PERFORMING TEXT: *TRISTRAM SHANDY* AND THE THEATRICAL PARADOX

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LAURENCE STERNE'S *THE LIFE AND OPINIONS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY, GENTLEMAN*

AND THE THEATRICAL PARADOX

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines the influence of the eighteenth-century theatre on the composition and structure of Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Eighteenth-century theatre epitomises the paradoxical drive toward a stable model of experience in texts and the simultaneous breakdown of textual stability in performance. Sterne was familiar with his contemporary theatre and makes numerous references to it throughout *Tristram Shandy*; this theatrical paradox of text and performance represents a significant mode of inquiry into the problems and paradoxes of social communication and literary signification addressed in the novel.

Each chapter explores one aspect of the eighteenth-century theatre and its appearance in major episodes in *Tristram Shandy*. Sterne's use of theatrical techniques is compared with the similar investigations of other eighteenth-century writers, including Dryden, Addison, Hogarth, and Garrick -- who appear in the novel -- as well as Fielding, Diderot, Shaftesbury, and Richardson. Chapter one discusses the intimate and often antagonistic relationship of theatre performers and writers and their audience and its similarity to Tristram's constructed relationship with his audience. Chapter two examines pictorial modes of signification -- naturalistic gesture and tableaux -- in the theatre. These techniques obviously influenced Sterne's sense of visual detail in the novel, but the inherent textuality of his medium allows him to expose the textual nature of this attempt to transcend verbal declamation. Chapter three deals with the similar issue of theatrical dialogue. While dialogue in performance suggests the interweaving presence of multiple discourses, Sterne suggests that this play of alternatives tends to be subsumed within a desire for a single dominating or incontestable point of view.

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Writing about *Tristram Shandy* is a rewarding but often hair-raising -- might we say Shandean? -- experience. I would like, therefore, to thank everyone at McMaster for their guidance and support—conscious or other wise—while we rode our hobby-horses and danced our white bears through the dense jungles of knowledge critical, theoretical, historical, theatrical, romantical, sceptical, psychological, bureaucratical and fifty other branches of it (most of 'em ending, as they do, in *ical*);—and the even denser forests of professional stress and personal anxiety,--as well as the occasional mire of computer failure,--not to mention brain failure;—

Bless me! what a trade is driven by the learned in these days!—Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle,--hum--dum--drum.

I would like to offer special thanks to my supervisor, Professor Richard Morton, for his interest, his insights and his indefatigable patience. Thanks also to my parents for their unending support and to Alison -- for coping.

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The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions succesively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different, whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity or identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are successive perceptions only that consitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is composed.

David Hume, *Treatise Concerning Human Nature*

The theatre is precisely that space which calculates the place of things as they are observed; if I set the spectacle here, the spectator will see this; if I put it elsewhere, he will not, and I can avail myself of this masking effect and play on the illusion it provides. The stage is the line which stands across the path of the optic pencil, tracing at once the point at which it is brought to a stop and, as it were the threshold of its ramification.

Roland Barthes, *Diderot, Brecht, Eisenstein*

The scientific approach to the examination of phenomena is a defense against the pure emotion of fear. Keep tight hold and continue while there is still time.

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*

Introduction

"Of This Dramatic Cast:" Text and Performance

Writing to David Garrick in January, 1760, just after the publication of the first volume of *Tristram Shandy*, Laurence Sterne hinted at his own ambitions in the theatre: "I sometimes think of a Cervantic Comedy upon these and the materials of the 3d and 4th Vols which will be still more dramatick, -- tho I as often distrust its Successe... unless at the Universities" (*Letters* 46, p. 87). Although he never did write or produce a comedy for the stage, his prediction of "Successe... at the Universities" was fulfilled, as L. P. Curtis notes: "At Sterne's own university at Cambridge... Thomas Twining (1735-1804), and a group of his friends, who numbered four Fellows, closed the novel with glee and signed a mock deposition, affirming that it contained the 'best & truest & most genuine original & new Humour, ridicule, satire, good sense, good nonsense' ever put forth and hereafter to be put forth" (87 n4). If this account is accurate, then it seems that Twining and his friends had made up something of an audience for a novel which they presumably read together and aloud. Together, they had seen Yorick's black page, heard the varying intonations of Sterne's playful rhetoric, and been moved by Tristram's emotional intensity. For them, *Tristram Shandy* was a theatrical book.

What is at issue here is not whether *Tristram Shandy* would make a good play or is in any way a dramatic text. The answer is neither; *Tristram Shandy* is a novel. What is at issue, however, is the idea of what Sterne would have understood as *theatre* -- with all its own Cervantic aspects and resonances -- and its importance to *Tristram Shandy's* narrative style and subject matter. The specificity of Sterne's references to his contemporary theatre is not new to Shandean scholarship. Critics have established extensively that Sterne was as familiar with theatre arts as with painting and music -- in both of which he was an enthusiastic amateur. Arthur Cash, Sterne's most comprehensive biographer, notes that while a young clergyman at York he likely enjoyed the

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plays of many touring companies and probably engaged in amateur theatricals (*Early Years* 71, 207: Hafter 480). When *Tristram Shandy* first appeared, Sterne cultivated the acquaintance of the great actor-manager David Garrick, who, as is well-known, played a patron's part in the initial popular success of the novel. Sterne remained an ardent admirer and devotee of The Theatre Royal Drury Lane while living on his success in London through the seasons of 1760-1. He also considered himself an intimate friend of Garrick's, a fact which emerges prominently in his many letters to the actor at this time. As Cash remarks, there is some indication that Garrick was not wholly reciprocal in this friendship; in Sterne's feud with Bishop Warburton for example, Garrick may not have remained a true defender, as is sometimes believed (Cash, *Later Years* 9). Nevertheless, while in London the author was granted the free use of Garrick's box, usually reserved for featured playwrights, and while on the continent Sterne constantly reminded the actor of his talents and worth. From Paris, Sterne writes to Garrick: "O God! they have nothing here, which gives the nerves so smart a blow, as those great characters in the hands of G[arrick]! but I forget I am writing to the man himself -- The devil take (as he will) these transports of enthusiasm" (*Letters* 85, 157)

While in Paris, Sterne seems to have become the self-appointed "advance agent" of French plays for Garrick to perform or carry back to London (Later Years 145). His letters clearly reveal a certain disregard for French drama by comparison with the English variety: "I send you over some of these comic operas by the bearer... The French comedy, I seldom visit it -- they act scarce anything but tragedies -- yet I cannot bear preaching -- I fancy I got a surfeit of it in my younger days. -- There is a tragedy to be damn'd tonight -- peace be with it and the gentle brain which made it" (*Letters* 85, 157). Journeying south with his family for health reasons, Sterne organised a company to perform English plays at Toulouse, Christmas 1762: "Sterne probably acted, and certainly he played in the 'grand orchestra'. They put on Mrs. Centlivre's *Busy Body* and *The Provok'd Husband; or, A Journey to London* by Vanbrugh and Cibber. Sterne had some thoughts about adapting the latter to their situation - and making it the 'Journey to Toulouse.'"(*Later Years*

159). Sterne's participation in the theatre was not limited to observation and he seemed to support a theatre which was open to experimentation. Later, Sterne's own publications and ever declining health began to take up more time and energy. But he continued to visit the theatre while in Italy, and almost nightly upon his return to London, despite his ill-health, to the end of his life.

Comprehensive analysis of the dramatic aspects of *Tristram Shandy* , however, has been limited to one article, Ronald Hafter's, "Garrick and *Tristram Shandy*" (1967), and one full length dissertation, Elaine Goutkin's *Tristram Shandy* as Dramatic Novel: The Issue of Control, written for Columbia University (1969). Both of these studies begin with and, in fact, draw many conclusions from Sterne's personal involvement with theatre. Hafter and Goutkin carefully scrutinise Sterne's relationship and correspondence with David Garrick for keys to the theatricality of *Tristram Shandy,* and Goutkin develops that contemporary context with references to many eighteenth-century dramatists and drama theorists. Citing Garrick and his followers as a locus of the "naturalist revolution" in acting and theory, they conclude that Sterne's break with narrative and descriptive formalism, his stress on vision, gesture, sudden transition, and sense of a complete immersion in a character role has its source in the drama and dramaturgy of his day. Hafter writes: "Garrick... was propounding a theory much like Sterne's own: the dramatic artist must combine controlled form with an ability to keep himself receptive to surprise, to unexpected feelings and sudden inspirations, if he hopes to affect his audience" (489). He concludes that Sterne, "was both writer and actor on his own stage, no less -- but no more — that character called Tristram than Garrick was Richard III. Both existed entirely within their dramatic roles and both, by dint of their imaginative identifications with their characters, were able to make art look like nature."

Yet, even Sterne's personal love of and relationship with the stage reveal more complex issues than simply an affinity of styles, especially when the differences in media — theatre and novel -- becomes a consideration. For example, in his memoirs, Joseph Craddock recalls: "once

meeting [Sterne] at Drury-Lane Theatre, I said to him, 'As you are so intimate with Garrick, I wonder that you have never undertaken to write a Comedy.' He seemed quite struck, and after a pause, with tears in his eyes, replied, 'I fear I do not possess the proper talent for it, and I am utterly unacquainted with the business of the stage'" (Curtis, Letters, 87n). Responding to this account in his influential work, *Tristram Shandy's World*, John Traugott remarks that Sterne, "did not have the proper talent [for writing drama] because he had himself (in some mask) to be present in every action. His peculiar rhetoric made the dramatic quality of *Tristram* but prevented its becoming drama" (134). For Traugott, it seems that the dramatic event is a wholly self-enclosed demonstrative unit, constructed to show an aspect of experience by means of exemplary characters and situations. The digressive and commentating narrative of *Tristram Shandy*, then, represents an unacceptable transgression of dramatic unity and coherence: "The only possible way to imagine *Tristram Shandy* as a play is to imagine Tristram in front of the curtain as a chorus or commentator pointing to the stage action: and then the sense of freedom, of the voices as a simple dialectic of nature, would be lost" (133).[1]

By contrast, Cash provides a rather sceptical and perhaps more Shandean interpretation of Craddock's memoir: "It may be that Sterne did not feel competent to write for the theatre, but the tears in his eyes speak worlds about his talent for acting. At this sort of spontaneous, informal acting he was expert" (*Later Years*, 146). Unlike Traugott, who takes Craddock's memoir and Sterne's lament quite literally, Cash looks past the recorded statement to the larger theatre, so to speak, of social interaction and professional authorship in which Sterne was involved. Sterne's anxiety may be genuine in essence, for he often reveals his misgivings about seeing himself as a dramatist in his personal letters. However, in this meeting with Craddock, Sterne's reaction is the

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[1] This didn't stop Leonard MacNally from writing and producing at Covent Garden *Tristram Shandy: A Farce in Two Acts* as an afterpiece in April 1783. (Curtis 87n, see Conclusion). Traugott's reticence toward a Shandean dramaturgy seems very unimaginative indeed. This kind of forestage rhetoric is exactly the kind of presentation which characterised eighteenth-century theatre, as I will argue in chapter 1. Moreover, as Traugott should have been aware, even in 1954, Brecht and Williams had employed this direct address technique with great success. We might add that even Fielding's domineering narrator plays a crucial role in the 1963 film version of *Tom Jones*, complete with halts in the action and extensive commentary. Most recently a German company has produced a TV version of *Tristram Shandy* itself — though it is not yet available in North America as of yet.

product of controlled artifice; he is playing the role of the well-intentioned but failed artist. His denial of dramatic talent is paradoxically a denial of that talentlessness.

As such his dramatic confession to Craddock has the same effect as Yorick's "~~Bravo!~~," simultaneously confirming both his modesty and his self-regard. When Yorick scores a line through his own judgement of the elegy to LeFever he effectively disrupts the presence, and thus, the straightforward application of the signifying remark, "Bravo!" The line questions the sincerity of the comment, making it, therefore, a theatrical, or strictly speaking, falsified gesture. But, the line itself could be considered a theatrical gesture for, while he preserves his modesty, in leaving the word behind the line Yorick retains his pride. We are left with both the word and its denial, with the realisation that language is truthful in itself, but, at the same time, that truth is always posited within the necessary impulse to construct the conditions of truth. In other words, the line, in cutting through the word and by virtue of its own non-verbality, undermines the validity of the signifying word. But the word remains; the text and its apparent meaning do not disappear. They are simply extended to embrace a larger context -- the tension between acknowledged self-regard and social self-depreciation.

Parson Yorick points to another important aspect of theatre in Sterne's personal life, his preaching; it is no coincidence, surely, that Sterne took the name of Shakespeare's famous jester under which to publish his sermons. Cash writes that "Sterne... was an excellent preacher. His delivery was dramatic, his voice in these years [1740s and early 50s] was strong and sonorous, and he could be counted upon to deliver as he put it, 'a theological flap upon the heart'" (*Early Years* 216). Indeed, Sterne seems often to have left his audience in tears, and he makes no qualms in including one of his own sermons in *Tristram Shandy*. "The Abuses of Conscience," read by Corporal Trim in Volume II, was first preached on Sunday, July 29, 1750. Sterne, and others, including Voltaire, regarded it as his best (234); it is no wonder then that it serves as the advertisement to his *Sermon's of Mr. Yorick*, the first volume of which appeared as *Dramatick Sermons* just after *Tristram Shandy* in 1760. Of course, Sterne goes to great lengths to invoke the

necessary environment for its reception in the text of the novel: Trim's stance, gestures, and intonation, the varying sentiments and commentaries it inspires, the effect it has on its reader, Trim, who is swept away by the description of the Inquisition and the thoughts of his brother, "poor Tom" (II.17.161-3). Suggesting both the conditions of reading and the effect, Walter has the last word on the style and strength of *The Abuses of Conscience*: "I like the sermon well, replied my father, — 'tis dramatic, — and there is something in that way of writing, when skilfully managed which catches the attention" (165).[2]

Sterne's preaching and sermons, as well as both Yorick's and Walter's comments, which are really Sterne's own, suggest what I would like to argue is a crucial issue in the study of drama and *Tristram Shandy*, the relationship between novel and play, language and action, text and performance. A sermon is more text than performance; it is, for the most part, a recited critical commentary on a biblical text or moral precept, with only one speaker, directed at an expectant and purposeful audience, awaiting enlightened truth. Yet Sterne's style, incorporating varieties of voices, sometimes even characters, the invocation of landscapes and visual vistas, and his dynamic emotional sentiments suggest that the realisation of that truth is more effective in a medium which seems to transcend or even deny the effective communicability of pure, rational discourse.

Critics agree that Sterne's lively delivery is bound up directly with his theology. Recreating the multiplicity of interweaving voices and interplaying interpretations possible in readings of scripture, Sterne invokes a faith aimed at a "sympathetic" and "mutual understanding" of the possible fluctuations and conflicts which characterise human experience. For example, Melvyn New's interesting interpretation of Sterne's "Job's Expostulation with His Wife" provides a notable referent to the drama of this sermon: "Sterne shifts the moment of scriptural dialogue into a domestic scene, binding husband and wife together in mutual affection

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[2] All references are to *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne* version of *Tristram Shandy* edited by Melvyn New et al., 1978.

and desperation and finding the meaning of their words in the interplay of their feelings... Sterne

seeks a sympathetic reading... understanding the relationship between Job and his wife in the

context of domestic regard" ("Other Women" 58).[3] Sterne thus aligns himself with the tradition

of fideistic scepticism, exemplified by "Erasmus and Montaigne" who, as Donald Wehrs points

out, "popularised a tradition of placing in the service of Christian humility the Pyrrhonian

argument that efforts to know reality with certainty from reason and sensory evidence must end

either in suspense (*epochè*) or in gratuitous dogmatism" (130).[4] The attempt at textual explanation

is not rejected outright; there could be no sermons -- or novels -- otherwise. But it is augmented

by a sense that this attempt will always remain as desire, which "produces both the recognition

that desire will never be satisfied and acceptance of the benefits of the soul of that non-

satisfaction" (Wehrs 131). Sterne's multiple tones and points of view, therefore, allow him to

capture this balance of desire in an acceptably un-dogmatic mode of discourse.

I would like to posit this meeting of verbal signification, and the attempt to find a means

of signifying the perceptible irrationalities of experience within a tension of *text* and *performance*.

The term *performance* has been adopted by linguists, grammarians, and critical theorists to mean

the effective application of repeatable aspects of language which produce effective

communication. As developed by Noam Chomsky and Jonathan Culler, effective linguistic

performance is determined by "an extensive amount of varied linguistic knowledge, including

the ability to produce and understand an indefinite number of novel utterances (the creative

aspect of language): to recognise relationships between sentences; to resolve ambiguities; and to

identify and interpret certain mistakes or deviations in grammatical form" (Rivero 526). In

dramatic circles, however, performance criticism stresses the non-textual aspects of theatre, that

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[3] New points out that Sterne takes both the traditionally scathing dismissal of Job's Wife as unsympathetic and dim-witted, with the much more sympathetic view that in appealing to her husband to end his torment she reveals with the real emotional frustration of witnessing her husband's suffering. We will return to Sterne's use of dialogue as a distinct theatrical device in Chapter 3.

[4] D. W. Jefferson's "*Tristram Shandy* and the tradition of Learned Wit" is the most notable article to demonstrate Sterne's relation to Renaissance thinkers and theology. Elizabeth Wanning Harries, "Gathering Up the Fragments" also posits Sterne's narrative style within a theology of both Christian faith and empirical scepticism. See also numerous accounts of Sterne's theological sympathies in Cash's biography.

is, its gestures, *mis en scènes*, stage design, audience interaction. As the study of theatrical situation as structure and event, performance criticism in some respect suggests that the linguistic transfer of information is insufficient in itself for the total communication of meanings contained within or suggested by the play text. The use of the same term by these two schools is clearly a simple question of nomenclature and convenience. But we might suggest that a performance is always defined by a carefully constructed combination of words and sights which can be used effectively to contradict one another and underscore the tenuousness of the proper performability of language in general. Often, therefore, complete understanding involves a variety of meanings which can only emerge through the physical context or intonation of a word. We might say that in both the study of language in a text and structures in a theatre, performance is the guiding principle of effective play and word-play.

The delicate conditions of performance undermine the permanent validity of language, but to make such a claim in the context of a rational explanation or discourse, one must rely on the implied validity of that text anyway. 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. Similarly, an understanding of the inevitable multiplicity of interpretation, of impermanence, of constructedness might undermine the whole process of signification, if the espousal of that disruptive awareness did not have to be made within language. As is well known, the avowal of an ambiguous impermanence to linguistic structures is an important aspect of Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. In a dialogical context, the impositions of a rationalised signifier-signified relationship are recognised as arbitrary and repressive of existent countering forces — and therefore are inadequate to represent the total ambiguity of reality. Not surprisingly, Bakhtin's dialogism, and its socio-historical extension, carnival, has often been used to elucidate the subversive and self-parodying style of Sterne's narrative. Indeed, Bakhtin himself calls one of his novel-subgenres the "Sternean novel" and Sterne is used often as an illustration of the dialogical process (Todorov 91).

It is Julia Kristeva, however, who recognises the paradox of Bakhtinian carnivalesque performance and conveniently demonstrates that its structure can be considered analogous to theatrical presentation. "Within the carnival," she writes, "the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of *the author* emerges as an anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, man and mask." But, she continues, "the cynicism of this carnivalesque scene... destroys a god in order to impose its own dialogical laws" (49). Her summation restates this paradoxical critique in theatrical terminology:

> The scene of the carnival, where there is no stage, no 'theatre', is thus both stage and life, game and dream, discourse and spectacle. By the same token, it is proffered as the only space in which language escapes linearity (law) to live as drama in three dimensions. At a deeper level, this also signifies the contrary: drama becomes located in language. A major principle thus emerges: all poetic discourse is dramatisation, dramatic permutation... of words (49).

For Kristeva, then, the dialogical linguistic process can be characterised as a paradox of discursive truth and spectacular, and thus engaging falsehood. We see the fallibility of language, as we do of the stage, but we persist in making those "dramatic" truth claims, which we recognise as the product of theatrical construction.

This is the very problem addressed recently by performance critics and theatre semiologists, notably Patrice Pavis. Just as language cannot be separated from the behavioural conditions which surround and affect it, the analysis of dramatic texts and performance events are not distinguishable critical modes. Like Kristeva, Pavis articulates a paradox of theatrical interpretation:

> The *mis en scène* is not the putting into practice of what is present in the text. On the contrary, it is the speaking of the text in a given staging, the way in which its presuppositions, its unspoken elements and its enunciations are brought out that will confer on it a particular meaning. Moreover, the possibilities of staging (the interpretations) are not unlimited, since the text imposes certain constraints on the director and vice versa. To read a dramatic text one must have some idea of its *theatricality*, and the performance cannot make a total abstraction of what the text says (18-9).

In other words, while performance criticism often seeks to explore the "contradictions between systems" of text and *mise en scène*, attempts to understand, clarify, or even note the semiotic potential of those contradictions can reduce the performance into a text. "The very term *notation*," Pavis writes, "reveals a logocentric attitude toward theatre" (113). But while he views this paradox as a problem in arriving at a concrete method of theatre semiology, he suggest that it is the acceptance of it as a paradox which defines new developments in semiological analysis, "show[ing] a greater flexibility in the purely linguistic method and a clear desire to set up a poetics or rhetoric of theatre forms, without being intimidated any longer by the genre that is specifically theatre but encompassing all types of performance" (20).

Interestingly, this very "desire to set up a poetics or rhetoric of theatre forms," -- the paradoxical impulse to textualise aspects of performance beyond the text -- seems to be evident in the acting treatises of Sterne's day. True mid-century empiricists, these commentators eschew the assumption that rational language is sufficient for performative signification but they cannot resist attempting to determine the exact rules for the successful communication of those emotions. For example, in his oft-cited "Essay on the Art of Acting," first published in 1746, Aaron Hill also stresses an open-minded response to the "natural" emotions of an acted situation: "To act a passion, well, the actor never must attempt its imitation, 'till his fancy has conceived so strong an image, or idea, of it, as to move the same impressive springs within his mind, which form that passion, when 'tis undesigned and natural" (355).[5] Undesigned and natural -- the idea seems clear enough. Know the character, the feeling, the situation, and the proper passion is inevitable. But Hill's language is distinctly Lockean: "conceived so strong an idea," "within his mind." Moreover, he cannot stress enough that "this is an absolute necessary, and the only

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[5] Ronald Hafter notes that "Sterne owned a four volume collected edition of Aaron Hill," and cites *A facsimile Reproduction of a Unique Catalogue of Laurence Sterne's Library* as his source. Arthur Cash and other Sterne biographers have concluded that since Sterne's library was mixed in with several others' at the time of his death, the *Facsimile* is no longer a completely credible source. On the other hand, as it was included, he likely saw it. Moreover, the subscription list included in Vol I of Hill's four volume *Works* does not include Sterne. It does however list many prominent members of London literary society whom Sterne would eventually become closely connected with. Apart from Johnson and Richardson (who order six sets), the list notes Lord Fauconberg, Sterne's first patron, and the Marquis of Rockingham, his second, as well as David Garrick.

general rule." Of course, he then suggests that "that idea cannot strongly be conceived without impressing its own form upon the muscles of the face" (356), and conclude "that there are only ten dramatic passions," and to describe the necessary form of each on the face and body, including copious *textual* examples to assist in the "practice" of each.

John Hill's *Treatise on the Art of Acting*, first published in 1750, also seems to stress a subjective reactionary approach – as opposed to a rhetorical, explanatory one – to the presentation of the passions on stage: "It were best that the heart of a player had no reigning passion of its own, with this ready sensibility of all... thus he would represent all well, because he would first feel all properly" (cited in Taylor 66). In typical "naturalist" fashion, this sensibility is considered a talent, an almost spiritual or sublime gift from the natural world: "performers... more than all the rest, ought to be selected from among persons whom nature has particularly favour'd" (2). But John Hill, like his namesake, cannot leave sublimity well enough alone: "It is not sufficient that he knows how to raise his passions, he must know how to raise it by just rules... below which it must not sink and beyond which it must not rise" (4). Hill even suggests that "Playing is a science, and is to be studied as a science; and he who will all that nature ever did, or can do for a man, expects to succeed wholly without the effects of that study, deceives himself extremely" (cited in Taylor 64-5). Thus, George Taylor summarises: "the term Passion for our philosophers of acting... is a mental state, not necessarily an emotional motive; it is a state recognised and controlled by the mind" (60).

