soul, it is also inhibited by the very tool of self-expression -- language.

Malcolm Bowie explains Jacques Lacan's ideas about linguistic limitations:

Desire is the subject matter of psychoanalysis, but something is always left out when the analyst writes about it. A shadow has fallen across his page and will not go away. However hard he tries to 'articulate desire' -- by constructing a theory of it, say -- desire will always spill out from his sentences, diagrams or equations. But theories should not be silent on that which eludes them, Lacan insists. (Bowie 1)

The perseverance of the will to articulate the inarticulable -- to communicate -- is the essence of Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, in which the text and the body of Tristram's self are symbiotically elided. The impossibility of finishing the *Life* before the end of his life is the "shadow that falls across his page and will not go away". Yet, somehow, despite this shadow, his unique desire does not "spill out from his sentences" -- at least not so as to leave them empty, as Bowie's use of the words intends: the text of *Tristram Shandy* is replete with Tristram Shandy, with laughter and with meaning. How is Sterne able to

do this, in spite of the shadow of inarticulate desire? "The evanescence of the beautiful object, Freud suggests, does not reduce and may enhance its charm: 'a flower that blossoms only for a single night does not seem to us on that account less lovely'" (Bowie 8, quoting Freud). Perhaps in his very awareness -- insistence, even -- on his own mortality, Tristram evokes a sense of fleeting selfhood in the text which renders in his readers the meaning and significance of desire -- not as the subject of psychoanalysis (for such a thing did not exist for him) but as the subject of fiction.

John Preston, in *The Created Self: The Reader's Role in Eighteenth-Century Fiction* (1970), comments on the

concept of the 'created self', the 'reader' invented by the author in order to make his fictional world work. He is in this sense a fictional reader; yet, as [Wayne] Booth notes, he is a fiction the real reader is willing to co-operate with. He represents what the reader will have to become in order to take possession of the whole fictional experience. He stands for a desired reading. (2)

Sterne, as Tristram, is not trying to "articulate desire" by constructing a theory of it (though he does include diagrams and equations of sorts); indeed, rather than using language to define or theorize, he uses language to express feeling in physical terms and manages to convey essence. Like Lacan's view of psychoanalysis, Sterne's subject is one

of common things -- of speech as the vehicle of desire, of the connections between those desires that are directly speakable and those that are not, and of the reciprocal pressures that speakers exert on each other. Far from being a cult of 'theory', Lacan would claim, psychoanalysis studies that which is most distinctively human in human beings, which is the constitution of the speaking subject in relation to others. (Bowie 16).

Through the medium of fiction, Sterne is able to express the inarticulable without actually articulating it, because the medium of fiction can absorb theatrical elements to include visual aspects of expression as well as those of aural speech-sound. In this way, the body can take part in the language of the mind/soul within the text, thereby expanding the possibilities of expression in a way that is not always available to the more technical style of writing associated with psychoanalysis. Furthermore, the reader's contribution of reading potentially expands on the imaginative aspects of the writer's expression:

the reader is involved in an activity much more complex and challenging than would be suggested by the notion of 'identification'. ... reading [must be seen] as an ideal conversation. 'Fiction has to be seen', [D.W. Harding] writes, '...as a convention, a convention for enlarging the scope of the discussions we have with each other about what may befall.' There is more to reading than vicarious experience or 'identification'. It is a matter of joining 'with the novelist or dramatist in the psychological act of giving them [i.e. our desires] statement in a social setting'. (Preston 5)

In this way, fiction aspires to the imaginative and revelatory qualities hitherto associated with poetry, replacing the poetic restrictions of rhyme and metre with those of grammar and syntax in prose.

Burney's *Evelina* takes advantage of the fictional medium in a similar way: as I have pointed out, when her speech is limited by social convention, her features (and to a lesser extent, her gestures) may compensate somewhat in conveying her state of mind or her feelings. As in *Tristram Shandy*, this method

of self-expression works to aid others in an interpretation of the text of her selfhood. In *Evelina*, however, the misreadings of others within the text are significantly more meaningful in a social sense than those found in *Tristram Shandy*; for it is Evelina's express desire to reflect her private self onto an accurate public self, without compromising either (as opposed to Tristram, whose express desire is far more complicated). Evelina affords the reader a perspective which is familiarly realistic in its anxieties about the "other" of the social order and the need to inscribe one's self into that order of others without losing the integrity of personality. (It is the sincerity of this express desire that distinguishes it most from the more self-conscious desires of Tristram, as Sterne's unexpressed desires are a constant ironic undertone in *The Life and Opinions*.) In this way, Evelina's text is inscribed with the conventional desire to be recognized and to be loved in recognition: through her father Lord Belmont, and through Lord Orville, she seeks to confirm the identity she has formed through dialogue with Villars without losing or compromising the latter. Furthermore, "All the characters in the novel are readers; they are as much involved in reading letters as in writing them; the process of reading and writing is itself a significant part of the drama" (Preston 3). In this sense, the epistolary form of *Evelina* invokes an implicit invitation to the reader to participate in the "conversation" of the narrative.

Kristina Straub, in *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (1987), suggests that "The ability to sustain and express contradiction is both a

response to ideological conflicts in the culture and strategy for female psychic survival in mid-eighteenth-century life" (3). She goes on to explain:

The idea that women learned to be two-faced, to dissemble, to hide their 'true' selves from the world is one of the insights of radical feminism that feminist literary critics have incorporated into their readings of pre-twentieth-century literary texts. ... [A] masking presence acceptable to male-dominated culture and an inner self that is essentially female [must co-exist for the latter to survive]. (5 - 6)

Indeed, it is true (even today) that women's "laborings to be beautiful suggest a dangerous artfulness, a false and treacherous ordering of fragments" (13); and the fairy-tale quality of *Evelina's* narrative would seem to support an awareness on Burney's part of the duplicity inherent in this strategy. On this point, Straub agrees with Terry Castle, who, in *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century Culture and Fiction* (1986), says that "For Burney ... not surprisingly, the gynesium of masquerade is an entirely provocative domain -- a charismatic part of the landscape of the imagination" (255). With regard to the masquerade, Castle describes the liberating implications of anonymity for women: "By divesting her of her name -- a name inevitably associated with the power of husband or father -- anonymity obscured a woman's place within patriarchy. Under patriarchy woman's name is never her own but merely inscribes her secondary status" (254 - 5). In this sense, until she is "recognized" by Belmont and/or married to Orville, Evelina exists in a kind of masquerade: alone in society, she plays the part of an educated and beautiful young woman with all the trappings and properties of that role. That her role is incongruous

in the company of Mme Duval and the Branghtons, or that her sincerity in playing it is not recognized by the various lords and ladies of fashionable society, is Burney's way of commenting on how badly Evelina "plays a role": "confrontation with fashionable metropolitan life is Burney's primary metaphor for learning one's place in the symbolic [social] order" (Castle 260) which does not make room for sincerity. Evelina is misread because she, ironically, is the only one in the masquerade who does not carry the mask of her name.

In the same way, Sterne is quite sincere in carrying the mask of Tristram's name in *The Life and Opinions*, but to a very different effect. The concerns with identity and expression are just as problematic as in *Evelina*, but Sterne uses another aspect of masquerade in a much more elemental way than Burney does:

The history of human pleasures -- of festivities, games, jokes, and amusements -- has seldom met with the same dignified attention accorded the history of human suffering. Wars, plagues, and collective miseries of all kinds have always been conventional historical and philosophical topoi; laughter, as Mikhail Bakhtin observed in his monumental work on carnival, has not. This imbalance reflects a standard interpretation of experience: that suffering is perpetual, fundamental to human life, and hence worthy of discourse. Pleasures, felt to be discontinuous and fleeting (not to mention morally and theologically problematic), remain trivial. In Goethe's words, 'the most lively and exquisite delights are, like horses racing past, the experience of an instant only, which leaves scarcely a trace on our soul.' How to write a history of such instants? (Castle 1)

It is this imbalance in the interpretation of experience that Sterne seeks to redress with his plagiarized mockery of the "worthy discourse" of Walter

Shandy and Tristram. Yet Tristram can also appreciate the exquisite fleeting pleasure of a flower that blooms only for one night. It is this evanescent discontinuity that characterizes the discourse between *The Life and Opinions* and the reader: the instant of understanding may leave only a trace on the soul, but many traces make a pattern from which the soul can read itself to others; the pattern, which Sterne calls a “hobby-horse”¹, can also be called the vocabulary of the self, through which we attempt to hold up our most sincere (if sometimes ridiculous) masks to the world.

¹ When Sterne discusses the hobby-horse, he says that “if you are able to give but a clear description of the nature of the one[i.e. the hobby-horse], you may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other [i.e. the ‘body of the rider’]” (1:24, 99). Please note that all references to Sterne’s work are to *Tristram Shandy* unless otherwise noted. Volume and chapter numbers are followed by page references to the Penguin edition.

