

TRISTRAM SHANDY: HUMOUR

TRISTRAM SHANDY: A REFLECTION
OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF HUMOUR

by

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

October, 1969

MASTER OF ARTS (1969)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Tristram Shandy: A Reflection of the Development of
Humour.

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SUPERVISOR: Professor Graham Petrie

NUMBER OF PAGES: vi, 134

DEDICATION

To my parents, as an expression
of gratitude and love.

PREFACE

The question of what makes people laugh has puzzled men, no doubt, from the beginning of creation. The person with the talent of making others laugh is welcomed in every company, for he spreads good-cheer and contributes to man's happiness and well-being. The evocation of laughter, at best a difficult task, as shown by the many stage and television comedians who subject their audiences to painful un-funny experiences, is especially difficult in literary works, which must rely upon words without the aid of facial expression and bodily motion. The author who can evoke spontaneous laughter through his work is rarely encountered and doubly appreciated.

Laurence Sterne, in his novel Tristram Shandy, manifests the ability to prompt the response of laughter in many varying shades, ranging from the amused appreciative titter to the spontaneous outburst. Sterne's novel is essentially a humorous work. It reflects the growth of English humour, indicating its past developments and anticipating the turn which it was to take in the future.

It is the intention of this thesis to trace the concept of English humour, both in its historical development and in its modern interpretation. It is the purpose especially to examine Tristram Shandy as a humorous work,

describing its reflection of the development of humour in the past through Sterne's utilization of the hobby-horse in the delineation of character, showing its transitional stage in an examination of Tristram the humorous narrator, and pointing out its qualities which foresee the defining characteristics of modern humour in a discussion of the novel's humorous vision. It is hoped that the examination is not a valueless and uninteresting one. Most of all, it is hoped that it will not divest the book of its funny element, but will enhance its enjoyment through the analysis of its techniques and qualities.

I would like to express my appreciation of the kindly and patient assistance of Professor Graham Petrie throughout the preparation of this thesis, and also of the many interesting conversations both about the thesis topic and about films. I would like to thank Dr. B. N. Rosenblood for the loan of his articles about Tristram Shandy and Mrs. Margaret Belec, of the Department of Romance Languages, for her frantic and capable typing of this manuscript. I would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance of McMaster University and the encouragement of my parents, without whom this endeavor would, of course, be impossible.

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CHAPTER I

HUMOUR: ITS ORIGIN AND NATURE

The term "humour" is a common one frequently encountered in ordinary discourse. A random eavesdropping on several conversations will surely result in comments as: "'so-and-so' has a great sense of humour", "it was real humour", "he should be a professional humorist". The term humour in ordinary speech is used often as a synonym for the laughable. The expression "sense of humour" is as familiar as "common sense" or "sense of beauty", the words "sense" and "humour" being used with a wide range of significance. The word "humorist", likewise, is used loosely to mean simply a person skilled in telling or writing amusing stories and jokes.

The vagueness of the term "humour" as employed in everyday discourse is reflected in dictionary definitions, centered as they are upon current usage and generally accepted meanings of words. Rarely is an attempt made to assign to the word a more specialized connotation. After a description of its historical origin in the medieval theory of humours, humour is defined simply as: "the quality that makes something seem funny, amusing, or ludicrous; comicality",¹ or: "facetious turn of thought; playful fancy;

p. 708. ¹Webster's New World Dictionary (Toronto, 1960),

jocularly; drollery".² Similarly, a humorist is described as a: "Facetious person; humorous talker, actor or writer";³ or: "One who displays or exercises humour; a wag" and "A professional writer or entertainer whose work is humorous".⁴

The loose meaning of the word itself and the several changes undergone by it in its historical development have understandably resulted in some measure of confusion in its use by literary critics. Broadly equating humour with comicality, many critics disregard the precise meaning of the term, linked directly to its historical development and to its original interpretation with regard to English literature. The specific meaning of the term "humour", designating a particular variety of the comic, contrasted with other subdivisions as satire, irony, whimsicality, wit and caricature, has to a great extent disappeared.