Although these theories appear to present the new subjective approach to the emotions in performance, by their very existence and textuality as instructional treatises they cannot but objectify those emotions. Interestingly, Garrick admitted to sudden, interrupting moments of emotion on stage: "I pronounce that the greatest strikes of genius have been unknown to the actor himself, till circumstances, and the warmth of the scene has sprung to mine, as it were, as much to his own surprise as that of the audience" (cited in Donohue 220). But even in this letter, he cannot resist ascribing rules for this very process: "I make a great difference between a great

genius and a good actor. The first will always realise the feelings of his character, and be transported beyond himself." We might say that Garrick's method, in stressing reaction, and thus a static visual image, was digressive, even transgressive, but these transgressions form part of the actor's enactment and understanding of a "progress" through a series of scenes. [6]

Taylor traces the roots of acting theory to the philosophy of emotion from Descartes to Hobbes to Locke, Spinoza, and Hume, all of whom recognised the strength of any given emotional passion but, as Taylor says of Locke, felt the need to "subordinate its power to the power of reason" (59). For Locke, as for the Hills, the intense emotional components of acting are actually "trains" or "associations of ideas... in the mind" strengthened by habit:

> This strong combination of *Ideas*, not ally'd by Nature, the Mind makes in it self either voluntarily, or by chance, and hence it comes to different Men to be very different, according to their different Inclinations, Educations, Interests, *etc*. Custom settles habits of Thinking in the Understanding, as well as Determining in the will, and of Motions in the Body; all of which seems to be but Trains of Motion in the Animal Spirits, which once set a going continue on the same steps they have been used to, which by often treading are worn into a smooth path, and the Motion of it becomes easy and as it were Natural (II.30.396).

Despite his pretensions to scientific objectivity, Locke seems to have a certain disdain for anything which is "Extravagant in the Opinions, Reasonings, and Actions of Other Men" (II.30.394). An idea must be harnessed and controlled with the proper use of words and names in order that it does not become an "irrational... Ruling Passion."

Of course, as critics agree, Sterne's presents Locke's language theory in a satirical manner. Locke admits that the "imperfection" and "obscurity" of words is due to the fact that "Sounds have no natural connexion with our Ideas, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of Men, the *doubtfulness* and uncertainty *of their signification*" (III.9.477). His overall project involves the establishing of a rectifying and perfectly reasonable mode of philosophical discourse;

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[6] Taylor: "Garrick himself was hailed as a miracle of naturalness and a master of realistic psychology, yet... there were many critics who could analyse his pieces of stage business and indeed attack his notorious 'claptrap'" (52). Cf. Johnson: "If Garrick really believed himself to be that monster, Richard III, then he deserved to be hung every time he performed it" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, cited in Downer 1037).

the textual model of textual models. Sterne reminds his readers that the difficulties Locke finds in communication are much more prevalent in actual discourse than the transmission of "clear and distinct ideas." Human conceptions of time and duration, for example, as products of inner reflection upon the *"Notion of succession"* rather than outer reality, are products of discourse (II.14.183). Explaining the train of ideas to Toby, Walter echoes Locke: "in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or another, which follow each other in a train just like —." Toby interrupts Walter with his own typically hobby-horsical manner: "A train of artillery? said my uncle *Toby*. — A train of a fiddlestick! — quoth my father" (III.18.225). It is fitting that Walter is explaining Locke's notion of natural duration here, for Toby's interruption demonstrates how the mind is prey to sudden unexpected shifts in argumentation, transgressions of rational argumentation, based on the differing obsessions of speakers and responders. Rational discourse, then, is a textual construction, the aligning of distinct words and standardised significations into regulated "trains of ideas." But Sterne, echoing Locke's fears of irrationality, suggests that as an event in time, as a performance, rational communication is always coupled with sudden shifts of emphasis, unexpected ideas, the imperfection of words.

It is Hume, however, who uses the theatre as a model for "the train of ideas" and their signification: "The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations" (*Treatise* 253). More sceptical than Locke — and therefore, perhaps, a better model for Shandeanism — Hume does not simply suggest that ideas are constructions of mental reflection which can therefore be moulded into rational discourses, but rather that ideas remain prey to the inevitable fluctuations and interruptions of experience in time. "There is properly no simplicity," he continues, "in it at one time, nor identity indifferent, whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity." Interestingly, although Hume suggests that "the comparison of the theatre must not mislead us," he is attempting that very project — the harnessing of "human nature" into a textual format — of which he seems to be so sceptical. Like

Locke, like the acting theorists, and, I will argue, like Sterne, Hume finds himself in a paradox: trying to explain the manner in which theatrical performance in time seems to offer a "truer" picture of language and understanding, his explanation ends up subsuming that transcension into a textual format.[7]

Nevertheless, it is extremely significant that Hume chooses as his metaphor the theatre and not simply drama. Drama is a genre, a type of textual combination of established and recognised conventions; theatre is an event, a delicately composed performance, and in spite of numerous attempts to regulate it, utterly open to disruption. We must, therefore, also distinguish this "theatrical metaphor" from the older and better known *Theatrum Mundi* world view popularised by Shakespeare's immortalised statement: "All the world's a stage." The *Theatrum Mundi* stresses the constructed nature of existence, how human habits and social interactions seem to be dominated by codes and rules. This is certainly an aspect of theatrical writing and commentary in the eighteenth century; it became something of an ideal, in line with Locke's rationalist mandate. The "best" theatre was considered a controlled forum of rational discourse. But, as Hume's metaphor suggests, theatre in performance actually transgresses the rationalised limitations of genre and text -- becoming a model for interference and tension rather than perfect composition. Yet, as theatre semiologists realise, even the attempt to explain that self-transgressive nature of performance demands that it be regulated into recognised units of information -- conventions, codes, rules -- in essence, made into a text.

While the paradoxical tension between the need for discourse and the imperfection of words is Sterne's overall theme in *Tristram Shandy*, he does specifically relate this tension with theatrical presentation. "My purpose is to do exact justice to every creature brought upon the stage of this dramatic work" (I.10.18), Tristram remarks but soon re-evaluates -- recalling Locke --

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[7] Hume later wrote that the extreme scepticism of the *Treatise* was youthful and immature and he emended many of its theories in *An Enquiry Concering Human Understanding*. The basic sense of his theatrical metaphor remains intact in the later, shorter, and more moderate work: "...no philospher... has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe... we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves by any explanation of them"(IV.1).

the effect of that theatrical mode: "What confusion in greater THEATRES from words of little meaning and as indeterminate a sense" (II.2.100). And yet, this concept of communication in the theatre is posited in the context of other equally problematic methods of discourse including the "terrible battles" of Romances, "conversation," "a pudder and racket in COUNCILS... and in the SCHOOLS of the learned about power and about spirit." It is significant that Sterne emphasises the active, even noisy, confrontational nature of these discourses. More than simply texts and arguments, they are performances -- discourse as an event in time. On the other hand, the "racket" is caused not by the event itself but by the insistence of each party that they are right or, simply, their need to explain their positions.

The theatrical paradox, then, is a confrontation of argumentation and rebuttal, of the mask of absolute correctness worn by the proponents of reason and the responses of audiences or readers driven to reveal the inadequacies of that mask -- and thus unmask it -- but which in that process don the masks of absolute factual stability themselves. In this thesis, I will argue that it represents the basis of Sterne's references to the theatre and is, therefore, a significant aspect of his narrative method and analysis of language. Rather than associate *Tristram Shandy* with the content of the voluminous canon of British drama -- much of which, especially Shakespeare, Sterne knew intimately -- I will focus on Sterne's understanding of certain aspects of eighteenth-century theatrical performance itself and the tendency of eighteenth-century writers toward the textualised regulation of that performance situation in order to render it a suitable metaphor for social, moral, and linguistic issues.[8] The focus of Chapter 1 will be on the audience as an active participant in the theatre. Although many writers and commentators on the theatre, such as Dryden and Addison, attempted to create a stabilised and morally responsive and responsible audience, the theatre goers had ideas of their own and did not hesitate to interrupt plays to have

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[8] For Sterne on Shakespeare see especially New's *Notes* and Chibka's excellent study, "The Hobby-Horse Epigraph: *Tristram Shandy, Hamlet,* and the Vehicles of Memory." A theatrical connection might be made between Sterne and Shakespeare through the emergence of Garrick's "cult of Shakespeare" in the 1760s. None of Sterne's biographers make any mention of it, however.

their own voices heard. Sterne's allusions to the above-mentioned writers in their theatrical context and his own constructions of the novel's audience -- which I will contrast to Fielding's -- suggest that he hoped to engender a theatrically active engagement with his text including interruptions and transgressions. Nevertheless, his narrator, empiricist that he is, cannot but attempt to clarify the importance of that response itself.

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine Sterne's adaptation of two theatrical techniques. The first of these is the emerging pictoralism spearheaded by David Garrick and noticeable in the theatrical quality of Hogarth's painting and Diderot's dramatic theories. Sterne clearly admired the visual emphasis and respected its claims to greater "naturalism" than the textually-based rhetorical declamation which preceded it. But by transferring pictoralism into a strictly verbal format, he exposes the necessity for some kind of textual explanation to clarify the significance of the staged tableaux and visual images and stresses, therefore, the compositional intensity which this non-verbal "naturalism" demanded. At the same time, the combination of visual detail and suggestion in *Tristram Shandy* -- in its numerous tableaux and illustrations -- emphasises the tension between the silence of visual imagery and the directing presence of the explaining voice.

Chapter 3 is concerned with the similar issue of dialogue. While performed speech is undoubtedly the basis of theatrical communication, its potential to reflect the ambiguities of understanding inherent in the presence of multiple speakers and responders -- each with differing mandates and perspectives -- is often reduced, as it merely expresses single points of view and interest. The dialogues of *Tristram Shandy*, mainly centred on Walter Shandy's theorising, suggest a lively and realistically ambiguous alternative to the controlled textual dialogues of Plato and the epistolary dialogues which had come to prominence with Shaftesbury and Richardson. Tristram, like his father, is the controlling hand in these dialogues; through subtle manipulations of verbal connotation and textual presentation he attempts to realise the actually disputatious nature of true dialogue in performance rather than in its subordination to a textual mandate.

Chapter 1

"Clear the Theatre:" *Tristram Shandy* and its 'Theatrical' Audience

Tracing the philosophical significance of Sterne's digressive style in his recent article,

"Sterne and the Narrative of Determinateness," Melvyn New argues: "Sterne shows us... that the

instinct or desire to order the story is always more powerful than our capacity to rest in muddle,

to celebrate disorder without a contrary urge to tidy up the place" (317). As *tidy* as New intends

his own argument to be, his statement cannot but be besieged by Shandean verbal play. He

suggests that both the characters in and the author of *Tristram Shandy* want to "find very *clear*

solutions to the muddle of a real life," be it Toby's or Walter's or Tristram's or Sterne's. By New's

own admission, however, all must supply and borrow elaborate explanations and commentaries

to accomplish their intended communicative clarity, and in so doing, "restage the narrative

strategies of the reader/critic." But this "restaging" implies the antithesis of another equally

important meaning of "clear" — transparent or empty. Rather, it implies an accumulation of

things or ideas in some presentable format, on a *stage*, with prescribed *roles*, with appropriate

rules or even *unities*. We must consider, then, the extent to which clarity and textuality, as either

explication or commentary, are intertwined with "restaging," "staging," and eighteenth-century

ideas of theatrical production and presentation as they appear in *Tristram Shandy*.

In volume VI, chapter 29, in a direct reference to his "audience," Tristram indeed

proposes to *clear* the stage:

> I beg the reader will assist me here, to wheel off my uncle *Toby's* ordinance
> behind the scenes,—to remove his sentry-box, and clear the theatre, *if possible*, of horn-
> works and half-moons, and get the rest of his military apparatus out of the way;—that
> done, my dear friend *Garrick*, we'll snuff the candles bright,—sweep the stage with a new
> broom,—draw up the curtain, and exhibit my uncle *Toby* dressed in a new character,
> throughout which the world can have no idea how he will act: and yet if pity be akin to
> love,—and bravery no alien to it, you have seen enough of my uncle *Toby* in these, to trace

these family likenesses, betwixt the two passions (in case there is one) to your heart's content. (VI.29.549-50)

This passage is more than a typical Shandean digression. It is an interruption in the narrative, and thus as much a transgression upon uncle Toby's bowling-green campaigns as "Fate, envying his name the glory of being handed down to posterity with *Aldovandus*'s and the rest, —[when] she basely patched up the peace of Utrecht" (VI.30.551). At the same time, this interruption allows the reader, as Tristram suggests, to make a further attempt at a reasonable observation of uncle Toby's "character," based on the "family likenesses" of his "passions," and a comparison between his "bravery" and his "love," that is, between his campaigns and his *amours*.

Keeping Toby's campaigns and his affair with the Widow Wadman distinct is practically impossible: "—You shall lay your finger upon the place—said my uncle Toby.—I will not touch it, however, quoth Mrs. Wadman to herself" (IX.20.773). Her "imagination" jumps from one passion to the other; this confusion itself requires some explanation. "A second translation," Tristram calls it: "it shews what little knowledge is got by mere words." This attempt at further *clarification* is made as explicitly as the cleared stage of volume VI, and similarly invites the reader to participate:

> Now in order to *clear up* the mist which hangs upon these three pages, I must endeavour to be as clear as possible myself.
>
> Rub your hands thrice across your foreheads—blow your noses—cleanse your emunctories - sneeze, my good people!
> ——God bless you——
>
> Now give me all the help you can. [emphasis mine]

But we can't help. Tristram wants to compel us to sneeze by crossing the standard boundaries between text and reader. Yet, whether we sneeze or not, the text always reacts as if we did: "God bless you." Similarly, we cannot actually "assist" Tristram and "Garrick" to "clear the theatre" because we are not stage-hands in a theatre. "Clearing" is not "possible" because we are dealing

with a static text and not a disruptable or even mutable performance in the theatrical sense. Nevertheless, Toby does appear "dressed in a new character" and the direction of the narrative closes on one topic and moves on to another. The task of discerning the meaning or significance of Toby's actions and characterisation or the acceptance or denial of Tristram's directions still rests with the reader. Thus, the reader's potential to "assist" Tristram becomes a tension between a need to engage, to interpret, and a respect for Tristram or his text to tell us what to see and understand.[9]

Clearly, Tristram has engaged us, his readers/audience in a paradox, recognisable even in the word "clear," itself. The OED lists numerous definitions of *clear*. In a physical sense it can mean "purity or uncloudiness of light, transparent, allowing light to pass through," and correspondingly implies in an intellectual sense "manifest to the mind or judgement." As a verb the OED lists "to free or rid (a place or thing) of any things by which it is occupied, accompanied or encumbered, so as to leave the former clear or void." I suggest that it is practically impossible to make any idea "manifest" to anyone by creating a "void," or, as with Garrick and Tristram, "clear[ing] the theatre." Tristram proposes that with "the fixture of Momus's glass in the human breast... nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptrical bee-hive, and looked in,- -viewed the soul stark naked;- - -observed all her motions..." (I.23.82). "But this," as Tristram explains, "is not the case of the inhabitants of this earth." We must find other, less *clear* means precisely to define one anothers' characters: 'There are others again, who will draw a man's character from no other helps in the world, but merely from his evacuations;—but this often gives a very incorrect outline" (84).

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[9] Of seven definitions the OED supplies three immediately relevant interpretations of "assist." Derived from "as/ad-sistere, to take one's stand," to assist commonly means "to help or aid," as seems to be suggested by Tristram here: "I beg the reader to assist me." Nevertheless, as in use after the 1550s were, "to stand, remain near, abide by, attend," and an apparently hybrid of both, "to be present at whether simply as a spectator or taking part in the proceedings."

Incorrect indeed, for the very opacity of the language immediately leads the reader to a carnivalesque double meaning of "evacuations;" already Tristram's evident obsession with the lower bodily stratum is clouding his argument and affecting the way we respond. Even the accompanying and perhaps *clarifying* description of the imagined Mercurians is cluttered with computations, causes and parentheses, not to mention numerous sexual references. In other words, Tristram's ability to explain and our ability to understand is hindered by the mass accumulation of information required for exact interpretation. If we *clear* representation and communication of its signifying encumbrances we are left with the equivalent of the absolutely clear, that is empty, chapters eighteen and nineteen of volume IX: a blank, "nothing." These chapters themselves are replaced at the author's bidding in his formulation of the proper way to present his narrative, with all its digressions and progressions. In other words, as with our passive assistance in the clearing of the theatre, Sterne seems to open his narrative, but at the same time attempts to enclose parameters for our interpretative strategies.

To recapitulate: one crucial aspect of Sterne's novel is the tension between what might be called "clarity of mind" -- the desire for order, the need for rational explanation and nodding reception -- and the "clearing" transgressions upon that order -- an abandonment of the restraints of rational dictates. The first requires presence, the presence of facts; the second aims at absence, nothing left after restrictions are cleared away. But, the first also aims at an absence of mystery or ambiguity; the second also, inevitably, ends in an accumulation of substance. At which point we can finally return to the theatre. I would like to argue that this paradox of communicative clearing can be *clarified* with an associative analysis of the operations of the mid-eighteenth-century theatre, an association which Sterne's textual practice and Tristram's theatrical metaphor seem to make *clear*. Like *Tristram Shandy*, the theatrical practice of this period was no orderly affair. Constantly pressured by the inconsistencies of their medium -- a demanding and often unruly public, a theatre design which never fully enclosed the performance space, and the experiments of dramatists, actors, and commentators -- many writers, including Addison,

Dryden, Fielding, Garrick, Diderot and the Hills, with whom Sterne was evidently familiar,

sought to textualise, and thus *clarify*, the proper roles of actors, administrators, and audiences.

But the rationalising impulses of these writers tended to suggest ideal theatrical relationships

between audience and stage. *Tristram Shandy*, by contrast, in revealing how difficult it is to create

in a text *any* perfect communication, suggests a role for its readers/audience which is at once

troublesome, and therefore in need of some clarifying restraint, and tolerable, for it is not

augmented with the demands of the limiting standards of textualisation.

The need to clarify the function of the theatre and the role of the audience and the

resulting difficulties which disrupted that clarification was a paradoxical but nevertheless

prevalent aspect of eighteenth-century theatre, in both the performances themselves and the

building design and administration which supported them. It has become a commonplace of

eighteenth-century theatre history to suggest that the stage and the house were not completely

distinct. Allardyce Nicoll explains that traditional "fourth wall" concepts of the eighteenth-

century stage were developed in the 1890s by scholars, "dominated by the image of the bi-partite

theatre of their own time" (*Garrick Stage* 21). By contrast, he explains that "the only way of

appreciating the mid-eighteenth-century playhouse is to think of it in terms of three parts, the

'house,' the 'scene' and the 'platform,' or stage proper" (25). The scenes were structured within a

proscenium arch[10] and behind a curtain which was raised and lowered to demarcate a change of

act or, in the earlier period at least, the beginning and end of the play. But the main action of

each play continued to be performed on the forestage, even after, at Drury Lane, Garrick had it

shortened from twenty-one to eleven feet in 1765. The end of the forestage was separated from

the house by a row of lights and an orchestra pit, but galleries on either side actually flanked the

stage, allowing for direct communication between the boxes and the platform (fig 1-2). Relations

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[10] However, as Nicoll explains, this was "a relatively flimsy affair, and not the deep, three-dimensional, heavy-moulded structure so common in many contemporary theatres" (26). More a part of the scene than a proper or even conceptual barrier, the "flimsy" structure of the proscenium confirms more direct communication between stage and house.

between actors and spectators were, therefore, seemingly open and familiar. As Nicoll explains, "there, in the middle of the house. they symbolically became one; the cries from pit or gallery, the direct addresses made from the stage to the auditorium, result from an unconscious feeling that this was some kind of family party" (91).

Yet this intimacy was not uniformly harmonious. The unruly behaviour of English theatre audiences, which continued from the Restoration into the Regency and Victorian periods, is well-known and well documented. The booing and hissing of the actors was as common as applause. Also commonplace were altercations between audience members, solicitations from orange sellers and prostitutes, and the throwing about of orange peels and pennies — all during the performance. Of course, the theatre managers and performers did all they could to control and please their fickle audiences, but their attempts at discipline were often regarded as an infringement upon "traditional English liberty." Thus, the entire physical performance situation appears to have been dominated by a precarious and paradoxical tension between the separation of audience and stage — which would allow the play to maintain its structural and often moral unity — and a juxtaposition of the two, which allowed the audience to interject their responses or indifference at will.

One striking example of this conflict is the famous theatre riots of 1763. Responding to the annoying and noisy custom of allowing half-price admittance to the afterpiece, Garrick ordered a notice to be placed that "nothing under full price would be taken," to a performance of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and its following pantomime. As Nicoll explains, "Immediately a gang was organised by a certain Thaddeus Fitzpatrick: a rush was made on the stage, woodwork was smashed and chandeliers shattered" (90). Garrick was forced to concede. The management of Covent Garden did not, however, and attempted to enforce the new regulation the following night; the gang struck again, "with the result that the entire inner fabric of the playhouse was wantonly destroyed." Although their authenticity is sometimes doubted, two drawing of the "Fitzgiggo Riots" exist (fig. 3) and clearly show the rioters climbing the stage during the

performance. But the most striking aspect of this exchange is the continuous tension between the restraining of the managers and the resistance of the public. Each administrative tactic is obviously intended to drive away the rowdy half-paying riff-raff and thus create a quieter and more governable, if not more profitable, theatre environment. From the perspective of the code of social and economic conduct implied by the demand for full-price, the riots represented a transgression not simply of space (in climbing the stage) but of behaviour (in interrupting the performance to commit vandalism). On the other hand, from the perspective of Fitzpatrick and his gang the restrictions were regarded as transgressions of their economic privileges -- and so the struggle continued.

The 1763 riots are only one instance in a continuing tension between the house and the stage. Indeed, theatre riots in general, although they occurred repeatedly into the nineteenth century, represent only an extreme form of the interference of stage and house. Members of the audience, often aristocratic and usually drunk, would climb onto the platform in order to meet friends involved in the productions -- a habit which enraged the managers, and led to many mid-performance altercations (Price 95). But transgression of decorum perpetrated by the theatre professionals equally enraged the paying crowds. Foreign companies were not often tolerated; Garrick's invitation to Noverre's ballet company to perform *The Chinese Festival* at Drury-Lane in November 1755 was met with pamphlets and other xenophobic solicitations. The production went on, but when Garrick tried to explain that the company was indeed Swiss and not French, the gallery shouted: "Swiss! What the devil do we know of Swiss! -- a Swiss is a foreigner, and all foreigners are Frenchmen; and so damn you all" (cited in Price 97, Troubridge 91). Despite the presence of George II, "the rioters went through the routine of tearing the benches up and the chandeliers down, slashing the scenery and so on, ending with a visit to Garrick's house... to break the windows there" (Troubridge 92). Bad or boring plays, however, were the most common infringement of the audience's pleasure. James Boswell with a company of fellows, in response to a "damnable" play once "sallied into the house, planted ourselves in the middle of the

pit, and with oaken cudgels in our hands and shrill-sounding catcalls in our pockets, sat ready prepared... to be swift ministers of vengeance" (Troubridge 89). Dr. Johnson, famed rationalist though he was, was not pleased with the denial of a fireworks display, and proposed to his companions "to hold up our sticks, and threaten to break those coloured lamps that surround the orchestra, and we shall soon have our wish gratified" (90).

Vengeance. Gratification. Obviously, both the audience and the managers desired that the performance adhere to a number of expectations. It is in texts, however, such as these accounts from biography and the press, that this desire for a defined and expected theatre experience becomes clear. Each party wants to textualise, so to speak, theatre performance within the limitations which they set. The frustration of these writers/speakers reveals the fact that the performances they sought to define were affected by certain indeterminacies: illness, weather, politics, fire, drunkenness. In other words, as events occurring in time, no play or audience could exactly determine the outcome of any given production. At the same time, the occasional violent temper of the audience suggests a converse drive toward destruction and transgression -- to turn even a tenuous presence into an utter absence. The need to clarify the condition of the theatre space apparent in these texts, then, demonstrates the theatrical paradox of presence and absence.

Tristram Shandy is just such a text. The frequency of its appeals to the reader for reaction and understanding reflect the theatre's appeals to their audience for a certain openness and patience. Many critics suggest that the open narrative of *Tristram Shandy* is an aspect of its self-proclaimed continuation of a rhetorical style. Donald Wehrs states: "Sterne places his novel within the tradition of Erasmus, Montaigne, and Cervantes, *dramatising* experience's resistance to being absorbed into a straightforward narrative" (141; emphasis mine). As we have seen, this dramatisation extends *Tristram Shandy* from its narrative tradition to its theatrical context. Keeping this context in mind, therefore, Sterne's book becomes the locus for a meeting of not only a reader and a text, but also an audience and a performance, each struggling to comprehend and determine the actions and reactions of the other.

