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REALISM IN LAURENCE STERNE

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by

ITA MARY GIBNEY, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Ita Mary Gibney, B.A. (University College Dublin)

SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Petrie

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

The purpose of this study is to examine the place of Tristram Shandy in the development of realism in the English novel.

It sets up two categories of realism, mimetic realism and autonomous realism, and demonstrates how Sterne parodies the ideas of the first, and sets up an autonomous reality in his novel. By examining the techniques Sterne uses to present this special, avant-garde kind of realism, and how he treats its implications, this thesis hopes to explore fully an aspect of Tristram Shandy hitherto neglected, and to provide a new perspective on the novel.

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## INTRODUCTION

Criticism of Tristram Shandy tends to divide easily into two schools of opinion. The general tendency of eighteenth century critics was to disapprove of the content of the novel. "Nothing odd will do long: Tristram Shandy did not last", said Johnson. Some voiced moral outrage. Richardson thought it "too gross to be inflaming". The tone of censure has lingered in some of the criticism of the twentieth century. Leavis denied Sterne a place in the "Great Tradition" casting sentence on the novel with the brief -- "irresponsible (and nasty) trifling". Kettle, although he is not an adverse critic, says that "there is much in the book that is perverse and too much that is trivial".

Some however have approved of Tristram Shandy. Dorothy Van Ghent opens her essay by calling Tristram Shandy "deceptively frivolous". The serious elements in the novel has been discovered and examined. Jefferson places Sterne in a tradition of learned wit, the tradition to which Rabelais, Donne and Swift belonged. A large number of critics have explored Sterne's use of Lockean psychology in Tristram Shandy. The emphasis has shifted from dismissing the book as a cock-and-bull story, or a "fantasy" to an appreciation of the comedy, style, structure and the techniques used by Sterne in the novel.

Few however have approached Tristram Shandy's realism. Sterne, it must be remembered, was writing when the novel had only just established itself. Defoe, Richardson and Fielding were his immediate predecessors. "Realism" was one of the major preoccupations of Defoe and Richardson. In view of this context an obvious question to be asked about Tristram Shandy is, what relation does Sterne have with their kind of realism? Does he accept it, and if not, does he propose something in its stead? These two questions relate directly to this study. The answers help to reconcile the two divergent attitudes to the novel I have outlined - firstly recognizing the comedy, and the spirit of mad gaiety which derives from Sterne's parodic methods in his reaction to Defoe's kind of realism, "mimetic realism", and secondly exploring the serious philosophy which the novel contains in the "autonomous realism" it proposes, and examining the techniques used to achieve this realism.

Two of the most recent approaches to the novel, (by Nuttall<sup>8</sup> and Lanham<sup>9</sup>), indicate a new dimension in Sternian criticism. The intonations of solipsism in the novel have finally become openly acknowledged. Nuttall takes a philosophical approach to the novel, examining it in the context of the philosophy of Sterne's own time. Lanham recognizes that Sterne's realism has a peculiar stamp of its own --

If Sterne enters the house of mimetic fiction  
he comes in very much by the back door . . .

If we are now prepared to view the private world as essentially dramatic, ironically imprisoned in rhetoric, unalterably self-conscious, forever despoiled of its imaginative virginity, then we can think of Sterne as a realist. 10

Lanham's comment is perceptive, and just, to a point. This thesis contends, however, that Sterne enters "the house of mimetic fiction" only in a spirit of parody. The novel itself proposes a different kind of realism altogether which requires a different label and a different definition. These two critics Nuttall and Lanham, have opened the way for a new appraisal of Tristram Shandy which this thesis intends to pursue.

CHAPTER I  
REALISM AND THE NOVEL

Although the term realism has been used in many different ways, its central meaning for our purposes is the attempt by the artist, to relate art to the world. In the eighteenth century, the devices he employed to do so, resulted in a consciously contrived reality, not reality itself. The eighteenth century, nonetheless, held strongly to the idea that literature and reality do, and should, correspond to each other.

This attitude was heavily influenced by the Puritan<sup>1</sup> view that all fiction, since it is lies and deceit, is useless to man in his effort to attain salvation. Fiction only distracts man from his true purpose in life, which is to achieve salvation. Writers sought to justify their work in this context by trying to convince their public of the truth of what they wrote, in this way, their art may, after all, have a moral purpose, since it is directly related to the real world and the way men live.

The rise of the novel was contemporaneous with the<sup>2</sup> rise of individualism in the eighteenth century. The climate of the times encouraged the individual to apprehend and locate reality through his own experience. This factor helped defeat traditional philosophical notions that abstract universals<sup>3</sup> are the true "realities", not the external world. The

English novel of the eighteenth century embodied a new attitude towards the external familiar world.

The attempt to achieve a real-life quality in a literary work became known as "realism". Eighteenth century realism consists merely of a set of conventions used by the author, in order to conform to the expectations of a reader. The "reality" the novelist tries to portray is the external world which he assumes <sup>has</sup> substantial, palpable existence independent of an observer, the world in which men live and act. This is one way of looking at reality.

Reality may, however be viewed in a different way that in which the eighteenth century novelists conceived it. "Reality" may not be something outside the observer, but something created by the observer himself. The distinction between "what is out there" (in the world), and "what is in here" (In the man), is no longer valid. A writer concerned with his own reality in this way will not attribute great importance to the correspondence of his reality with that of others, or with an outside world. As far as he is concerned, his is the only true reality and in fact may be all there is anywhere. According to a writer's concern with either one of these two views of reality, he allies himself to one of two types of realism -- an external type or an internal type, which I shall call mimetic and auton<sup>om</sup>ous realism respectively. In Tristram Shandy, Sterne parodies the technique and conventions of mimetic realism, at the same time setting up an autonomous realism in the novel.

Mimetic realism is concerned with reflecting the external world. The relationship between the artist, his art, and reality, is one in which the artist is observer, his art the mirror of that which he observes, and reality is that outside himself which he is reflecting. This kind of realism takes for granted that a stable reality exists outside the perceiving self and is therefore basically the same for both reader and writer. Language too is a closed system shared between them since it is used referentially to name and describe their mutual world. Words correspond to objects outside the mind, and their meanings are understood mutually. When a writer refers to a chair or a hand, he has no need to doubt the reader's capacity to interpret his meaning correctly or fear that the reader may think he is referring to a table or a foot. In sharing an accepted external reality itself, reader and author also share the terms of that reality in the language they use.

Mimetic realism is akin to a way of seeing the world. Its emphasis is on the visual presentation of objects, places and people --"the actions of men against a background of other men and things"<sup>4</sup>. If we assume that the English novel begins with Defoe, it can be safely said that the realism manifested in the novel before Sterne is of the mimetic kind.

In an effort to give a total picture of life mimetic realism tries to be as inclusive as possible. Nevertheless,

it must use certain techniques to achieve this panoramic effect, to create the illusion that it is total reality with which it is dealing and not just a small corner of it.

Flaubert's statement -- "Art is not Reality. Whatever else you do, you must choose from the elements which the latter furnishes" -- points to the first rule which the realist must observe -- that of selection. Mere factors of time and space demand this economy in the novel. The novelist's aptitude of selection will determine the vividness of the broader reality implied behind what we are given explicitly.

One problem arises from the exertion of this principle of selection. Art cannot copy reality without the artist consciously choosing what to portay. One critic puts it aptly --

. . . the realistic writer is only, like any other writer, fascinated by certain aspects of reality, and uses the selective scheme of his fascination for the aesthetic ordering of his chosen materials. For, alas, we seem to get to know one thing at the price of losing sight of another; and however wide our interest, the sharp edge of our perception in one sphere is but in contrast to the bluntness of our sensibility in another. 6

No work can be realistic in any total sense since the very act of writing involves the prejudice of the writer. 7

The initial choice the novelist makes is that of subject matter. If he is to be realistic there ought to be no restrictions limiting his choice. In its early stages the novel exerted this freedom so that one of the novel's characteristics was that it dealt with low life and at times the seamy side of life. The novel, in including the ugly

and imperfect, tries to demonstrate its unrestricted choice of subject matter -- but what started as a sign of freedom became itself almost a convention. The subject matter of the novel may be lowly and ordinary. This factor was in part a reaction against the epic and the romance which required that the subject treated be of high importance and of a wondrous nature, respectively. The element of ordinariness extends also to a degree to the characters of a story and the novel's presentation of plot and action. Hardy remarks that the novel must nevertheless possess a degree of extraordinariness --

The writer's problem is, how to strike the balance between the uncommon and the ordinary so as on the one hand to give interest, on the other hand to give reality. 8

In satisfying the reader's desire for the uncommon, the writer is most often carried into the realm of fiction. He is no longer relating events that have an authentic basis in fact, i.e. history, but is deliberately presenting the reader with the unreal and the untrue. To the Puritan mind fiction was unacceptable because of this factor. Defoe's initial preoccupation in his novels was to insist that his characters were real, and the events in their lives fact, Richardson claims the same authenticity for his characters. Yet the novels of Defoe and Richardson both present us with the uncommon -- being marooned on a desert island is not a familiar occurrence in an average man's life; and the life and adventures of Moll Flanders are equally "strange and surprising". The imprisonment and seduction of young girls is

sensational rather than everyday. In order to appear realistic, such subject matter must be presented in such a way that it does not overstep the bounds of credibility or make excessive demands on the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief". The author may not be giving us le vrai, but he must take care that what he gives us is vraisemblable.

The problem of maintaining verisimilitude in the novel gives rise to another set of conventions, which relate to narrative techniques as well as techniques of characterization and manipulation of plot. If the writer has been selective in his choice of subject, or area of experience, his method of dealing with it, or portraying it, will attempt to be as inclusive as possible. The primary convention of the novel is that it is

a full and authentic report of human experience and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions. 9

This "circumstantial view of life", details of character and description, particularly of time and place, Ian Watt terms the "formal realism" of the novel (deriving the word 'formal' from the fact that this type of realism is peculiar to the novel form itself). The use of detail enables the novelist to include the unimportant and the insignificant as a means of filling out the background of his story and making it lifelike. Defoe's precision in describing Robinson Crusoe's island contributes greatly to the realism of the novel.

Richardson is not so concerned with surface details of setting as much as with psychological forces. Nonetheless, in the Postscript to Clarissa he comments that "there was frequently a necessity to be very circumstantial and minute, in order to preserve and maintain that air of probability, which is necessary to be maintained in a story designed to represent real life . . ." <sup>10</sup> The location of the action of the story in a particular place enhances the novel's verisimilitude. The novelist's attention to details of background, and his care to describe in specific terms the physical setting of the story, is carried over with the same results into his techniques of characterization.

A character is individualized in a novel by details of speech, gesture, mannerisms and thoughts. The use of unusual or peculiar details emphasizes the individuality rather than the typicality of the character. Any deviation, physical or moral, from a norm (and this norm of human behaviour and standards must be understood by both reader and author), will make for a character portrayal which is more realistic. The distortion however must not be extreme. Reynolds warned the painter of this danger - "By regarding minute particularities and accidental discrimination the painter will deviate <sup>11</sup> from universal Rule, and pollute his canvas with deformity" In Robinson Crusoe the hero's circumstances are sufficient to individualize him and details of characterization tend to make him into a type. Crusoe relates to the reader directly

the details of his life previous to the novel. However by his behaviour and mentality he betrays his middle class background and Puritan outlook. He applies the terms and practises of his previous world to the new one he encounters and in this way Defoe and Crusoe are both realists in the everyday sense of the term - pragmatic, common sense men. Crusoe's practical nature and his matter-of-fact way of dealing with his situation balance the unusual aspect of the story.

In both Defoe and Richardson there is the felt presence of a larger social reality against which the actions of the characters take place and without which the characters in the novel would seem to live in a closed, unreal world. In Defoe's novels the implied social reality is that of middle class England, the predominant values of which are economic, and the morality of which is Puritan. Despite the rather claustrophobic atmosphere of Richardson's novels, an objective moral and social code exists and the actions of the characters are seen and judged according to a social morality with its rules of decorum and propriety as much as a religious morality of right and wrong. The presence of such a background is one of the factors which enables us to call Defoe and Richardson realists of the mimetic type.

Verisimilitude then, in the novel is attained through the delineation of immediate setting, the presentation, explicit or implicit, of a social background, the individualization of character through the use of detail. Structure and

plot must also conform to certain conventions. The events of a story, however unusual, must be probable and likely to occur in real life. Events that occur must coincide with a time scheme set up at the outset in the novel. The time factor is an important criterion in the maintenance of probability in the novel. The episodes of a realistic novel normally follow a chronologically ordered sequence. Connections between past, present and future are set out clearly so that cause and effect bear a natural and unambiguous relationship to each other. Within the context of the story, events are given reasonable time to take place. The episodic novel relies on the assumption that time is an external scheme, which has existence outside the individual mind and in which events occur and to which the episodes of a story may be aligned. The relation of a story in such a manner rests on the assumption that experience can be contained and ordered in a work of art. The discrepancy between real time in life in which things happen every minute and each minute is as long as the next, and the time scheme of a novel which is deliberately contrived - time in the novel can be expanded or contracted to meet demands of suspense, tempo, continuity and climax - points to another fallacy of mimetic realism. Richardson tries to bridge this discrepancy in his epistolary technique of "writing to the moment" and consequently the pace of his novels is slow and his plots unravel laboriously and often tediously. Fielding, on the other hand, discards this over-precious desire for time probability and his plots tend to hasten to an

inexorable climax and dénouement at the end of the novel.

Probability is an intricate part of the mechanisms of plot in the novel. However unexpected a course events may take, it must be made acceptable within the context of the story by the strict adherence to cause and effect. Chance and coincidence may play their role, as they do in life, but cannot be overworked at the expense of verisimilitude in order to manipulate a plot to its conclusion. The conclusion itself must appear to some degree a natural and inevitable consequence of what has gone before and not the "tidying up" by an interfering author, of the material with which he has been dealing. Any change a character undergoes in the novel also requires explanation, or the exposition of its cause. Richardson objected to "sudden conversions" as violations of probability in the novel, demonstrating as they do the observance of orthodox puritan morality at the expense of realism of characterization.