Before humour as a subspecies of the comic can be examined, it is necessary to look briefly at the larger categories to which it belongs. The evasive quality of laughter, its resistance to abstract definitions and its

²Britannica World Language Edition of Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary (Chicago, 1959), I, 615.

³The Concise Oxford Dictionary (Oxford, 1964), p. 592.

⁴Britannica, p. 615.

tendency to disappear when attempts are made to understand it render any discussion of it difficult at the outset. Many approaches to the laughable or ludicrous are possible. It may be viewed physiologically, a study being made of bodily behaviour and of the neuro-muscular processes involved in laughter. It may be approached psychologically in an examination of the unconscious and the relationship of the ludicrous to dreaming. A philosophical study, relating laughter to all knowledge and reality, and an aesthetic approach, examining the ludicrous in art, are also possible. Laughter, an inextricable part of living, seems to pervade all facets of life. It is sufficient for the purposes of this study to accept laughter as an aspect of human behaviour and to designate the ludicrous simply as the laughable or as that which causes laughter.

The comic, on the other hand, is the ludicrous with some intellectual appeal. The necessity of intellection for the genuinely comic has been attested by such writers as Meredith, Bergson and Freud. Meredith states that to laugh at everything is to have no appreciation of the comic. The purely comic, the "first-born of common sense",⁵ is addressed to the intellect. The comic poet aims

⁵ George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy" in Comedy, intro. and app. by W. Sypher (New York, 1956), 33.

at the head, touching and kindling the mind through laughter, for "the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter".⁶ Bergson, although hesitating to imprison the comic spirit within a definition, maintains that an absence of feeling is a necessary condition for laughter: "To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart. Its appeal is to intelligence, pure and simple."⁷ Freud, in his discussion of Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious also relegates the comic to the sphere of thoughtful activity produced in the foreconscious of the mind, the pleasure of the comic arising from an "economy of expenditure in thought".⁸

A significant characteristic of the comic is the incorporation into its domain of many diverse elements which seemingly ought to be excluded from its principal function of affording amusement. The modern interpretation of comedy in terms of existentialism and absurdity causes a laughter so raw that it can scarcely be distinguished from tragic response. The Renaissance and Restoration linking of comedy with satire and of laughter with ridicule and

⁶Meredith, p. 47.

⁷Henri Bergson, "Laughter" in ibid., 63-4.

⁸Sigmund Freud, "Wit and Its Relation to the

with a scornful expression of superiority to a deformed thing⁹ is hardly light-hearted. Yet comedy, although including such elements as satire, the ridiculous and the grotesque, implies a basic acceptance and affirmation of life. Even in the comedy of the absurd, the comic artist begins by accepting the absurd and the irrational in human existence. By portraying the doggedly unquenchable spirit of absurd man in all his weaknesses, the comic artist gives hope for mankind in the face of a desperate existence.

In more conventional comedy, the moral and metaphysical frame of life is not usually challenged. Comedy reveals truth largely in a negative way, by exposing contradictions and conflicting appearances as false. It suggests that despite irrational appearances, things have a rational structure. This results in a fundamental gaiety regarding the trials of existence. Comedy often approaches human nature from the outside, stressing the life of the

Unconscious" in The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud, tr. and ed. A. A. Brill (New York, 1938), 803.

⁹During the Restoration period, the main exponent of malevolent laughter was Thomas Hobbes, who gained a large following for his interpretation of laughter in terms of the "sudden glory" theory. In Leviathan, he stated that: "Sudden glory, is the passion which maketh those grimaces called LAUGHTER; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own, that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves." As quoted in Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist (Chicago, 1960), p. 46.

body and its incongruity with the aspirations of the spirit. The appreciation of the comic is generally incidental and episodic, the sudden reversals of fortune and vital threats to the characters gaily treated resulting in comic action and situations. The dialogue is marked by jesting and wit. The ending is usually happy, for at the bottom of the adversities encountered by the characters, there is an intimation of a balance in the nature of things.