One of the important ways in which *Tristram Shandy* establishes itself as this kind of theatrical book is as a critique of theatrical texts -- prologues, plays, commentaries, -- which seek to condition performance, and other novels — notably Fielding's *Tom Jones* -- which employ a theatrical metaphor to accomplish the same determination of audience reception. Stallybrass and White, analysing a number of prologues from the Restoration period, note that, "the rhetorical and metaphorical manoeuvres... reveal how powerfully... the carnivalesque and the unruly public body are *produced* as transgressive and taboo-laden categories in the urgent attempt to *clear* the public sphere" (84, latter emphasis mine). Thus in the prologue to his *Cleomenes* Dryden hopes, "our Bear garden-friends are all away,/ Who bounce with Hands and Feet, and cry Play, Play.../ Who, while we speak make love to Orange-Wenches,/ And between Acts stand strutting on the Benches" (3-8, cited in Stallybrass 84-85). He makes an appeal to right-minded critics: "Arise true Judges in your own defense,/ Controul those Foplings, and declare for Sence" (19-20). He also implores the women of the audience to "rise.../ That Fools no longer should your Favours boast" (23-4), and suggests to them that, "Such Squires are only fit for Country Towns,/ To Stink of Ale; and dust a Stand with Clownes/ ... Let not Farce Lovers your weak Choice upbraid,/ But turn 'em over to the Chamber-maid" (27-30).

Stallybrass and White's interpretation is revealing here, especially for the relevance of these issues of theatre history to *Tristram Shandy*: "the speech endeavours to coax and shame the unruly audience of aristocratic Beaux and vulgar groundlings into *keeping still and keeping quiet*, transforming them, precisely, into a deferential and receptive bourgeois audience" (84). Dryden does state quite categorically, however, that he wishes these hooligans "all away." In either case, Dryden hopes to make a disturbing presence disappear, whether the "Squires" or simply their behaviour, and forge out of that absence a new presence of sense-minded spectators. But to achieve this required absence, he must first make it present in the formal framework of the prologue. As in *Tristram Shandy*, therefore, Dryden's prologue reveals the doubleness inherent in the phrase "to clear the public sphere." *Ridding* the theatre of its transgressive elements responds

to an intellectual demand for a *clarity of mind* in the audience, which will render the themes and morals of the plays *transparent* . At the same time, those rowdy transgressors must be constituted as such in order that the necessity for their dismissal is logically *clear*.

While Dryden's prologue to *Cleomenes* is perhaps the most direct example of intended audience conditioning, Pope's prologue to Addison's *Cato* reveals that this conditioning is the basis of moral reform: "To wake the soul by tender strokes of art,/ To raise the genius and to mend the heart,/ To make mankind in conscious virtue bold,/ Live o'er each scene and be what they behold:/ For this the tragic Music first trod the stage" (1-5). With these demands and references to "hero's glory," "patriots, " and "Roman drops from British eyes," the prologue is intended to create a particular kind of receptive body. This desire is reaffirmed in the final few lines: "Britons, attend: be worth like this approv'd,/ And show how you have virtue to be mov'd" (35-6). Interestingly, Pope seems aware of the pressures which this moral theatre reform was up against: "Our scene precariously subsists too long/ On French translation and Italian song" (39-40). Thus, he encourages audience reaction, even anger, but it is an anger determined by and directed toward a rationally defined agenda: "Dare to have sense yourselves: assert the stage,/ Be justly warm'd with your own native rage" (41-2).

Apart from prologues, which really form part of the overall production, the commentaries in essays and journals also sought to affect the way theatre and dramaturgy were understood by the audience, that is, the discerning bourgeois audiences invoked in the prologues by the same authors. For example, B. L. Joseph cites Addison's comment on *Venice Preserved* in *Tatler 133*:

> "Silence is sometimes more significant and sublime than the most noble eloquence..." [Addison] describes an actor (probably Macklin) in the last act of *Venice Preserved* where Pierre begs Jaffeir to rescue him from the wheel by stabbing him... 'As he is going to make this dreadful request, he is not able to communicate it; but withdraws his face from his friend's ear, and bursts into tears. The melancholy silence that follows hereupon... raises in the spectators a grief that is inexpressible. (72)

As Addison's description suggests, the static moment caused by Macklin's breakdown is an interruption to a normally continuous dialogue. Though it may have been an accident of emotional strain, it is described in such a way that it must have added considerable pathos to the scene. Yet as a record of the occurrence, Addison obviously feels that it is exemplary of a proper interruption and reaction. If the audience is going to respond, better they weep than holler.

But Addison's interpretation does not really deviate from the text. Otway's stage directions suggest that Pierre "weeps," although the display of emotion does not seem to have been intended to interrupt the action of the whole scene. Moreover Jaffeir's, "Tears! Amazement! Tears! / I never saw thee melted thus before" (314), verbally clarifies the significative potential of what Addison later describes as "the melancholy silence." Jaffeir not only points out the visual signifier, the tears, but also interprets Pierre's uncharacteristic breakdown as a revelation of the limits of individual strength in the face of personal humiliation and a dishonourable death. Pierre himself declares through his tears, "Curse on this weakness!...Is't fitting a soldier who has lived with honour,/ Fought nations' quarrels, and been crowned with conquest,/ Be exposed a common on a wheel?" What appears initially to Addison to be a noteworthy interruption in the action and dialogue in the play, is subsumed by him back into the formulated reasoning of the play itself. The disruption of one aspect of the performance, the dialogue between Jaffeir and Pierre, is implicated within another, Jaffeir's explanation to the audience -- through which they are, essentially, told how to respond.

Thus, the inevitable irregularities of performance, such as a boisterous audience or an overwrought actor, are subsumed within a textualized, that is, theoretical, framework of proper or effective theatre conduct.[11] Of course, Dryden and Addison represent only two authors involved in the attempt to define a suitably rational audience reaction. Moreover, Sterne does not refer directly to their prologues and commentaries. However, these texts represent the clearest

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[11] Many scholars, notably Barthes, have pointed out that the words *theatre* and *theory* come from the same Greek root, *thea*, a view, sight, the observable.

and most immediately relevant examples of their rationalistic and stringent audience reforms --

reforms of which Sterne is frankly sceptical. As Tristram first attempts "to enter a little into"

uncle Toby's "character," he alludes to both Dryden and Addison's theories of why English

comedies are better than French. The associative logic which brings Tristram to mention his

dramatic forbears can only be appreciated from the whole passage:

> --Pray what was that man's name,-- -for I write in such a hurry, I have no time to
> recollect, or look for it,---who first made the observation, That there was a great
> inconsistency in our air and climate?' Whoever he was, 'twas a just a good observation in
> him.- - - -But the corollary drawn from it, namely, That it is this which has furnished us
> with such a variety of odd and whimsical characters;'--that was not his;- - -it was found
> out by another man, at least a century and a half after him:--Then again,--that this
> copious storehouse of original materials, is the true and natural cause that our Comedies
> are so much better than those of *France*, or any others either have, or can be wrote upon
> the continent;---that discovery was not fully made till about the middle of king *William*'s
> reign, -- when the great *Dryden*, in writing one of his long prefaces, (if I mistake not) most
> fortunately hit upon it. Indeed toward the latter end of queen *Anne*, the great *Addison*
> began to patronise the notion, and more fully explained it to the world in one or two of
> his Spectators;--but the discovery was not his--(I.21.71).

In his *Notes*, New traces Addison's association of comic drama and climate to *Spectator* 179: "the

Gloominess in which sometimes the Minds of the best Men are involved, very often stands in

need of such little incitements to Mirth and Laughter, as are apt to disperse Melancholy, and put

our Faculties in good Humour. To which some will add, that the British Climate, more than any

other, makes Entertainments of this manner in a manner necessary" (108). In *Spectator* 371,

Addison further suggests that, "our English comedy excels that of all other Nations in the Novelty

and Variety of the Characters" (107). According to New, "Dryden does endorse English comedy

over French in his *Essay on Dramatick Poesie*," though not in Sterne's climatic terms:" "I dare boldly

affirm... That we have many Playes of ours as regular as any of theirs; and which, besides, have

more variety of Plot and Characters" (107).

It is important here that in positing a set of truths about the nature of English comedy,

both Dryden and Addison not only constitute the French plays as inadequate, but also neglect the

actual originators of their "facts" concerning comedy and climate. Sterne does not neglect them in

the same way. His appeals to "the great Dryden" and the "great Addison" are ironically

undermined by the presence of their sources "identified" only as "what was that man's name."

The irony of Tristram's own neglect takes a further stab at the two "greats" in that their restrictive

"affirmations" are revealed as the product of two little time and "this copious storehouse of

original materials."

In the same instance, Sterne directly, though humorously, suggests the hopelessness of a

codifying rationalist mandate:

> ... our knowledge physical, metaphysical, physiological, polemical nautical, mathematical, enigmatical, technical, biographical, romantical, chemical, and obstretical, with fifty other branches of it, (most of 'em ending as these do in *ical*) have for these last two centuries and more, gradually been creeping upwards towards that * Axµ* 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 kinds of writings whatsoever;---the want of all kind writing will put an end to all kind of reading;- - -and that in time, *As war begets poverty; poverty peace,* ---must, in course, put an end to all kind of knowledge,- - -and then-----we shall have all to begin over again; or, in other words, be exactly where we started.

> -----Happy! thrice happy Times!   (I.21.72)

New points out that the phrase "*As war begets poverty; poverty peace*" is originally from an inset

verse interpretation of the zodiac from *Wing's Sheet Almanack...* printed by *J. Roberts* for the

company of *Stationers,*" though Sterne's source is likely Swift's *Tale of a Tub*. The rhyme reads:

"War begets Poverty/ Poverty Peace:/ Peace maketh Riches flow,/ (Fate ne'er doth cease)/

Riches produceth Pride,/ Pride is War's ground,/ War begets Poverty &c./ (The World) goes

round" (109). Interestingly this rhyme is in direct contrast, as is Tristram's joy "that we shall have

all to begin over again," to the idealised and fabricated "perfections" of the rationalists. Similarly,

the Rabelaisian list of "icals" suggest how the search for knowledge leads inevitably, and often

absurdly, to accumulation rather than clarity.

Given this context, therefore, Sterne's allusion to "the great" Dryden and Addison

suggests a satirical exaggeration of their rationalist mandate, including their attempts at theatre

reform.[12] The idea that a single text or directive can clarify a "natural" truth -- the object of

rational exploration -- is obviously undermined by the practically innumerable mental

associations brought on Tristram's untenable accumulation of knowledge. In line with this

reasoning Addison and Dryden clearly attempt to textualise the dramatic experience, in both

their plays and their theories, by reducing the extraneous aspects of theatre performance or, at

least, incorporating them into a verbal format. But the rotations of the zodiac, and the debates of

theatre prices, the history of eighteenth-century theatre, and *Tristram Shandy* along with it,

suggest that the textualising process will be unable to restrict the interfering elements of actual

experience.

Sterne's critique of rational systems acts primarily as a means of elucidating, if not

justifying, his narrative structure. Thus, while he uses theatrical terminology -- the raising and

lowering of curtains, the removal of sets, the Aristotelian division of plot (which he likely also

derived from Dryden) -- to open the workings of his narrative production, it also, as we have

seen, sanctions the reader's scrutiny and involvement in a manner consciously reminiscent of

theatre audiences. Sterne is not the only novelist to employ the theatrical metaphor to this end.

Fielding, for example, who came to write novels only after a prominent career as a comic and

critical dramatist, uses the theatrical metaphor to inculcate proper reactions to his novel.[13]

Fielding describes the typical reactions of each "order of spectators" in a theatre audience. He is

careful to suggest that they represent not a specific audience, but the reading public. Thus, "the

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[12] To be fair to Dryden and Addison we should note that, although they were confirmed rationalists,
followers and devotees of Locke, they were not dogmatists. On the contrary, they were are all too aware of
the darkness which underlies Enlightenment. What was important to them, however, was the perceived
need to bring everything into the light — a desire which Sterne and others found unrealistic. See Marshall
Brown, "Romanticism and Enlightenment:" Whether in religion or politics, the Enlightenment yearned for
the splendour of the sun. But it never forgot that light is born out of darkness... Historically the bright sides
of Enlightenment dominated at first, and the dark sides — satire and then sentiment — prevailed later,
especially after 1740" (33-5). Brown cites *Tristram Shandy* as a prominent example of this "satire and
sentiment."

[13] New suggests that "Sterne's image of 'good cookery' [for his offering to the reader] might owe something
to the opening chapter of *Tom Jones* (*Notes* 117).

world's upper gallery, treated that incident, I am well convinced, with their usual vociferation;

and every term of scurrilous reproach... the good women gave Black George to the devil, and

many of them expected every minute that the clovenfooted gentleman would fetch him down"

(VII.1.301). In typical Fielding fashion, the narrator cannot resist including a dose of good-

humoured, type-casting satire into his description:

> The pit, as usual, was no doubt divided: those who delight in heroic virtue and perfect character, objected to the producing such instances of villainy, without punishing them very severely for the sake of example. Some of the author's friends cry'd — 'Look'e, gentlemen, the man is a villain; but it is nature for all that.' And all the young critics of the age, the clerks, apprentices, &c. called it low, and fell a groaning.
> As for the boxes, they behaved with their accustomed politeness. Most of them were attending to something else. Some of those few who regarded the scene at all, declared he was a bad kind of man; while others refused their opinion 'till they had heard that of the best judges.

While there is no drastic behaviour or throwing of pennies, Fielding does capture the reactive

nature of eighteenth-century audiences and is obviously, like Sterne, encouraging the reader to

engage the text in the same judgmental manner.

But, as Edward Hundert has observed, "Fielding's object was conceptually to isolate these

spectators by situating them as the central and previously unconsidered characters 'at this great

drama.'" As such, the audience becomes a part of the continually encoding tendencies of the

narrator. By positing reactions according to demarcations of the ironically related levels of

theatre balconies and social status, Fielding makes his actual audience, as Hundert notes, "aware

of the possibility of its detachment from any particular social embodiment, and for the

understanding of character as a circumscribed feature of this self-awareness." He posits his

novel's audience beyond the satirised social stratifications of "hypocrites," who are so obviously

prevalent that, "when we mention transactions behind the curtain, St. James's is more likely to

occur to our thoughts than Drury-Lane" (299). In so doing, Fielding encourages a response which

is in-line with the moral position he has established. He suggests that his privilege of being

"admitted behind the scenes" allows him to "censure the action, without conceiving an absolute

detestation of the person." Thus Fielding wants to expose the faces behind the masks of social

behaviour, but still implies a necessity for a codified moral standard, an alternative, good-natured

mask, perhaps, for his audience to wear.

Sterne's "dear reader" is also posited as a character in his novel, but the reactions of that

audience are not appealed to as the holders of a rational or moral standard, but rather, as we have

seen, the interpreters of an overwhelming number of confessions and codes -- moral, rational,

linguistic -- which, in their sheer abundance, collapse the framework of the well-tempered text.

Wehrs notes: "Narrative, however artfully contrived, remains an all-too-human exertion, an effort

at communication that reinforces through its failure the distance between those whose 'own ideas

are call'd forth' and those who cannot read the book because it has inscribed something foreign to

themselves" (128-9). We have seen how eighteenth-century audiences reacted to the "foreign" on

their stages -- with cat-calls and cudgels. Wehrs further suggests that "Sterne differs from

Fielding by refusing to entertain the possibility that the new genre of the novel might evade such

failure" (129). Tristram's jester-like awareness of the fallibility of these appeals -- as formulations

of easily misunderstood experiences or reactions -- indicates his realisation that the reader might

not understand, might be impatient, much like a theatre audience. "I have dropped the curtain

over this scene for a minute,—" he explains, "to remind you of one thing,—-and to inform you of

another" (II.19.169). The pause is typical of Sterne's narrative method, just as Fielding's is of his

own. 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. He is responding, as it were, to his own apprehension at the audience's

possible misapprehension in order to assuage it with more information. But, like a performance,

this transfer of information, textual though it seems, is actually occurring in time. Indeed,

Tristram admits that he is often at the mercy of "a sudden impulse" which, as he explains, has

theatrical consequences: "—-drop the curtain, Shandy—I drop it" (IV.10.336). And yet this sudden

impulse is directed at the transitions from chapter to chapter, which he suggests, "in a work of

this dramatic cast... are as necessary as the shifting of scenes" (337). He does not act "out of all rule," but merely outside of the conventional rules of textualising discourse, which even in the theatre channels a single, ideal perspective, "a sententious parade of wisdom," for its audience to accept. On the other hand, he is aware of the need to offer guidance, to control the action, to divide the work into readable scenes.

While Fielding's theatrical address operates from an imposed moral standard, Tristram's is hinged on a precarious balance between providing what he considers necessary information and the possibility that, at any given moment, the audience might not understand. Each act of intended clarity is presupposed by the desires and perspectives of those for whom the life is made clear. Tristram, therefore, can only hope that his reader will follow at each given turn, through each given scene, and that our expectations will match his own:

> ...let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—or, if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should put on a fool's cap with a bell on it, for a moment or two as we pass along,- -don't fly off,--but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside;--and as we jog on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short do anything,—only keep your temper.   (I.6.9-10)

Obviously, the passage serves as an invitation to interpret, to engage the text, to react to it as any theatre audience would – with high emotion. As many critics have noted, the image of the journey engaged in by both writer and reader is one of the most persistent and important images in the novel. Like a theatrical performance, a journey is an event in time, and therefore is at the mercy of the indeterminate interruptions which affect all such events. And a good many of the journeys in the novel are interrupted, from the problematic disruption to Mrs. Shandy's intended lying in at London, to the abbess of Andouillets' interrupted trip to Bourbon, to Tristram's own journey to Italy. Like many theatre performances, the expectations of those involved are often proved fallible. Indeed, the last we hear of "the great Addison," Tristram reminds us that he "*wrote-galloping*... with his satchel of school books hanging at his a—, and galling his beast's crupper at every stroke—" (VII.4.580). New suggests that, "Sterne is probably alluding to

Addison's introductory comments to his *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy* (1705)," in which he states

that, "*before I enter'd on my Voyage I took care to refresh my Memory among the* Classic *Authors... I*

must confess it was not one of the least Entertainments that I met with in Travelling, to examine these

several Descriptions, as it were, upon the Spot, and to compare the Natural Face of the Country" (449).

Upon reflection (all of Tristram's images invite us to reflect), the image of the grand old man of

Augustan letters galloping around Italy while taking and comparing notes seems as preposterous

as the idea that a landscape will look exactly the same as it is described in a text, especially after

seventeen or more centuries.

So we return to the paradox of performance and text; no written description can hope to

represent exactly an event and therefore will inevitably collapse under the necessarily

voluminous or ridiculous weight of its own attempt, especially as the circumstances of

communication between speaker and listener – unexpected associations of ideas, conflicting

interests, skewed perceptions – become apparent. But the attempt at understanding, at

engagement in the issues at hand, must be made nonetheless. After his lengthy "parodic

rewriting of Piganiol's entry on Calais" (VII.5; New *Notes* 450-4), which ends abruptly with the

promising suggestion that "it would be injustice to the reader, not to give him a minute account of

that romantic transaction, as well as of the siege itself, in Rapin's own words:" Tristram changes

his tune:

> —But courage! gentle reader!—I scorn it—'tis enough to have thee in my power
> —but to make use of the advantage which the fortune of my pen has now gained over
> thee, would be to much—No—! by that all-powerful fire which warms the visionary
> brain, and lights the spirits through unworldly tracts! ere I would force a helpless
> creature upon this hard service, and make thee pay, poor soul! for fifty pages, which I
> have no right to sell thee. (VII.6.584)

Quite simply, Tristram does not want to bore his reader with fifty pages of textual description

and so disposes of it. But he admits to having a certain amount of power over the reader anyway.

"– So put on, my brave boy! and make the best of thy way to Boulogne. " he declares, and though

he states immediately in the next chapter that "we are all got together" *we* are only with him to the extent that we are engaged in the reading of a text, the very task which Tristram denies he will make us do.

In one of the most curious of his addresses to his audience (and there are many), Tristram takes the part of a theatre-fiddler *entre-actes* attempting to humour the overly serious-minded among the imagined spectators:

> Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle, dum. There is nothing in playing before good judges,—but there's a man there—no—not him with the bundle under his arm—the grave man in black. —'Sdeath! not the gentleman with the sword on.—Sir, I had rather play a *Caprichio* to *Calliope* herself, than draw my bow across my fiddle before that very man; and yet, I'll stake my *Cremona* to a *Jew's* trump, which is the greatest musical odds that ever were laid, that I will this moment stop three hundred and fifty leagues out of tune upon my fiddle, without punishing one single nerve that belongs to him. (V.15.443-4)

Tristram "plays" in order to put his audience in the right, that is "tolerantly amused" frame of mind with which to "jog on" and "laugh with" their guide and "keep [their] temper." At this moment, in his own opinion he is successful: "I've undone you, Sir,—but you see he's no worse." Yet we do not have a perfectly harmonious relationship here between performer/ manager and audience. Tristram makes a sentimental appeal to "Your worships and reverences," who "love music" and "play delightfully yourselves," as well as, "—who I could sit and hear whole days,—- whose talents lie in making what he fiddles to be felt,—who inspires me with his joys and hopes, and puts the most hidden springs of my heart into motion." But presently he refuses to lend his respondent "five guineas, Sir,—which is generally ten guineas more than I have to spare," saying in terms of this kind of direct, *financial*, interaction that he can have nothing to do with "your time." A circumstance of "real time" performance -- money -- gets in the way of their transaction of understanding. Moreover, we, the actual readers, though we laugh at this interlude along with

Tristram's less grave audience, are left, unassisted, to discover the sense of "diddle diddle" and

the significance of the whole interlude.[14]

As in *Tom Jones* the direct references and invitations Tristram makes to his readers are

important aspects of the novel as theatrical performance. but it is also important that those

audiences themselves are not stable, homogenous units, like Dryden's proposed devotees of

sense. Both Fielding and Sterne construct heterogeneous, theatrical audiences within their texts,

but the differences in these representations characterise the significant difference in their

conception of both theatre audiences and public readership. Fielding's audience is heterogeneous

only within the limits -- the textual limits, we might say -- of the standard "orders" of theatre

structure -- the galleries, the pit, the boxes -- and the synonymous "orders" of social class. The

audience in Sterne's novel is similarly made up of obviously distinct kinds of people, from

"Madam the reader" to "Sir the reader" to "Your worships and reverences" to "Jenny! Jenny!"

Moreover, as Helen Ostovich has argued, the gender differences are extremely significant to the

role of the audience in Sterne's novel: "Tristram usually treats Sir -- his male reader -- with casual

indifference, and showers his mighty or fashionable readers... with genial contempt... But Madam

he treats as a special hobby-horse of his own -- with all the ambiguity the term implies" (326).[15]

Thus, Tristram can invite "my dear girl" to "get astride of [her] imagination" in dealing with the

particular maze of "this chapter:" "let me beg of you, like an unbacked filly to *frisk it, squirt it, jump*

it, to rear it, to bound it, -- and to kick it, with long kicks and sort kicks, till like Tickletoby's mare, you

break a strap or a crupper" (III.36.267). Tickletoby's mare being "a cant term for 'penis' or 'a

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[14] New cites Issacs' "The Autoerotic Metaphor in Joyce, Sterne, Lawrence, Stevens, and Whitman" which claims that a strong sexual subtext emerges here: "this entire chapter should be understood in masturbatory terms; among other hints, he points to "diddle" as having slang reference to copulation, masturbation, and the penis." While I do not intend to pursue this particular line of reasoning, it does suggest, once again, the difficulty in pinning down some readers' interpretations, and thus the conditioning of the audience. For further sexual connotations of Tristram's "intercourse" with the reader see Ostovich, "Reader as Hobby-horse."

[15] In her article, "Reader as Hobby Horse in *Tristram Shandy*," Ostovich argues extensively and convincingly that the gender differences in Tristram's inter-textual audience is an important indication of Sterne's establishment of a differing sexual discourses throughout the novel. According to Ostovich, the relationship between Tristram and all his readers is "disputatious" analogous to Sterne's recurring metaphor of the rider (author) on a "recalcitrant hobby-horse" (the reader).

wanton'" (New, *Notes*, 269), the metaphorically intercursive nature of Madam and the text is here explicit. Asking, "pray who was Tickletoby's mare," the suggestively dull-witted "Sir" is told to "Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader!" -- read, in other words, to try again, because Tristram's meaning is not yet clear. (268: Ostovich 329).