So far, I have demonstrated how the novel as mimesis has ended in its attempt to reproduce reality by constructing for itself a set of rules and conventions. These, although they are not normally acknowledged explicitly by the author in the work, so dictate the structure of the novel that ironically, they defeat the very end for which they were instituted. What the reader is given in mimetic realism is not, as the novelist would like us to believe, a first hand piece of life, but a carefully constructed counterfeit reality. The dis-

parity between life, which is various, continuous, subject to chance and change, often incongruous and incoherent, and art which orders and imposes a pattern on experience, shows the inadequacy of the notion of mimesis and correspondence in the novel. Q.G.Kraft points out the problem

- if we share the now rather common, and perhaps "realistic" view that the world manifests no humanly intelligible order, then a novel, to the degree that it is realistic, would have to be as meaningless to us as the world itself. In so far as the novel manifested an order giving it meaning, it would in our judgment cease to be mimetic, to have that correspondence with reality which earns it the title "realistic". 12

Maupassant concluded from this that "realists of talent  
13  
ought rather to be called Illusionists" and excuses the realist on the grounds that the novelist, in order "to make true . . . must give a complete illusion of truth by following the ordinary logic of events and not by slavishly transcribing them in the haphazard way they come". The inadequacy of the term mimetic realism to deal with literature which is realistic on a level other than the mere representational and referential, highlights the need to find "new categories for judgment of fiction, categories that move beyond the ideals of "inevitability".of action and character and correspondence with external reality"  
14  
Kraft moves in the right direction by viewing fictions as "human creations, and that, as created objects they are possessed of autonomous being rather than the merely dependent being attributable to mimetic objects" and speaks

of "a self-world relation brought to being within the work".  
 Levine also shifts the emphasis to the creative aspect of  
 the novel and its internal sources.

The novelists who practised realism (in 19 )  
 shaped and controlled their worlds ulti-  
 mately in response not to what was out there  
 but what was inside them ...

Autonomous realism takes this statement further and says that  
 the novelist actually makes his own world.

A work of autonomous realism recognizes that the  
 reality it is presenting is the reality of one man, and as  
 such is a limited world. A man's vision of reality consti-  
 tutes his world. Each man makes his own reality by the way  
 in which he sees and relates to his environment. His ideas,  
 thoughts, interests and vocabulary are determined by the realm  
 of his experience and his sphere of action and so make up  
 the horizon of his reality, the limits of what is real for him,  
 Since each man has his own reality, the notion of an external,  
 abiding reality to which the novel refers no longer holds.  
 The recurrent image in Tristram Shandy of a spider spinning a  
 web from its own interior is an apt analogy for the process  
 autonomous realism depicts.

One of the essential features of a novel exemplifying  
 autonomous realism is the constant presence of a self-consc-  
 ious narrator. By the use of the narrator the novelist ex-  
 plicitly acknowledges that all is seen through the eyes of  
 one man. The self-consciousness of the narrator enables the  
 writer to escape one of the pitfalls of mimetic realism -

that everything is related from one point of view. Autonomous realism capitalizes on this very factor. The pervasive presence of the narrator's voice and personality in the novel, serve to remind the reader that this is one man's world into which he is invited and in which he himself is to participate. The writer's aim is not to describe reality in a way that will evoke for the reader an appropriate picture of the writer's world. Instead he attempts to present that world in an unprocessed, dramatic way to the reader. The world of the novel is the world of the narrator sitting at his desk now writing. Tristram is ever present to us in this way in Tristram Shandy, so is Ishmael (perhaps to a lesser degree) in Moby Dick as he sits and tells his story.

A second feature present in a work of autonomous realism is a preoccupation with language as a means of communication. If each man's reality is peculiar to himself he will naturally encounter difficulty in communicating or presenting that reality to another. Such difficulties either confirm the individual in his solipsism or draw his attention to the inadequacy of language itself. Language, instead of enabling the individual to escape the confines of his world by entering the worlds of others, or making others partake of his world, only serves to isolate him even more. Mimetic realism takes for granted that language is a shared system between reader and writer. Autonomous realism can make no such assumption. Melville attempts to insure that his world is understood by

translating his terms for the reader by definitions and minute explanations of the terms of whaling. Sterne tries to bridge the gap in communication by attempting to extend the limits of the convention he is using - and the most basic convention of the novel is that it uses words and sentences to communicate. The section of Locke's essay on "Words" undoubtedly influenced him in this respect.

Man, though he have great variety of thoughts, and such from which others as well as himself might receive profit and delight, yet they all are within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made appear. 16

If all men's thoughts are private in this way, Nuttall re-  
 17  
 marks, it may be inferred that they are in fact incommunicable. This is what Sterne deduces and what he depicts with comic relish. Although Sterne's treatment of Locke's theories are often comic, nonetheless we must remember that the tendency in Sterne towards absurdity arises from his recognition of the limits of the possibility of communication through the literary work - a problem inherent in autonomous realism.

The view of reality held by autonomous realism derives ultimately from the philosophical doctrine labelled empiricism. For Locke, all knowledge is attained through the senses. Man encounters the external world on levels of sensation and reflection and ideas are in this way grasped by the mind. Man can only know his ideas of the world, the

world itself is only known indirectly. A.D. Nuttall draws attention to the epigraph from Epictetus on the title page of the first volume of Tristram Shandy and translates it, "Men are harried, not so much by things, as by their notions of things".<sup>18</sup> Man has no way of proving that his ideas resemble any material objects since he can only see these objects through the senses and we can never get beyond our observations except by reflection. The human mind is a closed world of ideas which it cannot escape. Since we cannot know the world, what proof of its existence has a man got? Posing this question, Locke unintentionally helped the metaphysical doctrine of solipsism along. The solipsist answers the question by denying that the external world exists and says his ideas are self-made. Autonomous realism exhibits certain aspects of solipsism in its emphasis on subjectivity and man's private, self-made world.

Sterne's inclination towards a solipsistic view of man is not only embodied in the autonomous reality of Tristram writing the book, but also in the people of the Shandy world itself. Each character is isolated in his own reality by what Sterne calls a man's hobby-horse and the characters also encounter much the same problems of communication that Tristram does. Sterne however avoids the more serious implications of solipsism and instead exploits its comic potentialities. One of the sources of comedy however is failure and inadequacy. For this reason, to take Bergson's

example, we may laugh at a man who falls down on the street, but if he sits down voluntarily, it does not evoke laughter. The laughter in Tristram Shandy is in fact a means of holding back the despair which might ensue from the contemplation of man's isolation. There is something of the feeling that Sterne spoke of in one of his letters when he said - "I laugh till I cry and in the same tender moments cry till I laugh".

## CHAPTER II

## STERNE'S PARODY OF MIMETIC REALISM

Tristram Shandy is not a novel one would readily include in a list of realistic works. It lacks the grand scope generally associated with realism. The characters verge on caricature in their comic eccentricity and therefore lack the "ordinariness" which could make us identify them with everyday, "real" men. Although the novel ostensibly deals with familiar aspects and events of life - birth, death, marriage, love and family relationships - the manner in which these events and situations are depicted in the novel renders them improbable to such a degree that they add to rather than detract from the apparent absurdity of the work. However, much of the absurdity and eccentricity of Tristram Shandy itself derives from Sterne's Reductio ad absurdum of the conventions of realism. Sterne achieves a skilful parody of mimetic realism by taking its demands literally and by meticulously following its rules.

In speaking of Tristram Shandy, Sterne wrote - "The plan as you will perceive it is a most extensive one, - taking in, not only, the weak part of the sciences, in which the true point of Ridicule lies - but everything else which I find laugh-at-able in my way". Sterne found much to ridicule in the novel form itself. The fact that the novel could sustain the parody and experimentation to which Sterne sub-

jected it, indicates that the novel was already firmly established as a literary genre. Sterne's ridicule has a purpose - "I had other views - the first of which was the hopes of doing the world good [and one might add the novel] by ridiculing what I thought deserving of it".<sup>2</sup> Sterne's ridiculing of conventional realism helps to strip the novel of its pretensions - particularly those of mimesis.

In parodying mimetic realism, Sterne is also subtly subverting the reader. Any preconceived assumptions or expectations the reader may bring to the novel are undermined so that any complacency on the reader's part is displaced by a feeling that the whole book may just be a joke at the reader's expense. Sterne's techniques of parody are also techniques of subversion and therein lies the difficulty of assessing any positive alternative to mimetic realism proposed by Tristram Shandy.

The title of the book - The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman - itself leads the reader to believe that he has in hand a biography. Nevertheless, a minimal part of the book is devoted to the actual life of Tristram, although one might say that we are given his opinions throughout. Sterne's aim is to flaunt not fulfil any expectations the reader may have - even if he arouses those expectations himself. When Tristram says

I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at anything. And in this, Sir, I am of so nice and singular a

humour, that if I thought you was able to form the least judgement, of what was to come in the next page, - I would take it out of my book".(I,xxv,101)<sup>3</sup>

I feel he has much in common with Sterne's desire to shock and surprise rather than to conform to the reader's notions of what a novel should contain and how it should behave. )

Tristram declares at the outset that "I shall confine myself neither to his (Horace's) rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived" (TS Vol.I.ch.4,p.38) and casts ridicule on the "connoisseur" who approaches a work with his rules and compasses" expecting proportion and regularity - an attitude unintentionally encouraged to a smaller extent by mimetic realism. "I would go fifty miles on foot . . . to kiss the hand of that man whose generous heart will give up the reins of this imagination into his author's hands, - be pleased he knows not why and cares not wherefore" ( TS , Vol.III,ch.12, p.193). Sterne gives ample warning that his novel will not conform to any given pattern or rules, and also the need for the reader to acquiesce in the wantonness of the book. (For this reason E.M.Forster, I think mistakenly, calls Tristram Shandy a "fantasy"<sup>5</sup>.)

I propose to illustrate how Sterne achieves his parody of mimetic realism and subversion of the reader, by carrying the 'rules' too far. Sterne's most obvious method is an excessive preoccupation with such conventions of mimesis as "formal realism", inclusiveness, detailism, cause and effect,

probability, materialism, chronology and time sequence, ignoring the effect they are supposed to produce. My intention is to select incidents, illustrative of this, from the novel. I pay particular attention to the opening chapters of the book since I find they contain many of the aspects of Sterne's parodic method I wish to discuss. If my summary of the events seems lengthy it is because of the nature of Sterne's narrative method itself which is mainly digressive.

The most natural beginning of any biography is the birth of the hero. Tristram goes beyond the normal demand by starting the novel, not with the details of his birth, but with his conception, thence proceeding to an elaborate description of the details of his delivery into the world at the hands of Dr. Slop. The opening "dialogue" of the book is the exchange between Mrs. Shandy and her husband.

Pray my dear, quoth my mother, have you not forgot to wind up the clock? - good G -! cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time - Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question? Pray what was your father saying? - Nothing. (TS, VsII, Ch. I, p. 36)

Sterne thus introduces us early to two concerns of the novel - the motif of disconnection and interruption, and the concern with time. This small passage actually contains two dialogues - one between Mrs. Shandy and her husband, another between the reader and Tristram. The tag implicates an outsider into the actual book, though not into the events of the book.

It is repeated a few pages later, "But pray, Sir, what was your father doing all December, January and February - Why, Madam, - he was all that time afflicted with a sciatica." (TS , Vol.I,ch.5, p.40). The possibility of such interpolations indicate that this book does not present us with a world which excludes the reader and denies the fact that it is a book.

Tristram proceeds to explain the reason for his mother's question, clocks and sexual intercourse have become closely associated in her mind because of Walter Shandy's habit of winding the clock the first Sunday night of every month, the same night he executes his marital duties with his wife. This detailed explanation of one spoken sentence lends an ironic touch to Tristram's early address to the reader - "Therefore, my dear friend and companion, 'if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out, - bear with me, - and let me go on, - and tell my story my own way: -" (TS,Vol I, ch.6, p.41).

The original cause of the accidents of Tristram's birth is also fully explained to us. Tristram was born at home, at the hands of a country midwife and Dr.Slop, because of an article of his mother's marriage settlement (presented verbatim to the reader, Vol.I,ch.15), which laid down that the mother be sent to London to be delivered of her child, except in the case where she had already been taken there on a false alarm. This case applied to the time of Tristram's

birth. Walter's concern over the economics of the trip to London has something of the Defoe flavour as also does the precise documentation of the marriage article. Sterne pokes fun at those effects which novelists like Defoe use in order to appear authentic.

But I must here once and for all, inform you, that all this will be more exactly delineated and explained in a map, now in the hands of an engraver, which, with many other pieces and developments of this work, will be added to the end of the twentieth volume" (TS, Vol. I, Ch. 13, p. 63, See also Vol. VIII, ch. 17, p. 531).

Tristram is carried into another digression in mentioning the local midwife and the parson Yorick's charity towards her, and thence to a "sketch of his life and conversations" (TS, Vol. I, ch. 10, p. 52). He also finds it necessary to depict the characters of his father and his uncle Toby and to recount the chain of events which caused his nose to be "squeezed as flat as my face, as if the destinies had actually spun me without one". Obadiah is sent to fetch Dr. Slop (p. 119), whom he meets head on (p. 125) because Dr. Slop is on his way to Shandy Hall just to see how Mrs. Shandy is. Since Dr. Slop did not presume that his professional services would be required, he omitted to bring his medical instruments with him. Obadiah is sent to fetch his bag, rides in all haste, and secures the bag with intricate knots - so secure that Dr. Slop cuts his thumb trying to undo them . . . which in turn accounts for his awkwardness in delivering Tristram, resulting in the maiming of his nose. Such

a scheme of events illustrate the close relationship between cause and effect which Sterne maintains. The apparently random digressive narrative is deceptive. Beneath lies a carefully constructed causal relationship of events. The build up of a sequence such as this can often lead to an effect disproportionate to the cause or causes set out. Mrs. Shandy's untimely question has, Tristram feels, affected his whole constitution. Obadiah is formally cursed and excommunicated by Dr. Slop for tying up his bag. Instead of lending probability to his work, Sterne uses cause and effect as a means of suggesting improbably great consequences of small actions or events.