Humour is a particular variety of the comic. Although commonly merged in the indiscriminate field of the comic and not easily distinguishable from it, humour as Louis Cazamian points out, is "not every kind and aspect of the comic, but a province within that empire. Shifting and loose as the value of the word has undoubtedly become again, it was rather more precise and restricted for a period of time; and at the center of its widened range nowadays there does persist a core of that more solid and specialized connotation."¹⁰ Humour, as in Cazamian's study of the subject, evades exact definition. Yet it is not simply a synonym for the ludicrous or the comic. A humorous work, although both evoking laughter and partaking of many characteristics of comedy, has certain qualities peculiar to it alone. Humour and comedy are not mutually exclusive; an eye for the comic is the best qualification of the

¹⁰ Louis Cazamian, The Development of English Humor

humorist. Humour, in fact, is linked to other species of the comic. On one side, it shades off into an extravagant release, an irresponsible flow of animal spirits and popular farce. On the other, it becomes the artistic and intellectual elaboration of comic points.¹¹

The study of humour in its precise meaning is inseparable from the theory of humours. The evolution of the term "humour" is marked by three main stages: the medieval physiological theory, the Jonsonian meaning, and the modern meaning which exists side-by-side with the other two meanings. Besides this, for a time, humour came to be closely associated with benevolence and amiability, the humorous character being looked upon with pride as the laudable product of his English heritage.

The physiological theory of the four humours, according to Cazamian, can be traced in England at least from the fourteenth century. The theory, advanced initially by Hippocrates and developed by Galen, established a connection between the four chief liquids of the human body: blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile, and the four corresponding elements: air, water, fire and earth respectively. It was believed that a person's health and the original features

(Durham, 1952), p. 4.

¹¹Based upon Cazamian's distinction between humour of release and humour de finesse. See ibid., p. 25ff.

of his character were determined by the state of his humours, a healthy individual and a perfect temperament resulting when the humours were well-balanced and conversely, disease and exaggerated characteristics occurring when the humours were disproportionately mingled.

With the passage of time, the emphasis was shifted from the normal to the abnormal aspect of the significance of humours. The exaggerated characteristics produced by a disordered state of the humours and thus the peculiar forms of mental variation from the norm were stressed. The sanguine man, having a dominance of blood, was beneficent cheerful and amorous. The phlegmatic man was dull, sluggish and cowardly. The choleric man with a dominance of yellow bile was irritable and easily angered, while the melancholic man, dominated by black bile, was gloomy, unenterprising and soberly musing. The pronounced idiosyncracies of character were associated with the notions of oddity and eccentricity. By the latter half of the sixteenth century, the accepted meaning of the word "humour", as described by the New English Dictionary, was: "a particular disposition, inclination, or liking, especially one having no apparent ground or reason; mere fancy, whim, caprice, freak, vagary".¹²

¹²As quoted in Cazamian, p. 310.

The relationship of the theory of humours to literature and in particular to comic drama was brought to the fore in the late sixteenth century both by the plays of Ben Jonson and by his pronouncements on the subject. Although occurring in literary works as early as those of Chaucer, the theory was popularized by Jonson in his two plays: Every Man in His Humour (acted 1598) and Every Man out of His Humour (1599). In the introduction to Every Man out of His Humour, Jonson gives definitive status to the dramatic use of humours:

Why, Humour (as 'tis ens) we thus define it
 To be a quality of aire or water,
 And in it selfe holds these two properties,
 Moisture and fluxure. . . .
 . . . So in euery humane body
 The choller, melancholy, flegme, and bloud,
 By reason that they flow continually
 In some one part, and are not continent,
 Receiue the name of Humours. Now thus farre
 It may, by Metaphore, apply it selfe
 Vnto the generall disposition:
 As when some one peculiar quality
 Doth so possesse a man, that it doth draw
 All his affects, his spirits, and his powers,
 In their confluxions, all to runne one way,
 This may be truly said to be a Humour.¹³

In his definition, Jonson stresses the psychological or temperamental aspect of the humours theory, as opposed to its merely physical interpretation. The definition is introduced, however, as a protest against the abuse of the

¹³ Ben Jonson, "Every Man out of His Humour", ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson (Oxford, 1927), 431-2.

word "humour". Jonson distinguishes two kinds of humour as applied to disposition. He speaks of true humour as an overbalance or an excess of characteristics, formed when one peculiar quality so dominates a man that it overshadows all others, causing him to be completely orientated in one direction. Then there is affected humour, based upon manners and exhibited by men who attempt to cloak their foppery and slavish following of fashion under the word "humour".