Thus, like a theatre manager, Tristram asks that his audience be patient of his performative experiments, but the ideal relationship between performance and audience remains one in which, unlike Fielding's indifferent nobles and type-cast clerks, there is a direct interest and understanding, including certain puns and euphemisms for which a close reading is necessary. Ideally, then, we have a complete openness, a complete clarity, of mind between author and reader. But the paradox closes in on itself again. It is always *Tristram* who invites his readers to read or interpret in a particular way. It is always *Sterne* who directs the action on his theatre, including the audience's. It is always *Sterne* who writes and then asks even Madam's intrusive and complicating questions. If the performance situation of *Tristram Shandy* is centred on its theatrical self-transgressions, then, because their interruptions are really scripted, we must conclude that both Sir and Madam the reader are not truly speakers of the audience interruptions, but part of the play text.

But as in *Tom Jones*, the interpretation does not end with the audiences in the text, but begins with us, the real readers, the real audiences. The reactions and lifestyles of Fielding's "theatrical" audience represents an undesirable and shallow moral position. Against this, Fielding himself, in the guise of his universal narrative voice, posits the true moral position which, like any good prologue writer, he compels us to entertain. Considering the interpretative guidance we are given directly throughout the digressions, episodes, and structure of *Tom Jones*, it is practically impossible for the reader to see any other interpretative strategy. Sterne, of course, will not let his text remain so morally or structurally resilient when it comes to interpretation. For example, Tristram sends Madam "back... as soon as you get to the next full stop," to reread the chapter in which, as Tristram would have it, "It was necessary I should be

born before I was christened." Despite a series of scripted remonstrances, Madam complies, more convinced than ever that she had missed nothing the first time. But Madam is a textual fiction, a constructed audience; she interrupts and responds to Tristram, but is created by Sterne. The most interesting thing about the passage is that Tristram is mistaken; looking back ourselves, though we -- the other readers -- are invited nowhere to do so, we find the reference reads: "it was not necessary I should be born before I was Christened." (I.20.64). Sterne, the author seems to be playing a joke on his own narrator and our gullability in -- like Madam -- believing him. In the process, Sterne exposes his own readers' willingness to believe, or even become, what we read.

Thus, Tristram's concluding diatribe, "that all good people, both male and female, from her example, may be thought to think as well as read" (66), must be taken as ironic for it is he who is actually in error. The presence of that irony is also a product of Sterne's artful manipulation of his narrator's discourse. On the other hand, we, the readers, are left to ponder, unhindered, the significance of *that* aspect of the text. And the fact that even Tristram's language is unreliable and, at this point, foolish is proved again in other digressions and examples -- which lead in turn to other conclusions. Madam's interruption of Tristram's account of his conception begins the novel: "Pray, what was your father saying?" (I.1.2). But Sterne has constructed this question as an interruption of not only narrative continuity but also the standard flow of accepted information from narrator to reader -- and Tristram's ambigous reply, "Nothing," also provided by Sterne, hardly sets the matter to right. It is the fact that this interruption has taken place within the act of retelling an interrupted conception which is intended to engender further interest. Sterne's point is that the act of explicating a life is as much affected by the irregularities of events in time as that life itself, and the opening is constructed to emphasise the similarities of the interruptions to both, and initiate our active response in that very manner.

Like any good theatre audience, we must remain involved in the performance in order to make it meaningful -- even when that means, short of bearing torches and cudgels, we disrupt our reading or the flow of Sterne's text. Fielding, like Dryden and Addison, believes that he can

construct a rational or moral framework for his "theatrical" audience's sensibilities, thus making the job of communication infinitely clear -- essentially, as the transfer of information from one text (the play, story) to another text (the ideal audience established by prologues and commentary). Sterne, on the other hand, recognises that he cannot absolutely textualise his audience any more than he can his *Life and Opinions*, and so both actors and audience are compelled to move both forwards in the performance and backwards in its explanations until, hopefully, they meet on some communicative common ground. As Helen Ostovich and Mary Wagoner have observed, "The ideal for both reader and writer is amused tolerance, a 'good-humoured acceptance of the inevitability of error and the likelihood of mutual responsibility for it'" (Ostovich, 325; Wagoner 344). "The truest respect, "Tristram writes, "which you can pay to the reader's understanding, is to halve the matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself" (II.11.125). It is the realisation of this "mutual responsibility" which makes *Tristram Shandy* such an engaging read, and thus for its audience, such a theatrical book.

Chapter 2

Meditations Upon Trim's Hat: Tableaux, Gesture, Text

The experience of reading *Tristram Shandy*, like that of a journey or, more importantly for this study, a theatrical performance, is an event in time. The end of this journey, the aim of this performance is a clarity of understanding; but, as Tristram's *Life and Opinions* suggests, the progress toward clarity is the constant prey of interruption and transgression. To make up for this pressure, as many writers had done before him, Tristram attempts to condition his audience to tolerate his perceived necessary digressions. However, he realises that this conditioning is also at the mercy of the transgressive forces which affect all communication: the obscurity of language, the sheer volume of material, the inevitable fickleness of any audience. The result is what we have called the theatrical paradox -- the tension between the drive toward the standardisation and completion of issues, events, and opinions into a stable, textual format, and the inevitable fluctuations of the performance situation which constantly interfere with that drive.

Tristram's sense of himself as a theatre performer, as musician, actor, story-teller, and stage-manager is also affected by the theatrical paradox. As is well known, Sterne is well-aware of the limits of text in the attempt to communicate anyone's *Life and Opinions*. Words are imperfect, as Locke tells us, because the relationship between words and the ideas which they represent has never been standardised to avoid complications, errors in judgement, and misreadings. In the theatre, however, "communicators" have recourse to other modes of signification in performance -- especially *mise en scène*. The significance of a particular phrase can be enhanced by a gesture or facial expression -- or gestures and facial expressions can contradict other verbalised sentiments complicating the significance of the scene and rendering its meaning more specific. Similarly, Tristram accumulates masses of detail regarding the postures, gestures and expressions of his various speakers as they speak and also when they are

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silent. In trying to move beyond the unreliability of words to the fuller truth of gestures and movements, but maintain at the same time their audiences' understanding of those images, actors and acting theorists always seem to fall back into textual formulation or contrivance. I would like to argue, then, that in the intense visual details provided by Tristram in the form of a textual narrative, Sterne presents this paradoxical motion -- away from the limitations of strictly verbal discourse to visual images, and back to the articulated discursive rationalisation of those images.

As Martin Meisel notes, prior to Garrick's debut the dominant theatrical methodology was "transitive and rhetorical" (38). The emphasis of this dramaturgy is on the rationalisation and demonstration of a particular moral or historical event into a mainly textual and unified format. The extreme proponents of this model, notably Thomas Rymer, stressed the Aristotelian or Classical dramatic mode because of its density and linearity, allowing for the presentation of stratified, logically articulated, moral ideas. According to Meisel, "meaning and the sensation of drama inhered in an articulated succession ... the prevailing model asked [directly] that doing and suffering have a justification beyond their intrinsic interest. In this dramaturgy, however peripatetic the course of the play... the standard remains an unfolding continuum." In his famous description of a childhood visit to the theatre, the late-century dramatist George Cumberland described James Quin, a proponent of the declamatory style. Quin spoke, "with very little variation of cadence in a deep full tone, accompanied by a sawing kind of action which had more of the senate than of the stage in it, he rolled out his heroics with an air of dignified indifference, that seemed to disdain the plaudits, that we bestowed upon him" (cited in Nicoll, 10). The most important features of dramatic representation are the overall unity and continuity which, for Quin and actors of his school, means plot and speech -- that is, text. Indeed, for the sake of his oratorical, verbal method, Quin restricts both the appropriate indeterminacies of human reaction, especially in Shakespeare (the play in question was *Macbeth*), and also the "carnivalesque" responses of the audience.

By the time Sterne arrived in London, actors, led by David Garrick, had begun to de-emphasise rhetorical declamation and stress illustrative, pictorial stage images based on the seemingly unexpected and instantaneous reactions of characters to the events on stage, without, for the most part, articulated explanation of that reaction. Both eighteenth- and twentieth-century critics agree that the key to this "revolutionary" technique was the abandoning of "formalist" declamatory unity in favour of emotionally vivid pictures -- tableaux -- connected by "spectacular transitions" (Taylor 62). As Ronald Hafter notes, Garrick himself "conceived of the art of directing as the art of forming a picture" (letters I, 82-83; cited in Hafter 482n). In his account of Garrick's performance of *Richard III*, Thomas Wilkes demonstrates the shift in dramaturgical emphasis: " before there had been only one broad conventional delineation of 'the wicked tyrant,' who was savage and furious, and nothing more... instead of 'chuckling' over his own deformity, and taking pleasure in being so odious to his fellow-creatures, he showed himself pained and uneasy when he dwelt on these defects." By further contrast, Garrick's skill at rapid and sudden transition is evident in Wilkes description of the tent scene: "He called out boldly, as if in the battle, 'Give me another horse!' then paused, and, with dismay in his face, came forwards, crying out in misery, 'Bind up my wounds!' then dropping on his knee, prayed in the most piteously tender accent --'Have mercy, Heaven!'"(239, cited in Donohue 232).[16] Each pause establishes a wholly distinct emotional picture or *scene*, which, in some way, undercuts the pause before. Richard's militant, strutting demand for a horse, exemplifying his domineering attitude toward his servants, is almost opposed in emotional content by the following pitiable, understandable appeal to bind his wounds. The final outcry again juxtaposes the previous; Richard's command to assist him physically is significantly undercut by his new spiritual "piteously tender" prayer, suggesting the sudden, awe-inspiring awareness of a power above him

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[16] Donohue devotes a chapter to the transition in dramaturgical emphasis during Garrick's career. The strongest point of his argument is his comparison of Cibber's *Richard III*, in which Gloucester appears as uniformly and unsympathetically grotesque and ambitious to Garrick's production and readaptation of Cibber's version as cited by Wilkes above. Donohue makes it plain that Garrick did not completely abandon declamation, in fact reinserted many of the longer speeches. But his point is that Garrick made the text subsidiary to a larger picture of a not inhuman individual.

and also, therefore, undercutting the first royal demand. The text is only a component of a larger image in which speech, intonation and visual display are combined and juxtaposed, pause to pause, moment to moment.

Thus, unlike Quin's declamatory style, concentrated on the transmissions of rhetorically augmented text, Garrick emphasised the total physical involvement of the actor to produce the representation of believable and moving reactions. In *Tristram Shandy*, Sterne repeatedly voices his own admiration for, and indeed defends, the "naturalism" and broad emotional effect of Garrick's pictorial method. For example, Tristram admonishes the "connoisseur... *befetished* with the bob and trinkets of criticism... stuck so full of rules and compasses, and hav[ing] the eternal propensity to apply them upon all occasions" for their commentary on Ernulphus' curse in terms of theatrical delivery:

> ——And how did *Garrick* speak the soliloquy last night?——Oh, against all rule, my Lord,—most ungrammatically! betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in *number, case,* and *gender,* he made a breach thus,—stopping, as if the point wanted settling;——and betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times, three seconds and three fifths by a stopwatch, my Lord, each time.——Admirable grammarian! ——But in suspending his voice——was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm?——Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look?——I looked only at the stop-watch, my Lord.——Excellent observer!   (III.12.213)

Sterne's "observer" is unquestionably of the "old" school of Quin and Rymer. The textual or grammatical perfection and timing of the soliloquy are most important to this critic. Although he notices the "suspensions" which repeatedly interrupt the speech, he fails to recognise their value in heightening the emotional image of one moment before the textual and temporal transition to the next. What Sterne's satirical account of this critic makes most clear is the fact that to the old school Garrick's pictorial method represents a transgression of the traditional stress on rhetorical unity and textual exactness. But for Sterne this visual transgression represents the opening of a purely textual model into a three dimensional expression of sentimental discovery, a widening of representation which goes even beyond his own textual renditions to the extent that he must

interrupt his own description to suggest the superiority of Garrick's visual technique: "So stood my father, holding fast his fore-finger betwixt his finger and his thumb, and reasoning with my uncle *Toby* as he sat in his old fringed chair, valanced around with party-coloured worsted bobs---O *Garrick*! what a rich scene of this would thy exquisite powers make!" (IV.7.333). Ironically, Ernulphus' curse itself is a masterpiece of textual control, comprehensiveness and translation, complete with the alternative plural endings and classical rhetorical periods. Thus, Sterne satirises the critics' attention to rhetorical and grammatical detail, but has made sure in its transposition that we, the readers. are aware of them as well.

In Garrick's method, the physical action does not merely illustrate the dramatic text -- it works to complement, even perhaps to undercut it. A performance can do this by using the two modes of communication with the audience -- the words (provided by the dramatist) and the *mise en scène* (provided by the actors). But we must recognise that Garrick's "naturalism," by his own admission, is "*forming*... a picture" (emphasis mine, cited in Hafter 482), or really the juxtaposed serialisation of a number of pictures and gestures articulated into signifying compositions. Garrick's choice of words here is not coincidental, for the drive toward a livelier, we might say theatrical, compositional style had already been evident in Hogarth's painting since the 1730s.[17] While Hogarth stresses variety, multiplicity, and gesture in his most famous paintings, including several of Garrick, he is also consciously textual. As his most noted commentator, Ronald Paulson, demonstrates, "Hogarth follows the example of the seventeenth-century Dutch genre painters who hid their symbolic meanings 'behind a plausible pseudo-realistic facade.' Thus the lover does not actually stab the cuckold in the back but only appears to; horns do not sprout from his head but are visible behind him in the wallpaper" (43). Recognising the correspondence between Hogarth's art and the experiments of his contemporary novelists, Paulson concludes that they both, "were seeking new structures, and however various their intentions they all

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[17] See Hogarth's portrait of Garrick as Richard III in the "tent scene," for the paradoxical pictoralism of both actor and painter (fig. 4).

transformed the old structures beyond recognition. But of course there is no absolutely new meaning. Hogarth violates the simplicity and stability of *topoi*, but in practice he has to produce *topoi* of his own, which he then repeats" (50).

This pattern is also recognisable in Hogarth's two illustrations for *Tristram Shandy* (Fig. 5-6). The second, which became the frontispiece for volume III, features Walter's entry upon the ill-fated baptism of Tristram. The quick and transgressive nature of the episode is evident throughout; Walter is still pulling on his breeches as he rushes upon the scene and the curate is obviously in mid-declaration as the infant Tristram wails away in his arms. But, true to form, Hogarth includes thematic -- we might say textual -- cues. In this case, the clock, the symbol of Tristram's ill-fated and interrupted conception, stands in the background; it stands behind the sleeping Dr. Slop in the sketch of the sermon as well. Both Walter and the curate are drawn as caricatures -- something Hogarth rarely did with Garrick -- with simple cartoon like lines, in keeping with Hogarth's mandate for humorous illustrations. As outlined in *The Analysis of Beauty*, "The general idea of an action, as well as of an attitude, may be given in pencil in a very few lines" (135). But here the paradoxical nature of Hogarth's program is evident. The sketchy design of the characters and the suggestion of motion in their gesturing attitudes is intended to inspire the viewers imagination, but the imagination is obviously directed by the picture's symbolic cues. The performance is thus textualised.

Sterne's only direct reference to Hogarth in the novel occurs in the midst of "the entrance of Dr. Slop upon the stage," so the correspondence between Hogarthian painting, the theatre, and Tristram's narrative is quite explicit (II.9.121-3). In fact, Dr. Slop's entrance itself, after his collision with Obadiah and fall into the mud, is overtly theatrical: "*Obadiah* had led him in as he was, *unwiped, unappointed, unannealed,* with all the stains and blotches on him -- He stood like *Hamlet*'s ghost , motionless and speechless, for a full minute and a half at the parlour door (Obadiah still holding his hand) with all the majesty of mud" (II.10.123-4). Dr. Slop's entry is thus a sudden and signifying interruption of a number of expected set of circumstances -- namely, that

it would take Obadiah longer than two minutes and thirteen seconds to fetch Dr. Slop -- as

attested to by the "hypercritick." That the entrance represents such an interruption is further

evidenced by the fact that Walter and Toby are "surprised" by his entrance; in fact it halts their

discourse. But it does not halt Tristram's. In order to preserve himself "dramatically" Tristram

must explain the set of events which led to Dr. Slop's ghost-like appearance, "all which put

together, must have prepared the reader's imagination" (II.8.120). The near collision of the horses

is itself an interruption of standard progress: that is, of Obadiah and Dr. Slop along the road in

their respective directions. The horse image, as we have seen, invokes the image of ambiguity

and transgressions within theoretical discourse. Moreover, the cross used to indicate Dr. Slop's

"crossing himself" is itself a visual disruption of Tristram's explanation.[18] But Tristram provides

a minute, almost mathematical account of the collision, including references to "the NUCLEUS"

of "the vortex" and the exact location of the encounter, "within five yards of a sudden turn, made

by an acute angle of the garden wall" (9.122). Thus, Tristram refers to "Hogarth's analysis of

beauty" and its suggestion that "the outlines of Dr. Slop's figure... may as certainly be caricatured,

and conveyed to the mind by three strokes as three hundred," to suggest at least initially the

suddenness and rapidity of Dr. Slop's appearance. His appeal to "the reader's imagination"

reveals paradoxically the contrary impulse, also evident in Hogarth and Garrick, to form and

thus explain the event with a particular emphasis or directive in mind.

By virtue of its temporality, the whole episode is closer to an event than one of Hogarth's

paintings. The entrance of Dr. Slop is a tableaux, a pause in the midst of discourse, both

Tristram's and his elders', engendering thereby a contrast with discursive progress in general.

Thus we encounter a tension of vision and verbality, of text and time in the very construction of

the narrative which is suggestively more ambiguous than Hogarth's painting.[19] Sterne's tableaux

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[18] Arthur Cash cites Sterne's poem "The Unknown" as an early indication of Sterne's understanding of the paradoxical relationship between verbal and visual sense in text: "In the original manuscript... Sterne had used symbols for four key words — O world; , He; , heaven; and , soul... At the age of twenty-nine Sterne was already an experimenter in semiotics (*Early Years* 152-4).

[19] For a full length account of Sterne's final antipathy toward Hogarth's *Analysis*, see Holtz, *Image and Immortality*. 22-38.

are much closer to theatrical moments of stasis than wholly static pictures. We can therefore

posit a source other than Hogarth for Sterne's theatrical pictoralism. Denis Diderot was the

pioneer of tableaux as a distinct theatrical devices. For Diderot, as for Garrick, the declamatory

style could no longer adequately represent the complexities of emotional reaction: "There is too

much talking in our plays, consequently our actors do not act enough." (93). His own plays,

especially *Le Fils Naturel* and *Le Pere de Famille,* bear this out, as is evident from the unusually

extensive specificity of the stage directions for a play of the 1750s (fig. 7). In *Entretiens Sur Le Fils*

Naturel and *Discours Sur Le Poesie Dramatique,* the prefaces to his two major plays and the earliest

of his theoretical writings on the theatre, Diderot outlines what amounts to a project of theatre

reform, an important aspect of which is the replacement of much overdetermining, transitive

discourse, with "intransitive" discourse and independently signifying tableaux. Rather than

being told what to see or feel, or being conditioned to respond to a character because of the

rationalised conventions of myth or social position (i.e. kings are always shown as noble on stage

because kings are noble in real life), Diderot's projected audience identifies not with the spectacle

of conventional standards of conduct but with an image of genuine emotions. Actors must look

at each other, not the house. Dramatic situations must be recognisable to any audience; thus

Diderot insists on "serious" drama in which the family, rather than a mythic figure or hierarchy, is

the centre of attention. Movements and gestures must be in accord with the subject matter, as

they would be in a purely non-textual medium, like art or dance. Peter Szondi cites Diderot's

comment that, 'True dignity... is the picture (tableau) of maternal love in all its truth (vérité)," and

adds, "For Diderot tragedy owes its dignity and sublime character not to the fact that its heroes

are kings and queens, but to the truthful depiction of the feelings which motivate them" (116).[20]

Diderot's ideal theatrical experience is an identification with an ongoing demonstrative

process in which the theatrical artifice "imperceptibly makes me feel concern... that draws me out

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[20] We might say that part of the sentimental project is to have stories that are close to the experience of
ordinary people in the audience. This is clearly also a part of *Tristram Shandy* — everyone has an odd father,
a crazy uncle, etc. This differs from the conventionalised *adventures* of *Tom Jones* and *Clarissa.*

of the quiet and comfortable situation I myself enjoy" (*Discours* 104). However, already in *Discours*, he admits that accomplishing this dynamic in the theatre, "would mean *constructing* the work in such a way that those questions arise naturally out of it... If such a scene has been made obligatory *by the construction*, if it arises out of the subject matter, if *it has been prepared* and the spectator is looking forward to it, then he will give it his attention and be far more affected by it than those elaborate little maxims with which authors embroider their works" (105; my emphasis). While he insists, as do Garrick and the Hills, on an absolutely naturalistic result, he also exposes the inevitable artifice and contrivance of that display. Diderot is aware that the intransitive theatrical model is still a significative construction and, therefore, is an aspect of the actor's and the playwright's discursive control. Diderot's theatre represents yet another, and perhaps the most comprehensive, cycle of transgressions and retextualizations which make up the theatrical paradox.

Diderot later makes this claim explicit in *Le Paradox Sur Le Comedien*: "The natural actor is usually detestable and occasionally excellent... how could nature form a great actor without the aid of art, since nothing happens on the stage exactly as it does in reality and since dramatic works are all composed according to a fixed system of principles?" (*Paradox* 318). But Diderot's underlying dramaturgical point is not that reality is chaotic; rather, as something of an optimist, something of a romantic, he tended to regard "nature" as an ideal of perfection which all art must attempt to reproduce. A moment of stasis highlighting a significant gesture, communicating "the truth," must be composed in a very intricate manner, like a painting: "A well-composed picture [tableau] is a whole contained under a single point of view, in which the parts work together and form by their mutual correspondence a unity, as real as that of the members of the body" (cited in Barthes 71). Thus a basic paradox could be said to underscore all of Diderot's aesthetics regarding theatrical pictoralism: tableaux are transgressions, interruptions, points of segmentation of a normally continuous textual order, but each is orchestrated, *composed* as a signifying unit, serving to explain or clarify. In terms of the development of eighteenth-century

drama, Diderot's tableaux represent, like Garrick's acting, a new set of themes, a "different axis of signification" (Hundert 243). But in order for those new ideas of "true" emotion to be successfully communicated, new sets of conventions must be established and repeated. It is no wonder then, that Diderot stresses a "right" composition.

Diderot's plays are not nearly as important to dramatic theory as their prefaces. We might say that Diderot has subsumed his entire dramaturgical method into an absolutely textual framework, indexing his plays and theatre in general, articulating meanings in just the rhetorical fashion that he rejects. On the other hand, the control necessary to create those tableaux reveals the rationalising and indexing impulse behind them. By reverting to textual explanation each time he presents a tableau scene, Sterne also underscores that constant rationalising impulse which lies behind the new visual emphasis in performance.[21] Of course, his novel is replete with tableaux – highly significant moments in which the action or progress of the "drama" is halted and the "actors" frozen while Tristram makes voluminous explanatory comments. His stage directions set the scene in the precise visual detail for which Sterne is famous: "I think, replied my uncle *Toby*, taking his pipe from his mouth, and striking the head of it two of three times upon the nail of his left thumb, as he began his sentence" (I.21.70). But, Tristram does not trust us, the viewer, to capture the significance of Toby's actions and speech and so, "to enter rightly into my uncle *Toby*'s sentiments upon this matter, you must be made to enter a little into his character..." Forty-four pages, nine chapters, and one very extensive hobby-horse later Toby can finish his sentence: "I think, replied my uncle *Toby*, -- taking as I told you, his pipe from his mouth, and striking the ashes out of it as he began his sentence; -- I think, replied he, -- it would not be amiss,

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[21] As is well known, Sterne and Diderot were acquaintances while the former was in France, and indeed have been said to be recognisable influences on one another. Sterne had been asked to recommend "half a translation" of *Le Fils Naturel* to Garrick, which he did not do, explaining to the actor that "It has too much sentiment in it, (at least for me) the speeches too long, and savour too much of *preaching*" (Letters, 162). An ironic statement from a dramatic preacher like Sterne, but it nevertheless demonstrates his sensitivity to Garrick's style and taste and, possibly, the tastes of his audiences, now accustomed to the "sensational transitions." Indeed, neither *Le Fils Naturel* or *Le Pere de Famille* were successful, for much the reason Sterne outlines. On the other hand, it is more likely that Diderot was influenced by Sterne, though he did not meet the latter until 1762, five years after the publication of *Le Fils Naturel*. The major claim in this regard is that several key sections of Diderot's *Jacques Le Fataliste* were adapted, if not plagiarised, from *Tristram Shandy*. Cf. A. G. Fredman. *Diderot and Sterne*, 1955.

brother, if we rung the bell" (II.6.114-5). The sentiment, the play-text, Toby's "line," is insignificant; but the pause in the action, the visual image of Toby, repeated and focused, allows Tristram to enter into his character, to make another explanation, to tell another story.