Matters of no more seeming consequence in themselves than whether my father should have taken off his wig with his right hand or with his left, have divided the greatest kingdoms and made the crowns of the monarchs who governed them, to totter upon their heads'. (TS.Vol.III. ch.2, p.172.

This technique of describing small and unimportant events with pomp and ceremony, using <sup>the</sup> inflated style this requires, is all part of the Cervantic humor in Sterne. Nonetheless, it is by his excessive use of conventions which are more usually employed naturally in a novel exemplifying mimetic realism, that Sterne achieves this effect.

The section of the novel I have summarized, shows how Sterne undermines one of the major assumptions of mimetic realism - that the novel, (in this case the biography), can give a full account of life, ordering it into a neat pattern.

In his quasi-biography, Tristram decides to give all the details of his life "ab ovo" - not only the events themselves but also their sources.

My way is ever to point out to the curious new tracks of investigation, to come at the first springs of the events I tell" (TS.Vol.I, ch.22, p.89).

In so doing he is in fact following <sup>the</sup>precept of mimetic realism that in order to be life like, one must be as inclusive as possible. Tristram carries to extremes such a demand, and ignores the need for some pruning, some selectivity and choice of the material at hand. Tristram's desire to tell all, accounts for the many digressions and the unprogressive nature of the plot. Because of this, Tristram's main concern in writing, is not to convince us that this is a real history, but is more orientated towards the organization of intractable material. Tristram's father encounters the same problem in writing the Tristopaedia as Tristram does in Tristram Shandy, namely that he cannot bring what he has to say into "so small a compass that when it was finished and bound, it might be rolled up in my mother's hussive". Instead he finds that "matter grows under our hands" (TS. Vol.V, ch.16, p.366). The purpose of the convention which Sterne exploits is distorted in the end. The inclusiveness, and details which Tristram presents so profusely, detract from the probability of the story, reminding us more of the problems of writing, rather than establishing its veracity.

Another aspect of "formal realism" undermined by Sterne and which also accounts for the voluminousness of the book, is his treatment of time and place. The specification of a particular time and setting for the events of a story lends authenticity to it. Sterne prepares to comply with this demand at the beginning of the novel. The reader is led to believe that the locality of the book is Shandy Hall - a country estate in England - and its immediate environs, and that the time of the story dates from Tristram's conception which Tristram takes great care to establish as "betwixt the first Sunday and the first Monday in the month of March, in the year of our Lord, one thousand, seven hundred and eighteen" (TS, VOL. I, ch. 4, p. 38). It is therefore assumed that references to other times, places or occurrences off the scene of Shandy Hall, previous to Tristram's life time, are digressions. These would include not only the major digression in this section of the story of Parson Yorick, but also the asides of Tristram as author, writing of his life from a future perspective, (March ninth, Seventeen-fifty nine), and commenting on the present as he writes - references to Jenny, addresses to the reader, expositions on his methods of writing. The whole idea of one time and setting advocated by mimetic realism in Tristram Shandy becomes ridiculous as the novel progresses and the digressions tend to usurp the main plot.

The requirement of a specified, particular locality for a story is fulfilled in an unexpected way in Tristram

Shandy. When Tristram says

There is but a certain degree of perfection in everything; and by pushing at something beyond that, I have brought myself into such a situation, as no traveller ever stood before me, for I am this moment walking across the market place at Auxerre with my father and my uncle Toby, on our way back to dinner - and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broken into a thousand pieces - and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the garonne, which Mons. Sheniac has lent me and where I now sit rhapsodizing all these affairs. (TS.Vol.VII. ch.28, p.492.  
- Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey.

we are finally let into the locale of the book - it is itself the mind of the author - the final lines of the passage establishes this fact. Of all the Tristrams in the passage, each in a different place, we finally return to the authentic Tristram, the writer who sits "rhapsodizing" and makes the others possible. If the locality of the book is essentially the mind of the person writing it, (and this is an essential factor of the autonomous realism Tristram Shandy exemplifies), on what grounds can we say that the world which the characters of Tristram Shandy occupy is not a mere fantasy world? This world however does retain the element of palpable 'realness'. Shandy Hall is close to the fore with its creaking parlour door, bowling green and its windows bereft of window sashes. Sterne takes care to place us on firm English ground. The kind of physical location used most frequently in realistic works is not totally abandoned by Sterne.

He shifts the main emphasis however to the real location of any novel - the mind of its author - and achieves a higher form of realism.

Sterne also liberates his novel from any one time scheme. The regressive nature of Tristram's narrative as he relates the details of his birth is due to a great extent to the continuous backward shifts in time made by Tristram as he explains each happening.. There are in fact three kinds of time used in Tristram Shandy - the narrator's time, that is the real time of his life as things happen to him now, the reader's time as he reads the book, and the story time - that is the time in which the events being related took place. Besides shifting from one of these levels to another, Sterne often intermingles and overlaps them with each other so that a complex interrelationship is built up. An example of this complexity can be found in taking an apparently simple passage like the following. Tristram is speaking at an early stage of the flattening of his nose -

How this event came about, - and what a train of vexatious disappointments in one stage or other of my life, have pursued me from the mere loss, or rather compression, of this one single member - I shall be laid before the reader all in due time - (TS,VOL.I,ch.15,p.69).

The actual event has already happened ("came") to the narrator, but its consequences persist in the present ("have"). Since the event however, has not yet taken place in the story time of the novel - it has not yet been related - in

the reader's time sequence it belongs to the future. This is one way of creating suspense in the novel.

The time of the story being related by Tristram is constantly being changed. Although all the events have already happened in the past (call this Time Scheme A), they are for the most part related dramatically as if they are taking place in the present as the writer writes the story (Time Scheme B). In Time B Tristram perpetually recalls the minutes and hours it takes for the slightest gesture or event to take place. In the digressions, a further shift in time occur to a past before A. For example, Uncle Toby's adventures occurs long before Tristram's birth so that there exists a perspective (Time C), deeper than the ordinary past (Time A). Yet Time C is often linked to Time A by a causal relationship between events or by a juxtaposition of the two times -

I would, therefore, desire him, (the reader) to consider that it is but a poor eight miles from Shandy Hall to Dr.Slop's, the man-midwife's house; - and that whilst Obadiah has been going those said miles and back, I have brought my Uncle Toby from Namur, quite across all Flanders, into England: - That I have had him ill upon my hands near four years: - and have since travelled him and Corporal Trim in a chariot and four, a journey of near two hundred miles down into Yorkshire. (TS, Vol.II, ch.8, p.123.

(Here we also have the juxtaposition of two places).

In mimetic realism, time is used to establish authenticity, to maintain probability in the plot, and as a basis

on which to order the episodes of the plot. Sterne acknowledges the first purpose to an extent in correlating Time C with historical time, by giving real dates and places for the happenings. However, his acknowledgement of the time it takes the writer to write the book, and the time it takes the reader to read it ( a factor usually ignored or evaded by the conventional novel), makes Tristram Shandy realistic in a higher sense since we are continually thrown back to the fact of the book as a book, and not as a piece of life limited in a certain time and space.

The second end to which time may be used in the novel is explicitly parodied by Sterne at one point.

It is about an hour and a half's tolerable good reading since my Uncle Toby rang the bell, when I was ordered to saddle a horse, and go for Dr.Slop, the man-midwife, so no one can say, with reason, that I have not allowed Obadiah time enough, poetically speaking, and considering the emergency to both to go and come; - though, morally and truly speaking, the man perhaps has scarce had time to put on his boots. (TS,VOL.II, ch.8, p.122).

Sterne solves the problem by presenting the reader with a probable alternative, followed by a proof of it by the entrance of Dr. Slop, stained and dirty after his fall. In Obadiah's time scheme only two minutes, thirty seconds have elapsed. His speedy return with Dr.Slop can be believed if we say that "Obadiah had not got above three score yards from the stable yard before he met with Dr.Slop". (TS,Vol. II, viii, 123). This is in fact Sterne's way of saying -

"if you can't believe that, believe this". In poking fun at a realistic convention, the reader is also the subject of the joke. Tristram's concern is for probability "poetically speaking", but he conforms to the reader's (or critic's) more pragmatic notion of probability. In this instance Sterne does not flaunt the reader's expectation as is his usual practice. Instead he takes care to satisfy it - letting the reader know he is doing so - and in so doing, in the light of his previous attitude to the reader, Sterne's seriousness becomes suspect. A further subversion of the reader has in fact taken place. If Sterne continually flaunts the reader's expectations, the subversion itself will become an expectation and so lose its effectiveness. By conforming occasionally in a passage of this sort, Sterne keeps the reader's conventional expectations alive, if only to continually play with them.

The time element can also be an organizational factor in the novel. Sterne however feels under no obligation to remain in one time scheme and follows the rules of chronology in the sequence of events. Although he does follow a kind of chronological sequence - it can be seen in the delayed follow up of an action, for example - Sterne is deliberately making fun of a convention essential to plot continuity - a sequential, linear, chronological ordering of events - and through Tristram, shows the difficulties of such attempts. Sterne organizes his material on a principle of association in the

mind of Tristram rather than according to an independent time sequence. More important in Tristram Shandy is the acknowledgement of the writer's and reader's time and the way in which Sterne recognizes the intermingling of all times in showing Tristram's frustrated efforts to write his story in a straight line.

The aspects of mimetic realism provided in Volume I of Tristram Shandy which I have examined so far, relate for the most part to plot and narrative technique. Sterne's flirtatious attitude to realistic conventions can also be seen in his characterization and description - both of course related to each other. In his methods of characterization Sterne makes fun of the claims of omniscience by an author, exploits the comic potentialities of psychological realism, and by eclipsing the supposed 'hero' of the work in recounting faithfully the material that accumulates around the other characters, points out the underlying <sup>UN-</sup>reality of the notion of hero - a man who takes the limelight - in the novel. Sterne does portray his characters using - and often abusing - techniques of realism by the use of detailism and suggestion, in his descriptions, and by his dramatic presentation of a thought or gesture in great detail.

The initial assumption which validates any theory of characterization is that an author knows his characters. Sterne sweeps this aside and points out the impossibility for him, or for the reader, of knowing his characters. Sterne

denies that a man's character may be observed as through a window; since Momus' glass is not affixed to the human breast he cannot take "pen and ink and set down nothing but what you have seen, and could have sworn to" (TS.Vol.I,ch.23,p.96), (which mimetic realism attempts to do). Man is therefore unknowable in any total sense. Besides the fact that the human personality is unpredictable, everyone looks at different sides to different people and each in fact sees his own person. Since there is no one right way of seeing someone, neither is there any one certain way of knowing them.

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

This is the true reason that Jenny and I, as well as all the world besides us, have such eternal squabbles about nothing, - she looks at her outside - and I, at her in - How is it possible that we should agree about her value? (TS,Vol.V,ch.24, p.374).

Man in the <sup>Eighteenth</sup> ~~Century~~ <sup>Century</sup> was usually considered as an entity, the mental and physical in relative harmony in him, the mind and body acting on each other, and in mimetic realism is depicted as such - a creature whose thoughts, feelings and actions, to a certain degree accord with each other. Sterne sounds the note of discord in his presentation of the human personality. His disproportionate emphasis on either the mental or physical in his delineation of a character im-

plies a dualistic concept of man and establishes for us two methods of characterization which Sterne employs. He himself has listed a number of ways a character may be painted one of which is "in the camera, that is most unfair of all, - because there you are sure to be represented in some of your most ridiculous attitudes" (TS.Vol.I.ch.23,p.98). He does, however, use this method, particularly when he describes a person in one stance or gesture. The other, more psychological method he uses is by portraying a character through his hobby-horse, or by giving minute particulars of his ideas in a given situation. A few short passages will illustrate these two techniques of characterization - both of which carry to one extreme principles normally used to make a character appear realistic.

The attack of widow Wadman on Uncle Toby (Ch.16, Vol.VIII) deserves to be quoted to illustrate Sterne's *technique of presenting a scene or an action - almost exclusively visually;*

This, though slight skirmishing, and at a distance from the main body yet drew on the rest; for here, the map usually falling with the back of it close to the side of the sentry-box, my uncle Toby, in the simplicity of his soul, would lay his hand flat upon it in order to go on with his explanation; and Mrs. Wadman, by a manoeuvre as quick as a thought would as certainly place hers close beside it; this at once opened a communication, large enough for any sentiment to pass or repass which a person skilled in the elementary and practical part of love-making, had occasion for - By bringing up her forefinger parallel (as before) to my uncle Toby's - it unavoidably brought the thumb into action - and the forefinger and thumb being once engaged, as naturally brought

in the whole hand . . . whilst this was doing, how could she forget to make him sensible, that it was her leg (and no one else's) at the bottom of the sentry-box, which slightly pressed against the calf of his - so that my uncle Toby being thus attacked and sore pushed on both his wings - was it a wonder, if now and then, it put his centre into disorder?  
(TS, Vol.VIII,Ch.16, p.530-1).

By taking such an almost exclusively external approach to character, describing so precisely each movement, Sterne is taking the "art as mirror" theory very literally for comic effect. Repeatedly one finds this kind of extremely detailed description of a gesture or attitude, for e.g. Trim's position as he prepares to read his sermon -

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain horizon - which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence . . . He stood, - for I repeat it, to take a picture of him in at one view, with his body swayed, and somewhat bent forwards - his right leg firm under him, sustaining seven eights of his whole weight in the foot of his left leg, the defect of which was no disadvantage to his attitude, advanced a little, - not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line, betwixt them; - the knee bent ... (TS.Vol.II,ch.17,p.138-9)..

and so on. Likewise Walter's oratorical pose as he goes to speak, his prostrate figure lying on the bed after he hears the news of Tristram's christening, and Trim's emphatic gestures with his stick emphasize the spacial dimensions of these characters. The people of Tristram Shandy are all endowed with a very physical presence in the book (perhaps

Mrs. Shandy is the exception in this respect) - even if they are not described according to their physical attributes. They derive their physicality from the descriptions of their actions, not their appearances. The widow Wadman's expressive north-east kick, Dr. Slop's fumbling hands, Trim's waving stick - all emphasize a certain physical density in the persons of the novel. It is also to be remarked that bodily contact between people is more easily possible than communication. It can be seen that Sterne again carries detailism too far and that in his descriptions of character, his personages have a quality of physicality or "thingness" more usually associated with objects in a realistic work.