I. Laurence Sterne and “the proper balance”

“Truth is to be found in errors and misapprehensions of all sorts, in nonsense and word-play, in the wanderings of sense through the labyrinth of the dream-work. It cannot inhere in individual states of mind or states of affairs, and can only be syncopated and spasmodic.” -- Lacan’s brief reconstruction of Freud’s books on dreams, slips and jokes, from Bowie, 114

The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy is a text about words and bodies which uses bodies and words to describe what it is about. Laurence Sterne himself (through Tristram) claims that “the machinery of my work is of a species by itself: two contrary notions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which are thought to be at variance. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too, -- and at the same time” (Sterne, 1:22, 95). Indeed, much of the novel seems concerned, in one way or other, with “the proper balance” (3:20, 206) between chronology and memory, reason and feeling, the male and female readers, language and gesture, writing and reading, expression and response. If anyone seems to take the side of one thing over another (such as Walter Shandy, who sides with strict reason and the omnipotent word) then he is unambiguously shown to be a fool. Even Tristram himself, whose acknowledged task -- to write the entirety of his life and opinions -- is impossible as he defines it, is capable of seeing the imbalance inherent in such a task: “Tristram intimates his control over the telling of his stories but at the

same time implicitly acknowledges that if the story were utterly controlled he would have no need to stop the action to make something clear" (Dick, 32). Through the figure of the hobby-horse, Tristram can imply the necessity of trying to express himself in his chosen form despite the likelihood that he will fail -- because it is in his nature as a human being to use language in such an effort. "In *Tristram Shandy*, words resemble the coach horse that threatened to trample Dr. Slop but merely splashes him with mud: they are less dangerous than what they spatter about them, [which are] the associated meanings that muddy discourse" (Oakleaf, 1987, 62). And Sterne, through Tristram, treats them as such with an awareness that both incites laughter and elevates the possibilities of interpretation. Sterne's comic reductions of logic and language convey their limitations as communicative tools; the additions of gesture and feeling allow the systematic elements of expression to acquire a symbolic resonance as well. The co-operation of various modes of expression then acquires a significant place in memory, and thus in the formulation of identity: "There are some trains of certain ideas which leave prints of themselves about our eyes and eye-brows; and there is a consciousness of it, somewhere about the heart, which serves but to make these etchings the stronger -- we see, spell and put them together without a dictionary" (5:1, 343). The "reader's persistent attempt to read *Tristram Shandy* like a conventional novel" (Simpson 155) is the hobby-horse we are conditioned to ride: to read words only, in a straight line from beginning to finish and, if we can, remarking instruction and delight in

equal proportion in the writer's rhetoric. Sterne, however, insists that "there is nothing unmixt in this world" (Simpson 146, quoting Sterne from *A Sentimental Journey*), and we will not find *The Life and Opinions* so easy or so predictable.

The necessarily complex and fluid state of human existence requires the co-existence of tragedy and comedy, reason and feeling, language and gesture, masculine and feminine principles. In order to do this most effectively,

Tristram puts his readers into the playful, pleasure-seeking attitude that characterizes gossip; we find ourselves in the same frame of mind as Walter Shandy, who suggests [while his wife is giving birth to Tristram] that, 'as we have nothing better to do, at least till Obadiah gets back', we might as well extract some pleasure from what is at hand -- in this case, a sermon on conscience (2:15 [136 - 7]). (Stovel 118)

By thus easing his audience into a sense of comfort and familiarity, he facilitates the involvement of the reader in the very process of his own writing:

I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and expecting that your knowledge of my character, and of what kind of mortal I am, by the one, would give you a better relish for the other: As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance that is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship. ... Therefore, my dear friend and companion ... bear with me, -- and let me go on, and tell my story my own way: -- ... courteously give me credit of a little more wisdom than appears on my outside; -- and as we jog on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short do any thing, -- only keep your temper. (1:6, 41)

In this way, the reader can enter into an imaginative and symbolic dialogue with Tristram, and the text becomes a conversation.

The significance of this conversation recalls the language theories of Lacan, as well as the actual language of Lacan himself as Richard Macksey has

noted: "Sterne like Lacan writes texts (at once 'written' and 'spoken') that displace and deconstruct themselves in the very process of their production. His style, quirky, discontinuous, and deliberately odd like Lacan's, inhabits time and triumphantly accepts its own incompleteness" (1007). The texts of these two authors are much like an actual conversation, where each participant does not always get to finish a thought or argument owing to interruptions. As well, conversations tend to continue in each participant's mind, sometimes long after the gathering has ended: in the same ways, Sterne's and Lacan's odd and quirky words tend to reverberate in the reader's mind (perhaps because they are so odd). This aspect of conversation within Sterne's novel, like the aspects of gossip noted by Bruce Stovel, deepen the quality of the reader's involvement: what is at first playful and pleasure-seeking becomes potentially insightful and rewarding for the reader -- yet without losing the sense of playfulness.

Ruth Perry, in her article "Words for Sex: The Verbal-Sexual Continuum in *Tristram Shandy*" (1988), suggests that for Sterne, as for Freud and Lacan, "language is co-extensive with sexuality ... sex was just another language and language just another form of sex" (27). She goes on to explain the basis for Lacan's thoughts about language:

the consequence of mediating lived experience with language, according to Lacan, is the evolution of an unconscious structured like language and with the logic of a language. This linguistically structured unconscious represents the repressed content of experience, that which has been excluded by conscious use of this symbolic system. As the developing

human being is increasingly alienated from desire by social interdictions, mediated by language, the repressed content of that desire structures itself below the surface of consciousness. The symbolic systems of language and of the unconscious thus develop simultaneously and interdependently, like a weaving in which what appears on one side of the cloth determines the pattern on the other side. Seen this way, language acquisition [like rhetoric] is the process which distances, mediates and contains original desire; the unconscious [like humour] is the repository of that which is distanced, mediated and contained by the individual's entry into the symbolic order. (Perry 28)

If the unconscious is structured with the logic of a language, then it makes sense that language can express the repressed content of that unconscious. It also makes sense that an appeal to the unconscious -- through feeling or humour -- can reinscribe and reanimate the desire that has been alienated by "conscious use" of the "symbolic system" of language. Similarly, Sterne uses rhetoric to undermine rhetorical values while reinscribing them with the particularly human quality of desire through comic and sentimental appeals. The paradox, as with all paradoxes, exists only in the realm of logic; the only resolution is to comprehend that resolution is unnecessary and perhaps even impossible. In order to reach this level of understanding, we must let reason exist in tandem with feeling; language and desire must be able to co-exist to achieve the proper balance. To this end, Sterne undermines rhetoric by showing its absurdity in Walter Shandy. Yet he still uses it himself, because it is not to be dispensed with entirely. As John Traugott points out in *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric* (1954):

[Sterne] argued to his readers, using their own responses as his illustrations. ... Tobys and Walters understand one another when they

understand the human need of organizing one's own associations and symbols into some meaningful pattern. ... Evil for Sterne is not the wearing of a mask, but the assumption that Your Worship alone of all men is not wearing a mask. Sterne enjoyed pulling down masks, but only so that the wearer might not forget the accouterment.
(xiii)

Seen this way, Sterne can then use references to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* or Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as examples of the human need to organize -- just as Walter's bowling green, Walter's *Tristrapoedia* and *Tristram's Life and Opinions* are those characters' methods of making sense out of their respective existences. And while the comparison may not necessarily invalidate Burton's or Locke's texts, it does redeem them from the charge of infallibility -- just as it redeems the Shandys from complete and utter dismissal: "Sterne offers laughter as a fence against infirmities, not as a cure of them ... 'Shandyism' is [defined by] its determination to expect from life only what life will afford" (Lamb 795). It is this ability to recontextualize initial impressions and conceptions that typifies Sterne's particular use of rhetoric: he shows the reader, rather than telling him, and this respect for the reader's ability to interpret deepens the sense of familiar companionship and conversation.

Familiarity is further reinforced by a sense of sincerity and the continuity provided by the "frame-tale" of "the communication between the reader and his author (through the fool's mask of Tristram)" (Traugott 81). K.G. Simpson describes how, "by means of comedy Sterne warns against ...

polarization and prolongation of emotion as being self-indulgent and false to nature" (147) such as in the melodrama of LeFever's death scene:

In the main he eschews physical description ... (the point is made explicitly when a space is left in which the reader may draw the widow Wadman). What is essential in Sterne's view is that the reader should have knowledge of the character's mind. Since for Sterne it is the movement of the consciousness through past and present experience that largely constitutes individual identity, the novelist must render that consciousness in order to present a credible character. This means, in addition, that Sterne rejects emotional fixity and the sustaining of any emotional note as being false to the nature of experience. For Sterne emotions are complex or, if they are single, they rarely endure for long. (Simpson 150).

Sterne's language invites the reader to feel the evanescence of each character's "past and present experience"; such feelings, like Tristram's own opinions, it is to be hoped will "give a better relish" for the life and liveliness of the character. Notions of identity are thus assembled in *Tristram Shandy* in a way that reflects "a concept of individuality [that] is dependent on particularity of place and time" (Miriam Allott, quoted in Simpson 149), and Tristram's difficulties in finishing his *Life and Opinions* show "that the complexity of experience cannot be rendered through the limited medium of language, but he also suggests that, unlike language, communication need not be time-bound; in place of the time-language co-ordinates he suggests the possibilities for communication in the relationship of spatiality and silence" (Simpson 150). Like a memoir, identity is a compilation of "Thoughts [which] cannot be timed like calendars or clocks; they span timeless worlds inside one. Writing is the link" (Sereny, 674). In the *Life and Opinions*, Tristram attempts to bridge the gap

between the “timeless world within” and the reasonable world around him, he supplements his vocabulary with “spatiality and silence”.

Uncle Toby provides another example of the attempt to communicate in this way:

When my uncle Toby got his map of Namur to his mind, he began immediately to apply himself, and with the utmost diligence, to the study of it; for nothing being of more importance to him than his recovery, and his recovery depending, as you have read, upon the passions and affections of his mind, it behoved him to take the nicest care to make himself so far master of his subject, as to be able to talk upon it without emotion. ... But the desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it. The more my uncle Toby pored over his map, the more he took a liking to it ... (2:3, 109)

In transferring the need for physical recovery to the intellectual exercises of the map of Namur, Toby translates his body into a map, a site which can be interpreted in scientific detachment. His language then becomes the military lingo associated with his maps -- except that, carried to Shandean extreme, he reduces everything into this lingo, with the result that only Trim can really understand him. In this way, Toby isolates himself: like a damaged short-wave radio, he can receive signals but cannot reply in kind. Toby's relationships with Trim and with his brother Walter, despite his self-induced linguistic isolation, are the only things that redeem him from complete insanity. Toby's failure to communicate is ironically made in the course of his attempts to find a new way to communicate; like his brother Walter, Toby isolates himself in a too-great dependence on one thing: Walter with excess of reason, Toby with excess of feeling. Each brother tips the “proper balance” too far.