This is exactly Sterne's point. Again and again he stresses the importance of the physical, the visual, the pictorial and always falls back into the need to contain or capture that image in text -- a need he shares, consciously and ironically -- with the "learned" he so characteristically satirises throughout, including his drama critics. The sense that even the emotionally motivated images of Garrick's *mise en scène* are the product of a conscious act of formal signification -- really a textual process -- has its best expression in text. In a way, it is convenient that a novelist is limited to the words -- to the text itself. Sterne's particular skill as a novelist/performer is that he constantly requires his readers to set his text against his stage directions, which, as text themselves, highlight the impulse toward textual clarification which governed the most subliminal performance. For example, Walter's collapse after Tristram's nose is crushed is representative of an intense emotional anxiety:

> The moment my father got up into his chamber, he threw himself prostrate across his bed in the wildest disorder imaginable, but at the same time, in the most lamentable attitude of a man borne down with sorrows, that ever the eye of pity dropped a tear for.----The palm of his right hand, as he fell upon the bed, receiving his forehead, and covering the greatest part of both his eyes, gently sunk down with his head (his elbow giving way backwards) till his nose touched the quilt;--his left arm hung insensible over the side of the chamber pot, which peeped out beyond the valence,--his right leg (his left being drawn up towards the body) hung half over the side of the bed, the edge of it pressing upon his shinbone.----He felt it not. A fixed, inflexible sorrow took possession of every line of his face.--He sighed once,--heaved his breast often.--but uttered not a word.   (III.29.254-5)

An unusual episode in a narrative text -- or even, in the context of Garrick's "acting revolution" a unified drama. But, as we have seen, these pauses and expressive gestures -- these tableaux -- developed into basic units of theatrical presentation. Indeed, this passage demonstrates the cycle of interruption and rationalisation which characterises intransitive drama. Sterne takes great care to place and describe each of Walter's limbs in their rather awkward positions, but does so to

give the impression of its "most lamentable attitude." At the same time we are limited to accepting the fall as "lamentable" because Tristram has pointed out that it signifies those sensations. The "viewer" is expected to comprehend that the arm is "insensible" and that Walter cannot feel the pressure on his skin. It is Tristram's extensive verbal description which allows us to "see" "the sorrow in every line of his face" that is covered by his hand and the quilt and is thus actually invisible. Walter's collapse, though accomplished in "disorder," represents a careful rationalisation, indeed a verbalisation, of visual signification.

This scene is only one example of Sterne's visual sense. Like a play-text, Sterne carefully orchestrates the visual details of the scene with a number of very specific "stage directions;" in Sterne's case, however, the directions are not suggestive, as in a script, but descriptive, as if Tristram were watching and recording a dramatic performance, but certainly different from the stop-watch description. Not surprisingly, then, Sterne's sense of visual detail is often used to exemplify his drive toward extending the limits of the novel form beyond conventional narrative toward its intersection with the visual arts.[22] We might say that his detailed accounts of gestures, postures, attitudes, and expressions, and the transgressions to the narrative account of his life which they cause, make up Tristram's performance, as they would Garrick's, extending beyond the significative limits of texts. Employing his journey metaphor once again, Tristram declares, "if he is the man of the least spirit he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make... He will have views and prospects to himself perpetually soliciting his eye, which he can no more help standing still to look at than he can fly" (I.14.41). However, Tristram then lists in a very rational manner for the benefit of his readers these views and prospects: "Accounts to reconcile, [new line] Anecdotes to pick up [new line] Inscriptions to make out..."

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[22] William Holtz, for example, has scrutinised Sterne's attempt to negotiate Locke's perceived need for a clear philosophical discourse to re-perfect words, as it were, and Lessing's sense that "words", as conventional or "arbitrary" signs, will never attain the clarity of the natural signs possible in the visual arts. Interestingly, Lessing states that, "the highest kind of poetry will be that which transforms the arbitrary signs completely into natural signs. That is dramatic poetry." Cf. Holtz, *Image and Immortality* p. 65-68.

Sterne's point is that communication, understanding, expression, always exist, perhaps frustratingly, within discourse. Like Aaron Hill instructing actors that there are only ten passions with which they might react, Sterne must include, as we have seen, conventional verbal signifiers such as "lamentable" within his "visual" moment of stasis. In fact, Tristram goes to great lengths to establish, through absolutely textual means, the *proper* context for the reader to determine the meaning of his description. He addresses Madam the reader just before and just after, and instils in her two interpretative maxims, which could not possibly be dramatised without some verbal clarification. Sterne underscores the textuality of the first by putting it in quotation marks: "I am persuaded of it, Madam, as much as can be, 'That both man and woman bear the pain or sorrow, (and, for aught I know, pleasure too) best in a horizontal position'" (II.29.254-5). The second suggests a reason for Toby's patience, for he has entered at this point, in comforting his brother: "Before an affliction is digested, — consolation ever comes too soon; — and after it is digested, — it comes too late: so you see, Madam, there is but a mark between these two as fine almost as a hair, for a comforter to take aim at." It is the same mark Tristram wants his reader to find, but, given its philosophical and interpretative nature, he can only present that mark by falling back into text: "To explain this, I must leave him upon the bed for half an hour, —" (30.256). Interruption follows interruption; the cyclical paradox of digression and explanation continues.

One of the most important of these emphasised gestures is the falling of Trim's hat, symbolising the recently announced death of Bobby Shandy. Hafter refers to Trim as that "expert little actor" and explicitly compares his method to Garrick's, stating that, "both... are masters of the art of the visual; both comprehend the power of gesture to deliver a *smart blow* to the spectator's nerves and souls" (482). Undoubtedly, Trim has this affect on his immediate audience:

> Are we not here now, continued the corporal, (striking the end of his stick perpendicularly upon the floor, so as to give an idea of health and stability)---and are we not---(dropping his hat upon the ground) gone! in a moment!--'Twas infinitely striking! *Susannah* burst into a flood of tears.--We are not stocks and stones.--- *Jonathan, Obadiah,* the cook-maid, all melted.--The foolish scullion herself, who was scouring a fish-kettle

upon her knees, was rous'd with it.--The whole kitchen crowded around the corporal. (V.7.431)

Without question the scene is moving and the falling hat visually stimulating, even to the reader. The gesture is so emotionally stimulating for the other servants that were they in an actual theatre they might all suddenly burst into rousing applause.

But even in a theatre, the audience is conditioned by their knowledge of both the actors' artistry and the significant moments of the play text which the actors will highlight with their gestures and tableaux. Even though Tristram declares that in his oratorical style, Trim went "straight forwards as nature could lead him" (6.429), that declaration is itself only one part of the narrator's elaborate orchestration of the scene and the responses to it. In further support of Trim, and in line with the new methods of Garrick and Diderot, Tristram states that, "the eye... has the quickest commerce with the soul, -- gives a smarter stroke, and leaves something more inexpressible upon the fancy, than words can either convey -- or sometimes get rid of." Sterne later emphasises the disruptive effect of "the eye" with widow Wadman's tactics in making Toby forget his bowling-green: "If thou lookest, uncle Toby, in search of this mote one moment longer-- ---though art undone" (VIII.24.707). But Sterne's point here is that in spite of its apparent ability to transgress rational discourse, such an idea must be present in the mind to realise the significance of the visual gesture. "An eye is for all the world," Tristram says of widow Wadman's, "exactly like a cannon, in this respect; That it is not so much the eye or the cannon, in themselves, as it is the carriage of the eye-----and the carriage of the cannon, by which both the one and the other are enabled to do so much execution" (25.707) . Similarly, as soon as Trim's hat has fallen, Tristram suggest in an imploring and exaggerated manner that, "the preservation of the whole world -- or what is the same thing, the distribution and balance of its property and power, may in time to come depend greatly upon the right understanding of this stroke of the corporal's eloquence and, "demand[s], your attention worships and reverences, for any ten pages together" (7.356). Tristram realises that he has interrupted the scene: "I've gone a little about -- no

matter 'tis for health -- let us only carry back in our minds to the mortality of Trim's hat." The non-verbal significance of the hat falls back into textuality.

Even without this immediate commentary -- to give an idea of the extent of Tristram's need to clarify -- the intended effect and significance of Trim's hat is established by Sterne's manipulation of its surrounding context. The chapter opens with Obadiah declaring that "My young master in London is dead!" and Susannah's immediately thinks of "A green satin night-gown" -- an associated idea which Tristram qualifies: "Well might *Locke* write a chapter on the imperfection of words. --" (V.7.429). Already a tension has gone into effect. Words are imperfect, as Locke suggests; our ideas, however dislocated from fact and reason they might be, continue to run into one another. Yet, in order to make our complex feelings clear, we are forced to formulate presences -- words -- to represent them. Susannah does not specifically say anything about the mistress's green dress which might now become hers, and so her spoken concern for Mrs. Shandy can be considered as the result of an act of suppressing her natural associations with "proper" sentiments. The conventional sexuality of the green gown image is therefore likewise suppressed by Susannah -- only to be restated by Tristram.[23] She is explicitly contrasted to the "foolish scullion" who simply declares "So am not I!" (430). This is a declaration of pure presence -- and thus, we might say, emphasises the pure theatricality of words -- but it is socially problematic enough to be, at this point, considered foolishness.[24] Trim's hat, therefore emerges as an alternative: a physical object which, like one of Lessing's "natural signs," can act and move in a manner which clearly represents an experience without the social improprieties that words are heir to. All of the servants are moved -- and all of them understand, in a way which they do not in reaction to Obadiah's verbal declaration. But, as we have seen, Tristram can only make the impression of the falling hat clear by explaining that the servants react in the appropriate manner:

[23] Both New and Petrie note in their editions that "green gown" and "old hat" have strong associations with female sexuality dating back to the sixteenth century. Cf New, *Notes*, 358; Penguin *Tristram Shandy*, 642.
[24] The scullion is an interesting figure worthy of further study. She is really an embodiment of the theatrical paradox. Tristram explains that "she had been struggling all autumn with a dropsy;" Her presence is underscored by the nearness of absence -- her own death -- but her statement is a declaration of presence in the face of absence: "he's dead, said Susannah,--As sure, said the scullion, as I'm alive" (430).

crying, melting, rousing, and most importantly, listening. They become for us, the reader, an

ideal audience -- somewhat like Fielding's -- through which we can derive our own reactions.

Yet, Tristram must also explain why the servants react, that is, that "the eye... has the quickest

commerce with the soul."

Tristram repeats (an undeniably verbal tactic) his description of the hat's fall and

augments it with a pause: "--'Are we not here now;'--continued the corporal, 'and are we not'--

(dropping his hat plumb upon the ground--and pausing before he pronounced the word)-- 'gone!

in a moment?'" (432). The tension again: Trim's pause, like any of Garrick's, transforms his

dropping of the hat into a visual icon and thereby establishes the importance of his gesture. But

Tristram cannot but further reiterate its effect. He actually says that Trim is pausing as well as

suggests as much with the dash. He reiterates the importance of the fall with a descriptive simile,

an interpretative opinion, a metaphor, and another appropriate audience reaction: "The descent

of the hat was as if a heavy lump of clay had been kneaded into the crown of it.----Nothing could

have expressed the sentiment of mortality, of which it was the type and forerunner, like it,---his

hand seemed to vanish from under it,---it fell dead,---the corporal's eye fixed upon it, as upon a

corps,---and *Susannah* burst into a flood of tears." But Tristram does not even stop there, at a

point at which he is still largely using pictorial language. He continues to clarify both the image

of the hat and its meaning:

> Now---Ten thousand, and ten thousand times ten thousand (for matter and
> motion are infinite) are the ways by which a hat may be dropped upon the ground,
> without any effect.----Had he flung it, or thrown it, or cast it, or skimmed it, or squirted,
> or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under heaven,---or in the best direction that
> could be given to it,---had he dropped it like a goose--like a puppy--like an ass--or in
> doing it, or even after he had done had looked like a fool,--like a ninny--like a
> nincompoop--it had failed, and the effect upon the heart had been lost.
>
> Ye who govern the might world and its mighty concerns with the *engines* of
> eloquence,--who heat it, and cool it and melt it, and mollify it,---and then harden it again
> to *your purpose* ---
>
> Ye who wind and turn the passions with the great windlass,---and having done
> it, lead the owners of them, whither ye think meet--

> Ye lastly who drive----and why not, Ye also who are driven, like turkeys to
> market with a stick and a red clout—meditate—meditate, I beseech you, upon *Trim*'s hat.
> (V,vii,432-3)

Tristram's language has suddenly become transitive, declarative, utterly textual. The source of

his style here is undoubtedly Rabelais, with long exaggerated periods and metaphors. Most

importantly, Tristram again turns to the audience with instruction and although he demands that

we pay attention to his visual image, the hat, we must do so only in accordance with the

significance which he has deemed appropriate.

But Tristram's supporting commentary is still not limited to this chapter. Prior to Trim's

speech Tristram explains that whatever topic was at hand, "in the parlour, there was generally

another at the same time, and upon the same subject, running parallel along with it in the

kitchen" (6.427). We are also privy to a comparison of Walter's and Trim's oratorical technique by

which we are led to understand that Trim will provide an important eulogy, "with nothing--to

remember---of no deeper reading than his muster-roll" (429). Admittedly, Walter is a convincing

and successful orator and not totally devoid, it seems, of a significant visual sense, "proceeding

from period to period, by metaphor and allusion and striking the fancy as he went along, (as men

of wit and fancy do) with the entertainment and pleasantry of his pictures and images." He is

also something of an actor, at least to the extent that he can convince Toby, who is not familiar

with the same source texts, "either to suppose his brother to be the wandering Jew, or that his

misfortunes had disordered the brain" (3.423). But Walter is also a rhetorical actor, more like

Quin than Garrick; as Toby is about to interrupt him (with a point of clarification) Walter

declares, "do not -- dear *Toby*, continued he, taking him by the hand, do not -- do not, I beseech

thee, interrupt me at this crisis" (422).

This, then, is the root of Sterne's theatrical paradox. To assuage his grief on the death of

his son, Walter turns to the recitation of "Philosophy [which] has a fine saying for everything---

For *Death* it has an entire set" (421). Words provide the clearest understanding; indeed, Sterne

very cunningly provides us with no vision of Bobby other than as the subject of these eulogies, so we have no opportunity, it would seem, to see him otherwise and contradict either Walter's or Trim's sentiments. But in the midst of his speech, Walter "had absolutely forgot my brother *Bobby*" (425). The associations of Walter's word-play have led him away from the matter at hand, namely the real event of Bobby's death. An absence is replaced by a presence, and yet the correlation of that presence to a real presence is undermined. Trim, similarly, loses his focus by the end of his speech; the unreliable association of ideas affects even this "great little actor." Trim begins to tell the story of Le Fever, attended by the other servants: "*Susannah*, the cook, *Jonathan*, *Obadiah*, and corporal *Trim*, formed a circle about the fire; and as soon as the scullion had shut the kitchen door,--the corporal begun" (10.438). But he never does.[25] The next chapter begins, "I AM a Turk if I had not as much forgot my mother, " who had been listening to her husband from beyond the parlour door. Again the stage directions and the text intersect; Trim's hat turns into a speech which then reverts to a tableau of an expectation of a story. Trim's hat leads Tristram into explanations which in turn remind him of the other characters he has left frozen, mid-action, in other chapters.

Trim's falling hat is perhaps the most theatrical gesture and the most visually significant tableau in the novel. It is formulated as a pause in, an interruption of, and is therefore juxtaposed to, Tristram's narrative and explanations, the *Life and Opinions*. Nevertheless, it also engenders more narrative and more explanation which serve to clarify it. In other words, the hat tableau necessitates the very process of verbal explanation which it, in its suggestively visual sense, was intended to undermine. "Nature is nature, said *Jonathan*.--" Things are the way they are, seems to be the message of both speeches and Sterne's text. Our performances, our interactions and

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[25] Of course, the story of LeFever is eventually told in VI.6-10 (See Chapter 3). At that point Tristram, not Trim, tells the story as the narrator had originally intended, "Fool that I was," he exclaims, "the occasion is lost" (VI.5.499). This is typical of the apparent lack of control which Tristram has over his text and the correlative sense of the book as a single event in time. Tristram disallows us, it seems, to go back and disallow himself likewise to change volume five. The book, to him, is a single performance in time which cannot be adjusted. Nevertheless, we might say that this awareness of the misplacement of the story represents a kind of adjustment in itself: telling us that we, and he, can't go back is an aspect of the writer's control over his text and his readers.

demonstrations, must transcend the purely theoretical, the discursive, the verbal, in order to be true. Tristram, however, the good eighteenth-century empiricist that he is, cannot let the natural be simply as it is: "I Am a *Turk* if I had not as much forgot my mother, as if Nature had plaistered me up, and set me down naked upon the banks of the river *Nile*, without one" (11.438). In spite of the sexual puns and hints, "nakedness" is not an adequate state for our inquiring narrator. Indeed, another aspect of tableaux composition is its focus on the body -- in a sexual manner or simply as an image of human irrationality. Walter's contorted efforts with the handkerchief (III.2) is plainly the cause of a significant halt in his discourse with Toby and Dr. Slop, but Tristram feels compelled to explain that "my father was much to blame; and I will give you my reasons for it" (187). He then proceeds with a minute account of "the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt" including Walter's coat and pockets. Trim's bodily "attitude" as he recites the sermon has long been held as the most precise visual image in the novel, but it is based on the "precise angle of 85 degrees and a half to mathematical exactness" (II.17.140). Widow Wadman's kick is symbolically a disruption of her own physically enforced sexual restraint, but Tristram feels the need not only to suggest that it was "a north-east kick" -- thereby subsuming the disruptive effect of the kick back into scientific discourse -- but also stating definitively that "it was plain that widow Wadman was in love with my Uncle Toby" (VIII.9.668). Diego's nose is also a sexually-charged object, but its most significant role is to inspire reams of speculative commentary between the Nosarisans and the Antinosarians which ultimately leads "them naturally into *Thomas Aquinas*, and *Thomas Aquinas* to the devil" (IV.315). A similar oppotunity for intellectual speculation is arroused by Phutatorius' "Zounds!" -- and one need look no further than his name or his walnut to recognise the sexual innuendo surrounding the episode (IV.27). For a novel that is this obsessed with the human body, it is significant to Sterne's aim -- to the paradox which he hopes to maintain -- that the physical drama operates as an inspiration to and in tandem with the drive toward clarity of mind implied by verbal explanatory discourse.

The focus of the visual details on body motion need not be as outright humorous as Sterne's satire on rational learning and rhetorical declamation seems to suggest. Diderot's theatre reforms illustrate that the emergence of tableaux in the theatres is an aspect of the larger project of sentimentalism toward universalisation of represented emotional experience. Perhaps the most sentimental episode in the novel — the death of LeFever — clearly establishes genuine human reaction as the principle of human morality. And as Le Fever's death arrives, the prose rhythm is clearly intended to capture the genuine gratitude of the sick Lieutenant and the actual motion of his heart:

> ----The blood and spirits of LeFever, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to the last citadel, the heart,---rallied back,---the film forsook his eyes for a moment,---he looked up wishfully in my uncle's face,---then cast a look upon his boy,---and that *ligament*, fine as it was,--was never broken----
>
> Nature instantly ebbed again,----the film returned to its place,---the pulse fluttered----stopped----went on----throb'd----stopped again----moved----stopped----shall I go on?----No.   (VL10.512-3)

This "end" of Le Fever has sometimes been called one of the novel's Shandean "jokes."[26] In as much as it exposes the control of the author in the creation of the sentimental tableaux — it is Tristram who actually controls the motion of the heart — the end of this passage undermines the age-old claim to "truth" which the early sentimental writers' advanced. Yet, the combination of that control and the significant theatrical gestures of the text here suggest a consciousness of the theatricality of sentiment and realise, perhaps even accept, that theatricality as an aspect of social discourse. In other words, we need to textualise the body for its little signifying "performances" to make any sense. We can criticise Walter for holding the ancient theorists too dear, but we must accept that having a tutor "about my son, as the mirror in which he is to view himself each

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[26] Jonathan Lamb has suggested that Le Fever's death points to "the double principle" of the comic and the tragic which Dryden had noted as the combined strength of English drama (23-4). I think Lamb's suggestion is accurate from the point of view of generic similarities, but he does not take into account the performance side of theatre beyond Dryden's proposals and generic requirements which I argue Sterne had in mind as the basis novel's theatricality. Certainly sadness and humour were both aspects of performance but both also realise the emotional extension of text into action and gesture and spectacle — which is the overall concern here.

morning, and by which he is to adjust his looks, his carriage, and perhaps the inmost sentiments of his heart" (VI.5.497) demonstrates a genuine concern for young Tristram's welfare. The physiognomic conditions which Walter places on the future tutor are obsessive and precise, but they suggest that even Walter has an understanding of the significative potential of bodily motion: "I maintain it, added he, that a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room, -- or take it up in going out on it, but something escapes, which discovers him" (401-2).

Tristram is obsessed with the body, and his book is equally obsessed with its own physical – and especially visual – appearance. As Michael Vande Burge has noted, the "exaggerated print displays" which characterise *Tristram Shandy* – its typography, its pictures, even its textual packaging – have been the distinguishing feature of Sterne's novel and the mainstay of its continuing critical interest "from the moment of its publication" (22). For example, in a recent article entitled "Romanticism and Enlightenment," Marshall Brown argues that the marbled page, "is an emblem, but it is also the thing itself, a real presence that brings the self-image of the age bodily into our chamber. For once, in a way perhaps only possible in a book, the image is at one with the object, in ambiguous fulfilment of an age-old yearning for a self-begetting clear and distinct idea" (37). As we have seen, however, the idea of clarity is itself ambiguous, resting on a paradoxical conflict of a desire for the absolute and stable understanding of factual and moral truths and the contrary mistrust of the notion that words can signify absolutely. As with dramatic tableaux, Sterne acknowledges the inevitable drive toward making clear rationally, that which is clear of immediately recognisable elements of reason. Thus, Tristram tells Sir the reader that he will need "much knowledge" to understand the marbled page, but he cannot resist providing the famous clue, "motley emblem of my work!"; this comment itself is parenthetical -- visually disrupting the progress of the sentence -- but it is a direct invitation to engage in interpretative discourse. The clue is both transgression and guide.

The same pattern emerges with the other pictures. I think that we can call the black page, the blank page, the missing chapters, and the two diagrams "theatrical" because although they are

physically bound with the text, they are interruptions in the progress of our reading — that is Tristram's performance of his life and opinions. We cannot "read" them in the same way as we "read" the text. As the static tableau calls for different intepretative strategies in an audience from the dynamic action, so they call for different types of responses. The eccentric pages are all invitations to interpret, but we are given cues and opportunities to make those interpretations. The "picture" of widow Wadman is blank so that we might "paint her to [our] own mind" but, true to form, Tristram goes on to give his assistance: "as like your mistress as you can — as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you" (VI.38.566). Jester-like, he declares " — 'tis all one to me — please but your own fancy in it," and obviously, his sexual cues must be taken in their humorous context; nevertheless, the presence of these verbal instructions, however satirical they might be, expose the tendency to fill the voids in discourse which these pictures seem to be. We know that the black page is a memorial — a grave more likely — to Yorick because we have just had two chapters describing his death in detail, including enough textual allusions — not the least of which is "Alas, poor Yorick!" itself — combining the twin feelings of loss and memory.[27] We know that the diagrams of Tristram's narrative are such, because we are *told* as much: "These we the four lines I moved in through my first second, third and fourth volumes." The last diagram of the fifth volume is "the precise line," complete with letters indicating the various digressions — letters which Tristram, of course, interprets for us: "it appears, that except at the curve, marked A, where I took a trip to Navarre, — and the indented curve B, which is the short airing when I was there with the Lady Baussiere and her page..." (VI.40.570). Tristram then claims to go on with conventionally rational narrative "gravity" indicated by the straight line which he compares to "the *best line*" of "cabbage planters." He then does away with that formula as he begins the projected volume. Trim's curved line in volume IX is a symbol of freedom and independence — and Tristram cannot resist the urge to claim that "A thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms could not have said more for celibacy" (IX.4.744). But the irony of Tristram's claim to

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[27] See Chibka "The Hobby-Horse Epitaph" for an excellent treatment of this topic.

celibacy in the context of his own family (Aunt Dinah) and Trim's hinted sexual exploits is made

the real truth by the combination of a visual image and a textual explanation.[28] As Gabriel

Josipovi has suggested, the line of gravity always leads down, away from the mind to the body,

at which point mental or moral gravity is no longer stable -- and yet the author and the reader

must, it seems, strive toward that stability.