Sterne also uses a rather radical method of characterization in his internal approach to character. The portrayal of Toby by his hobby-horse is one method. Because of Sterne's tendency to endow his characters with a kind of monomania - each character becomes highly individualized so that one is reluctant to see any of them as types of humanity. Mimetic realism has led one to expect an element of ordinarieness in a character portrayal. Sterne stresses each man's difference from another so that in Tristram Shandy each character seems eccentric, and there seems to be no ordinary, "normal" man in the book - or any norm, for that matter, by which to judge the characters. This accounts for the lack of feeling of a social milieu in Tristram Shandy that we get in other novels. These characters seem to have little in common,

at times not even a language. The major thing they do have in common, with each other (and, to an extent, with man in general) is the very fact that each has his own hobby-horse, and this is what makes them realistic in terms of Sterne's solipsistic vision of man.

Another facet of Sterne's psychological realism, related to the theory of the hobby-horse, is the association of ideas. The hobby-horse, or ruling passion may provoke the association. (This is true in Toby's case). At other times the association seems random. The effect of this is to show that man's mind does not necessarily function in rational, ordered and therefore apprehensible ways, and that what one may conjecture to be in the mind of a man at any given moment may be totally different than what really is. Ideas associate themselves in the mind in an unexpected way. The greater the dissimilarity between the ideas associated in the individual mind, the more comic the effect of its portrayal.

The episode of Bobby's death in Tristram Shandy provides an illustration of the two facets of Sterne's psychological characterization I have pointed out. When told of Bobby's death Walter Shandy reacts to it in terms of his hobby-horse.

Philosophy has a fine saying for every-thing. For Death it has an entire set; the misery was, they all at once rushed into my father's head, that 'twas difficult to string them together, so as to make them anything of a consistent show out of them - He took them as they came .....

(TS.Vol.V.ch.3,p.348).

. . . and Walter proceeds to expound on his store of learned quotations on the subject, at even this moment, still embellished in his own rhetoric

But he is gone for ever from us! -be it so. He got found <sup>from</sup> under the hands of his barber before he was bald - he is risen from a feast before he was surfeited - from a banquet before he had got drunken (TS.Vol.V.ch.3,p.351).

until he actually forgets Bobby.

The announcement of Bobby's death in the kitchen produces an alternative reaction in Susannah.

- My young master in London is dead!  
said Obadiah
- A green satin nightgown of my mother's which has been twice scoured was the first idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head - Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words -
- Then, quoth Susannah, we must all go into mourning - But note a second time, the word mourning, not withstanding Susannah made use of it herself failed also of doing its office, it excited not one simple idea, tinged with either grey or black, all was green - 'The green satin nightgown hung there still . . . (TS.Vol.V.ch.5 p.355).

Trim's reaction is to deliver an oration on death which eventually leads him to a eulogy on his captain.

Sterne's apparently flippant treatment of Bobby's death defies any conventional stock reactions one brings to, or expects from, any situation - even death itself. In his depiction of the workings of the minds of Walter and

Susannah, Sterne points out how each individual may react in very different ways to the same situation. The disconnection between the external and the internal, the discrepancy that often exists between doing and thinking, is comically illustrated by the association of ideas. The body may be in mourning but the mind does not necessarily think in black. The act of sexual intercourse may be accompanied by thoughts of clocks. Although Sterne's psychology may seem unrealistic in its absurdity, the admission underlying it - that the mind in fact is ungraspable since each man's mind works in its own way - does give it a realistic basis. The ultimate illustration of this fact is the book itself which comes from one man's, Tristram's mind, thence deriving its structure and organization.

I have remarked on the physical details of description used by Sterne in his characterization, and the use of materialistic touches more often attached to objects than to persons. Sterne does attribute the same sense of physicality to objects in his book. Although the locale of the book is the mind of the author, Sterne does allow a degree of reality to the 'scene' before us by his use of objects. The immediacy of objects such as Dr. Slop's bag, Yorick's saddle, Uncle Toby's pipe, Trim's stick, the creaking parlour door, must be acknowledged. These objects do not however add any pictorial vividness to Shandy Hall or realize it for the reader in visual terms. Their purpose is to deviously lead

the reader to believe in the reality of this world and then to oust him from that position by the insistence on the book itself as an object, in much the same way as Toby is recalled to England -

- and having done that corporal, we'll embark for England -
- We are there, quoth the corporal, recollecting himself - very true said my uncle Toby - looking at the church! (TS.Vol.VI,ch.34,p.447).

Toby is jerked back to reality by looking at the church. For the reader, the recall is in the book itself. The materialism associated with mimetic realism manifests itself in Sterne in a very different way. If the depiction of real things gives a sense of concreteness and reality to the world of fiction, Tristram Shandy reverses the very reason for this "thingness" (the term Realism derives from the Latin 'res' meaning 'thing') by constantly emphasizing the physical existence of the book itself. In this emphasis Sterne reminds the reader that right now, this world which is presented to him, is a world on paper. He plays around with page numbers, blank pages, patterned pages, squiggles - and at one point addresses the reader

- We'll not stop the reader dear Sir, - only as we have got through these five volumes, (do, Sir, sit down upon a set, they are better than nothing) (TS.Vol.VI,ch.I,p.397.)

reminding him of this fact.

It can be seen in the passages I have chosen to illustrate Sterne's parody, that Sterne's most frequent practice is to take a familiar principle of mimetic realism pretending to use it to the ends for which it was established - in so doing, subverting the reader - and finally, skilfully using it to his own ends to insist on the autonomous reality of Tristram. By reminding us that the locale of the book is the mind of the author, that writing and reading time must also play a part in the time scheme of the book, that the book exists as a physical thing, as part of the reality presented, Sterne is continually forcing us to recognize that this is one man's autonomous world, to which the criteria of mimetic realism do not apply.

## CHAPTER III

THE AUTONOMOUS REALISM OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

In view of the subversive nature of so much of Tristram Shandy, one must be wary of looking for any serious philosophy in the work, an exercise which might become a hobby-horse of the reader, and as irrelevant to the book, as are Walter Shandy's hypotheses to the world around him. If Tristram should sometimes put on a fool's cap with a bell to it, the reader is to keep his temper. (TS.Vol.I, ch.6, p.41). Tristram draws attention to the clownishness of the book.

- Pray reach me my fool's cap - I fear you  
sit upon it,  
Madam - 'tis under the cushion - I'll  
put it on -  
Bless me! you have had it upon your head  
this half hour.
- There then let it stay, with a  
Fa-ra diddle di  
and a fa-ri diddle d  
and a high-dum - dye-dum  
fiddle - - - dumb - c.  
(TS , Vo.VII, ch.26, p.488).

Nonetheless, Sterne has intimated that there are serious tones in the novel. The title page of Vol.III presents a Latin quotation which translates as

I do not fear the opinions of the ignorant crowd; - yet I ask them to spare my little work, in which it has always been my purpose to pass from the serious to the gay, and from the gay to the serious.

Beneath his gay parody of mimetic realism lies a serious intention to question the novel form and what it attempts

to do. Likewise, the autonomous realism Tristram Shandy presents, and the serious vision of man it entertains, is balanced by a mad, comic gaiety, which holds off a threatening feeling of despair or frustration. The abundance of gaiety in Tristram Shandy / can deceive one into ignoring or passing over the autonomous reality Sterne attributes to each man and in particular to Tristram as author. It is the intention of this chapter to discuss Sterne's "realism" and its implications.

Apart from the actual presentation of an autonomous reality in Tristram Shandy, Sterne's concept of man as maker of reality is prevalent in his portrayal of characters within the novel, and particularly in his use of the hobby-horse motif. We are shown, as it were, at a second remove within the novel, how Sterne views man in his relation to the world, the autonomous reality he constructs for himself, and his consequent isolation from fellow-man seen in problems of communication.

For the midwife in Tristram Shandy, the world meant "a small circle described upon the circle of a great world, of four English miles diameter or thereabouts, of which the cottage, where the good woman lived, is supposed to be the centre" (TS.Vol.I, ch.7, p.42). The limits of her world are marked by the extent of her influence and importance, In the same way

every soul living, whether he has a shirt to his back or no, - has one surrounding him, - which said circle,

by the way, whenever 'tis said that such a one is of great weight and importance in the world, - I desire may be enlarged or contracted in your worship's fancy, in a compound ratio of the station, profession, knowledge, abilities, height and depth (measuring both ways) of the personage brought before you" (TS.Vol.I.ch.13, p.63).

Sterne, early on, thus suggests how each man's "world" differs from the next.

Each man not only reacts differently, but also sees things differently, as a result of which a thing is different. The manner in which we view the world, constructs for us our own reality. Of Walter Shandy, Sterne says

The truth was, his road lay so very far on one side, from that wherein most men travelled, - that every object before him presented a face and section of itself to his eye, altogether different from the plan and elevation of it seen by the rest of mankind - In other words, 'twas a different object - and in course was differently considered.1 (TS.Vol.V, ch.24, p.375

The same is true of Walter Shandy's opinions - they become his own "goods and chattels" (TS.Vol.III,ch.34,p.229.

He picked up an opinion, Sir, as a man picks up an apple, - It becomes his own and if he is a man of spirit, he would lose his life rather than give it up. (TS.Vol.III.ch.34,p.228.

As a result Walter Shandy, like Tristram, has his own autonomous reality - "Mr.Shandy, my father, Sir, would see nothing in the light in which others placed it; - he placed things in his own light" (TS.Vol.II,ch.19,p.160). Sterne stresses man's importance as an individual rather than as a social

being and in this he sets himself apart from the mainstream of the English novel tradition with its major emphasis on society and the family, and the idea of reality as something which is commonly shared by all. In one of his letters Sterne uses the image of a walking stick with many handles, and, "in using the stick, everyone will take the handle which suits his own convenience. In Tristram Shandy the handle istaken which suits their passions, their ignorance, or sensibility"<sup>2</sup>. The same is true for the way in which each person relates to the world. In the context of autonomous realism, each man makes a different world for himself by the handle he grasps.

We are made aware of Sterne's quasi-philosophy of autonomous realism in Tristram Shandy by his use of the self-conscious narrator, by the part the reader is encouraged to play in the book, and by the problems of communication Tristram encounters and his efforts to overcome them. A discussion of these three concerns - the narrator, the reader and language - is therefore warranted if we are to assess the autonomous realism of Tristram Shandy and the techniques Sterne uses to attain it.

In this discussion it will be necessary to cover ground already covered in much of Sternian criticism. Parish deals with the narrator of the book in his article "The Nature of Mr Tristram Shandy, Author"<sup>3</sup>, and Booth

examines Tristram's self-consciousness in the light of his predecessors in fiction. Again, of Tristram, Henri Fluchère says,

Il est toujours dans l'histoire, il est  
 "dans le coup"  
 A la fois auteur et acteur, sujet et objet,  
 conteur et conté, il se montre et il se  
 voit, il parle, il pense, et il s'écoute  
 et se transcrit, il se trompe et se corrige,  
 il s'ennuie et le voilà qui se pince, il se  
 sent Ridicule et il éclate de rire - mais  
 il faut qu'il le dise, il faut que nous  
 sachions qu'il le sait. 5

Critics have also remarked on the different ways in which the reader figures in the novel, as friend,<sup>6</sup> as a source of laughter,<sup>7</sup> as active collaborator, "complice et rival à la fois"<sup>8</sup>, and as part-author.<sup>9</sup> Others have examined the individual way in which Sterne uses language, Tristram's rhetoric,<sup>10</sup> syntax, grammar and style. Griffen examines the language of Tristram Shandy and the problems of communication it involves. Another critic has remarked that "there is not one language but as many as there are grades of perception and fields of culture."<sup>11</sup> The private language argument for solipsism has not been applied, however, by many critics, to Tristram Shandy.

Despite these various approaches to Tristram Shandy from any, or all of these angles, the aspects mentioned seem to be examined for their own sakes and their full implications have been missed or avoided. Little mention has been made of the relation between any of these aspects and the

kind of realism to be found in Tristram Shandy. This chapter will attempt to re-examine these subjects - the narrator, the reader, and language - in Tristram Shandy, justifying this re-examination by placing them within the framework of Sterne's realism.

Tristram's self-consciousness as a narrator and writer is the very basis of the autonomous realism of the book. In this way Sterne approaches the problem of authenticity in fiction, hitherto a major preoccupation in realistic writing, with a certain nonchalance. Earlier writers, in their efforts to be realistic, felt the obligation to disclaim the fact that this was a written work and to insist on the truth of what was related. Through Tristram, Sterne allows the fact that this is a written account to blatantly stand forth. Granted, Tristram sets out to recount the events of his life, and if this scheme had been followed, the book would become Tristram's memoirs, not unlike Moll Flanders. However, this memoir element is overthrown by a concern with the process of writing itself, by Tristram's own thoughts in the present as his mind wanders over his material, so that Tristram Shandy becomes, not a biography or a memoir, but the presentation of one man's mind, one man's point of view and one man's world. It is this aspect of the book, I believe, that Sterne has in mind when he speaks of Tristram Shandy as "a web, wrought out of my own brain".  
 Tristram uses the same phrase when he refers to his father at work on the Tristra-paedia -

My father spun his, every thread of it, out of his own brain, - or reeled and cross - twisted what all other spinners and spinsters had spun before him, that was pretty near the same torture to him. (TS.Vol.V, ch.16, p. 366).

Sterne is not saying that Tristram Shandy and the Tristra-paedia are products of the imagination of their respective authors, when he uses the image of the web (a frequent image in Sterne). Both works derive from the way in which their authors think, feel and see, and as such contain the realities of both men, not their fantasies.