Toby's attempts at communication, however extreme, recall the relationship between sex and language about which Ruth Perry wrote²: the body can participate in communication (which is the realm of language) and language can function in the realm of sensation or feeling. This kind of "interdisciplinary" co-operation is figured most strongly in the double figure of Tristram's life and his text: it would seem that each contributes to the other: "Man and hobby-horse, Tristram claims, are like soul and body: 'long journeys and much friction' create electric charges between the two that redefine both, so that ultimately 'a clear description of the nature of one ... may form a pretty exact notion of the genius and character of the other' (1.24.86)" (Ostovich 326). Helen Ostovich, in her article "Reader as Hobby-horse in *Tristram Shandy*" (1989), goes on to focus on the relationship between Madam reader and Tristram:

Arguably, by subverting or distorting conventional male sexuality in the analogues to Walter's clock-work, Toby's war-wound, Tristram's circumcision, even Phutatorius's hot chestnut and Diego's gigantic nose, Tristram is also rejecting the purely male perspective as farcically inadequate. Instead, Tristram proposes literary and sexual roles not hampered by strict notions of gender and performance, but played with and shared for mutual pleasure and whatever enlightenment comes with it. (328)

In fact, as Ostovich points out, feminine silence does not -- at least in "Shandyworld" -- signal Sterne's misogyny: "both Mrs. Shandy and Madam cause argument to break down into quibble [and this] is a clue to their practical purpose in the narrative as deflators of witty extravagance, representatives of

² Perry 27; see p. 16.

the 'comic irreverence' of reality, reminders of our absurd physicality, fragile and vulnerable no matter how high the spirit flies" (336).

The allegation of Sterne's misogyny is a mistake that many feminist critics -- Ruth Perry among them -- fall into. She seems almost personally offended that "the narrative spotlight comes to rest most often and most continually on men alone, talking" (39), and quite misses Sterne's point in this "spotlighting" that masculine reason is isolating and non-productive. As Marco Loverso puts it succinctly, "The result of this thesis-centred approach to the sexual metaphor is that the gynocentric argument, like the phallogocentric argument, describes the structure of *Tristram Shandy* [or, potentially, any other text] only partially" (379). The mistake of assuming that Sterne is misogynistic on the basis of the relative silence of his female characters is an example of the kind of unbalanced reasoning that *The Life and Opinions* ridicules in Walter Shandy, and does not allow the possibility that silence can be a different (and equally significant) kind of agency; it also disallows the possibility that the (silent) body can have unbiased (in terms of gender) communicative value.

"'Humour, after all,' says Virginia Woolf, 'is closely bound up with a sense of the body'" (McMaster 198). Sterne is as aware of the body as he is of language, and he uses both in the development of the novel, as Juliet McMaster goes on to note:

Tristram can swear until he is blue in the face that by 'nose' he means nothing but 'the external organ of smelling' (III, 33, 221) but the more he protests the more he suggests something at least a yard below. And so

with all the multiple and continuous double entendres in the novel; there seems to be scarcely a word or an image that can be sustained at a purely intellectual level: everything tends eventually towards a bodily and sexual inference. (208)

The aspect of physical humour and the “visual orientation of verbal art” (Holtz

6) emphasizes the work of the eye, enjoining the reader to see, spell and put

things together without a dictionary. In his M.A. thesis, *Performing Text:*

Laurence Sterne's The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman and the

Theatrical Paradox (1994), Alexander John Dick makes interesting points about

the visual element of the text and the prominence of the concept of performance

in *Tristram Shandy*. He points out that the rhetorical tradition in which Sterne

was trained regarded the descriptive elements of “writing” and of “painting” as

analogous (see also Holtz 6). Furthermore, the terms of theatrical performance

in the eighteenth century were considered supremely capable of bringing the

two elements together through the addition of a third element, which is

performance³: “The awareness of performative conditions exposes the mask as

mask, the actor as *actor*, the theatre as *theatre*[;] nevertheless in order to continue

the play, those falsehoods must be retained” (8). Similarly, in Sterne’s novel,

we are aware that Sterne is not Tristram, we as readers are not “Sir” or

“Madam”, and the novel is a text of fiction -- nevertheless, we read on,

retaining these falsehoods as would an audience in a theatre.

³ It is important to note here that a theatrical performance in the eighteenth-century took place in an environment that was significantly less controlled than it is today: the audience, by all accounts, was vociferously capable of adding its voice to their performance -- much like participants in a conversation.

"Drama is a genre, a type of textual combination of established and recognized conventions; theatre is an event, a delicately composed performance, and in spite of numerous attempts to regulate it, *utterly open to disruption*" (Dick 14, italics mine). Like Terry Castle's ideas about the masquerade, Sterne puts on "the fool's mask of Tristram" and disrupts his own proceedings (literally, in the case of the sermon on conscience). His text surpasses "textness" and aspires to the performative quality of a theatrical event, a performance which is "utterly open to disruption" -- if only his own.

Just as the use of language immediately infers a theatricality or role-playing of 'the self', so Sterne's narrative self-consciousness has suggested to many critics ... the encroaching awareness or anxiety of 'the self' as a constructed or theatrical identity. The need for personal understanding breeds dialogue, which in turn breeds more mystery -- and thus more dialogue. (Dick 93)

Sterne's role-playing is the essence of the conversational relationship with the reader: the extent of the relationship resides, and is limited by, the text. In the end comes the realization that this story is all about a COCK and a BULL -- perhaps one of the best of its kind, but still, nothing more than an albeit capitalized cock and bull story; and

The signifier becomes a versatile topological space ... "The subject" is no longer a substance endowed with qualities, or a fixed shape possessing dimensions, or a container awaiting the multifarious contents that experience provides: it is a series of events within language, a procession of turns, tropes and inflections. "A signifier is that which represents the subject for another signifier" (Bowie 76)

Sterne thereby dispenses with the “dark covering of uncrystalized flesh” -- which he has never put much stock in anyway -- and inhabits the text of *The Life and Opinions* as his own body:

our knowledge ... ha[s] gradually been creeping upwards towards that ‘Αχμη’ of their perfections, from which, if we may form a conjecture from the advances of these last seven years, we cannot possibly be far off.

When that happens, it is to be hoped, it will put an end to all kind of writings whatsoever; -- the want of all kind of writing will put an end to all kind of reading; -- and that in time, *As war begets poverty; poverty peace* -- must, in course, put an end to all kinds of knowledge, and then -- we shall have all to begin over again; or in other words, be exactly where we started. (1:21, 88)

To be “exactly where we started” is the narrative thrust of Tristram’s *Life and Opinions*: at the moment of conception. But is it a literal, physical conception, or the intellectual conception of the text? Must it be one or the other? Ultimately, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is a text about words and bodies and how my words and body converse with yours. Sterne means us to retain both conceptions of “conception” always in mind, the better to understand the true meaning of the thing.⁴

⁴ It is fitting at this point to direct the reader to return to the epigraph at the beginning of the chapter, before proceeding to the next.

II. The Masquerade and Evelina

“The tangible is the ultimate state of things.”
-- Isaac de l'Étoile

According to Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language*, character is “A representation of any man as to his personal qualities”. David Oakleaf goes on to paraphrase Johnson, saying that character “is also a piece of type, handwriting, or an account” (Oakleaf [1991] fn. 9, 344). It is important, when discussing Frances Burney's *Evelina*, to keep this definition in mind, as the novel has much to do with the portrayal, perception and manipulation of character. “Evelina's task was fundamentally to *identify* herself and to enforce, in social and economic terms, that identification in a publicly sanctioned way” (Epstein 281). This task is complicated by her gender, social values, and the ever-problematic medium of language. A disturbing tendency among critics to elide Burney's fictional character with the author herself further confounds the discussion.

Kristina Straub, for instance, in her book *Divided Fictions: Fanny Burney and Feminine Strategy* (1987), asserts that

When *Evelina's* success forced Burney into the public life of literary London, the claims to a public voice implicit in *her writing* came into conflict with that part of *her femininity* which did not authorize power outside the realm of the personal. Writing was still a means to self-definition, but it also implied a kind of authority -- a public, not a

personal sense of control -- that disconnected power from the private self in which Burney's journals, written after the success of *Evelina*, show her seeking to invest writerly authority. (153, italics mine)

Here it is easy to see how Straub assumes that Burney wrote fiction for the public in the same way that she wrote to herself, privately, in her journals. The conflict Straub seeks to name is one that sufficiently manifests itself in the fictional work -- the conflict between the feminine value of reticence and the implicitly public ambitions of a female writer. If Burney does go on to "seek writerly authority" through private means, then these private means are limited to a private authority in self-definition. If Straub truly wishes to support her claim for the afore-mentioned conflict, why does she not refer to the later fiction of Burney? Why does she find it necessary to support "fiction" with "fact" -- as if Burney's life validates (or invalidates) any aspect of the novel *Evelina*? David Oakleaf has also raised this point in his criticism of Katherine M. Rogers, who, he says,

contrasts the novels' conventions with the journals' revelations: 'Burney's heroines show the destructive effects of cultural stereotyping; she herself shows the triumph of natural character over stereotype.' ... They [critics who elide Burney with *Evelina*] dislike *Evelina*'s subservience to social convention and reduce Burney, a comic novelist in the tradition of Smollett and Sterne, to a cliché, the sensitive soul thwarted by stultifying literary and social conventions. ... *Self-centred* critics miss the drama of stable private self grappling with an uncertain social identity in a world where public views of identity were, though challenged, socially ascendant. They salvage the journals by savaging the novels, though the novels established the diarist's public identity. ... the social authority of private identity is what is at issue in *Evelina*. (Oakleaf [1991] 343)

In other words, by assuming that the novels are autobiographical, Burney's fictional works are rendered secondary; her quality and maturity as a writer, furthermore, is undermined, as the assumption implies that she could write of nothing but herself in any genre.