Sterne's book, then, is theatrical not because it is a drama but because it recreates the

paradoxical interplay of visual and verbal signification which characterises the relationship of

words and *mise en scène* in performance. Moreover, the intransitive structure of tableaux-based

dramaturgy, in which significative moments of stasis interrupt conventional textual progress, is

evident in the organisation of chapters and digressions. Episodes weave in and out of each other

-- often stopping discourse altogether -- but we are better prepared for that occurrence by the

spaces and stops of which Tristram has control. "ask my pen—it governs me—I govern it not"

(VI.6.500), he declares, but in so doing reveals that the apparent free flow of his thought is

recognisable enough for him to explain the reason for his wanderings.

Tristram's "shifting of scenes" represents therefore gestures and tableaux signifying in

themselves the paradoxical motions toward and away from rational control. It is fitting that not

only is Tristram's audience compared to the transgressing restlessness of the hobby-horse, but

also his narrative method and his role as narrator. His spirits are continually "mounting me upon

a long stick, and playing the fool with me nineteen hours out of the twenty-four" (VII.1.575). The

"long stick" here recalls the theatricality of play and dance -- theatre without words or argument

-- which is one of the many sources of the hobby-horse.[29] Tristram is drawn to this playfulness,

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[28] Though it is a problematic article, Hillis Miller's "Narrative Middles" does suggest an interesting reading of Trim's line as a parody of Hogarth's line of beauty -- a fact which further reveals a textual loophole for the reader's understanding of the line. See also Markeley's reply to Hillis Miller, "*Tristram Shandy* and Narrative Middles."

[29] In "Long Sticks, Morris Dancers, and Gentlemen: Associations of the Hobby-Horse in *Tristram Shandy*," David Oakleaf traces the literary roots of the hobby-horse in folkloric carnival, the may-pole and dance, as well as child's toys. He comments: "the man astride the child's toy violates conventional distinctions, suggesting widespread human folly and the saving value of folly, neglect of study and recreation for it." Oakleaf does not discuss the theatrical aspect of the dances and play, but does acknowledge the contrary forces of body and mind, folly and learning, which are inherent in it.

as he is drawn to the "truth-value" of visual mystery and pictorial transgression, as he is to the Morris dancers in France and to the slit in Nanette's petticoat: "We want a cavalier, said she, holding out both her hands, as if to offer them——And a cavalier ye shall have; said I; taking hold of both of them" (VII.43.649). He decides to "take a dance" and suggests specifically that it is a sentimental panacea – a true ideal – as the composition of tableaux is for Diderot's theatre. But like Diderot, Sterne reveals the drive toward method and reason which runs in tandem to theatrical freedom and dance. Tristram cannot linger, cannot be drawn completely into the sexual meanderings promised by Nanette and the "slit" in her petticoat. In other words, he cannot exist wholly or contentedly within the play of alternative discourses. Like the theatre writers which he often satirises, Tristram falls from pure performance back into text.

Thus Sterne leaves images, characters and tales hanging in stasis or forgotten altogether, transcending, thereby, the airtight but contrived solidity of conventional narrative and allowing Sterne's stories, to use Kristeva's words, to "live as drama in three dimensions." (49). Yet each of these fragments, these narrative tableaux, is textually organised to juxtapose one another and be linked as "motley emblems" of the whole. Theories of numbers and letters seem to fall into the body of random movements and asymmetry, the mental to the physical, words into actions and pictures, but that fall is composed, indexed and explained creating a tension between the apparent freedom of the players' minds and the cunning manipulations of their director and author. Sterne does not abandon discourse, of course, but his tableaux suggests that in the visual signification of pictorial drama is the source of alternative discourses to rational argumentation. We, the readers, read and see, therefore, a multiplicity of significative perspectives – and it is that multiplicity which can, finally, inspire the imagination.

Chapter 3

"Beds of Justice:" The Silence and Dialogues of *Tristram Shandy*

Rhetoric and typography are perhaps the most prominent points of critical interest

surrounding *Tristram Shandy*. The relationship between rhetorical style in the novel and Sterne's

analysis/critique of Locke's theories of language is the central concern of John Traugott's

landmark *Tristram Shandy's World*, and that text has inspired a wealth of articles and books

devoted to determining the key to Sterne's unique textual method. As Michael Vende Berg has

argued extensively, Sterne was "trained in the rhetorical tradition -- a tradition which held sway

roughly from the time of ancient Greek rhetoricians until, and to some extent beyond, the advent

of romanticism -- [and therefore] conceived of writing in oral terms, treating the written word as

an adjunct to, and as a reflection of, the writer's spoken word" (24). Sterne's tonal precision

implies "the active oral participation of his reader" (22) rather than simply the benign acceptance

of rational argumentation. Commenting on Sterne's typography, T. C. Livingstone describes the

Shandean dash as "a typological gesture [conveying] the changes of tone, confidences, the

implicatory silences, the veerings of the narrative, the doublings of meaning, which characterise

Sterne's methods as a writer." William Freedman's *Laurence Sterne and the Musical Novel*, sets up

an elaborate analogy between the narrative method of the novel and the musical forms of

counterpoint and harmony which Sterne was familiar with as he fiddled on his *viol-gambol*. The

analogy is evident in the musical references throughout the novel, as Freedman argues, all

stressing the simultaneity and variety of musical performance which Sterne -- and Freedman --

juxtapose to the restrictions of textual linearity.

These studies reveal a common, though often implicit, thesis: the musical flavour and

expressive tone of Sterne's style, supplemented by its oral cues, invoke the intertwining variety of

meaning and discourses which results from the subtle shifts in tone and context: "--'Are we not

here now:'-- continued the corporal, 'and are we not'--(dropping his hat plumb upon the ground--and pausing, before he pronounced the word)--'gone! in a moment?'" (V.7.432). Trim's described pause create a tension between the flow of Tristram's narrative and the significative potential of his gesture; but this tension of text and transgression, presence and absence is evident in the organisation and presentation of the sentence itself. The dashes visually disrupt the semantic structure of the phrases, and provide a visual cue for a pause in the reading, a shift in intonation. This shift heightens the nuances of Trim's meaning -- the affirmation of life in the acceptance of the suddenness of death -- and also indexes and identifies the alternative method of discourse, in this case, the tableau. The theatrical paradox is recognisable not only in the combination of visual image and textual explanation, but also in the dual emphasis on tonal variety and verbal precision which characterises Sterne's rhetorical method.

I would like to argue that these rhetorical and typographical displays are also aspects of speech, particularly speech in performance, which further implicates theatre as a structural topos for Sterne's understanding and investigation of language in his novel. As we have seen, Sterne's theatrical paradox of text and performance is drawn from his understanding of theatre and theatrical techniques. Two of these -- constructions of the audience, and pictorial tableaux -- Sterne adapts from performance itself, and he prominently includes the distinctly transgressive nature of both these aspects of the eighteenth-century theatre experience. Interruptions of action and static, pictorial moments in performance were important parts of the developing dramaturgy, but drama did not drop speech from its mode of presentation. Diderot's plays, though said to be based on intransitive tableaux, are still distinctly verbal. Garrick was as well known for his rhetorical and oral skill as he was for his agility in transition and his sense of the visual. The point is, although there was an increased emphasis on pictorial signification in the theatre, dramatic texts -- with traditional rhetorical structures -- continued to be written.

I would like to focus Sterne's use of dialogue as a specific form of dramatic speech, because in it the tension-filled relationship between actor and actor and between actors and

audiences in the eighteenth-century is practically duplicated. At its simplest level, a dialogue

consists of two characters speaking and replying — conversing essentially on relatively equal

footing. Certainly most of the scenes between Walter and Toby, which Tristram describes or

between Toby and Trim, or between any of the characters are, in essence, dialogues.

Interestingly, many of these dialogues begin as attempts at monologue and become dialogue only

when Walter or some other speaker acknowledges the alternative perspectives — the absences

beneath his presences — of his audience. More subtly, Tristram's "monologues" become

themselves dialogues since he opens his text to the "imagination" of the reader and entertains the

notion that it plays a viable part in the establishment of meaning.[30] As with his references to

theatre audiences, and dramaturgical styles, however, these dialogues often end up reflecting the

narrator's desire to explain and clarify and not leave any loose ends after all. Tristram suggests

that "the truest respect which you can pay to the reader's understanding is to *halve* this matter

amicably" (II.11.125; emphasis mine); but this division — though ostensibly a breakdown of the

author's supposed complete control — suggests the establishment of a codified equilibrium. As

always, Tristram tries to maintain textual codes and verbal presences, but must admit to the

power of performative interference and encroaching absences — in this case, his audience's own

need to fulfil its desires and imaginations.

In drama since Greek tragedy, the human tendency toward control and manipulation

rather than satisfaction with equality has been represented by the rhetorical strength of one

character over another. The result is a textualised codification of desires or events based on the

identification of the stronger speaker, who is often then held up for ironic scrutiny before the

audience.[31] It is this tension of control and contrivance which is recognisable in the adaptation of

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[30] I want to make it clear that I am use the term dialogue in the strictest dramatic sense and not referring to Bahktin's "dialogism," though I have mentioned it as a general concept in introducing the transgressions of theatre performance. Many scholars have already linked Bahktin's theories with Shandeanism — not the least of whom is Bahktin himself. The possible "trialogue" which might be constructed around Sterne, Bahktin, and the theatrical metaphor — especially dealing with dialogism and carnivalism — would be very interesting, but is beyond the scope of this study.

[31] This is a staple of Greek tragedy — a notable modern example, and one which is central to the eighteenth century canon of theatrical performances is the wooing scene of *Richard III*, I, ii. Richard manipulate Anne

dialogue to printed, rather than performed texts. Of course, the dialogue has also existed as a

recognised dramatic sub-genre since Plato -- a fact not lost on Sterne in his significant allusions to

Socrates. Just as Trim's shift from speech to tableau suggests the paradoxical interplay of verbal

presences and non-verbal absences, as well as the interplay of life and death, Walter's "transition

to that of Socrates... pleading before his judges" and the predicament into which he puts himself

with his own audience -- Toby and Mrs. Shandy -- is augmented by the suggestive allusion to the

Platonic dialogue form.[32] In the Platonic dialogues some wayward but enterprising young

scholar comes to Socrates and represents not only an audience but the questioning instigator of

Socrates' insights. Thus an alternative perspective is provided in the performed "text" which is

the whole dialogue. Yet the purpose of the larger enterprise of the dialogue form always absorbs

the alternatives into Socrates', or Plato's philosophical position -- the "true" text. Significantly,

then, Platonic dialogues become vehicles for a philosophical lecture which simply highlights the

insufficiency of the suggested alternative discourse. Indeed, Socrates respondents rarely

interrupt the master but to give Plato's menial replies -- "Of course," "You are right," "Certainly,

Socrates" -- and when they do speak it is mainly to answer Socrates' questions or corroborate his

explanations. Not surprisingly, then, neither Plato nor his modern translators include any kind of

stage directions or indication of intonation. The performance is completely subsumed within

text. On the other hand, considering the attempts at textualisation of eighteenth-century theatre

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into turning against her late husband and loving him -- but Richard reveals his surprise at his own success once she leaves, emphasising by the contrived nature of his decision to "prove a villain" and its ambitious methods. It is particularly interesting that this revelation was replaced in Garrick's update of Cibber's version (Donohue 227).

[32] Melvyn New comments that "Sterne almost assuredly did not go to Plato's *Apology* in writing this paragraph, but rather to Montaigne's version in "Of Physiognomy" (360). I would not contest Dr. New's editorial skill, and agree that the wording of this reference is derived from Montaigne as he suggests and proves by providing the appropriate passage from Cotton's translation. It is important to note, however, that the passage in is very close to the actual *Apology* itself (section 34d) to merit the connection between Walter and Socrates established in the novel. It is interesting that of all the Platonic dialogues the *Apology* seems to maintain an almost completely monologic structure; for that reason it is a most appropriate allusion for Walter, of all people, to make.. Socrates does at one point drop into "his usual manner" of dialogue (24c-25b) and also refers to the opinions of his audience enough to merit the inclusion of the *Apology*, as Grube has done, in the canon of Platonic dialogues. I also insist that the Socratic dialogue and its tensions between the known and the unknown, the present and the absent, would be as equally significant to Montaigne's work as Sterne's. As noted by many Renaissance scholars, Erasmus's comic dialogues also approach the platonic form in an often parodic manner.

commentators and theorists, the platonic dialogue form seems to be conveniently close to many views of theatricality during Sterne's day.

Walter's admiration for the Socratic method is hardly surprising, since this is exactly the kind of philosophical determination which he idealises. But unlike Socrates, who had an utterly loyal scribe in Plato, Sterne does not allow Walter a like measure of argumentative success. Whereas Plato's censorial sensibilities allowed only one correct definition for any given word -- an ideal which recurs in Locke's intended linguistic reforms -- Sterne uses the multiplicity of verbal definition to undermine the absolute philosophical determinateness of the Socratic method. Thus, there never seems to be a definitive conclusion to Shandean dialogue, no "last word" for either party. Walter ends his speech on the death of Bobby: "'I have friends--I have relations,---I have three desolate children,'--says *Socrates*" (V.13.442). To which Mrs. Shandy replies, "you have one more, *Mr Shandy*, than I know of." Mrs. Shandy, not aware of the immediate context of Walter's undeniably and strictly verbal dramatisation of Socrates, draws, from her point of view, a no less correct conclusion. Yet the dialogue ensues: "By heaven! I have one less,--said my father." Toby even tries to assist in the determination of a solution: "--They are *Socrates*'s children;" but Elizabeth persists in maintaining an alternative position: "He has been dead a hundred years ago" (V.14.443). Now she is actually wrong -- but it is not Toby's or Tristram's or Sterne's point to necessarily discover the "right" -- for that would disallow the positive potential of multiple perspectives. In this case, the ideal end of dialogue is congenial respect: "My uncle Toby was no chronologer--so not caring to advance one step but upon safe ground, he laid down his pipe deliberately upon the table, and rising up, and taking my mother most kindly by the hand, without saying another word, either good or bad, to her, he led her out after my father, that he might finish the ecclaircissement himself." The doors close, the curtain falls -- quite literally in this case, for here Tristram steps out for his musical interlude for the benefit of "the grave man in black" (V.15.444). But is this exit a conclusion? No, for Walter never does set the issue to right and we hear very little else about Bobby. And so Sterne's theatrical

paradox continues: the dialogue forms part of a composed scene; neither is ever absolutely or conventionally "concluded," which would imply an encoding of interpretation by the narrator onto the audience, but both are rather framed by an emblematising desire to see things clearly. The dialogue scenes become episodes, nuggets of ordered speculation in a larger "naturally" transgressive production.

Like his references to theatre itself, Sterne's textual adaptation of the theatrical potential of the dialogue does fit in a larger body of eighteenth-century authors. For Shaftesbury, as David Marshall has noted at length, the ideal communicative act is so tightly composed that all traces of that composition — that is, the design and structure of the performance — disappear. To a great extent, Shaftesbury reveals an anxiety of being discovered as dishonest and conscious of one's public audience, the response to which seems to be an intensification of the theatrical form and obedience to the strictures of coherent and unified performance: "Must I have nothing to act? And thus thou becomes one of those seditious and quarrelsome actors that mutiny against the *master of the stage*. For it is plain, whilst thou art thus affected, thy aim is toward spectators, not towards Him of whose approbation alone thou hast need" (*Philosophical Regimen* 119; cited in Marshall 57).

Paradoxically, Shaftesbury's underlying aim is the disappearance of theatre by the imposition of more theatre, "theatricality defeated by theatre" (Marshall 33).[33] Such a view explains Shaftesbury's recommendation of the constructed private exchange — a epistolary dialogue we might call it — as the most "genuine" or "natural" form of communication. Marshall underscores the paradox of this recommendation, suggesting that by disallowing the publication of "private meditations" Shaftesbury "appear[s] to be incriminating himself" in an act of overt hypocrisy (17). The epistolary dialogue however, being addressed to a single person and thereby anticipating and encouraging responses, becomes a textual reconstruction of the actor-audience

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[33] At this point Marshall makes a very interesting comparison between Shaftesbury and Diderot. Certainly, Diderot's *Paradox Sur Le Comedien* is an exposure of this very process — see Chapter 2. also Cf. Edward Hundert's comparison of Fielding and Diderot in "Performing the Enlightenment Self: Henry Fielding and the History of Identity" 242-4.

relationship. It effectively suppresses the possibility of a harmful or transgressive, but nevertheless genuine, response: "As a letter, the text would constitute a dialogue between its first person and its specific (fictional) destinaire: in principle, excluding the reader, turning him into a witness to a scene which occurs accidentally, as it were, before his eyes. The author would have the status of an actor in the dialogue; the reader would be displaced by the character of the reader personated in the text" (31). Essentially we are left with a textual reproduction of the ideal theatrical situation so adamantly sought after by Dryden and Addison.[34]

It is Samuel Richardson, however, who turns the epistolary dialogue into a popular literary genre. Like Shaftesbury's and Fielding's constructions of their audiences, the inclusion of not only letter writers but also respondents closes the gap of intervening transgressions of the reader's imagination. At one point in *Clarissa*, Anna Howe reconstructs "the dialogue that passed between the widow mother and the pert daughter" as a dramatic text, complete with speaker prompts, stage directions [(Lips drawn closer; eye raised); (angrily, and drawing back her face)], italic indications of stressed intonation, and critical reflections:

> D. Dear, Madam! — (but I don't love a Harlowe — that's what I meant). I *am* your child and *must* be your child, do what you will.
> M. A very pert one, I am sure, as ever mother bore! And you *must* be my child, so what I *will*! — As much as to say you would not, if you could help it, if I—
> D. How could I have such a thought! — It would be *forward*, indeed, if I had — when I don't know what your *mind* is as to the proposal — when the proposal is so very advantageous a one too.
> M. (Looking a little less discomposed) Why, indeed, ten-thousand pounds — (L197: 626)

The occasion of this dialogue is unusual and somewhat ludicrous — the "courtship" of Antony Harlowe and Anna's mother. It demonstrates, however, Richardson's awareness of the structure

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[34] In "Sentimentality as Performance: Shaftesbury, Sterne and The Theatrics of Virtue," Robert Markeley traces the correspondences between the paradoxical constructions of Shaftesburian optimism with Sterne's implied critique of sentimental benevolence in *The Sentimental Journey*: "By emphasising the theatrics of Yorick's generosity and by highlighting the equation of money and virtue, Sterne testifies to — and dramatises — both his own difficulties as a half-hearted apologist for sentimentality and the tensions that inhere in a genre that is both assertive and self-consciously defensive about its claims to moral authority" (211). Markeley's article, though very insightful, deals mainly with political and theoretical issues of class and aristocratic condescension and not, as in Marshall, with the problems and paradoxes of theatrical forms.

of his own dialogue practice. The dialogue itself is constructed with precision and detail, giving both the intended reader (Clarissa) and the actual reader an oral and visual account of the performance. It is perhaps noteworthy that like Tristram, Anna uses dashes here quite liberally to indicate pauses in speech and changes in tone. Like Shandean dashes, they serve primarily as visual cues. Similarly, Anna makes no hesitation in commenting on the ridiculousness of the situation and her mother: "A good *selves*-ish speech -- But I thought that friendship, and gratitude, and humanity were matters that ought to be deemed of the most *intimate* concern to us." She then adds, "but not to dwell upon her words." But that is exactly what the dialogue structure of this scene allows her, Clarissa and us, to do. The detailed theatricality of the scene suggests both the emotional tensions of the interview and the possible ambiguities of Anna's construction -- that is, it questions even the genuineness of Anna's report. But by including both Antony's and Mrs. Howe's letters around the dialogue we are left with little doubt as to the validity of Anna's summation -- at least from Richardson's point of view.

Both the ambiguities of dialogue and Richardson's textualisation are most clearly expressed in the "fragments" which Clarissa writes and Lovelace transposes after the rape. Like the tensions of text and performance which make up the paradoxes of the eighteenth-century theatre, the eighteenth-century fragment, as Elizabeth Warring Harries has recently argued, as an artistic and literary form, reflects the seemingly contrary impulses toward the imaginative potential of the incomplete and the rational assurance of defined structure (6). Like a Garrick tableau or like Shandean narrative, the fragments, both Lovelace's and Clarissa's, which immediately follow the rape "reflect and enact the [physical and emotional] violence within the text" (130). However, without transcending the limitations of Richardson's sense of decorum, these fragments do not -- like Anna's dialogue -- leave the moral ramifications or the emotional effect of the rape entirely up to the audience's imagination. Lovelace's short avowal of his act is perhaps the most dramatic in the whole book: "And now, Belford, I can go no farther. The affair is over. Clarissa lives" (L257; 883). Harries notes that the "simple sentences and terse diction

suggest the force of suppressed emotion; the gaps between the sentences suggest his inability to think coherently," but also explains that "Richardson's editorial comment that follows, enclosed between stark black lines, emphasises its reticence, its omissions, but not the missing logical connections" (130). While she does not point to the theatricality of this exchange directly, Harries summation of Richardson's impulse to clarify the significance of the fragment reveals the central paradox of the transgressive ambiguities of performance and the rationalising impulses of text. We see the proper moral response of the audience in the immediate commentary Richardson grants to Belford: "O THOU savage-hearted monster! What work hast thou made in *one guilty hour*, for a *whole age* of repentance!" (L258; 883). Undoubtedly, Richardson's purpose is to provide the cues which will invoke our antipathy toward Lovelace, without having to contemplate the emotional ambiguity of his own statement.

The same pattern of textual staging and restaging occurs with Lovelace's reading and copying of Clarissa's thoughts. These fragments -- textual performances of Clarissa's violated consciousness -- are true transgressions of conventional textuality, contrasting explicitly with Clarissa's earlier controlled prose, a contrast which Richardson, I think, encourages. It is the grieving Lovelace, however, who has them transcribed, first by himself: he "can write no more of this eloquent nonsense myself, which rather shows a raised, rather than a quenched imagination... as written by the whimsical character" (L261; 890). Our established antipathy toward Lovelace at this moment solidifies a sympathy with Clarissa's loss of emotional control. His restaging of her text only serves to reconfirm that allegiance. Although the violence and transgression of the experience are granted to the characters, we are provided with interpretative, textual clues as to the proper moral response. Richardson does not permit the ambiguities to entertain alternative interpretations. As Donald Wehrs states: "the great promise of

Richardsonian fiction lay in its claim that mimetic, plausible narrative could secure inductively

certain interpretation;... there would be a seamless web between mimesis and meaning" (129).[35]

The epistolary dialogue is a restaging of the eighteenth-century performance situation,

actor to audience and audience to actor, disallowing the interfering responses of its actual

reader/audience. Shaftesbury's and Richardson's sense of the theatrical is subsumed within a

need for the moral assurance of textual structures. Richardson and his letter-writing characters

compose textual fragments which maintain a symbolic ambiguity, but as letters, as compositions,

remain in a permanent state of objectified stasis. In other words, the unchanging design of both

records of and response to events implants a similarly objectified moral interpretation. By

contrast, the textual strategy of *Tristram Shandy* is based on the inevitable and almost

irrepressible nature of performances occurring within time, by which the opposing voices are

structured not to implant one "seamless" interpretation, but to engage in a larger dialogue

between the Sterne's text and *his* reader. At the same time, they are designed so that certain

readings are undoubtedly knitted into the fabric of Sterne's word-play and textual design. By no

means does Sterne disallow his narrator an attempt at interpretation -- as he does in the

examinations of tableaux -- but Sterne's point is that interpretations can never settle on definitive

meanings. The participants play off one anothers' interpretations of words and events, which

allows the dialogue to continue; it is that play which is the motivating force in their design, not an

end, a definitive "truth." The end of the play is as arbitrary as the possible interruptions in a

theatre, or the falling of a curtain -- which always signals a transition to some comparable event.