In his two Humour plays, Jonson is concerned more with satirizing affected humours than with portraying natural though ridiculous overbalances. In Every Man in His Humour, although all the characters exhibit a pre-dominant trait to a greater or lesser degree, the focus is upon the group of gulls: Master Stephen, Master Matthew and Bobadill. All three are poseurs, pretending to wit and wisdom, yet having none. Neither the truly humorous characters nor those who affect humours are developed throughout the play. To a greater or lesser extent, the characters are used as vehicles of satire, the gulls being satirized directly and the other characters, although not expressly criticized, being governed by an implicitly satirical approach in their creation.

Jonson's contribution to the development of humour is based not only on his popularization of the metaphorical aspect of the humours theory. Although Jonson's intent in

creating his humorous characters was mainly satirical, it was also comic. This resulted in an association of humours with comedy and laughter and it was then a short step to the development of a new notion of humour, founded upon a linking of humours with cheerfulness, amiability and benevolence.

The change took place during the highly analytical age of the Restoration and Augustan periods. It was a progressive one, resulting in much confusion with regard to humour in the late seventeenth and the greater part of the eighteenth centuries. Humour, along with laughter, comedy and wit, became the subject of many controversies, while philosophers, literary theorists and critics tried to assign to these terms their proper domains. At the same time, a significant development occurred in, what Cazamian terms, "the obscurer mind of the nation".¹⁴ The person possessing a humour in the Jonsonian sense became conscious that his humour caused the laughter of his fellow-beings. Consequently, he began to exploit this humour as a source of enjoyment and comedy, all the while maintaining the appearance of being unconscious of its comic effect. The shrewd onlooker, however, was amused not only by the manifestations of the humour but also by his perception of the humorist's intent. This change from the passive

¹⁴Cazamian, p. 322.

unconscious manifestation of humour to its active conscious sense marked the development of the term from the Jonsonian to the modern meaning. The objective sense of the word "humour", denoting "a mode of being which is unconscious of itself, and is perceived as a fact by persons other than the one who harbors it", became the subjective modern sense we know today, in which "everything. . .hangs upon the sly intention of a conscious mind; and. . .the perception and enjoyment of that intent by other persons actualizes a virtual energy of significance, raising it to its full value."¹⁵

The new concepts of humour, formulated during the Restoration and Augustan periods, were bound inextricably with discussions of laughter, comedy and wit. A reconsideration, directly in critical works and indirectly in the comical works themselves, of the proper objects of laughter and comedy led to a shift in the attitude toward both. The trend of argument with regard to laughter showed a progression from a negative view of laughter to a positive one. Laughter, associated with the mirth of profane rakes and wits, and interpreted in terms of superiority and ridicule, came to be accepted as a pleasant

¹⁵Cazamian, p. 321.

and natural human emotion, prompted by the perception of incongruity in ideas and objects.¹⁶ The attribution of laughter to incongruity made the alliance of laughter with benevolence if not inevitable, at least possible, as was evidenced in the writings of Hutcheson and Beattie.¹⁷

Humours, associated traditionally with satire, similarly underwent a process of change. The term "humour" came to indicate disposition in the commonly heard phrase "good humour". "Good humour", in its turn, was associated with and an outward manifestation of "good nature", which itself was an integral aspect of benevolence. At the same time, humours, as dominant personality traits, came to be regarded as characteristically English, proud libertarian forces founded upon a confidence in nature and nation. No longer

¹⁶The change in the attitude toward laughter is capsulated in the shift of prominence and popularity from Hobbes's sudden glory theory of malevolent laughter to Hutcheson's theory of incongruous laughter, which, if not immediately influential, led eventually to other discussions of incongruous laughter, such as Alexander Gerard's Essay on Taste, Lord Kames' Elements of Criticism, and James Beattie's Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition.