All the above means to clarify the distinction between the study of Burney's life from that of her novels; and that my own examination will focus on the latter, and specifically *Evelina*. Since the journals of an author are available to critics, it would be unfortunate if they were completely ignored. In the case of Frances Burney, however, too much emphasis has been placed on the reflections of one in the other and too little has been written about the fiction itself.⁵

That being said, it seems natural to begin this discussion about Burney's *Evelina, or, The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World* (1778) with a look at the epistolary form, which is supremely adapted to the novel's central conflict between private and public identity. Irene Tucker, in her article "Writing Home: *Evelina*, the Epistolary Novel and the Paradox of Property" (1993), relates the case of *Pope v. Curl* (1741) in which the dispute involved Curl's publication of some of Pope's letters without first obtaining permission from the author. Judge Hardwicke's decision (June 1741) "rejected Curl's contention that a letter constitutes a gift from sender to receiver" and

⁵ In light of the comparative nature of this paper, I wish also to emphasize that Sterne and Tristram are not analogous to Burney and *Evelina*. This point will be explored again in chapter three.

"award[ed] Pope control over only the letters the poet himself had written". The recipient of a letter has legal control over the paper and ink he receives, and the writer of a letter retains possession of "the intangible ideas and expression contained within" the letter (419). Thus the separation of the "ideal" text and the "actual" text is articulated in the mid-eighteenth century in a way not seen before -- that is, in the public sphere.

In the epistolary novel, the author invokes the idea of the letter "while many of the material aspects are held in abeyance" such as "the fact that the letters are printed rather than handwritten [and] that there are no envelopes or seals" (424): "The form of the epistolary novel is characterized by an implicit doubleness of both [ideal and "real-life" counterpart], since along with the writer and addressee of any given letter within the novel there exists a second writer and addressee -- the author of the novel and the novel's readers" (422). In the form of the epistolary novel, then, Burney allows for the same kind of mirroring effect that we have seen in the performative aspects of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: Tristram's identity behind the "narrative" of his conception and birth, or Toby's *amours*, and his direct address to the reader, construct a drama within a drama. As we have also seen, Sterne uses specifically theatrical/physical methods as well; and so does Burney, though her comedy is complicated by the discontinuity between Evelina's private and public roles. These discontinuities, according to Gina Campbell,

between public persona and private self [are thrown] into sharp relief

and by extension criticize modes of reading that discount such discontinuities. Furthermore, a demonstration of such discontinuities implicitly recommends a reading or writing process that concerns itself with the relationship between the private self and public mask, and modes of writing, such as the epistolary novel for example, that make the private public. (Campbell [1990] 561)

Here Campbell unwittingly shows another stylistic similarity between *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina*, in that Burney “shows” rather than “tells” the criticism she means to convey about the problems of public expression of a private self.

In fact, the various misreadings of Evelina’s character are largely at the fault of language as a model of expression: even in her letters, the “built-in” self-consciousness of an audience precludes an assumption of her honesty. “Paradoxically”, Campbell continues, “Evelina proves her virtue by her nonconformity: her ignorance of the forms of etiquette testifies to her pastoral origin, and her tearful explanations of the motives behind her trespasses attest to her superior internalization of the morality on which the rules of etiquette are based” ([1990] 561). More than this, though, her virtue is proven in her inability to be duplicitous -- in the sense that Straub seems to mean when she refers to feminine strategy as “a masking presence acceptable to male-dominated culture and an inner self that is essentially female” (6). This “feminine strategy” recalls Terry Castle’s notion of the masquerade; and both Straub and Castle agree that a female in the eighteenth century would have been forced into a pre-determined set of possible roles in a way that males of the same period would have been exempt.

That being said, however, we must remember that *Evelina* does not follow these pre-determinations. As Campbell testifies above, it is *Evelina*'s ignorance of social rules, as well as her lack of a patrinome to furnish her character for her *a priori*, that denote her situation. In fact, it is the lack of a "masking presence acceptable to male-dominated culture" that allows her the possibility to assert -- or to insert -- her "essentially female self" in its place. Straub, at the beginning of her book, comments that "Some of the best recent readings of ... *Evelina* ... suggest doubleness, a text that tries to go in two directions at once, toward both a 'realistic' assessment of female difficulties and the solution to those difficulties in the ideology of romantic love" (1). She then asks whether "this doubleness bespeak[s] ambiguity, duplicity, or mere confusion?" (1). Her book suggests that doubleness is an inherent quality for females in a male-dominated society, and that Burney's *Evelina* is satirically (i.e. feministically) ambiguous, thereby imposing the critic's views on those of the author; however, *Evelina*'s doubleness need not be interpreted as feminist in Straub's sense. And the ideology of romantic love, with its solution in marriage, need not be invalidated by *Evelina*'s double view of it.

Instead, Burney wraps a reality in an ideal fairy tale; *Evelina*'s "namelessness" puts her in the situation of a masquerade, only she has no mask. When she acquires her two name-masks -- Belmont and Orville -- she concludes the fairy tale of the orphan princess. The reality within the fairy tale is hinted at in the fact that there are two masks acquired; it consists of the

"entrance into the world" to which every one of us -- male and female alike -- must submit. That there are rules to learn, and that a public mask must be fashioned, attests to the existence of human civilization: men and women must have their masks (or hobby-horses) by which other men and women may identify them.

Marriage, too, is one of the rules of society; marriage allows the public union of two otherwise separate identities. Straub contends that Burney "presents us with a moral contradiction" in that she is "able to see the pain that the institution inflicts on women and [that she is] unable to see her way to any alternative" (59 - 60). Far from a "moral contradiction", I would argue that Burney's portrayal of the difficulties of marriage (such as the Mirvans', or even the Belmonts' or the Evelyns') is evidence of the reality within the fairy tale. Evelina's experiences with romantic love have not all been pleasurable; nor will her marriage be so. Indeed, nothing is wholly pleasurable, not even humour (i.e. Captain Mirvan) and it is this undercurrent which ensures that the novel is more than a simple romance. Even the beauty of youth is overshadowed by a particularly vulgar and inappropriate example of old age in Mme Duval; indeed, the greatest value is placed not on the masking qualities of society but on the inner qualities that Evelina, Orville and Villars put forward in place of a mask.

Through Villars, Evelina learns how to live life without a mask; this ability is what enables her to use her true face instead. And it is in her face that

Lord Belmont recognizes her public identity, and her “masklessness” that earns her Orville’s love. It is through this persistent ability to live without a mask that, though it brings her some pain, allows her to transcend the masquerade of public society and marks her as an equal to Lord Orville who has the same ability. “In *Evelina*, ... culture has become a spectacle, a place to see and be seen. ... [Burney] suggests the only art that can truly enlighten is not an art that can be seen” (Dykstal 560) -- that is, the art of writing. So it is that *Evelina* is an epistolary novel, where the characters must be portrayed in their own writing. So it is that *Evelina*, after receiving Sir Clement’s forgery of a letter and thinking it to be Orville’s, comments on “how differently the same man can *talk*, and *write*!” (266). She herself, of course, knows no difference between talking and writing.

She is a singularly consistent character, in fact; she acts in the same way that she writes and talks. “Significantly, *Evelina*’s abortive action [to help the fallen old woman in the race] is involuntary -- not a move considered in social consciousness, but an inarticulated and unformulated impulse outside the rules governing social activity” (Straub 49). In her urge to discredit the men who incite the incident of the old women’s race, Straub neglects to note that all of *Evelina*’s actions can be described this way. Indeed, *Evelina* falls rather nicely into the category of the disinherited and ingeniously impulsive country orphan on a journey to the city and back, during which she literally makes a name for herself. The difference between *Evelina* and *Joseph Andrews* or *Tom Jones*, is

that she is of course female,⁶ thus the fictional device is re-inscribed. It is hardly surprising when Oakleaf calls Evelina “a cipher -- both nothing and the social puzzle that exasperates Willoughby. Like a zero, she changes value with context. ... [when she is with the] Branghtons ... Willoughby ... ‘seems disposed to think that the alteration in [her] companions authorizes an alteration in his manners’ (p. 201)” ([1991] 347). Except that she does not actually change value with context: her cipher-like quality is only a perceived one, and only to those like Sir Clement who cannot imagine a person without a mask. As John Richetti has noted, Evelina’s status as orphan allows her

for the most part [to place] herself at the edge of the various social groups she observes. ... Her silence ... becomes in the context of her powers as a satiric recorder of the flawed discourse of others an elegant refusal to speak improperly, and to that extent her reticence becomes a distinct voice not heard before in eighteenth-century fiction. ... It is only in the subversive private world of her correspondence that she plays out the role of satirist that she assigns to Mrs. Selwyn, whose aggressive language displays a full command of the resources of language but whose violation of female decorum makes her in the end a comic figure and secondary player, lumped with other sorts of female marginality represented by Lady Louisa and Mrs. Beaumont. (270 - 271)

As he explains earlier in his article, Richetti does not mean “to claim that worthy female characters ... are mutes, but rather that speaking is not the center of their personalities and that they do not use speech for self-promotion or self-definition” (268) in the same way that male characters do. Just as in *Tristram Shandy*, eloquence in *Evelina* is not necessarily verbal; indeed, eloquence is often

⁶ And like her literary antecedents, her text’s title bears only her first name (cf. Roxana, Pamela, Clarissa, Amelia; and afterwards, Cecilia, Camilla, Emma, etc.)

unspoken.