Interestingly, unlike Richardson, Sterne never produces a scene which is exactly intended

to resemble a printed play-text. The arbitrary quality of Tristram's play with character dialogue,

stage directions, and intonation gives Sterne's novel the flavour not of a dramatic text, but rather

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[35] Wehrs suggests that the Richardsonian novel, as we have seen of Fielding's and the prologues and strategies of theatre-writers, uses this "seamless web" to "inculcate" a specific response from a particularly conditioned audience: "instead of reinforcing the division between those whose "own ideas" are mirrored in a narrative argument and those whose ideas are not, the novel would put an end to the division, "inculcat[ing] *religion* and *morality* in "so probably, so natural, so *lively* a manner (Richardson, *Pamela* 31). In the context of this conditioning and Sterne's response the irony of Richardson's appeal to nature is notable.

a dramatic text in stage performance.   The best example in the novel, by virtue of its

stychomachia-like organisation, is the Shandy's *beds of justice*:

> ... indeed he is growing a very tall lad,--rejoined my father.
>
> —He is very tall for his age, indeed,—said my mother.—
>
> —I can not (making two syllables of it) imagine, quoth my father, who the deuce he takes after.—
>
> I cannot conceive, for my life,—said my mother.—
>
> Humph! — said my father.
>
> (The dialogue ceased for a moment.)
>
> —I am very short myself,—continued my father gravely.
>
> You are very short, Mr Shandy. — said my mother....
>
> I suppose, replied my father, -- making some pause first, -- He'll be exactly like other people's children. —
>
> Exactly, said my mother. —   (VI.18.526-7)

Many critics have been misled about the repetitive quality of Elizabeth's replies, assuming that

they are an indication of her thoughtlessness.   True, Tristram gives Walter the initiative in the

dialogue, right down to his careful descriptions of the manner his interjections: "quoth, "

"continued... gravely," "replied... making some pause first." By contrast, the repetition of "said my

mother" seems to add to the tautological nature of her replies; the rhythmic repetition of Mrs.

Shandy's speech tags suggest the same kind of acquiescence as those of Socrates' pupils.

Elizabeth does repeat Walter's words, but the organisation of the text and the emphasis

which Tristram places on the pace and diction of the discussion indicates a sense not only of the

importance of what the words mean but how they sound, and, therefore, how a shift in that

sound can change the meaning. The dashes here serve to note a change of speaker, and of tone,

but they also connect certain passages together, suggesting primarily that Elizabeth interrupts

Walter quickly and therefore that her response must have some relevance to the effect of Walter's

statements. Moreover, in the early editions of the novel -- and now in the Florida edition -- the "paragraphs" indicated by left-margin dashes are separated on the page, further revealing a self contained unit of meaning. We are left in effect with a series of puns; Walter's attempt to discover a theoretical resolution to the problem of how to "put the boy in breeches" is comically redressed by Elizabeth's very slight shifts in word order and tone. The repetition of the tags actually augments the subtle, sexual irony of her responses: "I cannot conceive," "You are very short," "exactly," (implying and strengthening Walter's "like other people's children"): Mrs. Shandy's witty puns are undoubtedly orchestrated examples of Shandean humour, but they also realise a clear transgression of not only text, but also social and moral decorum -- Walter is not Tristram's father. Indeed, the two suggested positions are almost diametrically opposed; Walter's desire to put Tristram "into breeches" is a reflection of his desire for direct control, on his own terms, over all the events of his family's life.[36] Mrs. Shandy's puns suggest that Walter has not even had control enough to father his wife's child -- at which point we might suggest that Walter's schedule for intercourse becomes all the more ludicrous and, especially to the obviously lively Mrs. Shandy, anathema. Thus, Sterne constructs the beds of justice as a dialogue but one which suggests a completely contrary interpretation of Walter's yearning for theoretical control, namely, its impossibility. In the same way, in attempting to ascribe the date of his conception to his inquisition of Madam the reader, Tristram hints that his father was "afflicted with a Sciatica" nine months before his birth (I.4.4). He states that the date of his birth, eight months after his closest possible date of conception by Walter, "brings the thing almost to a certainly." This is an

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[36] The nature of Sterne's theatrical paradox in this dialogue form is also recognisable in the image of the breeches themselves. The breeches are clothing, forging an impression of both status and order, which hides the truth -- and it is a distinctly sexual truth -- of human nakedness and animality. As Walter admits, "the child looks extremely well... in his vests and tunics" (VI.18.526), so we can say fairly definitively that his intention is not to make Tristram more comfortable or better looking. "Putting this boy into breeches," then, is a notably theatrical act in itself for it establishes one thing in the place of another in order to encode a particular meaning, in this case, the growing maturity of a socially-upstanding young gentleman.

important "almost:" Tristram is driven to find a date, but its correctness is left up to us -- not even Madam the reader is satisfied.[37]

It is fitting that the *beds of justice* passage bring us to the problem of dates and times, for it is central to Sterne point about the nature of discourse and dialogue. Elizabeth Shandy's replies underscore a temporality which Walter -- in trying to codify everything around him into stabilised theoretical models -- wants desperately, it seems, to overcome. Sterne again uses his journey metaphor to demonstrate this difficulty -- and it is, significantly, a *demonstration*. Like the *beds of justice*, Tristram's encounter with the French commissary (VII.33-6) is presented textually in the form of an ongoing dramatic dialogue, and like his father, Tristram is faced with a frustratingly tautological respondent. And yet, like a barrier to the fulfilment of Tristram's expectation that he can change modes of transportation at will, the commissary's repeated comments indicate that Tristram is obliged to follow though with both choices:

-- But I do not chuse--

-- But you must pay for it, whether you do or no----

Aye! for the salt; said I (I know)----

--And for the post too; added he. Defend me; cried I----

I travel by water---I am going down the Rhône this very afternoon---may baggage is in the boat--and I have actually paid nine livres for my passage----

C'est tout egal--'tis all one; said he.

Bon Dieu! what, pay for the way I go! and for the way I do *not* go!

----*C'est tout egal*; replied the commissary----   (VII.34.635)

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[37] As Helen Ostovich and Juliet McMaster have made very clear, it is vitally significant that both alternative discourses in these dialogues are provided by women. The juxtaposition of male "penetrative" discourse and female "receptive but undefined" discourse is essential to an understanding of Sterne's concepts of identity and sexuality and their relationship to the theatricality of language. As such it becomes a larger issue -- especially since the forwardness of Widow Wadman and the silences of Uncle Toby complicate it somewhat -- and is better served by a paper of its own.

Tristram's plans can represent here the tendency to maintain a degree of order in decisions or thought-processes over time; the commissary suggests that all alternatives must be considered as they appear. Both sides of the dialogue -- speaker and audience, in a way -- remain active agents.

But what is most interesting about this encounter, as we saw in the *beds of justice*, is that Sterne has presented the dialogue to state, quite firmly, this dialogical condition. Sterne's textual control is evident, as before, in the spaces and dashes indicating changes in speaker and intonation. He even includes a most dramatically textual "aside" -- significant because the dramatic aside is used to provide clarifying information to the audience, as it does here: "---The devil take the serious character of these people! quoth I--(aside) they understand no more of IRONY than this---" (634). Sterne thus seems to consolidate a point of reference, garnering sympathy for his hero; he even includes a bit of patriotic sentiment and emotional soliloquy for the benefit of his English audience: "O England! England! thou land of liberty, and climate of good sense, thou tenderest of mothers--and gentlest of nurses. cried I, kneeling upon one knee, as I was beginning my apostrophe---" (635-6). At the same time, Sterne maintains the possibility that even this commentary has a stabilising effect, for when the director enters, "seeing a person in black, with his face as pale as ashes, at his devotions... ask'd if I stood in want of the aids of the church." But this response -- the introduction of a new speaker and a new perspective notwithstanding -- is still part of the dialogue and thus part of Sterne's design and intention.

Thus, we again encounter the theatrical paradox. The audience, both Walter's and Tristram's, are not only involved in the reading of the text, but that involvement undermines the textual consistency of the initial speaker's self-contained, verbal logic. At the same time, however, that involvement is textual -- for our recognition of its multivalence is dependent on the rhetorical manipulation of an author. In other words it is highly significant to Sterne's dialogues that while their purpose is to demonstrate the simultaneous and continuous presence of alternative discourses, paradoxically that very discursiveness is dependent on some attempt at textual control. The loss of Tristram's "remarks" after his confrontation with the commissary is

emblematic of this paradox. "I was determined to note down the imposition amongst my remarks" (VII.36.638), Tristram says, but then finds that his notebook has been stolen. Yet Sterne -- and Tristram -- have provided us with a full account of the incident already, in perhaps a more accurate manner than the angry traveller might consent to record. Sterne has the commissary make this quite plain: "Mr. commissary! pray did I drop any remarks as I stood beside you?---- [new line] You dropped a good many very singular ones; replied he." But Tristram insists that he must have a record under his control: "I must have my remarks" (639). In short, Tristram, like his father -- if it is Walter -- cannot leave any matter well enough alone. Walter's aim in the particular dialogue is made very clear: " -- I'll put him, however, into breeches, said my father,--- let the world say what it will" (VI.15.522). Making up an entire chapter in itself, Sterne allows the statement to appear to be a self-contained, unified, statement of intent. It is significant however, that in suspending the statement in its own chapter, it emerges as an alternative, not a solution to the debate concerning Tristram's circumcision which precedes it. Indeed, the second phrase of the chapter, "let the word say what it will," opens the issue to the speculation of the reader, in a distinctly contrary manner to the intended closure of Socratic and epistolary dialogues. Again, Sterne's textual control carries with it the suggestion of ambiguity -- an ambiguity located in the performance situation of book and reader.[38]

As with his tableaux, therefore, not only does Tristram provide the visual and oral clues to the ambiguity of Mrs. Shandy's responses, but even attempts to provide some textually grounded frame of reference for the *beds of justice* dialogue. The analogies which Tristram provides as a clarification of the *beds of justice*'s significance are equally dialogical -- in both the theatrical and critical sense of the term. Both explanatory analogies -- the example of the ancients

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[38] New notes the source of *the beds of justice* as Chambers: "BED *of justice, lit de justice* in the French laws denotes a throne whereon the king is seated in parliament "(416). The association with the French monarchy is important, I think, to the satirical subtext of the passage. Sterne's anti-French sentiments emerge often in the novel; though he was no pamphleteer or politician, he was definitely a firm supporter of the British Parliamentary system, in which the monarchy was much more beholden to the government than in France. Sterne's suggestion, I think, is that Walter would like Mrs. Shandy to act the acquiescent -- as a parliament before an absolute monarch -- but her resistance and ironic undercutting reveals a much more democratic sense of governance.

and his own style of writing -- are as confounded as Walter and Elizabeth's dialogue itself; the answer lies not in one discovered or ascertained position but in the engaging of discourse itself, in the hopes that " a middle one was generally found out which touched the point of wisdom" (VI.17.524). The Goths are named as the source for the technique of "debating every thing of importance to their state, twice; that is,--once drunk, and once sober:---Drunk--that their councils might not want vigour;---and sober--that they might not want discretion" (523). Interestingly, Tristram's naming of the Goths cannot remain unchallenged even for a second as they "afterwards incorporated the Herculi, the Bugians, and some other Vandallic clans to 'em."

The point is not that the clan has a name, but that over time and inconceivable mitigating circumstances even the name of a clan can change -- the theatricality of these established, verbal indicators of identity is, of course, recognisable in the theory of names. His theory of names (I.19) testifies to Walter's belief in the power of words to stabilise reality into quantifiable units: "His opinion, in this matter was, That there was a strange kind of magic bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our characters and conduct" (57-8). His daily life is organised by schedules and the theses of the ancients. In Walter's ideal vision of the world, words are the highest and most desirable presence for textualising reality into rational postulates, so that reality may become governable. And yet, as the novel and Walter's conduct in it makes clear, this textual stability is not manifest. For Walter it is the argumentative -- the dialectical -- process which is the happiest state. Interestingly, the image of the horse (hobby-horse) which Tristram uses to characterise the unfulfilable hope of stabilising audience reaction recurs in the description of Walter's love for the debate:

> My father had a favourite little mare, which he had consigned over to a most beautiful Arabian horse, in order to have pad out for his own riding; he was sanguine in all his projects; so talked about his pad every day with as absolute a security, as if it had been reared, broke,--and bridled and saddled at his door ready for mounting. By some neglect or other in *Obadiah*, it so fell out, that my father's expectations were answered with nothing better than a mule, and as ugly a beast of the kind as ever was produced.

> My mother and uncle *Toby* expected my father would be the death of *Obadiah*--and there never would be an end of the disaster.--See here! you rascal, cried my father, pointing to the mule, what have you done! ---It was not me, said *Obadiah*.--How do I know that? replied my father.

> Triumph swam in my father's eyes at the repartee--the *Attic* salt brought water into them--and so *Obadiah* heard no more about it (V.3.420-1).

Again we see a dialogue emerging. Walter's "expectations" are intended to be "as absolute a security," but they are only "so talked about." They represent a verbal presence which does not, at that moment, consider the possibility that it is an active suppression of alternative occurrences. Of course, they remain unfulfilled, and Walter, as usual, is enraged, but that merely makes the thrill of the debate more enticing. Thus, Walter's repartée can be considered theatrical because the words stand in for a reality, but are acknowledged to be simply "stand-ins."[39] Shandean dialogue does not solidify the textual ideal as the absolute meaning, the absolute truth, but rather suggests that the truth and the meaning of the event lie in its very duplicity.

It is not surprising, then, that Walter's speeches -- though not nearly as gestural as Trim's, for he is still more of a rhetorician than he is an actor -- are often described in performative terms, analogous to music and dance. To underscore the theory of names, Tristram reports: "Your BILLY, Sir!--Would you, for the world have called him JUDAS?--Would you, my dear Sir, he would say, laying his hand upon his breast, with the genteelest address,--and in that soft and irresistible piano of voice, which the nature of the *argumentum ad hominem* absolutely requires,--Would you have consented to such a desecration of him?" (I.19.58-9). Again the theatrical paradox is recognisable in both Walter's recitation and Tristram's description of it: the overtly constructed and contrived rhetoric of Walter's *argumentum* undermines the assurance of a theory based on the "magical" determining power of words. At the same time, Tristram attempts to consolidate that contrivance as "absolutely require[d]" for this particular device. Indeed, through

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[39] A concrete theatrical analogy: Garrick was universally heralded -- especially by Sterne -- as the pinnacle of natural or realistic acting (as we saw in chapter 2), but that everyone referred to his performances as "Garrick's Richard" and "Garrick's Hamlet."

the dialogue of Toby and Trim, Sterne suggests that speech and words are always bound up in

the intertwining persepctives of dialogue, a fact which undermines the "power" of Walter's theory

of names:

> --For my own part, *Trim*, though I can see little or no difference betwixt my
> nephew's being called *Tristram* or *Trismegistuss*... I fought just as well, replied the
> corporal, when the regiment called me *Trim*, as when they called me *James Butler*—And
> for my own part, said my uncle *Toby*, though I should blush to boast of myself, *Trim*,—
> yet had my name been *Alexander*, I could have down no more at *Namur* than my duty—
> Bless your honour! cried *Trim*, advancing three steps as he spoke, does a man think of his
> Christian name when he goes upon the attack?--Or when he stands in the trench, *Trim*?
> cried my uncle *Toby* looking firm--Or when he enters a breach? said *Trim*, pushing in two
> chairs--Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up and pushing his crutch like a pike--
> Or facing a platoon cried *Trim*, presenting his stick like a firelock--Or when he marches
> up the glacis? cried my uncle *Toby*, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.—
> (IV.18.352)

Interestingly, this dialogue is coupled with the vision of Toby and Trim acting out the battle. As

we have seen, the visual signifiers and verbal declarations themselves form an interweaving

dialogue within a single text. The audience is left with a series of paradoxically intertwined

positions to observe -- establishing, by the textual presentation, their involvement -- their

transgression of the literal meaning of the passage.

Similarly, in the "auxiliary verbs" section of the *Tristrapedia* , Walter states, hoping to instil

his associative sensibilities in his son: "the highest stretch of improvement a single word is

capable of, is a high metaphor,—for which, in my opinion, the idea is generally the worse, and

not the better;---but be that as it may,---when the mind has done with that with it--there is an

end,--the mind and the idea are at rest,--until a second idea enters;---and so on" (V.42.484). We

might suggest that Walter's theory identifies a theatricality inherent in discourse. An actor must

be wholly subsumed within his character to be convincing, thus forcing his own identity into

"absence." Failure to so would disrupt the successful accomplishment of the debate. With the

auxiliary verbs Walter suggests that any matter can be made present in an argument -- meaning,

therefore, before an audience -- regardless of any reality which that presence might codify or

suppress into absence: "Didst thou ever see a white bear? turning his head round to *Trim*, who stood at the back of his chair:--No an' please your honour, replied the corporal.---But thou couldst discourse about one, *Trim*, said my father, in case of need---" (V.43.486). The presence of the white bear is immaterial, for it is already forged by the words -- the bear itself, in fact, becomes superfluous.

Tristram himself, however, augments the recollection of his father with implicit dialogues of his own. We can recognise the paradoxical multivalence of Walter's "metaphor" in the description of the "bear" itself: "How would the white bear have behaved? is he wild? Tame? Terrible? Rough? Smooth?" The double-entendre in "rough" -- meaning both uncouth behaviour and coarse to the touch -- allow Walter to slip from one conventional meaning to another. In fact, considering that "smooth" also has social connotations, we might say that "rough" here provides the pivot for a meeting of opposites, a double transgression -- in essence a dialogue. It is highly significant, therefore, that Tristram suggests that his "father had danced his white bear backwards and forwards through half a dozen pages" (VI.2.492). Once again Tristram uses words to textually describe the performative nature of Walter's theatrical dialogues -- invoking in his own words the doubleness of clarity and ambiguity. Indeed, as the chapter, and volume, of the dance comes to a close, the structure of the questions which Walter asks become more regularised in presentation, apparently drawing to a close the argument itself: "Is the white bear worth seeing? -- [new line] Is there no sin in it? -- [new line] Is it better than a BLACK ONE?" But this is not closure; the argument is still twisting and turning between value judgements ("worth"), moral controversy ("sin"), and finally an absurd undermining of all possible speculation ("better than a black one"). Walter and, to a certain extent, Tristram strive to forge a perfectly rational system of speech which will standardise the irregularities and fluctuations of reality to the point of redundancy. But we are left with an ending that establishes no rational conclusion. Indeed the

arguments and dialogues which result from the *Tristrapaedia* take the next volume into completely new digressions. [40]

Similarly, Tristram describes his method of writing as a combination of opposed forces: "When I write full,--I write as if I was never to write fasting again as long as I live;--that is, I write free from the cares as well as the terrors of the world... In a word, my pen takes its course... when, an' please your honours, I indite fasting, 'tis a different history.--I pay the world all possible attention and respect" (VI.17.525). In "a different history" over time, with alternatives allowed, the interpretation of events can change. Thus the performative aspect of text comes into view: self-transgressing, the text opens itself for speculation and interruption from its narrator, and engaging thereby a dialogue between book and audience: "betwixt both, I write a careless kind of a civil, nonsensical, good-humoured Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good --- And your heads too, provided you understand it." We are offered the opportunity to understand, but not told what to think. Self-consciously paradoxical, the book is "careless" and "civil." In the sense then that it is the theatrical consciousness of audience which produces the desire for presence -- to be seen and thereby understood -- Sterne also engages the absence of that consciousness in the simultaneous "carelessness" and "civility" implicit in his textual organisation, punning, and apotheosis. Garrick's and Trim's pauses between lines of their speeches invoke interpretative difference; they are absent of formulated, verbalised "truth." But that absence is clearly intended to be a presence of its own -- a space waiting to be filled or at least commented upon by an identifying spectator. In other words, the relationship between presences and absences established by Sterne is not intended to formulate a right and a wrong response, but a realisation of a constant fluctuation -- a dialogue -- between alternative discourses.

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[40] The "dance with the white bear" is replete with allusions -- mainly to Chapter 11 of Obadiah Walker's *On Education* which Sterne copies almost verbatim, and the dance of the academes in Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*. Not only does this angle -- intertextuality -- invoke a whole new aspect of theatricality in *Tristram Shandy*, but these texts specifically lend themselves to a discussion of the relationship of rationalism and the emergence of concepts of identity -- a very "theatrical issue" of its own quite apart from the theatricality of Sterne's text itself and the problem of language. Cf. New *Notes* 381-95; Hundert, "Performing the Enlightened Self."

Apart from the rhetorical and typographical patterns which Sterne uses to mark his textual fluctuations, the dialogues which make up much of the novel emerge within the theatrical tension of rationalised presences and transgressive absences. To the extent that theatrical dialogues mirror the relationship of stage and audience, Sterne's dialogues attempt to mirror the lively and self-transgressive performance situation of the eighteenth-century theatre. But that implicit mixture of alternative discourse is really a conflict of varying desires for order on particular claims for rational truth — a fact which is realised in Tristram's constant attempt to regularise and explain the dialogues of his family and their neighbours. In a more direct way than Walter's stated determination to put Tristram "into breeches," the Sermon of Conscience is a textual document. Indeed, Tristram supplies the title and verse as *a proper title and verse on the page*, as if the novel had suddenly become the sermon, but immediately we are made aware of the performative variations which are brought out by Trim's reading:

The SERMON

Hebrews xiii. 18

— For we trust *we have a good Conscience, —*

TRUST!—Trust we have a good conscience!'
[Certainly, Trim, quoth my father, interrupting him, you give that sentence a very improper accent; for you curl up your nose, man, and read it with such a sneering tone, as if the Parson was going to abuse the Apostle.

He is, an' please your honour, replied Trim. Pugh! said my father, smiling...
(II.18.143)

Trim's reading of "Trust" — repeated twice, with a sneering tone, represents a shift in connotation which is itself significant to the sermon. Like Mrs. Shandy's "exactly," the word "Trust" is repeated, not for logical emphasis, but for the reverse — to move the discourse in a new direction. The intonation, as Walter suggests, makes all the difference to the interpretation of the sermon and changes the derived meaning of the biblical passage; Sterne's point is, here, as in the sermon, that a statement which claims to "trust" in anything cannot necessarily be trusted — this is the

abuse of the apostle. The shift is not subversive to Sterne's mandate; it states clearly that words cannot be taken as whole truth.

Thus, by emphasising the shifts in intonation of one word, Sterne suggests that each word contains within it the potential of dialogue -- that every word is somehow dialogical. Not surprisingly, the parenthetical comments on the sermon usually revolve around an associated idea upon a single word or statement. Trim and Toby cannot but refer every mention of "fortification" and "hold" to the strength of battlements (156). Walter and Dr. Slop argue over the relevance of certain passages to the Anglican and Catholic churches respectively. Trim eventually associates the long description of the Inquisition with his poor brother Tom. It is significant, however, that these interjections from the sermon's audience are parenthetical; structurally punctuating the passage in this way, Sterne does establish a hierarchy between the "central" text of the sermon and the "marginal" texts of the responses. Ideally, the possible rebuttals are repressed or disallowed -- but clearly they occur in the minds of any listeners. They are, therefore, present absences -- that is, sentiments which ought not to be expressed, but are anyway -- like Mrs. Shandy's rather underhanded references to Walter's possible impotence. Trim, then, becomes both a speaker and a listener, both a presence and an absence; he reflects the potential for text to reveal its own dialogical tendencies in performance.

We must, therefore, include silence as representative of this transgressive potential. After all, there is a more than implicit dialogue in language itself between speech and silence, between what can be said, what social patterns and reason will allow to be said, and all that is therefore *not said* that seethes beneath it. Ideally, silence is the proper mode for an audience willing to be told what and how to interpret; but a completely silent audience -- as opposed to a receptive, that is, applauding or cheering, audience -- might have been somewhat daunting to a performer on the eighteenth-century stage. Indeed, perfect tableaux are silent, static moments, but that silence is so encoded with visual signifiers and, as we have seen, indexing text that it ceases to be silence *per se*, a true absence of meaning. Sterne's pictures are also silent, but it is a theatrical silence.

They stand in the place of words, and suggest thereby an absence -- Yorick's death, the Widow Wadman, a narrative order, a missing chapter -- but we are directed by that absence to interpret nonetheless. Indeed, we are directed by Tristram who makes them distinctly present on the page.

The difference with the stars and spaces on the page is that they are not offered, like the pictures, as alternatives to language, but are intermeshed with the flow of the text itself. The black page is not "spoken" and therefore not "read" -- it is seen, removed from text, like a tableaux, and only textualised, as we have seen, by the rational impulse of the speaker. Sterne's aposiopeses are "spoken" by the characters, including Tristram, even if he -- and it is always him -- does not always let us know what they are saying. They imply the textual control which he demands, but at the same time, reveal the resilience of those things pushed away by that textual control when the text is performed. When Susannah tells Tristram "for a single time, to '***** *** ** *** ******" because "the chamber-maid had left no ******* ***" (V.17.369), we know that she wants him to "piss out of the window" because there is no "chamber pot." The stars in this case are exactly synonymous with the structure of the words and the context clearly indicates that this is what Susannah intends Tristram to do. Even when, subsequently, Tristram disallows us to hear what Walter has determined to be the conveniences of circumcision (27.460) or Dr. Slop explain the result of this accident (VI.14.521), we know Tristram is referring to something that they have said, which he will not repeat for the sake of decorum.