Sterne uses various techniques in making Tristram's presence as a narrator felt throughout the novel. His most direct method is to allow Tristram to present himself to the reader, as a writer sitting at his desk in the act of writing now. Three passages in particular illustrate Tristram's presence in the book in this way.

I enter upon this part of my story in the most pensive and melancholy frame of mind, that ever sympathetic breast was touched with. - my nerves relax as I tell it. - Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse, and of that careless alacrity with it, which every day of my life prompts me to say and write a thousand things I should not - and this moment that I last dipped my pen into my ink, I could not help taking notice what a cautious air of sad composure and solemnity there appeared in my moment of doing it. - Lord! how different from the rash jerks, and hare-brained squirts thou art wont, Tristram! to transact it with other humours. - dropping thy pen - spurting thy ink about the table and thy books, - as if thy pen and thy ink, and thy books and thy furniture cost thee nothing. (TS.Vol.III.ch.28,p.222).

Tristram's self-awareness is seen clearly in this passage. The immediacy of Tristram is also conveyed by Tristram's descriptions of his own actions as he writes. At one point he tells us:-

- It is not half an hour ago when (in the great hurry and precipitation of a poor devil's writing for daily bread) I threw a fair sheet, which I had just finished, and carefully wrote out, slap into the fire, instead of the foul one.

Instantly I snatched off my wig, and threw it perpendicularly, with all imaginable violence, up to the top of the room - indeed I caught it as it fell - but there was an end of the matter; nor do I think anything else in Nature, would have given such immediate ease. (TS.Vol.IV, ch.17, p.291).

Another time he tells us

- I never stand conferring with pen and ink one moment; for if a pinch of snuff, or a stride or two across the room will not do the business for me - I take a razor at once; and having tried the edge of it upon my hand, without further ceremony, except that of first lathering my beard I shave it off .....
- (TS.Vol.IX, ch.13, p.587).

Sterne very explicitly presents the narrator to the reader in these passages. We see Tristram as an impulsive, scatter-brained writer, not a shadowy, characterless narrator in the background.

The narrator appears less explicitly throughout Tristram Shandy in the abundant references by Tristram to the problems he encounters in writing the work. In these, Tristram excuses his digressions (Vol.I,ch.22) and discusses the structure of the book (Vol.VI.ch.40). At various points

he also discusses with the reader the problems of suspense which arise from his indecisions as to when to reveal an event to the reader;

the story, in one sense is certainly out of its place here; for by right it should come in either amongst the anecdotes of my uncle Toby's amours with widow Wadman, in which Corporal Trim was no mean actor - or else in the middle of his and my uncle Toby's campaigns on the bowling green, - for it will do very well in either place, - but then if I reserve it for either of those parts of my story, - I ruin the story I'm upon, - and if I tell it here - I anticipate matters and ruin it there. (TS.Vol.III.ch.23.p.215. See also Vol.II.ch.19 & Vol.VI.ch.29).

By elucidating on his methods of writing, Tristram openly acknowledges himself as the source of the anarchy of the book, and its break with traditional notions of structure. "Therefore" says Tristram at one point, "I forthwith put an end to the chapter, - though I was in the middle of my story" (TS.Vol.II, ch.4, p.111). Tristram is very conscious of himself as creator of the book, and also very aware of what the book is becoming under his hands. The image he projects of himself to the reader is that of a man trying to come to terms with the material in hand, often acting the clown, adopting a "fanciful guise" (TS.Vol.IV.ch.22, p.299). writing at times, it seems, according to the whim which takes him - " I have a strong propensity in me to begin this chapter nonsenically, and I will not baulk my fancy" (TS.vol.I, ch. 23, p.96) says Tristram. Another time, he

begins a chapter again after a false start. (TS.Vol.VI, ch.23, p.445). By such pervasive references, Sterne constantly forces Tristram's presence on the reader.

A third way in which the narrator appears in the novel is as a manipulating agent of all that goes on in the story. Tristram can hold up his characters in their activities for as long as he wishes. This is a suspense technique used throughout the novel at the expense of narrative continuity. Again and again the narrator pauses in the action of the story, interposes some digression or explanation, and picks up the action again later, at his own convenience. For example ... "I have left my father lying across his bed, and my uncle Toby in his old fringed chair, sitting beside him, and promised I would go back to them in half an hour, and five and thirty minutes are lapsed already" (TS.Vol.III.ch.38, p.2 240). This technique of suspending action, speech and time, is rather like stopping a film while the camera-man explains the camera, or tells a story. A few examples will illustrate this method, which might not emerge on a cursory reading of the novel.

In Vol.I, chapter 21, (p.89) Uncle Toby takes his pipe from his mouth and begins to speak. He gets no further than the words "I think -", at which point Tristram interposes with the statement that Uncle Toby's character needs a little illustration in order to understand his sentiments.

Toby does not get to finish his sentence until Vol.II, chapter 26, (p.119). "I think, replied he, - it would not be amiss, brother, if we rung the bell".

Again in Vol.V, chapter 5, (p.353), Tristram leaves his mother standing at the door eavesdropping on uncle Toby's and his father's conversation in a similar still life stance. - "She listened with all her powers; - the listening slave with the goddess of silence at his back, could not have given a finer thought for an intaglio. In this attitude I am determined to let her stand for five minutes: til I bring up the affairs of the kitchen (as Rapin does those of the church) to the same period". Not until Vol. V, chapter 14, (p.364) is Mrs.Shandy allowed move from her poised position. When Tristram's father quotes Socrates - "I have friends, - I have relations - I have three desolate children", Mrs. Shandy moves - "Then, cried my mother opening the door - you have one more, Mr.Shandy, than I know of".

This technique can in fact have two very different purposes. In one way it seems to point to the presence of Tristram as a controlling agent over the events and characters of his story. Alternatively it can also be seen that Tristram is himself manipulated by the material in hand, since each occurrence sparks off in him a new train of thought which he pursues. In both cases Tristram's primary concern is seen to be very different from a novelist like Jane Austen.

He is not trying to convince us that the Shandy Hall world exists somewhere in England, and that Walter Shandy and uncle Toby did live there. It is a fictional world, manipulatable by a writer, not a world observed, and related faithfully to us.

If the narrator is seen as the controlling factor in the story (as is normally the case with a narrator in a novel), it is obvious that Tristram abuses his power by allowing such extreme breaks in narrative continuity. His parody is again aimed at exasperating the reader. It also serves to imply that the characters and events of the story Tristram is relating are dependant solely upon him for their existence and their sphere of action. These characters are not endowed with any lives of their own apart from their creator. Sterne insists that the Shandy Hall world is a secondary world, contrived by, and at the mercy of, Tristram.

Apart from the techniques of suspense I have shown, this is also illustrated by Tristram's use of stage terms when he refers to the happenings of his story. At times he sees his characters as in a dramatic scene;

So stood my father, holding fast his  
fore-finger betwixt his finger and thumb,  
and reasoning with my uncle Toby as he  
sat in his old fringed chair, valanced  
around with party-coloured body - O  
Garrick! what a rich scene of this would  
thy exquisite powers make.  
(TS.Vol.IV.ch.7,p.280)

He sees himself as a stage hand when he says

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

When these two things are done, - the curtain shall be drawn up again, and my uncle Toby, my father, and Dr.Slop shall go on with their dicourse, without any more interruption. (TS.Vol.II, ch.19, p.159.)

and again when he asks the reader to assist him

to wheel off my uncle Toby's ordnance behind the scenes - to remove his sentry box, - and clear the theatre, if possible, of hornworks 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 tonight, 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. (TS. Vol.VI, ch.6, p.403).

Tristram tells us that what his book contains is, almost literally, staged by him, and as such has no claim to any reality apart from him.

If, on the other hand, Tristram is controlled by the story, (he says thus himself - "Ask my pen, - it governs me, - I govern not it") (TS, Vol.VI, ch.6, p. 403), a radical shift has been made by Sterne in the use of the narrator. The narrator is not used to describe a world to us, in a manner which makes it realistic for us. Instead, in Tristram Shandy, the narrator himself acts as a telescope through which to view the world of the book - and the constant interruptions, digressions and reflections of Tristram as he writes, constitute the real world of the book. The action of

Tristram Shandy does not consist in the events Tristram relates to us, but in the actual movement of Tristram's pen across the page.

In this way, the reality of Tristram Shandy is presented rather than described, Tristram does not describe his world in the way we might normally expect - giving us accounts of his surroundings, or the people closest to him. Jenny remains a virtual blank throughout the book. In the context of realism, the difference between description and presentation is of major importance. For example, one may describe England, one cannot present it, in a novel. When something is described, one may be given a realistic picture of it. If it is presented, one is given the real thing itself. Tristram's world is presented to us in this way - as Tristram says in his preface, " - here it is, ... it must speak for itself" (TS.Vol.III, ch.20, p.202). Tristram has swept aside the novel's practice of setting up a hypothesis and then fitting it to reality, and shows that "reality" is, in effect, "its own hypothesis"<sup>13</sup>. As a result, Tristram is liberated from many of the demands made by mimetic realism and one cannot approach this kind of realism with notions of correspondence and life-likeness. It is a self-referential, preformative reality - "to write a book" says Tristram, "is for all the world like humming a song - be put in tune with yourself, Madam, 'tis no matter how high or low you take it" (TS.Vol.IV. ch.25, p.313). Neither can we detach Tristram

from the reality which is presented, as we might be able to do if it were described. "Let us leave, if possible, myself, says Tristram once, - " But it is impossible - I must go along with you to the end of the work" (TS.Vol.VI, ch.20, p.427).

I have examined closely how the narrator appears in Tristram Shandy. The effect of using these methods is not merely to place Tristram Shandy in a historical context, or to impose a unity on the novel, as Booth suggests. In his use of the narrator in the ways I have elucidated, Sterne carefully lays the foundation for the autonomous realism of the book. This foundation requires, not only the presentation of a narrator to the reader, (this is present in most novels) but of a self-conscious narrator, one who is himself aware that he is narrating a story, and so makes us aware of the same.

One problem immediately arises if we concede the autonomous realism of Tristram Shandy, and that is the relationship between the reader and the book. If each man's reality is peculiar to himself, (and in particular Tristram's) how can the reader, with his own conceptions of what is real, come to terms with, or even recognize, the reality of Tristram? And, if he does recognize this reality, in what way can it be said to be autonomous in any way? Tristram overcomes this problem by encouraging the reader to partake of the reality presented. Tristram's ideal reader is not one

who approaches the work objectively, as a looker-on at one man's reality. If this were the case, there would be a danger that the reader and author would be in continual conflict, not unlike Walter and Toby. Sterne cleverly gives the reader a participative role in the writing of the book, so that the reader shares in Tristram's world.

At certain points, Tristram invites the reader into his world very explicitly. He calls on the reader to help get his father and uncle Toby off the stairs. Likewise the reader is to remove Toby with Tristram in Vol.VI.ch.29. The reader<sup>is</sup> allowed a blank page to describe the widow Wadman. We are to imagine Dr.Slop's entrance (Vol.II.ch.9) for ourselves. When it comes to the unsayable, Tristram leaves blank spaces, or \*, presuming the reader will continue to follow the train of thought into which Tristram has led him. Tristram constantly tries to make the reader exert his own faculties in one instance by posing a puzzle for him.

- How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, that my mother was not a papist. (TS.Vol.I.ch.20.p.82).

In all these addresses, Tristram devises a reader for himself and blatantly draws attention to the fact that this reader is to help the writer do his work. Whether Tristram allows him room to do so is debatable. Tristram is careful to dictate in what terms widow Wadman is to be described - "as like your mistress as you can - as unlike your wife as

your conscience will let you " (TS.Vol.VI.ch.38,p.450).

It is also Tristram who has made the decision in the first place, to take Toby and Walter off the stairs.

A more subtle relationship, however, exists between the reader and author than is suggested by the above references. The usual relation between a reader and a book is one in which the reader approaches the book and the author's ideas, relates these to his own, and thus forms an idea of the book. In Tristram Shandy, the reader, using the words on the page as clues, brings himself to the narrator's situation and ideas, and this process in fact makes the book for him. Each reader becomes partly the author of the book he reads, and Tristram Shandy is a different book to every man who reads it. The very tone and character of the book is contingent on the reader's approach and particularly his mood.

I am very proud, sir, to have had a man,  
like you, on my side from the beginning;  
but it is not in the power of any one to  
taste humor, however he may wish it -  
'tis the gift of God - and besides a true  
feeler always brings half the entertain-  
ment along with him. His own ideas are  
only call'd forth by what he reads, and  
the vibrations within, so entirely corres-  
pond with those excited, 'tis like read-  
ing himself and not the book. 15

In Tristram Shandy, the reader is to imagine himself in the author's position by mounting behind Tristram on his hobbyhorse. In doing this, each reader will nonetheless bring his own ideas, associations and thoughts along with him,

and so what passes in the reader's mind is also part of Tristram Shandy. Sterne hints at this when he says

Writing when properly managed, (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation. As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all; - so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the readers understanding is to halve this matter amicably and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself. (TS.Vol.II.ch.11, p.127).

This process, in which the reader assumes a part in the construction of the novel, is closely analogous to <sup>that</sup> of an actor acting a part in a play. An actor and the role he plays are inseparable. The actor and playwright are so close as to be almost indistinguishable. Similarly, the reader in Tristram Shandy is brought close to the narrator, sees all from his point of view, and acts out Tristram Shandy for himself. This process is subtle and sophisticated, and <sup>that</sup> such an endeavour was made by a writer in the eighteenth century when the novel had only just established itself as a literary form, is remarkable. For its own sake, the part the reader is given in Tristram Shandy, is a technique which deserves commendation. Its major effect however is to insist on the autonomy of the world of the book, an autonomy which does not break down when the book is read, but on the contrary is upheld, strengthened by, and dependent on, the approach of the reader.