And again, as in *Tristram Shandy*, non-verbal eloquence is an effective way of contriving the audience to “see” -- not as one looks, as at a masquerade, but with an “observing eye”: “One may take a share in a conversation without uttering a syllable. *The expression in the countenance shows it*, and this never escapes the observing eye” (John Gregory, quoted in Campbell [1990] 559; *italics mine*). In this way, Burney invokes and encourages the reader’s attention to the possibilities of non-verbal means of expression -- and as such, identity in *Evelina* is expressed in a situation very much like that of theatrical performance. Furthermore, the aspects of performance invoked in the novel tend often (though not exclusively) to be comic. John Hart, on the subject of comic action in *Evelina*, quotes Gérard Genette, who

describes the tension between ‘fixed significations’ such as in those of caricature and the uncertainty that breathes life into character by positing a “rhetoric of silence. ... Thus it breathes new life into the world, freeing it from the pressure of social meaning, which is a named meaning ... maintaining as long as possible that opening, that uncertainty of signs, which allows one to breathe”. (Hart 54)

Captain Mirvan is the most caricatured of *Evelina*’s characters, yet as Hart points out,

The discontinuity between consternation at Mirvan’s actions and the polite forbearance of those who treat him as a gentleman links him to other characters -- Evelina [herself], Mme Duval, the Branghtons, MacCartney [sic], and Mrs Selwyn -- who receive a divided response because their status is contested or because they challenge the status ascribed to them. The dissonance lends them an air of uncertainty that, to echo Genette, breathes new life into their character. (69 - 70)

All of the characters listed above have in common an uncertain social status, and thus command a divided response not only from those of more stable social status but also from each other. All, except Evelina and Macartney, are subject to a particularly scathing kind of "wild and earthy comedy" which Judy Simons and others have found "At odds with th[e] overt romantic direction" of the novel (Oakleaf [1991] 342). Margaret Anne Doody commented on this discrepancy in criticism of Burney's fiction, when she concluded the July 1991 special edition of *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* on *Evelina*: "None of these present writers addresses the question 'what made Frances Burney a comic writer?' or that other question 'How does her comedy work?'" (363). Since then, John Hart's article (1994) has sought to explore the latter question to some extent, especially with regard to Captain Mirvan. Yet the former question remains unanswered, and I would argue that the answer is linked to the non-verbal elements of the text -- those elements which, as in *Tristram Shandy*, have to do with the body.

Mme Duval is perhaps the best example of physical comedy in the novel, as she embodies the aging woman who, despite her age, conceives inappropriate desires -- and the equally absurd possibility of their return -- with regard to M. Dubois. This parody of the romantic circuit is as humorous as Toby's so-called *amours* with the Widow Wadman -- until M. Dubois' affections turn out to be quite honourably directed elsewhere, instead of, as in Toby's case, being overcome with modest and all-encompassing

embarrassment. Similarly, the gaucheness of the Branghtons is very funny, even to Evelina herself, who portrays them shamelessly -- until they are out in public and Evelina is associated with them, at which point they become a serious liability (see p. 201). Altogether, the humour of Burney's *Evelina* seems to function as it does in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* -- that is, to betray the inherent follies of those who place too much stock in material things. Yet Burney takes this one step further, in the sense that her setting is the larger world of the city and society, where the meaning of such physical comedy is rendered petty and often painful on this grander stage. For their part, the Branghtons and Mme Duval are incapable of feeling the discontinuity between their actual status and that to which they aspire; as such, they are funny, if only pathetically so. Evelina and Macartney, however, are painfully aware of their ambiguous origins and ranks; as a result, their plights acquire a depth which endows their respective characters with sympathy in a way that Mme Duval and the Branghtons will receive from no one -- not even the author. In the end, Evelina's disreputable cousins are simply disagreeably obtuse, and so consigned to oblivion (that is, they are not included in the conclusion in any significant way). Captain Mirvan, on the other hand, is not so easily dismissed; he retains his puckish status and regardless of whether he is treated as a gentleman or not, he will continue to embarrass his relations. Mrs Selwyn, likewise, will continue to "behave like a man" despite what people think of her; perhaps their immunity towards the opinions of others is what allows

them some measure of dignity. Or perhaps it is that they both manage, in their own ways, to help (or at least not hinder) the heroine in her quest for public recognition.

The humour of *Evelina* is not frivolous, but rather it serves to educate the reader as to when it is and is not appropriate. Just as speech is sometimes impossible for Evelina in social situations, so the ill-advised antics of Captain Mirvan -- and the ill-tempered responses of Mme Duval -- are censured for their insensitivity as much as for their impropriety. Mme Duval and Captain Mirvan show eloquently that society's rules have as their basis a fundamental respect for individuals' feelings. In this respect, Sir Clement, Lord Merton, Lady Louisa, et al. are revealed as transgressors equal to the boorish Mirvan and the ridiculous harriidan Duval. Evelina's *Entrance into the World* is as instructional for her as it is for the reader who can distinguish the fine difference between the simple consideration of etiquette and its arbitrary application.

Tucker comments that "Within the novel, sending, withholding and receiving information are not fundamentally different acts, but simply different moments in a single circuit. But as our experience as readers of the epistolary novel teaches us, we can never know exactly where in the circuit we are. For *Evelina*, such undecidability is opportunity" (431) and for Burney it provides the chance to explore the ambiguities of private meaning and public life. For it is through these ambiguities that Evelina manages to fashion her public self in a way that uniquely corresponds with her private self; yet without marring the

integrity of her privacy. Indeed, Evelina is singly capable of maintaining secrets -- not those of a duplicitous kind, but rather those necessary secrets that each of us must keep to ourselves. In the face of Sir Clement's entreaties and potentially dangerous advancements, she can keep her private history to herself -- knowing that even though it might free her from his interest in her, it is not right to expose oneself in such a manner. By contrast, Orville respects the necessity for privacy even though it may at times exasperate him: "Orville ... values the opaque in Evelina as an aspect of her singularity: 'She is not ... like most modern young ladies, to be known in half an hour' (p. 347). In a similar vein, part of what makes her narrative so engaging is the degree to which it sustains the unresolved and irresolvable" (Hart 70). Neither Evelina nor Burney's novel are quite like the others of their kind; in this respect, *Evelina's* most valuable message is the courage of its heroine to assert her self, sincerely, into the artificial construct of society without losing sight of what that society is made up of and for.

III. Language and the Performance of the Self

"You wish to see, listen then: hearing is a step in the direction of vision."
-- Bernard of Clairvaux

Comedy, like language or feeling, is difficult to discuss; it seems to dissipate as words try to capture it on the page. Comedy is something felt and seen or heard: it depends on the perceptions of the body of the audience as much as on the performance of the body on a stage or in a text. In this sense, comedy is an important aspect of these two texts, both of which seek to portray physical and intellectual comedy as complementary -- though in somewhat different ways. That comedy can be conveyed through the medium of the text, as in *Tristram Shandy* or in *Evelina*, is testimony to the flexibility of words themselves. Indeed, what characterizes comedy in any language is often the language itself: puns, plays on words and common misunderstandings can be very funny -- such as Toby's response to the Widow Wadman's question about the exact location of his wound:

In asking this question, Mrs Wadman gave a slight glance towards the waistband of my uncle Toby's red plush breeches, expecting naturally, as the shortest reply to it, that my uncle Toby would lay his fore-finger upon the place -- it fell out otherwise -- for my uncle Toby having got his wound before the gate of St Nicolas, in one of the traverses of the trench, opposite to the salient angle of the demi-bastion of St Roch; he could at any time stick a pin upon the identical spot of ground where he was standing when the stone struck him (9:26, 607)

Here Toby's mistaken understanding of Widow Wadman's question replaces the body with geography: the body as the albeit visual text of a map becomes an absurd notion and induces laughter. Sterne's comedy is flexible, flowing in and out of the narrative with an ease that lightens the burden of linguistic existence which would otherwise be oppressive.

The quality of Burney's comedy in *Evelina* distinguishes her voice from Sterne's or Henry Fielding's, perhaps the closest comparisons; her tone is more ostensibly structured into two distinct kinds of comedy. In *Evelina*, comedy is often burlesque and shows a vulgar underside to some character's personality -- as with Captain Mirvan's antics, Mme Duval's ill-temper or Mrs Selwyn's biting comments. Behaviour of any kind in *Evelina* is meant to expose character, and satire is one of Burney's main methods. Yet she can also convey, in some of the "worthier" characters, a sense of humour which is subtle and understated, perhaps explaining why critics have yet to comment upon it:

I have just had my hair dressed. You can't think how oddly my head feels; full of powder and black pins, and a great *cushion* on the top of it. I believe you would hardly know me ... When I shall be able to make use of a comb for myself I cannot tell, for my hair is so much entangled, *frizled* they call it, that I fear it will be very difficult. ...

[P.S.] Poor Miss Mirvan cannot wear one of the caps she made, because they dress her hair too large for them. (27 - 28)

While admittedly not a "knee-slapper", this passage is subtly and oddly reminiscent of the "big hair" that fashion dictates as attractive throughout the

ages⁷. Aside from this, Straub points out that “Evelina is quite detached from what she does at the dressing-table, while still firmly within the physical confines of the traditional role ... and hence, may be unknowable from a masculine perspective: ‘*You can’t think how oddly my head feels*’” (105, Straub’s emphasis). What Straub misses is that Evelina’s detachment -- her ability to separate her identity from her dress -- is what enables her to have a sense of humour, commenting on the “poor Miss Mirvan”, who can’t wear a cap because her hair is “too large”.