But this is exactly Sterne's point about the theatricality of language -- of text and performance. It is socially unbecoming for an author to make explicit mention of bodily functions, sexual intercourse, or incriminating persons (such as Yorick's overly-serious assailants), and these "unmentionables" are therefore textualised out of speech. Here is the theatrical tendency of social discourse. In performance, when the stars emerge on the page before us, we know exactly what is meant. The ideal theatrical restraints are once again transgressed. It is vital for our understanding of the theatrical tension created by the aposiopepis, however, that we recognise that it is Tristram who allows us, by virtue of the structure of his contexts and jokes,

to make socially transgressive interpretations of the verbal tautologies -- in Mrs. Shandy's case -- or the stars -- in Susannah's.

Though the social discourse in *Tristram Shandy* tends to go beyond the bounds of decorum, Tristram must encode those "breaches" of polite "conversation" into the "breeches" of textual rationalisation: "it can be nothing in the whole world, quoth my uncle *Toby*, in the simplicity of his heart,--but MODESTY;--My sister, I dare say, added he, does not care to let a man come so near her ****," (II.6.119) at which point, as Tristram explains, "the world stands indebted to the sudden snapping of my father's tobacco-pipe, for one of the neatest examples of that ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians style the *Aposiopesis*." To Tristram's mind, there is nothing naturalistic about the snapping of the pipe; he treats it as rhetorical figure, At this point, then, it is given by the stage director Tristram the features of the "neatest" of performances. Yet he goes on to suggest that there would be acceptable alternatives: "Make this dash.--'tis an Aposiopesis.--Take this dash away, and write *Backside*,--'tis Bawdy. Scratch Backside out and put *Covered way* in, 'tis a Metaphor." The audience is left, once again, with a theatrical paradox: The carefully forged absence of the word has lead inevitably to speculative and imaginative possibilities, revealed as other words, and thus as other presences.

While the ideal reader of a Richardson novel or Dryden play is almost exclusively receptive to a rational, textual model, the reader of *Tristram Shandy* must constantly and actively balance the fluctuations between progress and pause, silence and speech, the oral and the visual which make up its performance. Transgressions of rational textuality occur within constructed texts, but those larger texts also invoke potential for further transgressions -- the freedom of the reader's imagination. In a way, we might call this pattern Shandean humour. Even Tristram's "one-liners" betray this pattern; On arrival in Paris he declares: "The first, the finest, the most brilliant -- [new line] -- The streets however are nasty;" (VII.17.599). Brilliance is undermined by nastiness, but the "truth" of this statement -- the duplicity of appearances -- shines through. And yet, to arrive at this "truth" still involves the massive volume of recollections and to be true to his

mandate of simultaneous comprehensiveness and clarity, Sterne often leaves us with the mess: "You forget the great Lipsius, quoth Yorick, who composed a work the day he was born:---They should have wiped it up, said my uncle *Toby*, and said no more about it" (6.2.494). The spirited tension which characterises debates in the novel also, therefore, characterises the textual practice of its writer. Each time a matter seems to be consolidated, it leads the way for more and more discussion. In a sense, Sterne's theatricality reminds us that even in a work of fiction, experience cannot be completely limited to words, to images, to texts, -- to the stages on which we display the constructed masterpieces of human ingenuity and thought -- and yet we exist in a world in which there is so much that can *mean* something, we are bound by human will to try and understand it: "the story being told,--the dialogue went on as follows" (V.20.453).

Conclusion

The Text Performed: MacNally's *Tristram Shandy* and the Theatrics of Identity

On April 26, 1783, Leonard MacNally's *Tristram Shandy* was first performed as an afterpiece, "at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden for the benefit of Mr. Aickens with permission of the right honourable the Earl of Hertford." It appears to have been quite popular. It was performed on six other occasions that spring, eight times the following season, and revived once ten years later on April 12, 1794. A prologue was composed and spoken on the first and following nights by the actor Whitfield, who had starred in the tragedies which MacNally's farce followed, but whether MacNally had written it as well is uncertain. Nicoll and Curtis note that an octavo edition was published in 1783 under the title *Tristram Shandy, A Sentimental, Shandean Bagatelle* and Curtis suggests that it went into a second edition that same year (*Letters* 87, n3). However, MacNally's manuscript -- now part of the Larpent Collection at the Huntington Library -- reveals that the original title was *Tristram Shandy, A Farce in Two Acts*.

In his *Account of the English Stage* (1832), John Genest reports that "MacNally had not been happy with this dramatisation of Sterne" (VI.273). A reading of the play by anyone familiar with the novel will quickly agree that the simplicity of its original title reflects the simplicity of the play. Considering its pretensions toward Shandeanism, its most surprising feature is a relatively straightforward plot, though this, of course, means that many of the character relationships and dialogues have had to be drastically altered. The basic plot revolves around an unusually complacent Walter Shandy's wish to see his sentimental soldier of a brother married, preferably to widow Wadman. These intentions are echoed by Trim who plays the young suitor to Susannah; Mrs. Bridget does not appear and is only referred to, *Tom Jones* style, as a former and negligible lover of Trim's. Obviously, MacNally has taken quite literally Tristram's suggestion "that whatever motion, harangue, dialogue, project, or dissertation, was going forwards in the

parlour, there was generally another at the same time, and upon the same subject, running

parallel along with it in the kitchen" (VI.6.427). However, he seems to have overlooked the irony

of the servants' manipulation of open doors and the effect which this has on Sterne's reading of

Dryden. The complications of human communication and social interaction caused by the

unreliability of words and theory in performative situations -- the central thesis of Sterne's

examination of language in society -- are reduced to Dr. Slop's interfering exploits with both Mrs.

Wadman and Susannah. Dr. Slop is much more a typically wicked farce-villain than the dirty-

minded bumbler who appears in the novel; his rather violent attempt to seduce Susannah is the

climax of the first act. But in act two all is put to right by the lively exchange between Toby and

the widow and the "discovery" of Trim and Susannah under the broken bridge, upon which Dr.

Slop is pushed by the rest of the cast. The play ends with a round of songs about the virtues of

marriage; Mrs. Wadman is granted the final lines, which suggest that it is pure love after all, and

not Walter's plans, that have led them to their happy ending: "You may joke, Mr. Shandy, but

neither your boasted philosophy, your arts, not your sciences could ever withstand the fire of the

eyes."

This is a rather over-simplified version of the sentimentalist or pre-romantic project of

process over product, emotion over theory, performance over text -- the project which is so

complicated by the tension between time and textuality in Tristram's original attempt to tell his

life-story. One of the weakest aspects of MacNally's version is the exclusion of Tristram, who

never appears or is even mentioned with the exception of an almost literal transference of the

mis-naming scene, in which the curate is sadly absent. The whole scene seems to be a farcical

attempt to get the trouserless Walter on-stage. This is the essential problem of MacNally's

adaptation; the disruptions and transgressions which Tristram and his family encounter as they

perform for one another and for us and which Sterne uses to convey the essential paradox of

signification have been squeezed into the conventional mould of farce and sentimental panache.

The performative self-transgressive exuberance of *Tristram Shandy* is forced back into text.

To be fair to MacNally and his actors, we cannot be certain that all of the liveliness and controlled-chaos which is so much a part of Sterne's work did not emerge in the actual performance of the play. For instance, Trim's falling hat speech appears in Act I – here a eulogy on the death of Le Fever instead of Bobby Shandy – and no stage directions or any mention of the hat are included in the play-text. But we might assume that any actor and director familiar with the novel would produce a hat and recreate the scene themselves. In fact, the play seems to be intended for an audience familiar with Sterne's novel who would therefore respond enthusiastically to even pared-down hints of its various episodes.[41] Thus, in performance, the farce may have been closer to recreating the lively and continually self-transgressive appeal of its source.

But this is exactly what Sterne wants to clarify in his novel. Language, theory, textual discourse always proves to be limited, restrictive, and insufficient when it is seen to exist in time and between people whose perspectives do not necessarily conform to one another. The theatre represents one of the most immediately recognisable models – more so, perhaps, for Sterne's contemporaries than for us – of this performative aspect of literature. Sterne chooses a textual format, however, because it is likely that he felt the need to make this point clear to his audience in a manner only accomplishable within textual discourse. The reader is thereby limited to accepting the presentation as it is; apart from bannings and burnings there is no way to mimic the experience of a theatre riot in the context of literary documents. Nevertheless, with his puns and word-play, his interweaving of visual detail and verbal explanation, his addresses to the reader and the seemingly un-ending and undetermined dialogues, Sterne can come close and can, at least, demonstrate the manner in which these transgressions operate in social discourse and thus in literary texts. Even the most textual aspects of the novel, such as the Author's Preface, are

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[41] The influence of Sterne on the theatre would make for a lengthy study in itself. For example Sheridan's *The Critic* has a number of allusions to hobby-horses and that play appeared only two years prior to MacNally's. Frederick Reynolds' 1828 autobiographical record of his career as a dramatist in the 1780s and 90s reveals a number of references to Sterne and *Tristram Shandy* in particular.

written to intimate their existence in time as speech, as active communication while they discuss

that very problem. The Preface is loaded with lists, dates, place-names and appeals to

publication and scholasticism, but it is also written to represent a series of thoughts in process:

> Bless us!—what noble work we should make!—how should I tickle it off!—and what spirits should I find myself in, to be writing away for such readers!--and you,--just heaven!--with what raptures would you sit and read,--but oh!—'tis too much,—I am sick,—I faint away deliciously at the thought of it!—'tis more than nature can bare!—lay hold of me,--I am giddy--I am stone blind,—I'm dying,—I am gone—Help! Help! Help!--But hold,--I grow something better again...(III."Author's Preface." 229)

Tristram's apprehension at the inevitable abundance of information with which he and his

readers must contend — the other 364 days of the year, as Tristram later suggests — is frightening,

sickening, more than is bearable. But this is true only from the perspective of expectation and

hypothesis, fearful for the collapse of a delicate experiment or change of circumstance. By

appealing to the inevitability of this tension in the theatre — whereby spectators watch actors

pretending to be others by following a text, and await the opportunity to disrupt that pretence --

but presenting it as a text, Sterne can at once produce rational arguments and invoke his readers'

possible alternative interpretation.

Thus the theatrics of Sterne's novel are clearly intended to establish a comparison not

between drama and fiction, but between theatre and books. By contrast to the immortalised

Renaissance tag, "poetry is immortal," the empiricists knew that words are imperfect; however, as

Joseph Donohue remarks, "one of the most interesting (and sometimes annoying) characteristics

of the age of Doctor Johnson was its increasing predilection to impose order on the chaos of life

by writing treatises to explain or explain away, its inconsistencies, contradictions, and mysteries"

(216). And though Sterne consistently parodies this urge, he cannot rest in a kind of Keatsian

"negative capability." Instead he allows his book to be transgressed by its narrator, by its

audience, as if it were a performance before a rambunctious crowd, while he insists that his actors

carry on with the play of theoretical discourses. Tristram says, "I hate set dissertations"

("Preface." 235), and admonishes his fellow writers for their "opaque" specificity, but it is a role he

-- and Sterne -- play too, and play very well indeed.

The examination of Sterne's theatrical metaphor and its significance to our understanding

of the paradoxes which affect social and theoretical discourses brings us, inevitably, to the issue

of identity. 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 -- possibly more than

any other issue -- the encroaching awareness or anxiety of "the self" as a constructed or theatrical

entity. The need for personal understanding breeds dialogue, which in turn breeds more mystery

-- and thus more dialogue: "----My good friend, quoth I----as sure as I am I---and you are you---

... And who are you? said he.----Don't puzzle me; said I" (VII.33.633). Uncle Toby is "put in

jeopardy by words" and seeks an alternative to the pain caused by the inherent confusion of

verbal communication. With the possible exception of the parlour at Shandy Hall, the bowling

green is perhaps the closest thing to a stage in the novel and is definitely the seat of the novel's

most extensive tableaux of identity. Nevertheless, the subtle irony of Toby's "non-verbal" hobby -

horse is that it is wholly subsumed within a discourse of military terminology, geographical

location, and current events. The degree of this discourse interferes with Toby's understanding of

the discourses of those around him (notably their sexual lives as suggested by the Shandy

"curtins") and his own body: "you shall see the very place, Madam" (IX.20.772). This, as we have

seen, in turn leads to the need for more discussion and explanation.

Indeed, the sexual punning of the whole novel -- evident in the passage from the Preface

above -- acts as the inspiration for more response from the readers and the most pervasive point

of transgression upon the ideals of rational argumentation. MacNally's play does maintain

Sterne's sexual undertones. The play opens and closes with Trim and Susannah "discovered" in

compromising situations and focuses on the sexual tensions between Toby and the widow and

the ridiculous promiscuity of a Dr. Slop apparently excitable enough to be capable of rape; at one

point he addresses a reluctant Susannah as "Madam Lucretia."[42] The novel, on the other hand is never this explicit, even in some of its most sexually charged moments, such as the collapsing of the bridge and Trim's encounter with the Beguine. Sexual transgression -- like, perhaps, Elizabeth Shandy's infidelity, -- is never obvious and when it is, as in the case of the Shandys' Aunt Dinah, it is a source of deep regret and anxiety. Thus, the Shandys maintain a theatrics of sexuality which is as paradoxical as their theatrics of communication; the body always seems to slip away from the control of the mind, but social dictates demand that the mind at least attempt to suppress that instinct. The show of modesty and decency, as it were, must go on.

For this reason, then, is Tristram's absence from MacNally's play so disappointing. In writing his *Life and Opinions*, Tristram is the stage-manager of his own life. We only see and hear his family by virtue of his near-manic need to remember them in his text. Their lives are thus the staple of the Shandean theatre -- each hobby-horse is a defining feature but, due largely to its childish, sexual, and bodily connotations, it is also a transgression of the whole concept of theoretical or psychological self-definition. Accordingly, for each event recalled -- we might say staged -- in the novel some contradictory or mysterious aspect demands attention and leads the text into one of its many digressions. But this is the basis for Sterne's interest in human psychology in the first place and why the theatricality of that psychology demands an understanding of the role of theatre in the various aspects of Sterne's narrative practice. The mere fact that Tristram digresses to meet the interruptions of his narrative, verbal and explanatory methods, suggests the need to construct meanings for every possible incident. Thus. the significance of Phutatorius' "Zounds!" (IV.27.377) is not so much that it is a loud, sudden and obviously sexually connotative transgression of an intellectual argument, but that it is immediately subsumed within another intellectual debate. Similarly, the interruptions with

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[42] Richardson uses a similar allusion in Pamela (L15). Mr. B. calls Pamela "Lucretia" because of her unwillingness to entertain his advances and Pamela adopts the name as a point of honour. While I would not suggest outright that MacNally has made a conscious allusion to Richardson, the Lucretia reference seems to be fairly well-known.

which Tristram has been plagued since conception -- from his mother's reminder of the clock, to

the misnaming, to his flattened nose, to the circumcision -- are only significant to us as readers in

as much as they are used to chart the life of a family and thus arrive at some hereditary or simply

associative reasons for one person's apparent miseries. These interruptions may bring one

expectation -- one of Walter's theories for example -- to an end, but they represent the

opportunity to rekindle a whole new set of expectations regarding the reasons or solutions for

those occurrences. "Endless is the search of Truth!"

We might suggest this theatrical paradox as a reason for Sterne -- as Parson Yorick --

killing himself off in the first volume. The description of Yorick seems to be one of the neatest

character studies in the novel, contrasted to the digressive and circuitous description of Toby

which follows it, to the explanations of Walter's and Tristram's behaviour and especially to the

lack of explanation surrounding Mrs. Shandy's. Dramatically Yorick's end is highly conventional:

the recalled disagreement and battle, the tearful meeting of friends at the death bed, the final

optimistic last words, and, of course, the eulogy. The black page, therefore, can be considered a

silent falling curtain completing Yorick's great final scene as it completes his life. But everything

about the black page and Yorick's death suggests that it is a beginning not an ending, realised by

Yorick's continual presence throughout the entire novel.[43]   The black page, as we have seen, is a

visual sign of an end of not just a life but the description or staging of that life, the purpose of

which is to inspire new beginnings, significantly along new lines of verbal inquiry. Accordingly,

it is the absence of a theatre -- a familiar world beyond the study -- which has inspired Tristram to

restage his family's history.

But it is also Sterne, of course, who returns as Yorick -- the jester returns as the jester to

give the last word which isn't the last word: "A COCK and a BULL, said Yorick-----And one of the

---

[43]In *Hamlet*, "Alas, Poor Yorick" comes at the beginning of Act 5, not the end, and does not represent the jester's death as much as it does his life -- it is an uncovering, a rediscovery, not a dismissal. It reveals, as an act of memorial, presence in the midst of absence; as Robert Chibka and Ronald Paulson have argued, this is the connection between Sterne's black page and Shakespeare's graveyard scene (Chibka 127). As I have said, the significance of Shakespeare's drama on *Tristram Shandy* is obvious -- but since my focus is on theatre and not drama or the English dramatic tradition, I have not discussed it at length here.

best of its kind I ever heard" (IX.33.808). Paradoxically, this statement sanctions value and merit

to a story that, being a "cock and bull story," has no value and, being about sex, has no merit. But,

as every critic knows, this is also Sterne's summation of his whole novel -- his own life's work.

The author claims that his novel is "cock and bull," mere diversion -- and socially transgressive

diversion at that -- which the theatre audiences, in the tradition of the noisy crowds of Drury

Lane might have cheered for its bawdiness and the critics, in the tradition of Dryden and

Addison, might have jeered for the same reason. But, Sterne says, this transgressive, digressive,

entertaining book is also progressive -- it also has value. It explores how these mysteries are

confronted, how and why we want to stage our lives in the first place, why we feel the need to

turn our day-to-day performances into texts or expose others' texts as performances. *Tristram

Shandy* is at once an intellectual study of language and identity and an exposition of that study as

a construction of human will and anxiety. It is, therefore, theatre at its most paradoxically clear.

Fig 1: Anonymous eighteenth-century engraving showing intimate attitude of audience and performers.

From Allardyce Nicoll, *Garrick Stage*, p. 27

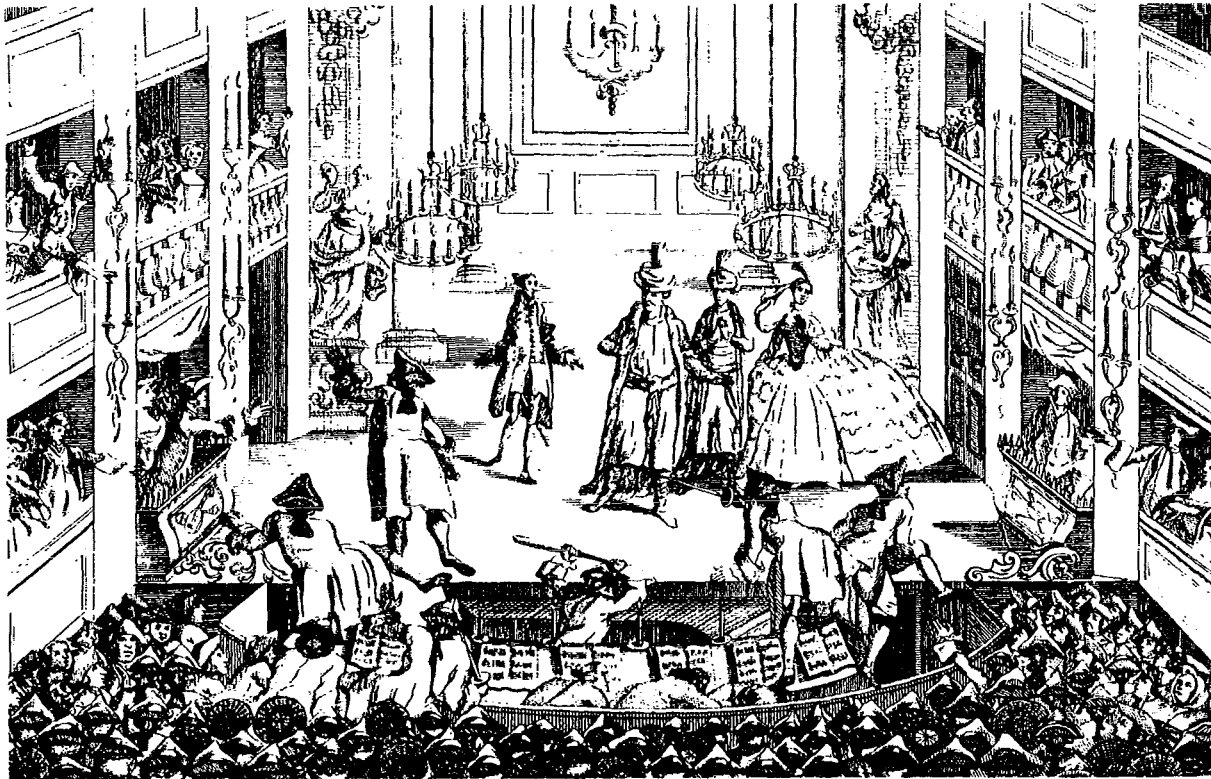Fig 2: "'John Bull at the Italian Opera' coloured engraving by Thomas Rowlandson, published between 1805-11."

Fig 3: One of two "frequently reproduced" anonymous prints "depicting the notorious 'Fitzgiggo' riot of 1763. From Allardyce Nicoll, *Garrick Stage* p. 28.

Fig 4: William Hogarth, *Garrick as Richard III in "Tent Scene"*; Oil on Canvas. Note the combination of "natural" background and facial
expression and "rhetorical" emphasis of gaze, hand gesture, and placement of armour. From Josph Donohue, *Dramatic Character in
the Romantic Age*, opp. 210.

Fig 5:   William Hogarth, Frontispiece to *Tristram Shandy* Vol II.

Fig 6:   William Hogarth, Frontispiece to *Tristram Shandy* Vol III.

LE

FILS NATUREL,

OU

LES ÉPREUVES DE LA VERTU

COMÉDIE*

ACTE PREMIER

SCÈNE I

La scène est dans un salon. On y voit un clavecin, des chaises, des tables de jeu; sur une de ces tables un trictrac; sur une autre quelques brochures; d'un côté un métier à tapisserie, etc.... dans le fond un canapé, etc.

DORVAL *seul.*

Il est en habit de campagne, en cheveux négligés; assis dans un fauteuil, à côté d'une table sur laquelle il y a des brochures. Il paraît agité. Après quelques mouvements violents, il s'appuie sur un des bras de son fauteuil, comme pour dormir. Il quitte bientôt cette situation. Il tire sa montre, et dit,

A peine est-il six heures.

Il se jette sur l'autre bras de son fauteuil; mais il n'y est pas plutôt qu'il se relève, et dit,

Je ne saurais dormir.

Il prend un livre qu'il ouvre au hasard, et qu'il referme presque sur-le-champ, et dit:

B. Drame *B C*

19

Je lis sans rien entendre.

Il se lève. Il se promène, et dit:

Je ne peux m'éviter.... Il faut sortir d'ici... Sortir d'ici! Et j'y suis enchaîné! J'aime!... *(comme effrayé)* et qui aimé-je?... J'ose me l'avouer; malheureux, et je reste. *(Il appelle violemment)* Charles. Charles.

SCÈNE II *(Cette scène marche vite.)*

Dorval, Charles.

(Charles croit que son maître demande son chapeau et son épée; il les apporte, les pose sur un fauteuil, et dit:)

CHARLES — Monsieur, ne vous faut-il plus rien?

DORVAL — Des chevaux; ma chaise.

CHARLES — Quoi, nous partons!

DORVAL — A l'instant. *(Il est assis dans le fauteuil; et tout en parlant, il ramasse des livres, des papiers, des brochures, comme pour en faire des paquets.)*

CHARLES — Monsieur, tout dort encore ici.

DORVAL — Je ne verrai personne.

CHARLES — Cela se peut-il?

DORVAL — Il le faut.

CHARLES — Monsieur....

DORVAL *(se tournant vers Charles, d'un air triste et accablé)* — Eh bien, Charles!

CHARLES — Avoir été accueilli dans cette maison, chéri de tout le monde, prévenu sur tout, et s'en aller sans parler à personne; permettez, Monsieur....

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Fig 7: Opening scene of Diderot's *Le Fils Naturel* (1757). Note the unusual quantity of stage directions as opposed to speech. From *Oeuvres Complete Tome X: Le drame bourgeois* (ed. J. Varloot), 1980

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