Besides the presence of a self-conscious narrator and the special part the reader plays in the novel, another feature of the autonomous realism of Tristram Shandy is a preoccupation with language as a means of communication. This problem derives from the solipsistic doctrine implicit in autonomous realism and points to the inefficacy of language itself, and in particular the ambiguities inherent in words themselves. Locke 's treatment of this subject in his Essay concerning Human Understanding influenced Sterne to a great degree. "Words" says Locke "came to be made use of by men as signs of their ideas" and as such "stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him who uses them" Thence arises the difficulties of communication the characters within Tristram Shandy experience. The mutual incomprehensions, misunderstandings and frustrations of Walter and Toby, tend to emphasize their hobby-horsical natures, and their inability to communicate in language might isolate them completely from each other, wvre it not for the fact that there exists a liaison between them on the level of emotional sympathy instead. Tristram in trying to reach the reader encounters many of the same problems

- Fair and softly, gentle reader! - where is they fancy carrying thee? - If there is truth in man, by my great grandfather's nose, I mean the external organ of smelling, or that part of man which stands prominent in his face, - and which painters say, in jolly noses and well-proportioned faces, should comprehend a full third, - that is, measuring downwards from the setting on of the hair. -

- what a life of it has an author, at  
 this pass!  
 (TS.Vol.III, ch.33, p.228).

- and tries every means at his disposal to overcome them. Sterne's constant efforts to expand the conventions of the novel - and its most basic convention is that it uses language as its means of communication - only serves to insist further on the autonomy of his world and the individuality of his ideas.

Locke suggests remedies for the imperfections and abuses of words, and one way of trying to resolve the ambiguity of words, and the various interpretations a word may carry, is by explicit definition by the speaker (in this case the writer) of his meaning. But, as Tristram remarks, "to define is to distrust" (TS.Vol.III.ch.31,p.225), and in this way one also encounters the impossibility of relying totally on any of the other terms used in the definition. Tristram goes to great length "to define with all possible exactness and precision", what he means by nose, and ends where he began.

For by the word nose, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word nose occurs, - I declare by that word I mean a nose, and nothing more or less.  
 (TS. Vol.III, ch.31, p.225).

He tries to exercise the same control over the word 'world' in Volume I (ch.7,p.42). Another indirect method of definition, is by listing words of approximate meaning,

or near synonyms together - for eg. "to frisk it, to squirt it, to jump it, to rear it, to bound it ..."  
 (TS.Vol.III. ch.36, p.232). In Volume VI, Tristram is finally driven to rely on the assumption - (shaky though it is, especially in view of Tristram's autonomous reality, and also the way in which this assumption has been seen to break down between widow Wadman and Toby) - that the world has the same idea of love as he has.

All I contend for is, that I am not obliged to set out with a definition of what love is; and so long as I can go on with my story intelligibly, with the help of the word itself, without any other idea to it, then what I have in common with the rest of the world, why should I differ from it a moment before the time?

(TS.Vol.VI.ch.37,p.449.)

In the end, definition does not suffice as a means of bridging the gap between the world and Tristram in the area of language. Tristram is thrown back on the intuition, that there are such things as reliable, shared meanings among words and among people.

In his preface to the novel, Tristram finds language an inept vehicle to explain his concepts of wit and judgement, and instead finds that a solid object (which he nonetheless does describe in words) will illustrate more clearly what he means

I hate set dissertations, - and above all things in the world, 'tis one of the silliest things in one of them, to darken your hypothesis by placing a number of tall opake words, one before another, in

a right line, betwixt your own and your reader's conception, - when in all likelihood, if you had looked about, you might have seen something standing, or hanging up, which would have cleared the point at once ... Will you give me leave to illustrate this affair of wit and judgement by the two knobs on the top of the back of it ....  
(TS.Vol.III.ch.20.p.208-9).

Similarly, Dr.Slop also tries a dramatic technique of replacing a word by the thing itself, and only ends by looking ridiculous - he reaches for his squirt instead of his forceps. (TS.Vol.III.ch.15,p.197).

Tristram recognizes that expression is not merely a matter of using language and that there exist more subtle and more eloquent ways of communication. In the Sentimental Journey Sterne says

There are certain combined looks of simple subtlety, where whim and sense and seriousness are so blended, that all the languages of Babel set loose together could not express them.

In Tristram Shandy he says, "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?" (TS.Vol.III,ch.12,p.192). He hints at this unspoken type of communication again when he says

There are certain trains of certain ideas which leave prints of themselves about our eyes and eye-brows; and there is a consciousness of it, somewhere about the heart, which serves but to make these etchings the stronger - we see, spell, and put them together without a dictionary. (TS.Vol.V.ch.1,p.343).

It is suffice to affirm, that of all the senses, the eye ... has the quickest commerce with the soul, gives a smaller strike, and leaves something more inexpressible upon the fancy, than words can either convey - or sometimes get rid of. (TS, Vol.V.ch.7, p.356).

Each character in this book can express himself, not only in looks, but also in gesture, - Trim dropping his hat upon the ground speaks volumes on his "sentiments of mortality", and Walter finds an outlet for his impatience at Toby's stupidity by biting his wife's pin cushion (Vol. III, ch.41), - or in sound - Pish, Pshaw, Zounds, . . . Tristram, in writing the book also tries to go beyond the domain of language. His equivalent to gesture is to sketch Trim's flourish with his stick, or to outline the structure of the book with squiggles across the page. He also tries to carry sound into the book -

Ptr..r.r..ing - twing-twang-prit,- trut -  
'tis a cursed bad fiddle ... Diddle, diddle,  
diddle, diddle,diddle,diddle,dum (V.xv,365)

- and he refers at times to Tristram Shandy in terms of music.

Another way Tristram tries to extend the boundaries of language is by coining new words, or by his using nonsense words. Words like "Shandeism", "Tristramed", and "hobby-horse" have their special meanings in relation to Tristram Shandy. Other words also assimilate various meanings to themselves in the context in which Tristram uses them and these account for many of the bawdy double-entendres and witty

word play in the novel - notably the last sentence in the book.

All these attempts, however comic on Tristram's part, to transcend the limits set up by language and to control the meaning of the words he uses, gives rise to a kind of battle for supremacy between Tristram and language itself. At times language gets the upper hand and Tristram is controlled by, rather than controller of, the words on the page. Like his hobby-horse, language can run away with him sometimes. Tristram's awareness of the way in which language can be used is evident in the various styles he is able to command in the novel. He uses legal English in giving us his mother's marriage document, the comment on Trim's sermon is that "the language is good" (TS Vol.II, ch.17,p.142), he enlists the learned sayings of others to support what he himself is saying, John Traugatt examines Tristram as self-conscious rhetor in the book.

Tristram's rhetoric however becomes an art of deception instead of persuasion. Obsession with style detracts from, instead of aiding communication. The major pre-occupation is often the words themselves rather than the meaning of them. This wordiness in Tristram Shandy reduces certain passages near to nonsense. At one point Tristram is carried along until he loses grasp completely on what he is saying ;

I told him, sir, for in good truth, when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards, and forwards to keep all tight in the reader's fancy - which, for my own part, if I did not take heed to do more than at first, there is so much unfixed and equivocal matter starting up, with so many breaks and gaps in it, - and so little service as the stars afford, which nevertheless, I hang up in some of the darkest passages, knowing that the world is apt to lose its way, with all the lights the sun itself at noon day can give it - and now you see, I am lost myself!

(TS.Vol.VI, ch.33, p.444).

Tristram gets led into the same labyrinth of words in his discussion of knots. He illustrates well his meaning by giving the reader knotty language to untangle, so that the passage is, in a sense self-referential.

In the case of knots, - by which, in the first place, I would not be understood to mean slip-knots - because in the course of my life and opinions, - my opinions concerning them will come in more properly when I mention the catastrophe of my great uncle Mr. Hammond Shandy, - a little man - but of high fancy: - he rushed into the Duke of Mammouth's affair: - nor, secondly, in this place, do I mean that particular species of knots, called bow-knots; - there is so little address or skill, or patience required in the unloosing them, that they are below my giving any opinion at all about them. But by the knots I am speaking of, may it please your reverences to believe, that I mean good, honest, devilish tight, hard knots, made bona fida, as Obadiah made his, - in which there is no quibbling provision made by the duplication and return of the two ends of the strings through the annulus or noose made by the second implication of them - to get them slipped and undone by - I hope you apprehend me. (TS.Vol.III.ch.10,p.180).

The note of doubt on which the passage ends indicates Tristram's well-founded suspicion that perhaps his meaning is not clear.

The constant efforts of Tristram to communicate in some way to "convey the same impressions to every other brain" which something "excites in his own" (TS.Vol.IV.ch. 32,p.332), accompanied by such passages as the above in which Tristram is victimized by language and cannot convey what he means in an intelligible and relevant way, leads us to two possible contrasting deductions about language in relation to autonomous realism. (1) Language can be a means of effective communication (when used appropriately by the individual), and as such can enable the individual to escape his isolation and expand the limits of his world by allowing others to share in it, (2) Language itself can deceive and confuse and in setting up barriers between reader and writer, it can prevent rather than aid communication. In such a case, the individual must reconcile himself to having his thoughts locked within himself, and to the solipsistic fear that this may be all that exists anywhere. Tristram uses language in the ways specified by both these categories, but in the end, the published book in our hands, is what testifies to Tristram's success in his endeavour to communicate and to his ability to escape the solipsism which lurks in the book's philosophy.

The real communication which Tristram Shandy

achieves is on a non-linguistic level, however. When Tristram calls for the reader of the book to be a "true feeler" <sup>19</sup>, he is indicating the true realm - that of humour - in which the reader and author meet. Laughter is, for Tristram, the means of holding off the more serious solipsistic implications of the book. Sterne is a firm believer in the power of laughter - "I verily do believe, that by mere Shandeism, sublimated by a laughter-loving people, I fence as much against infirmities, as I do by the benefit of <sup>20</sup> of air and climate"

In his dedication to the first volume of Tristram Shandy, Tristram says

Every time a man smiles - but much more so, when he laughs, it adds something to this fragment of Life. (TS.Vol.1, p.33).

Later he tells us that the book is "written against anything" that it is

Wrote against the spleen, in order by a more frequent, and a more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succussions of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the gall and other bitter juices from the gall-bladder, liver and sweet-bread of his majesty's subjects, with all the inimicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenums. (TS.Vol.IV.ch.22, p.299).

Laughter is also a means of linking Tristram to the reader, thereby overcoming his isolation. Laughter and an appreciation of the comic is something which is always shared.

You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others. Laughter appears to stand in need of an echo. 21

says Bergson. The goings-on in Shandy Hall do not only evoke the laughter of the reader. Tristram can also laugh genially at his father, Toby and Dr. Slop. Tristram, as jester, amuses himself, playing with the novel form, as much as he does with us.

The autonomous realism of the kind exemplified by Tristram Shandy has two important implications. (1) It places man at the centre of his universe, and, since he is sole judge of what is real, he is master and not victim of reality. For the writer, autonomous realism is a tribute to his creative rather than his imitative capacity in relating to the world. (2) As sole judge of what is real, man is isolated and alone in the reality he sees. Language, in itself, is not a sufficient means to communicate and hence arises the solipsistic doubt of the very existence of others. For the writer, creating a literary work is a useless and futile exercise.

The lines of communication Tristram opens are those of laughter. Once this correspondence has been established, the autonomous reality each man has, can in fact appear comic. In this way Tristram nimbly withdraws from the solipsism he would arrive at, if he in fact pushed the implications of autonomous realism to their logical conclusions. As a

result, the autonomous realism of Tristram Shandy retains the initial implication I have outlined - complimentary to both man and artist - but cleverly holds off the second and so avoids scepticism and tragedy.

## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

(i) CRITICISMS OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

(i) A number of pertinent questions remain to be asked regarding autonomous realism itself and Sterne's use of it. Much of the material in the foregoing chapters has been explanatory rather than critical. A critique of autonomous realism is now warranted if we are to decide whether it provides us with a valid alternative to mimetic realism, which has been shown to rely merely on a set of conventions. Is autonomous realism a higher form of realism, and, if so, in what way is it superior? We must then examine the autonomous realism in Sterne, inspecting it more critically than has been done up to this. To what degree does Sterne exploit autonomous realism to its full possibilities? If Tristram Shandy is an experiment, we need to measure its success as such or its failure.

The major virtue of autonomous realism is the freedom which the writer enjoys and his consciousness of it. He is allowed to set up his own rules, or even to have none. "I shall confine myself neither to his (Horace's) rules " says Tristram, "nor to any man's rules that ever lived" (TS.Vol.I, ch.4, p.38). Tristram Shandy demonstrates an extraordinary independence of the rules set up by mimetic fiction - even basic rules of temporality, and narrative

continuity. The writer is not only free from constrictions of this sort, but he is free in a positive way to present what he will. Uninhibited by the need to mimic an abiding reality, the writer is free to present his own reality, and can remain aware that his reality is, in a sense, created by him alone.

The superiority of autonomous realism does not merely reside in the freedom of the writer but also in the part the reader is allowed in the whole enterprise of constructing reality. Since the process at work in the novel, the writer writing and being read, is laid bare, the reader is not deceived into believing in a fictitious world. He is kept ever conscious of the way in which the writer is working on him, and his self-consciousness. (the reader's), rests essentially in the fact that he is aware of how he knows what he knows, and also in the constant riddles and puzzles set for him in the novel. To solve any riddle, one examines not only the riddle itself. One is also forced to place oneself in the same situation, and bring all aspects of one's experience into play, in order to arrive at a solution. The reader of Tristram Shandy is kept self-conscious in this way. Posing a puzzle as to where or when Tristram said his mother was a papist (Vol.1.ch.20,p.82) accompanied by the clue - "I told you as plain, at least as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing" (p.82) is a way of keeping the reader alert and also self-aware. The act of reading Tristram Shandy becomes for

the reader a means of self-knowledge.

Every realist attempts by some means to arrive at truth. The mimetic realist uses a number of means to adjust his fiction to the outside world ("reality") so that we get a simulated reality in the novel - something which seems true. This is the highest truth he can attain.