¹⁷Both Hutcheson and Beattie, by making laughter affectionate, good-humoured and good-natured, associated it with the benevolist creed. Hutcheson, in his third paper on laughter to the Dublin Journal, ascertained that laughter was nature-given as an avenue to pleasure and a remedy for sorrow; it was contagious like all affections and a bond of friendship. Similarly, Beattie, in the Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition, ascribed one kind of laughter to good humour, linking it with Christian "humility, gentleness, and kind affection" which bring out the "tender sympathies of our social nature". See Tave, pp. 68-87.

characters to be ridiculed, the humorists¹⁸ were usually good-natured individuals who frequently exhibited benevolent sentiments of the heart. The two qualities of incongruity and benevolence were thus found to be united in both laughter and humours. Laughter, prompted by the perception of incongruities, was easily stimulated by the incongruous oddness and eccentricity of the humorous character. An expression of good nature, laughter struck a sympathetic chord with the benevolence commonly found in the humorist. The success of the union of the new concepts of both laughter and humours was evidenced in the increasingly frequent presentation in the comical works of the period of humorous amiable characters, whose peculiarities were not satirically instructive, but were in themselves the objects of delight and love.

Although at almost any point during the Restoration and Augustan periods, the attitude toward humours was various and the ambiguous use of the word itself indicated its state of flux, it is nevertheless possible to trace the general evolution of both the concept and the term in the

¹⁸During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the usage of the term "humorist" shifted from the Elizabethan meaning, synonymous with satirist and referring to the artist whose material was the humours of others, to a denotation signifying the man who possesses a humour. See Corbyn Morris' distinction between a "Humourist" and a "Man of Humour" below.

intellectual dialogue of the times. It is, however, necessary to note that this discussion, like all simplifications, may be misleading. In the attempt to trace the general outline of the development of humour, it is hoped that the unavoidable simplifying will be regarded not as a superficial view of a complex topic, but rather as a necessary breaking-down of the subject into its component parts, which are rendered increasingly more complex in direct proportion to the width of the perspective from which they are viewed. The schematic tracing of the discussions of humour in the latter part of the seventeenth and in the eighteenth centuries is consequently a mere surface indication of the growth of the concept of humour. A more detailed picture of the period would reflect the many opposing notions with regard to humour, the development of which was inherent in the active discussions of the topic.

The attitude toward humours of a Restoration or eighteenth century author was often determinable by his attitude toward Ben Jonson. Shadwell, an enthusiastic admirer of Jonson, regarded him as "incomparably the best Drammatick Poet that ever was, or, I believe, ever will be".¹⁹ Taking his cue from Jonson, he considered a humour

¹⁹As quoted in Tave, p. 135.

to be an activity of the mind:

A Humour is the Biass of the Mind,
By which with Violence 'tis one Way inclin'd;
It makes our Action lean on one Side still,
And in all changes that way bends our will.²⁰

Like Jonson, Shadwell regarded humour as the satirist's prey, intending his play, The Humorists, "a Satyr against Vice and Folly".²¹ Natural humours, however, he considered as unworthy of attack as natural imperfections. Artificial follies were the proper objects of comical humours, for Shadwell, like Jonson, was interested in attacking humours as manners and as the current affectation predominant in society. He regarded slight circumstantial things, such as extravagant dress and bywords "not enough to make a good Comical Humour; which ought to be such an affectation, as misguides men in Knowledge, Art, or Science, or that causes defection in Manners, and Morality, or perverts their minds in the main Actions of their Lives".²²

Dryden, in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, also referred to humours in the traditional sense, often coupling discussions of the subject with references to Ben Jonson, whom he viewed with an admiration which was not as unqualified as

²⁰As quoted in Cazamian, p. 394.

²¹As quoted in Tave, p. 93.

²²Ibid., p. 94.