Evelina’s ability to detach her self from her dress epitomizes the mind-body dichotomy which is comparable to the problems of language, to the degree that language is separated from the things and ideas that it names, but (like mind and body) cannot exist without those things and ideas. In the same way, Evelina cannot exist without the trappings which surround and provoke her, any more than Tristram can exist without rhetoric and laughter. It is the combination, the marriage of complementary forces that provides the complexity of identity in these two novels. Indeed, the metaphor of marriage is explicit in *Evelina*: when she marries Orville, she claims wholeness in her self as recognized by Orville who values her silence as well as her fortitude. In this way, Burney’s use of comedy is instructional regarding character rather than exemplary of response as in Sterne. Both Burney and Sterne, however, use

⁷ Here I am referring to fashions such as the “beehive” of the 1950s, the pompadour of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and etc.

comedy to show the discrepancies between private self and the more public appearance of such.

The division between mind and body is reflected in the anxiety regarding language and identity, and this anxiety is expressed by inscribing the self onto the words of a text. While it is one thing to identify body and mind, it is another to identify self with (or through) a text; Evelina and Tristram both do so, however, and the significance of this act is revelatory -- specifically, the holistic revelation of the nature of a self which combines masculine and feminine principles, public and private roles, ideal and material values. Gary Kelly, for instance, demonstrates how

the Girondin-led Revolution [in France] was represented as a *feminization* of politics and *the public* [i.e. masculine] sphere, stressing the values of egalitarian conjugality and community, whereas the Jacobin Revolution [which followed] was represented as a brutal remasculinization of politics and public life. This gendering of Revolutionary movements subsumed pre-Revolutionary self-characterizations of the middle-class as the virtuous female resisting both decadent courtly seducers and brutal plebeian violators -- characterizations widely familiar to the middle classes, partly thanks to novels. (372, italics mine)

Thus in the latter half of the eighteenth century, we can trace the development of the ideas associated with either gender: masculine domains were seen to be public ones, such as rhetoric, politics, philosophy and history, while the realms considered feminine were private, domestic and material or practical. Yet the popular support for the "feminization of politics" represented by the Girondin-led Revolution hints at a growing recognition of the need for balance: as

represented most basically by the marriage of a man and a woman, complementary forces need each other for support and effective survival.

Nancy Armstrong suggests that "It is fair to say that Sterne's heroes ... clearly declared themselves anomalous when they inverted the sentimental responses. In this respect, they came to the reader in a form considered more appropriate for representing a female's experience than that of a male" (4). Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* represents an example of what Charles Taylor calls the cult of sentimentality, which can also be defined as a renewed regard for feminine principles: the emphasis on feeling, the gossipy tone and the non-linear "progression" of the narrative all point out Sterne's support for what would have been considered feminine values. The recurring image of "men alone, talking" further reinforces the inadequacy and isolation of masculine reason that is not enhanced by feminine feeling.

Sterne shows us what we should be; and he shows us as we are. The balance he seems to advocate is absent from his novel *except* by implication or as a desirable goal for humanity; as it is, the narrative swings back and forth from one extreme to the other, vainly striving for a balance that is not static. The resolution of laughter is what Sterne offers to unite these extremes, and thus balance is present inasmuch as we laugh. *Evelina*, with its complicated undertones of satire throughout, shows us as we are ("reality") within the fairy tale of what we should be. The contrast, if we can discern it, should enlighten us. Indeed, Villars explicitly encourages the ideal balance in Evelina:

Though gentleness and modesty are the particular attributes of your sex, yet fortitude and firmness, when occasion demands them, are virtues as noble and as becoming in women as in men: *the right line of conduct is the same for both sexes*, though the manner in which it is pursued, may somewhat vary, and be accommodated to the strength or weakness of the different travellers. (217, italics mine)

Villars and Berry Hill exemplify the fairy-tale idealism which begin and end Evelina's narrative, where there is an objective "right line of conduct" and where that line is unambiguously non-gendered. Contained within this idealism are the actual problems encountered by the young lady upon her entrance into society, when her idealistic "right line of conduct" is consistently and almost universally misread.

John Richetti comments on the effect of gender on speech: "As writers or speakers, [women] are recognized as awkward or extraordinarily good, like foreigners" (263). The woman as linguistic "other" is a fair description of Evelina's immersion in London society. This is also a fair description for *Tristram Shandy*, as

A subversively comic variation ... where my mother is a virtually silent presence whose simplicity and human directness undercut the foolish and elaborate schemes of her eccentrically voluble husband. ... 'My mother answered everything only like a woman; which was a little hard upon her; -- for as she could not assume and fight it out behind such a variety of characters, -- 'twas no fair match; -- 'twas seven to one. -- what could my mother do?' Walter has the exhilarating power of multiple personae and changing accents. ... Mrs. Shandy can speak only in the voice granted by nature, as a woman. (268)

Alternately, Mrs Shandy, like Evelina, refuses to take part in any foolish masquerade: she speaks only in her own voice, while her husband spouts seven

different “others”. In this sense, Richetti’s assessment of women as writers or speakers who are either “awkward” or “extraordinarily good” puts the comically inverted Walter firmly in the awkward category.

Thus masculine and feminine principles can be found within the identity of either sex, and reason can co-exist with feeling and laughter; yet how can public and private realms be united without, as Evelina so disturbingly finds, compromising one or the other? Both *Tristram* and *Evelina* show adequately how gendered principles can be uncompromisingly linked within one identity, except in the dichotomy between public and private. Barabara Benedict refers to the work of Kathryn Shevelow, who “has shown that eighteenth-century periodical literature defined women as domestic and printed advice even on their private lives. Private life thus became the subject of public conversation” (Benedict 487). Armstrong elaborates on this point with reference to the phenomenon of the conduct books:

The conduct books always use women who pursue amusement as examples to demonstrate why women lacking the conduct-book virtues do not make desirable wives. Such women are ‘regularly seen in the ballroom or at the card-table, at the opera or in the theatre, among the numberless devotees of dissipation and fashion.’ That, in a word, is their crime: these women either want to be on display or simply allow themselves to be ‘seen.’ It is not that the conduct books disapprove of dancing, enjoying music, playing cards, or even attending theatrical performances when they are enjoyed in the sanctuary of one’s parlor. This is a difference that both Austen and Burney scrupulously observe along with conduct-book authors. It is a woman’s participation in public spectacle that injures her, for as an object of display, she always loses value as a subject. (77)

It would seem that Evelina's fairy-tale, ideal conclusion, and the near inability of the Shandy menfolk to conduct successful relationships, indicate that Sterne and Burney saw clearly their society's difficulties with private and public issues.

In Burney's novels, "The central issue of expression for women ... is the prohibition about expressing their love" (McMaster [1989] 238). As McMaster points out, Burney extends the Richardsonian convention of the woman as "silent angel": "though they love, ... [and] are conscious of their love ... the heroines must never express it, for they are not supposed to feel it. ... Since each girl, moreover, has been characterized as open and frank in her sayings and doings, the shameful secret and the obligatory silence entail a crisis in identity" (239). Yet Evelina's (albeit tardy) consciousness of her love for Orville gives her an autonomy that Pamela lacks: she can feel desire on her own, without the official prompting of a man's open declaration. Does this essentially human quality implicitly increase her value and belittle the conventions which silence her?

Martha G. Brown has claimed that the feminism of Burney's novels is only in the eye of the modern beholder: the heroines' disinheritance is a matter not of gender but of genre, being part of the standard birth-mystery plot of romance; and her other difficulties, though adapted to her sex, are no greater an indictment on the social system than the similar vicissitudes in the careers of Tom Jones or Roderick Random. (McMaster 236)

Brown's view then might accord (or be supported by) Villars' injunctions to Evelina regarding the "right line of conduct for both sexes". Evelina's

consciousness of her love for Orville, and her subsequent withdrawal from him, show in her a self-consciousness that, arguably, goes further even than Clarissa's epistolary disclosures: to the reader, Evelina exposes her whole self, with the improprieties, thereby explicating the problems of public and private realms. Evelina's public silence, however, is not an expressive void.

Significantly, she "colours violently" (299), stammers (299), hangs her head "like a fool" (31), falls "breathless and senseless" (182), or in some other way manages to express herself as distraught or upset. Ostovich refers to Mrs Shandy and Madam Reader as "for the most part, silent readers, not verbalizers. ... But both are active manipulators of the verbal play around them, not merely silent receptors" (334). So too, Evelina's silence is not an indication of passivity on her part; rather, she is quite an accomplished reader, and her silence attests to her acute awareness of the discontinuity between her private self and her public situation.

This self-consciousness, or sensibility, is essentially what links Tristram and Evelina: both possess "a memory that has recorded events in terms of the emotions they generate" (Armstrong 43), and they are conscious of this factor in their respective personal histories. They are, furthermore, aware of the same tendency in others, and that others may not be as self-aware as they are. It is this sensibility to their own emotions and to those of others, combined with a deeply instilled sense of the meaning of order and authority in daily life, that distinguishes Tristram and Evelina from their fictional antecedents. Identity,

for these two, is composed of a simultaneous and continuous exchange between the assemblage of personal memories and the “showing” or expression of one’s self to another in the construct/context of society. Sterne and Burney both use the metaphor of the self as text, and the inevitable misreadings of self in each case are meant to be both instructive and realistic. Evelina’s “goal is social recognition of private character. Burney therefore values the social tact that attends to feeling as well as decorum. This tact distinguishes Orville’s attentions to Evelina ... [and] similar tact makes Evelina reluctant to judge or be judged prematurely” (Oakleaf [1991] 348). Similarly, Tristram’s goal is social recognition (through his readers) of private character; Sterne complicates this goal by “play[ing] on public willingness to play his game of collapsing narrative distance” by, for instance, publishing his own sermons as those of Mr. Yorick in 1760 and again in 1766 (Chibka 143).⁸

This tact, or sensibility, or self-awareness, is the intangible ideal that Burney and Sterne link to the tangible and public reality of social interaction. Significantly, “sensibility” and “social reality” are not gendered by either author: self-knowledge and social acceptance are thus available to both men and women. This in itself is perhaps an ideal worth noting in the context of eighteenth-century culture, where the separation of the ideal from the material

⁸ Burney’s initial anonymity, and her subsequent reticence in public, does not encourage the same kind of “collapsed narrative distance” as in Sterne’s case and implied by criticism that implies an inherent link between her fictional plots and her life.

is an inherent point of understanding, whether the discussion involved the body and the soul or a text and its contents (as in Pope v. Curll).