Tristram's quote points out the major drawback of mimetic realism in this respect - "La Vraisemblance (as Baylet says in the affair of Liceti) n'est pas toujours du Côté de la Verité" (TS.Vol.IV.ch.15, p.290). The major contention of the autonomous realist is that the 'truth' of the book lies in its very existence. The book projects rather than reflects a reality. It does not follow the world but allows "the world run mad after it" (TS.Vol.I.ch.9, p.46). Freedom and self-consciousness are the two gateways to truth in Tristram Shandy - the freedom of the writer to decide himself what is true, and present it, and the self-consciousness of writer and reader which leads to self-knowledge.

Fundamentally Tristram Shandy is an experimental novel, and, like all experimentation, Tristram's efforts undergo a measure of failure as well as success. Some of the techniques Tristram uses in presenting his autonomous reality are very often naive and lacking in subtlety. Tristram seems under constant pressure to reassert his presence in the novel. The presence of a self-conscious narrator

does not necessarily require such crude means as Tristram often employs. Surely autonomous realism can be presented in a more sophisticated way than this -

What a rate I have gone on at, curvetting and frisking it away, two up and two down for four volumes together, without looking once behind, or even on one side of me . . . . (TS.Vol.IV.ch.20.p.296).

Tristram also appears conspicuously when he comments on his problems of writing. It often emerges in many passages that Tristram is not a self-conscious narrator but a narrator who is sometimes deceived or blind to what the novel is. Tristram's mind is sometimes dull and unperceptive. The problem arises from a discrepancy between what Tristram says of the book and what the book actually presents us with. Tristram makes claims for a certain coherence in the novel. Tristram speaks, perhaps facetiously, of a "spirit and connection" (TS.Vol.II,ch.19,p.159) a book needs, a "necessary equipoise and balance (whether good or bad) betwixt chapter and chapter" (TS.Vol.IV.ch.25, p.313). A predominant motif within the novel is that of interruption and disconnection. The opening scene of the novel depicts Tristram's interrupted conception; conversations are constantly cut short in Shandy Hall, either by the snapping of a tobacco pipe (TS.Vol.II,ch.6,p.120) or the opening of a door (TS.Vol.II,ch.7,p.122 also Vol.V.ch.13,p.364); even the parlour door squeaks on its hinges. Attempts to construct bridges, whether it is for Tristram's nose, or for Toby's

battle-field, indicate attempts to connect things again. It is interesting that the book itself ends on an interruption, as in the beginning of the novel, by Mrs. Shandy - "L--d!, said my mother, what is this story all about? -" (TS.Vol.IX,ch.33,p.615). If we presume that Tristram Shandy has a unity, we may see this as Sterne's last paradoxical thrust - the last 'connection' in the book is in fact based on an interruption. But Tristram Shandy, demonstrates more chaos than connection. The disconnections in the story are analogous to the disconnections and disorder rampant in Tristram Shandy itself.

The autonomous realist is not constrained by a set of conventions. Tristram becomes slightly drunk with his freedom and goes too far to let us know he is exercising it. He tries to pursue and catch every thought that passes through his mind. In the haphazard material we get as a result, Tristram plays down the mind's capacity to organize, and its basic tendency to order things in sequence and to see things in patterns.

Other times he orders things according to the demands of the novel.

At one point in Tristram Shandy, Tristram finds himself in danger of forestalling Uncle Toby's amours with the widow Wadman if he explains fully how Toby mistook the bridge which Dr.Slop was constructing, for the drawbridge

of his miniature battle-ground. The dilemma occurs because "three several roads meet at one point" and there is no "guide post in the centre of them . . . to direct an uncertain devil which of the three he is to take"

(TS.Vol.III,ch.23,p.215). Tristram has to make a choice which road to take. The novel requires it. He proceeds to relate the story of Toby's drawbridge. The ultimate freedom for Tristram would be to be able to take all three paths which present themselves. At another stage in the novel, Tristram contends that he has done this "by getting foreward in two different journeys together" (TS.Vol.VII, ch.28, p.492). He states that these two journeys (there are in fact three in the following passage) proceed simultaneously -

.. for I am this moment walking across the market-place of Auxlere with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner - and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broke into a thousand pieces and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the Garonne . . . . (TS.Vol.VII,ch.28 p.492).

Tristram's mind has the freedom to allow all to happen simultaneously. So far the experiment succeeds. The withdrawal however takes place. "Let me collect myself and pursue my journey" and Tristram again makes a choice to pursue the Lyons journey, a choice demanded by the novel. A close

analogy to this occurs in a short story by Jorge Luis Borges, "The Garden of Forking Paths". Stephen Albert finds the key to the maze of Ts'ui Pen's 'novel', "The Garden of Forking Paths".

In all fiction, when a man's faced with alternatives he chooses one at the expense of the others. In the almost unfathomable Ts'ui Pen, he chooses - simultaneously - all of them. He thus creates various futures, various times which start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times. This is the cause of the contradictions in the novel (p.98).

Tristram, when confronted with alternatives finds himself pushed into choosing one. He must cooperate at times with the demands of the novel - in this case that he do, or think one thing rather than another, and one thing at a time. Tristram Shandy is therefore not infinite in the literal way that Ts'ui Pen's "The Garden of Forking Paths" would be, if it were written.

Autonomous realism has been praised because of the freedom and self-consciousness demanded of the reader. For the most part in Tristram Shandy, Tristram allows the reader this freedom. He does not want to give the reader unnecessary material, at one stage, -

But courage! gentle reader! - I scorn it - 'tis enough to have thee in my power, but to make use of the advantage which fortune of the pen has now gained over thee, would be too 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 see the, - naked as I am, I would browse upon the mountains and smile that the north wind brought me neither my tent or my supper. (TS. Vol.VII,ch.6, p.465-6).

Sometimes however, Tristram draws attention to the part the reader plays in the book, in an unnecessarily sensational manner. Leaving blank pages and blank spaces are tricks which cannot achieve the same success on a second reading of the novel. At other times Tristram impinges on the reader's freedom by aiming for a special effect and by trying to play on the reader's feelings. This happens in some of the more sentimental passages of the book. If we take Tristram at face value, when he says - " - when thou considers this, thou wilt not wonder at my uncle Toby's perplexities, - Thou will drop a tear of pity upon his scarp and his counterscarp" (TS.Vol.II.ch.2,p.108). We may deduce that here he is in fact attempting to dictate to the reader a certain reaction to what he has to say. Continual references to "poor Toby" and "poor Trim" may also be seen as ways in which Tristram attempts to manipulate the reader's sympathies for his characters.

In these criticisms of Tristram Shandy I have tried to point out that the novel contains some inconsistencies and blunders. in attempting to construct its autonomous reality, and that there are passages in the novel which are contradictory to some of the principles and virtues, which,

I have shown, belong to autonomous realism. The naivety of some of Tristram's methods only serve to remind us that Tristram Shandy is, after all, an experiment into a new kind of realism. Despite the occasional lapses, however, the novel, for the most part, exemplifies in a successful way (Ch.III illustrates the successful experiments Tristram conducts), a form of realism which provides us with an alternative to mimetic realism, an alternative realism which is for the first time complementary to the artist's and the reader's ability to create a world together, rather than merely the artist's ability to imitate one.

(ii) Sterne in the Eighteenth Century

In the foregoing criticisms of Tristram Shandy's autonomous realism, I have endeavoured to moderate slightly the sophisticated kind of realism I have attributed to it, thereby avoiding the danger of lifting the novel out of its eighteenth century context and allying it too closely to the twentieth century novel. The view of man implicit in autonomous realism is more akin to the philosophy of Wittgenstein than to that of Locke. From the technical point of view, Sterne is writing a novel about problems of communication and the problems a writer encounters in order to gain some kind of control over his material. The eighteenth century did not receive Sterne in this light. Whether Sterne himself intended, or suspected that he had made a radical

move out of his century is questionable. This chapter will conclude by attempting to achieve some sort of balance - (1) by ascertaining the kind of realism Sterne himself intended, and assessing his achievement of what he set out to do; (2) by examining Sterne's humanistic attitude to man, his sentimentalism and his religious beliefs,<sup>2</sup> all of which defeat any notion that Tristram Shandy is a kind of existential novel, and help to replace it more firmly in its eighteenth century context.

By parodying the conventions of mimetic realism, Sterne was not consciously trying to abolish the concept of 'realism' as the eighteenth century understood it, altogether. In Tristram Shandy, he shifts the emphasis from the external to the internal approach. Reality can be depicted by a novelist more truly, Sterne implies, not by describing the outsides of the world and its people, but by entering into the minds of his character and by showing us the workings of the mind of the author himself.<sup>3</sup> This psychological realism nonetheless differed greatly from that of Richardson. The thoughts which pass through Tristram's mind are presented to us in an unprocessed way. Sterne uses Locke's theories of the association of ideas, and of time by duration, for comic effect but in so doing he does show the irrational way in which the mind works at times, and the inconsequential details it can hold. For Sterne this internal approach is a more valid and a higher form of realism since it does not set

up criteria or rules with which the writer must comply in order to be realistic.

The final achievement of this new approach - autonomous realism - is, I believe, far beyond what Sterne actually set out to do. Sterne's outlook is not that of a morose solipsist, nor does this novel bear its desperate implications. Tristram, nor the characters he creates, do not turn inwardly on their solipsistic selves, nor are they ever driven to ride their hobby-horses to the devil, as Captain Ahab does. Sterne may depict man as a creature who clings to false illusions, who is frail and often foolish - but man is not an idiot and is never depraved. He is capable of laughter, pity, love, tolerance and is basically good at heart - and all this implies that he is part of a community of man. A.D. Nuttall cannot believe Tristram Shandy to be "an optimistic book" and senses a "breath<sup>4</sup> of nihilism behind even the most affectionate exchanges of the brothers Shandy". On the contrary, I find the depiction of man in Sterne's works exemplifies aspects of Christian humanism rather than of nihilism. Solipsism may linger in the autonomous reality of Tristram and the hobby-horses of his characters. It is never allowed to peep through. A discussion of the ramifications of Sterne's humanitarian outlook, and his humanism, in Tristram Shandy, will help to show how the other side of autonomous realism the solipsism, nihilism and tragic absurdity of man's existence, are never clearly focused

in the novel. If they were, Tristram Shandy could take its place with ease among the existential novels of the twentieth century. As it is, the novel bears clear marks of its eighteenth century context and "Sterne, though he qualifies, still continues and elaborates the affirmations of his great predecessors and contemporaries in prose fiction.<sup>5</sup>"

The aim of the following discussion is to help accommodate autonomous realism and its implications I have put forward, (particularly that of solipsism), to Sterne's own temperament and profession, thereby tempering somewhat its 'modernity' and emphasizing its eighteenth century characteristics, tone and atmosphere.

Many of the sentimental passages that come under consideration in this discussion, must, for my purposes be taken at face value and not as ironical, purposely sentimental, passages arising equally ironical feeling in the reader. At times the irony cannot be denied - for eg. When Tristram recounts the tale of the ass he met at Lyons, hands him a macaroon, not out of kindness but for the pleasure "of seeing how an ass would eat a macaroon - than of benevolence in giving him one, which presided in the act" (TS.Vol.VII, ch.xxxii, p.499). For all this, I do not accept the contention by one critic, that the description of Le Fever is "artful in the wrong way" and that we have not warm feeling but the "relish of the connoisseur". Sterne's expression of his view of man as a charitable creature is not limited

merely to sentimental episodes in the novel - which to some seem dubious in their sincerity. This attitude is reinforced in the sermons, to which I refer, since they can be taken completely seriously. Apart from the actual episodes cited, the atmosphere that prevails in Shandy Hall is one of goodwill and tolerance. No one comes to harm, and if they do, it is through a mistake or a blunder, never through purposeful maliciousness.

Man's innate goodness of heart is manifested in Tristram Shandy in a number of instances. At the beginning of the book we are presented with Parson Yorick's charity towards the midwife, at his own personal loss. Another notable instance of man showing kindness to his fellow man is the story of Le Fever. To be charitable is in fact an aspect of being human. This clearly stated in Toby's conversation with Trim

Thou hast left this matter short, said my uncle Toby to the corporal, as he was putting him to bed - and I will tell thee in what, Trim. - In the first place, when thou madest an offer of my services, to Le Fever, - as sickness and travelling are both expensive, and then knowest he was but a poor lieutenant with a son to subsist as well as himself out of his pay, - that thou didst not make an offer to him of my purse; because, had he stood in need thou knowest, Trim, he had been as welcome to it as myself. - Your honour knows, said the corporal, I had no orders; - True, quoth my uncle Toby, - thou didst very right, Trim, as a soldier, - but certainly very wrong as a man.

(TS.Vol.VI.ch.8, p.410)

Man's pity for the sufferings of another is emphasized throughout the novel in such touching scenes as Trim reading his sermon -

To be convinced of this, go with me a moment into the prisons of the Inquisition: - (God help my poor brother Tom) - 'Behold Religion, with Mercy and Justice chained down under her feet, .... Hark! - hark! what a piteous groan!' (Here Trim's face turned as pale as a ashes 'See the melancholy wretch who uttered it', - (Here the tears began to trickle down) ... (TS.Vol.II, ch.17, p.153).

- again his pity for the grenadier in Mackay's regiment that Toby mentions, causing Toby to say to him -

'Twould be a pity, Trim, ..... that thou shouldst ever feel sorrow of thy own - thou feelest it so tenderly for others. (TS.Vol.IV. ch.4. p.277).

Toby's sympathy for Walter whose misfortunes he supposes at one point "had disordered his brain" -

- 'May the Lord God of heaven and earth protect him and restore him', said my uncle Toby, praying silently for my father, and with tears in his eyes. (TS.Vol.V. ch.3, p.350.)

In this instance, the context in which the event took place to arouse such feelings is that of a comic misunderstanding between Toby and Walter. In view of this situation, perhaps this passage is one which may be treated as more sceptical or comic rather than a sincere portrayal of human feelings. The fact that Toby's deep sympathy for Walter is in fact

misplaced and unwarranted would tend to suggest this view. Toby's benevolence extends to even a fly. This kind of goodwill among men also occurs in many of the sermons, this time in an explicitly Christian context.