Shadwell's. Dryden, although praising Jonson's adherence to the classical unities, nevertheless criticized him for the lack of grace in his language. Jonson, though clearly an author to be emulated, did not equal Shakespeare's boundlessness of spirit. Dryden, comparing the respective qualities of the two poets, summed up his argument by acknowledging that he admired Jonson, but loved Shakespeare. In expressing a preference for Shakespeare, Dryden thus foreshadowed the later critical rejection of Jonson's satirically humorous characters in favor of such cheerful eccentrics with amiable oddities as Falstaff, whom one would choose as companions in real life.

In An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden's mouthpiece, Neander, defined humour during his discussion of Jonson's play, The Silent Woman: "by humour is meant some extravagant habit, passion, or affection, particular. . .to some one person, by the oddness of which, he is immediately distinguished from the rest of men; which being lively and naturally represented, most frequently begets that malicious pleasure in the audience which is testified by laughter".²³ Humours, according to Neander, are found in comedy, as

²³ John Dryden, "An Essay of Dramatic Poesy" in Selected Works of John Dryden, ed. W. Frost (New York, 1964), 368.

passions are in tragedy. They account for the superiority of English comedy to that of the ancients and of French writers. The ancients had little humour in their comedies; their characters were generalized pictures of humanity, as alike as the members of a family. The French, although having the word humeur, made small use of it in their comedies or farces. Their humours were thin-sown, i.e., rarely encountered, and clearly inferior to those found in English plays, as evidenced during the production of Corneille's The Liar on the English stage.

Dryden, in his discussion of humours, generally used the term "humour" in accordance with his own definition of it. However, in the consideration of the decorum of mingling mirth and gravity in a play, he coupled the term with mirth in a manner which would indicate the vague intuition of another meaning of the word: "we cannot so speedily recollect ourselves after a scene of great passion and concernment, as to pass to another of mirth and humour, and to enjoy it with any relish".²⁴ Although "humour", in this passage, could conceivably refer to characters with a dominant trait, it is clear that the emphasis is placed upon the aspect of comicality rather than upon that of character.

²⁴Dryden, p. 355.

Laughter, though still regarded by Dryden as an expression of malice instead of good nature, was becoming more and more dominant in its association with humours. A use of the word "humour" was developing which emphasized the connection of humour with laughter, almost to the exclusion of its original association with character.

In spite of the fact that Dryden praised the humours found in English comedy, it was not until Sir William Temple that "English humour" became a commonplace. Temple, defining humour as "a Picture of particular Life, as Comedy is of general",²⁵ attributed its superiority to the great pleasure produced by variety. The variety of the English comic stage was the direct result of the variety of English life, especially the climate, the soil and the government. The effects of these were sometimes bad, the climate contributing to making England a region of spleen, and the rich soil yielding wantonness and pride. The resultant nation of extremists was composed of both good and bad characters, the ill ones, however, being in a minority to the many characters with natural good qualities. The preponderance of positive humours in England was an indication of the wealth and liberty of the country. In England,

²⁵As quoted in Tave, pp. 94-5.

"every Man follows his own, and takes a Pleasure, perhaps a Pride, to shew it", in contrast to the poor enslaved countries, where the people were copies of one another "as if they were cast all by one Mould, or Cut all by one Pattern".²⁶

The derivation of humours from English breeding and the superiority of the English heritage in producing varied humours were notions which won great popularity in the eighteenth century. They were supported by many authors, including Addison and Steele, and were at least acknowledged by Sterne. The emphasis generally was upon humour as an established national expression. A true humour was something with which a man was born and which flourished best in the ideal conditions of peace, prosperity and liberty in England. A man possessing a humour in the eighteenth century was an Englishman pursuing his birth-right. At times, his humour led him into strange pathways, but always it was at least a guarantee that he was thinking for himself. A true humour could not be changed, nor did one want it changed. A humorist, thus, did not necessitate treatment in terms of satire and didacticism. His natural manner and character were indicative of his individuality and were delightful for their own sake.

²⁶As quoted in Tave, p. 95.