Both *Evelina* and *Tristram Shandy* invite the reader to participate in their respective texts as an audience for a performance. More than this, both texts require an involvement on the part of the reader: Tristram leaves us blank pages to draw what beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and Evelina's letters must be read with the implicit awareness of her fictional addressee as well as the actual audience of the reader. Despite this involvement, however, both texts are, ultimately, still texts: the narrator or author cannot react to his or her audience within the texts in the sense that a real audience in a theatrical performance could (and did, in the eighteenth-century theatre). This limitation to the text on the page can be seen as a reflection of the difficulties of miscommunication -- or misreading -- and reinforces the anxiety that language produces in the public sphere.

Raymond Williams reminds us that dramatic "in the sense of an action or situation having qualities of spectacle and surprise comparable to those of written or acted drama, dates mainly from C18 [i.e. the eighteenth-century]" (109). Furthermore, "*Persona* ... [was] from its earliest meaning ... a mask, used by a player, [developed] through a character in a play and a part that a man acts, to a general word for human being. ... The implicit metaphor can still haunt us. ... What matters ... is the development from a general to a specific or

unique quality. ... It was in C18 that the individualizing reference became quite clear" (232 - 233). He goes on to comment that

The recurrence of the metaphor, from both mask and graphic sign, and with overlap between dramatic or fictional presentation and the possession of a private as well as an evident nature, is very striking. ... a **personality** or a *character*, once an outward sign, has been decisively internalized, yet internalized as a possession, and therefore as something which can be either displayed or interpreted. (234 - 235)

The ideas of a text, then, are the possession of the author, just as personality or character is the possession of the self. Yet the words of the text, as the "evident nature" of self which is personality displayed, are publicly available. How is meaning to be separated from the words of the text? How are words to be divided from what they signify? Only in the written word does this problem arise (at least until audio- and video-recordings became possible), and thus the written word holds a special authority: it is both more and less than it is.

The private self inscribed into public text thus becomes possible; yet as Armstrong points out, the notion of privacy still carries associations of "otherness":

Literature devoted to the domestic [sphere] ... appeared to ignore the political world Of the female alone did it presume to say that neither birth nor the accoutrements of title and status accurately represented the individual; only the more subtle nuances of behavior indicated what one was really worth. ... writing for and about the female introduced a whole new vocabulary for social relations, terms that attached precise moral value to certain qualities of mind. (Armstrong 4)

A vocabulary is defined as "the (principal) words used in a language or usu. in a particular book or branch of science etc., or by a particular author" (OED) or,

in Williams' words, "a shared body of words and meanings". In this sense, the "new vocabulary for social relations" and values introduced by domestic fiction such as Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Burney's *Evelina* refers also, by contextual implication, to a correspondingly new vocabulary of identity as distinct and separate from a group. Indeed, without a sense of identity such as is displayed in Tristram's family histories or Evelina's country education, a sense of social value and relations such as Armstrong describes above is absurd -- like building a house without its foundation. It is this foundation which I have termed as a vocabulary of identity; this vocabulary lies under eighteenth-century culture and civilization, which Williams defines as "an achieved condition of refinement and order" (58). Understanding the vocabularies of eighteenth-century fiction affords the reader with a view of the first tentative extensions toward a vocabulary of self-definition and its relation to the wider landscape of eighteenth-century civilization and culture.

Conclusion

Speaking analogically, identity exists within society just as the mind or soul exists within the body. Foucault reminds us, however, that "the soul is the prison of the body", -- just as society can be a prison for individual identity. He also alleges that the separation of mind/soul and body was manifested in largely in the eighteenth century in a particularly public way; Tucker's citation of Pope v. Curl, with its insistence on the legal separation of ideal and material aspects of a text, would seem to support Foucault's assertion. How does fiction address these issues of separation, and the anxiety that comes with them? Arguably, fiction -- that is, the novel -- may have developed in part as a result of the eighteenth-century trend, in a sub-conscious and social attempt to mend the breach. In the artistic realm, human consciousness, as the source of language, would naturally seek to use linguistic means to express itself -- means that could also include the body. A written text or a theatrical performance would suit this purpose. In this sense, language exists within the context of expression just as mind is within body and identity within society. Here, though, the analogical formula breaks down, because expression (the context) is not the prison of language; if anything, language can be a prison of expression. Raymond Williams describes his thesis in *Keywords* as follows:

an exploration of the vocabulary of a crucial area of social and cultural

discussion which has been inherited within precise historical and social conditions and which has to be made at once conscious and critical -- subject to change as well as to continuity -- if the millions of people in whom it is active are to see it as active: not a *tradition* to be learned, nor a *consensus* to be accepted, nor as a set of meanings which, because it is 'our language' has a natural authority; but as a shaping and reshaping, in real circumstances and from profoundly different and important points of view: a vocabulary to use, to find our own ways in, to change as we find it necessary to change it, as we go on making our own language and history. (24 - 25)

In the same way, this thesis is an exploration of the vocabulary of the emergence of the idea of selfhood in the eighteenth century and the methods of self-expression that were used in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* and Burney's *Evelina*.

The cult of sensibility, which arose in the middle to late eighteenth-century, attempted to resolve some of the anxiety produced by the separation of mind and body (or of self from society). Using the "subtler language" of feeling, those who endorsed sensibility sought to re-establish the links which had been broken by strict adherence to reason. Sterne is perhaps the most vociferous among the sentimentalists, ridiculing as well as respecting authorities of philosophy such as Locke and provoking laughter as a response to excessive or extended logic. It is through laughter that he proposes the possibility of reunion; when we laugh, we must see things as they are, -- and our selves as well. Laughter, Sterne reminds us, is as uniquely human as is reason, and so the two should co-operate in our existence. John Traugott points out that "Sterne's purpose is to demonstrate and describe the constant frustration of ... [purely logical] analysis, the impossibility of determining

meaning apart from a context of human situations" (xv). Even within the human context, reason is consistent; but it lacks the ability to evoke a response in kind, as is vividly demonstrated in the reading of the sermon: "Trim weeps for his brother, Walter theorizes about oratory and authorship, Uncle Toby fortifies his hobbyhorse by sorting out the military metaphors, Dr. Slop sleeps" (Hunter [1971] 133). Undiluted rhetoric is boring, and if presented with such any human audience will insert its own feelings, more often than not distorting the text completely out of its original context.

Sterne's "subtler language", as Jonathan Lamb demonstrates,

is often characterized by the production of the very thing he is talking about: writing about a digression he makes one ... and talking about gaps in his narrative he falls into one. ... These comic sublimities arise from his decision never to separate the words he uses from the objects and feelings they name, so that they dwell *in* more than *about* their point of reference and, as the *Guardian* critic puts it, 'flow from an inward principle' in the thing described. (807)

Even Sterne's use of rhetoric is imbued with the principles of cohesion and balance; and these principles govern the formation of identity. In this way, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is a kind of exemplar text upon which a self -- in this case Tristram -- can be modeled: the actual text is "married" to its ideal content, as much as the text is symbolic of Tristram himself. Significantly, the text is also replete with laughter. "By giving us fragments and thwarting ordinary coherence, Sterne forces us to contemplate a different kind of order, -- an order not governed by 'any man's rules' (I, 4) but by rules more inscrutable

and divine" (Harries 44 - 45). Sterne's rules are discontinuous, and wonderfully so; the complete joy of existence is involved throughout.

Another aspect of eighteenth-century culture that affects identity is the "gendering" of ideas: using sexual identity to characterize abstractions such as politics (as masculine) or feeling (as feminine) is a way of linking the external world to the internal self. Yet in eighteenth-century culture, union was not the effect of applying gender to ideas; on the contrary, "gendering" in practice formed strong divisions between males and females and their respective roles in both society and the home. Even speech is affected, as Richetti points out:

Characters like [Haywood's] Emanuella ... must signify their heroism and their gender by a silent intensity evoked as unutterably sublime through Haywood's tumbling and turbulent melodramatic style. ... that is in a real sense unreadable. ... Like Italian arias for Anglophone opera lovers, Haywood's voice is more like expressive noise than language" (266)

Burney's *Evelina*, however, is quite the opposite; the prose is clear and quite readable. Furthermore, "Through her delicate but shrewdly perceptive heroine, Burney fashions a unique narrative voice out of the requirements and restrictions of female speaking, making her heroine assertive without assertion, silent and demure but thereby eloquent and critical" (Richetti 271). As can be seen by the reader, in her character and in Villars' letters to her, Evelina is not the quivering, domesticated, thoughtless bundle of hysteria that an eighteenth-century conduct book might expect a woman to be (even when she does "quiver", she collects herself admirably -- as when she takes the

pistols from Macartney, nearly faints, and then proceeds to explain herself both passionately and lucidly). Instead, she informs her femininity with the honourable principles of "fortitude and firmness" (217) -- traditionally considered masculine attributes. She is ideally created in seclusion from society's "genderings", and so her quest is not primarily for a man to complete her -- but for a public name to put to her hitherto private face. Initially, this name must come from her father: but "Being 'owned', far from turning Evelina into a commodity whose personhood is denied, is actually what allows her to become a person. ... In looking for someone to own her Evelina is looking for someone who can provide external [i.e. social] evidence of her identity -- assurance of her presence" (Pawl 286). In this way, Burney posits marriage -- in its ideal as well as its practical sense -- as a possible resolution to the divisive factors in society: marriage to Orville provides Evelina with a name she no longer needs (having acquired her father's name and recognition) but also with the ultimate assurance that *her* presence -- her identity -- is valued by an other. Marriage allows her the choice to participate in society or not; marriage legitimizes her undivided approach to life and people which combines compassion with propriety.