It emerges in many of the passages of the sort seen in Tristram Shandy that Sterne conceives of man as one who is more easily capable of feeling than of reasoning. Toby may find it hard to understand Walter, but this does not prevent him shedding tears for him. In Tristram Shandy it is through the workings of the heart that the characters are bound together. In The Sentimental Journey Sterne concentrates even more on the feelings. He emphasizes his purpose when he says "I told you my design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do - so it runs most upon those gentler passions and affections, which aid so much to it<sup>7</sup>". This sentimentalism in Sterne is part of the shift made in the attitude to man, in the latter half of the eighteenth century.

As the eighteenth century wore on, it was discovered that the 'Nature' of man was not his 'Reason' at all, but his instincts, emotions, and sensibilities, and what was more, people began to glory in this discovery, and to regard reason as an aberration from 'Nature'. Cogito ergo sum is superseded by the je sens, donc je suis, associated with Rousseau. 8

In showing the workings of the heart and man's kindness towards his fellow man, Sterne emphasizes the basic

fellowship and brotherhood that should exist between men, not their isolation from each other. Man is not a lone, solitary creature, since he is possessed of a heart and an inclination to love and to do good. To attribute to Sterne the man, any strong inclinations towards solipsism is dangerous in the light of such references as those quoted by Fluchère from his various writings;

. . . in the midst of the loudest vaunt-ings of philosophy, Nature will have her yearnings for society and friendship, - a good heart wants some object to be kind to - and the best part of our blood, and the purest of our spirits, suffer most under the destitution. 9

- Surely - surely, man - it is not good for thee to sit alone - thou wast made for social intercourse and gentle greetings  
..... 10

So far, I have extracted from Sterne's writings a vision of man which sees him as charitable, intuitively good, and by nature sociable. He is not however perfect, and Sterne also takes care to stress the frailty and weakness of man throughout Tristram Shandy, particularly on the sexual level. The theme of impotence runs throughout  
11  
the novel. Not only is it present on the physical level by hints at the sexual inadequacies of Toby and Walter, by Tristram's accident with the window, by the aspersion cast on Walter's bull at the end of the novel, but it also prevails in the minds of the characters, most notably by the presentation of so much sterile learning in the mind of

Walter Shandy. Man may be weak and often inadequate but in Tristram Shandy this does not evoke disgust of man or a rejection of mankind. Tristram does not turn away from mankind in the way Gulliver does; when Sterne says, "I deny I have gone as far as Swift"<sup>12</sup>, we may apply it also to his indulgent attitude towards mankind and the underlying optimism for man in Tristram Shandy.

The humanitarian outlook in Tristram Shandy is based largely on Sterne's tolerance. Despite Walter's and Toby's obvious alienation from each other each time they attempt an intelligent discussion, nonetheless, a certain tolerance in their natures prevents either of them from ever reacting viciously towards the other. Each man may have his own conceptions or illusions of reality, but this should only help to strengthen his ability to compromise and to make allowances for others. The same attitude of tolerance is encouraged in the reader. Tristram repeatedly evokes our sympathy for his characters, particularly Toby and Trim. Because of this, the laughter Tristram Shandy evokes is always genial and sympathetic, never derisive.

In the opening chapters of the novel, Sterne tells us, "so long as a man rides his hobby-horse peaceably and quietly along the King's highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him, - pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it? (TS.Vol.1.ch.7,p.43), and this is what Tristram himself attempts to do - "I'll tread upon no one,

... I'll take a good rattling gallop, but I'll not hurt the poorest jackass upon the road" (TS.Vol.IV.ch.20,p.296)

When Sterne was once accused of modelling some of his characters on real people he replied that "All locality is taken out of the book - the satire general"<sup>13</sup> Although Sterne himself may have had a particular individual in mind, he does not explicitly acknowledge it. The only character in the novel presented in a not-so sympathetic light, is the figure of Dr.Slop, but even so, Tristram does not give him any real detestable qualities. A notable feature of Tristram Shandy is the absence of a villian. The misfortunes that occur in the Shandy household are due, for the most part to chance, not to any evil element in human society.

Sterne's creatures are absurd, but they are never ridiculed for their faults and follies. Sterne admits that man can be ridiculous - in this he is realistic in a pragmatic way - but he is always ready to tolerate this rather than despair. His tolerance does not derive from any complacency about man, but ultimately from his faith in God who created him.

The basic contention of the solipsist that "I alone exist", will inevitably bring into question the existence of God. In the context of autonomous realism one may be led from the statement "I make my own reality" to ask the questions - "did God, then, not make the world?" and "do we exist in God's reality?". Sterne's realism, as I have shown

bears the seeds of solipsism but he never comes near the point of questioning God's existence or man's place in God's world. Such a view, Sterne knows, would reduce man to nothing.

However firmly we may think we stand, -  
 the best of us are but upheld, and  
 graciously kept upright; and whenever  
 this divine assistance is withdrawn, -  
 or suspended, - all history and espec-  
 ially the sacred, is full of melancholy  
 instances of what man is, when God  
 leaves him to himself, - that he is  
 even a thing of nought. 14

Sterne never arrives at this nihilism. In Tristram Shandy Toby is the character through whom the all-important assertion is made.

'Tis by the assistance of Almighty God,  
 cried my uncle Toby, looking up, and  
 pressing the palms of his hands close  
 together - 'tis not from our own  
 strength, brother Shandy - a sentinel  
 in a wooden sentry-box, might as well  
 pretend to stand out against a detach-  
 ment of fifty men, - we are upheld by the  
 grace and the assistance of the best of  
 Beings.  
 (TS.Vol.IV.ch.7, p.279).

Sterne's humane outlook and his firm religious beliefs, help him avoid the more revolutionary, and more frightening, aspects of autonomous realism. Uncle Toby, by right, belongs to the benevolent tradition of characters, among figures like Don Quixote, Mr.Allworthy, and Parson Adams. All this helps us to keep in mind that Tristram Shandy is, after all, a book written by a clergyman in the eighteenth century, not a twentieth century existential

novel. It also goes to show that although he presented us with a successful and avant-garde alternative to mimetic realism, Sterne, like Walter Shandy, hardly "knowing the names of his tools", deserves credit that he "should be able to work after that fashion with 'em". (TS.Vol.I, ch.19,p.79).

## FOOTNOTES

## Introduction

- <sup>1</sup>As quoted by Christopher Ricks in his "Introduction" to the Penguin Edition of Tristram Shandy, p.8.
- <sup>2</sup>Samuel Richardson, Letter to Mark Hildesly, Jan/Feb. 1761, as quoted in Alan Howes, ed., Sterne: The Critical Heritage (London and Boston, 1974), p.128.
- <sup>3</sup>F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (London, 1948).
- <sup>4</sup>Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, Vol.I
- <sup>5</sup>Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel, Form and Function (New York, 1953).
- <sup>6</sup>D.W. Jefferson, "Tristram Shandy and its Tradition" in From Dryden to Johnson, Pelican Guide To English Literature, ed., Boris Ford, (Hammondsworth, 1957), pp.333-345.
- <sup>7</sup>E.M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (London, 1927), p.99.
- <sup>8</sup>A.D. Nuttall, A Common Sky, Philosophy and the Literary Imagination (London, 1974).
- <sup>9</sup>R.A. Lanham, Tristram Shandy: The Games of Pleasure (London, 1973).
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.28-29.

## Chapter I

- <sup>1</sup>For a more extensive discussion of the influence of Puritan ideas on the novel, see Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp.60,177.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp.11-12.

<sup>4</sup>George Becker, "Modern Realism as a Literary Movement" in Documents of Modern Literary Realism (Princeton, New Jersey 1973), p.80.

<sup>5</sup>Gusstave Flaubert, Letter to J-K. Huysmans, Feb/March 1879, as quoted in Becker, Documents , p.96.

<sup>6</sup>Erich Heller, "The Realistic Fallacy" in his The Artist's Journey into the Interior, and Other Essays ( New York, 1959), p.94.

<sup>7</sup>The "naive realist", to use Grant's term, by ignoring the part he plays in creating the work, and by absenting himself from the book, attempts to disclaim that such prejudice exists. (Damian Grant, Realism (London, 1970 ),p.71.)

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Hardy, as quoted in Miriam Allott, Novelists on the Novel (New York, 1966),p.1.

<sup>9</sup>Watt, The Rise Of the Novel, p.32.

<sup>10</sup>Samuel Richardson, Postscript to Clarissa, as quoted by R.G. Davis in "The Sense of the Real in English Fiction",Comparitive Literature, III (1951), p.211.

<sup>11</sup>Joshua Reynolds, Letter to the Idler, 1759, as quoted by Davis, "The Sense of the Real in English Fiction", p.211.

<sup>12</sup>C.G. Kraft, "Against Realism; Some Thoughts on Fiction, Story, and Reality", College English, XXXI (1970), pp.345-346.

<sup>13</sup>Guy de Maupassant, 'Le Roman', Introduction to Pierre et Jean, (1888), as quoted in Allott, Novelists on the Novel,p.71.

- <sup>14</sup>George Levine, "Realism, or, In Praise of Lying", College English, XXXI (1970), 355-365.
- <sup>15</sup>Q.G. Kraft, "Against Realism", p.353.
- <sup>16</sup>John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (London, 1964), II,ii.
- <sup>17</sup>Nuttall, A Common Sky, p.54.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p.55.
- <sup>19</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.163.

## Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.74.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p.90.
- <sup>3</sup>Laurence Sterne, The Life And Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Penguin English Library Edition, ed., G. Petrie, (New York & London, 1967). Hereafter cited as TS. All parenthetical references are to this edition.
- <sup>4</sup>Tristram's remarks on techniques of writing may also be attributed to Sterne, who in fact is writing the book through Tristram. In passages of the sort quoted above, Sterne and his narrator, Tristram, are indistinguishable.
- <sup>5</sup>Forster, Aspects of the Novel, p.99.
- <sup>6</sup>This aspect of Tristram Shandy is clearly brought out in "Sternian Realities" in The Winged Skull; Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference, eds. A.H. Cash and J.M.

Stedmond.

### Chapter III

<sup>1</sup>A comparison may be drawn regarding this, between Tristram Shandy and two passages in Satre's La Nausée, which Nuttall refers to, (p.173);

To make us understand that he perceived another man's hand in an entirely new light, Roquentin-Satre says it was like a maggot.....A tram divorced from function becomes a bleeding belly.

<sup>2</sup>Curtis, Letters, p,411.

<sup>3</sup>C. Parish, "The Nature of Mr Tristram Shandy, Author", Boston Univ. Studies in English, V (1961), 74-90.

<sup>4</sup>W.C. Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction before Tristram Shandy", ELH, XXII (1955), 125-135.

<sup>5</sup>Henri Fluchère, Laurence Sterne, de l'homme à l'oeuvre (Paris, 1961), p.354.

<sup>6</sup>A.E. Dyson, "Sterne: The Novelist as Jester", Critical Quarterly, IV (1962), 309-320.

<sup>7</sup>N.N. Holland, "The Laughter of Sterne", Hudson Review, IX (1956), 422-430.

<sup>8</sup>Fluchère, Laurence Sterne, p.356.

<sup>9</sup>A. Ridgeway, "Two Authors in Search of a Reader", James Joyce Quarterly, I (1964), 41-51.

<sup>10</sup>R.J. Griffin, "Tristram Shandy and Language", College English, XXIII (1962), 108-112.

<sup>11</sup>B.H. Lehman, "Of Time, Personality, and the Author", Studies

in the Comic, Univ. of California Publications in English, III (1941), 234-250.

<sup>12</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.68.

<sup>13</sup>Lehman, "Of Time, Personality,....", p.250.

<sup>14</sup>Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator..".

<sup>15</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.411.

<sup>16</sup>Locke, Essay, III,ii.

<sup>17</sup>Sterne emphasizes the efficacy of gesture again, when he says; "..but as the Philosopher would use no other argument against the Sceptic, who disputed the reality of motion save that of rising up upon his legs, and walking across the room." (TS, Vol.I, ch.24, p.99).

<sup>18</sup>John Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1954).

<sup>19</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.411.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p.163.

<sup>21</sup>Henri Bergson, Laughter, An Essay in the Comic (London, 1911).

#### Chapter IV

<sup>1</sup>Jorge Luis Borges, Ficciones (New York, 1962).

<sup>2</sup>These aspects, I am aware, have been dealt with by various critics. I am more concerned with their connection with the solipism that lurks in autonomous realism.

<sup>3</sup>In "The Revolt of Sterne", A.A. Mendilow sees this shift as the basis of Sterne's modernity;

Sterne's awareness of the degree to which the accepted conventions limited the expression of the great inwardness in fiction, and the discrepancy between reality and fictional illusion, is what makes him so strikingly akin to modern writers.

Laurence Sterne, A Collection of Critical Essays, ed., J.

Traugott, (New Jersey, 1968), p.91. Sterne's modernity does derive partly from this, but also from something deeper which this thesis explores.

<sup>4</sup>Nuttall, A Common Sky, p.72.

<sup>5</sup>A.D. McKillop, "The Reinterpretation of Laurence Sterne", Études Anglaises, VII (1954), p.47.

<sup>6</sup>Nuttall, A Common Sky, p.76.

<sup>7</sup>Curtis, Letters, p.410.

<sup>8</sup>Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Background (London, 1961), p.108.

<sup>9</sup>Sermon XVIII, "The Levite and the Concubine", as quoted in Fluchère, p.582.

<sup>10</sup>Sterne, The Sentimental Journey, ed., D. Grant, (Harvard, 1967), p.570.

<sup>11</sup>The Sexual themes of Tristram Shandy have been fully discussed by A.R. Towers, in "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story", ELH, XXIV (1957), 12-29.

<sup>12</sup>Curtis, Letters, p. 76.

<sup>13</sup>ibid., p.81.

<sup>14</sup>Sermon XXXVIII, "On Enthusiasm", as quoted in Fluchère, p.457.

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