Still, the separation between public and private realms remains: it is a necessary division, allowing the self to retire and rest occasionally. Perhaps the growing recognition for the need for privacy has something to do with the development of the novelistic form and the increased availability of texts:

as private rather than public activity, the taste of reading is less susceptible to market forces .. [it is] intrinsically a modest pursuit, not lending itself to social display: a reader can always show off his or her library, but otherwise the knowledge gained through reading is known only when it is serving some useful purpose, like the enlightened one of criticizing those in power. [Also], ... reading is verbal .. and its medium [is] language. (Dykstal 576)

What then is the purpose of reading a novel, other than for entertainment?

How can the "knowledge" gained from reading novels be applied usefully?

With *Evelina* and *Tristram Shandy*, the answer depends on the reader and on the depth of his or her response to and involvement with the text. If the reader can "read" accurately -- that is, absorbing not just the words on the page but the message within them as well -- then the "useful application" of the novels should affect the way he or she knows him or her self and how that self conducts relationships in the masquerade that is society.

Both *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina* uncover fundamental problems in the way that identity is perceived and developed. Both novels, in the process of exploring the problems of identity formation or self-definition express the need to resolve these problems as a teleological one, that is, a need that can be satisfied only through a process toward ultimate self-knowledge. Curiously, the bodies of the protagonists (Tristram and Evelina) are figured as a textual expression of their respective souls or minds: Tristram's life is *The Life and Opinions*, and Evelina's face is a "rewritten marriage certificate" (Greenfield 311) between her parents. The

notion that written words might be effective where spoken ones are not

is confirmed in *Evelina* by the results of Evelina's and Macartney's mother's [sic] letters: both of them succeed in writing where they have failed in speech. Similarly, at the end of the novel, Evelina is content to leave Villars's letter with Orville 'to speak for both [her] and itself' (p. 404). In each of these instances Burney seems to be endorsing a substitution of text for self, a text which may be read as Evelina is read. ... Once they become public, they are more like spoken words in that they may be misunderstood or misused. (Pawl 298)

This alignment of self or body with text is then complicated by the "separation factor": again, once public, a text "may be misunderstood or misused". Again, the misuse or misunderstanding is attributable to language; when Evelina's face is offered to her father, there is no confusion of meaning: she is, without speaking or acting in any way, recognized in the way that she has been seeking throughout the novel (see also Pawl 295). Her impromptu speech (at her first ball in London, for instance, when she accept Orville's offer to dance after turning Willoughby away) is what creates problems for her; when she is silent, as when she writes, she is eloquent: "Much as she may thematize her lack of verbal ability, we are constantly presented with evidence of her fluent, elegant use of [written] language. ... For her [written] words are, of course, the only way we can know her. Unlike Belmont, we cannot see the truth in her countenance -- we see it only on the page" (Pawl 297). Like Mrs Shandy (or Jenny, or Widow Wadman), Evelina's silence is canny: she knows when not to speak -- or at least, she learns it. Tristram, too, learns that he cannot define everything in words; he cannot finish his *Life and Opinions* regardless, but the point here seems to be that it is not necessary to articulate everything in words

in order to express everything: the body has a language of its own, and can express the soul or mind in that language just as well.

Traugott contends that in *Tristram Shandy*

the effects of ironic distance are achieved very often simply by *naming* or otherwise ostentatiously exhibiting the devices for involving the reader. ... Tristram's devices keep the reader in the narrative, make him an actor on the stage. ... It was the *process* of argument, not the argument itself, that interested Sterne, for in the process minds describe themselves. (120)

The text is the meeting place between reader and author: dialectically, the author's word is past (i.e. finished) and the reader's reading is present; the future is the synthetic combination of word and reading, author and reader.

Sterne, in one of his sermons, commented that "lessons of wisdom have never such power over us, as when they are wrought into the heart, through the ground-work of a story which engages the passions" (quoted in Preston 133).

Preston observes that *Tristram Shandy* "is more than talk -- after all, the man who *talks* is a bore -- it is a conversation" (145). And Tristram himself says that "Writing, when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation" (2:11, 127). It is a conversational story, then, "which engages the passions" and conveys the "lessons of wisdom" with the power to affect us. Both the epistolary *Evelina* and the discontinuous *Tristram Shandy*

break down the reader's fence of self-interest. ... [They] urge on [the reader an enlargement of sympathy, and encourage the enhanced sense of reality that springs from being able to go beyond the 'real'. [They ask] us to be capable of reaching out into the lives of others, or, more

exactly, to be capable of imagining them. ... 'A pervasive loneliness is at the core of each [character], as in life itself. But ... the power of the imagination that makes [understanding] possible dissolves the loneliness'" (Preston 150, quoting Ben Lehman).

In this way, fiction is able to touch us more deeply than any sermon or treatise; fiction aspires to the level of poetic revelation and significance. The act of reading makes the writer's imagination available to others, and the reader's ability to imagine raises the possibilities of the written word itself.

The possibilities of the written word are, paradoxically, made explicit by the use of non-linguistic figures such as Sterne's marbled, black or blank pages, and his squiggles to convey narrative "progression". In Burney's case, non-linguistic figures transcend the written word in the simple statement of the frontispiece from *Evelina* volume 1 (1794), which depicts a classically garbed woman at the foot of a gravestone monument which engraved with the word BELMONT; the caption beneath says, "Oh author of my being! -- far more dear/ To me than light, than nourishment, or rest" (*ECF*, July 1991, 314). The figure is entitled EVELINA and the grave must be that of her mother, Caroline Belmont. Similarly, "In both scenes [with her father], the visual is undeniably the dominant mode of interaction ... This emphasis on the visual is the natural consequence of *Evelina*'s verbal inadequacy " (Pawl 293). That verbal inadequacy should engender visual imagery is not surprising; what is interesting is that these images are part of *texts*. A text is defined as the "original *words* of [an] author" (OED, emphasis mine); by definition, then, Sterne's marbled pages and Burney's frontispiece must be "words". In this way,

image-words are added to the sentimental vocabulary of feeling and gesture words; and this vocabulary, once inserted into the rest of the logical and syntactical forms of language, enhances the imaginative possibilities of meaning on the page.

In the sense that language is "time-bound", to use Simpson's words, both novels also consider the burden of time on the formulation of identity. Sterne's concern with time begins on the very first page of volume one, chapter one:

I wish my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were both in duty equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly considered how much depended on what they were then doing; -- that not only the production of a rational Being was concerned in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind; -- and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost ...

Pray, my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock? (1:1, 35)

Here it is clear that Tristram will associate time with the formation of body and mind which is his identity. In Volume Seven, when he lead Death "a dance he little thinks of" (7:1, 460) across France, the issue of mortality focuses clearly on the bodily aspects of existence. Earlier in the novel, Tristram finds that

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 just now, than when I first set out ... And ... for what reason should they [his life and opinions] be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write -- It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write -- and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read. (4:13, 286)

Here the intellectual wit plays with the physicality of time, while insisting on the correlation between writing and reading. Altogether, time renders existence ephemeral: Tristram's death, assumed by the conclusion of the book, depends on the ending of the body as a result of the workings of time. If time were only a construct of the mind, how could it kill a body unless there is a relationship between mind and body akin to that between writer and reader?

In *Evelina*, time's shadows loom in the shape of Mme Duval. Her inability to accept her physical deterioration leads her to act without thinking, for she has invested her idea of self in a physical beauty which no longer exists. On her own terms, she cannot exist as an old woman: "even if virtue should remain intact, it still loses much of its power when its earthly vessel is no longer attractive. ... many of the metaphors expressive of female ephemerality are close to or the same as metaphors for human mortality in general ... because they [the former] suggest a tenuousness specific to moral as well as physical identity" (Straub 10 - 11). In this sense, the end of beauty is a bodily mortality expressed in Mme Duval. Evelina, clearly in contrast, strives to escape this paradigm in her relationship with Orville: his attraction to her mind develops after he has dismissed her as "a pretty modest-looking girl" (35).

The vocabularies of identity in *Tristram Shandy* and *Evelina* are comprised of words not always written; "we are being asked to 'read' what has not yet been written, or more precisely, what has been written in the form of absence and silence" (Preston 163) and what has been written on the face and in the

imagination. Words have the power of naming things and ideas; to that extent, they are useful (for instance, I could hardly have written this thesis without them -- imagine a mimed thesis!). But the limitations of language in the expression of self require other and more dramatic or imaginative methods. Sterne and Burney deal comprehensively with this requirement. In these two novels, fiction "deals with the need to imagine, with the fictive power and the kind of reality it sustains. [They are books] about what stories mean, and this depends to a large extent on what the reader makes of them" (Preston 138). The invitation to the reader is explicit in *Tristram Shandy*; *Evelina* requires implicit involvement through the epistolary form. Indeed, all fiction requires a reader to participate to some extent, inasmuch as writing requires reading. Sterne and Burney challenge us to sustain multiple levels of understanding, both of their characters in fiction and of our selves outside it.

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