While humours were being regarded as peculiarly English qualities, a notion of good humour was developing as the result of a searching for a viable expression of happiness, midway between the wild mirth of the rake and the morose austerity of the Puritan. Good humour, as synonymous with and indicative of good nature, was popularized by Addison and Steele in the Tatler and especially in the Spectator. The periodicals advocated a cheerful serenity of temper, in place of wild mirth, as the representation of a joyful virtuous Christian. In Spectator No. 381, beginning "I have always preferred Cheerfulness to Mirth",²⁷ Addison rejected the transient though glittery qualities of mirth in order to support the steadiness and permanence of cheerfulness. Considering mirth as "too wanton and dissolute" for "Men of austere Principles", he espoused the cheerful mind which gave man complete command over his own soul, which, in its relation with others, prompted a reciprocal "good Humour", "Friendship and Benevolence", and which, in its relation to God, expressed an "implicit Praise and Thanksgiving to Providence" and "a secret Approbation of the Divine Will".²⁸ The cheerful,

²⁷ Addison's inconsistent usage of the term "mirth" may create the impression that in articles like Spectator No. 494, he is contradicting his assertion of the above statement. Although Spectator No. 494 supports mirth, it is an innocent mirth, directly opposite to "vicious and dissolute Mirth", and therefore broadly equivalent to cheerfulness in the above statement.

²⁸ Joseph Addison, Spectator No. 381, The Spectator

good-natured and good-humoured man increased the pleasures of both his own life and that of his fellow-beings. Good nature, according to Addison, was more agreeable in conversation than wit and was indispensable to social intercourse: "There is no Society or Conversation to be kept up in the World without Good-nature, or something which must bear its Appearance, and supply its Place."²⁹ Similarly: "Mutual good Humour is a Dress we ought to appear in wherever we meet".³⁰ Good humour and wit were not mutually exclusive, but for the good-humoured man, wit was not an essential requirement. The good-humoured man, seeming to contribute little to a social gathering, acted as a catalyst in prompting the wit of others: "He does not seem to contribute any thing to the Mirth of the Company; and yet upon Reflection you find it all happened by his being there."³¹

Addison's definition of humour in the literary sense marked the turning point in the treatment of humour in literary criticism. In Spectator No. 35, referring to

ed. G. Smith (London, Everyman's Library), III, 191-4.

²⁹ Addison, Spectator No. 169, I, 510.

³⁰ Steele, Spectator No. 100, I, 309.

³¹ Ibid., p. 310.

humour neither as an overbalance of character nor as the social Christian norm of "good humour", Addison in his discussion of humorous literary works, made reference to humour itself as a certain kind of mirth-provoking element. His difficulty of defining humour, as opposed to his clear definition of wit in Spectator No. 62, was indicative of his cognizance of its complexity: "It is indeed much easier to describe what is not Humour, than what is; and very difficult to define it otherwise than as Cowley has done Wit, by Negatives." Nonsensical schemes of absurd inconsistent ideas, "raving incoherent Pieces. . . under odd Chymical Titles" were not humour, for

Humour should always lye under the Check of Reason, and. . . it requires the Direction of the nicest Judgment, by so much the more as it indulges it self in the most boundless Freedoms. There is a kind of Nature that is to be observed in this sort of Compositions, as well as in all other; and a certain Regularity of Thought which must discover the Writer to be a Man of Sense, at the same time that he appears altogether given up to Caprice. . . .

Humour, as would be expected of its mixed genealogy compounded of truth, good sense, wit and mirth, was of a rather blurred outline:

HUMOUR. . . is very various and unequal in his Temper; sometimes you see him putting on grave Looks and a solemn Habit, sometimes airy in his Behaviour and fantastick in his Dress: Inso-much that at different times he appears as serious as a Judge, and as jocular as a Merry-Andrew.

Yet true humour could be distinguished from false humour in

that "TRUE HUMOUR generally looks serious, while every Body laughs about him; FALSE HUMOUR is always laughing, whilst every Body about him looks serious."³²

Addison's discussion of humour in Spectator No. 35 was significant in its recognition of humour as a particular and legitimate means of literary expression. Although assigning to humour a position inferior to that of wit, humour being descended from wit, Addison perceived the affinity of the two and perhaps intuited the salutary combination of both wit and humour in a single literary work, the idea of which was later given concrete expression by Corbyn Morris in his ascertainment that the most agreeable representations include both wit and humour, for: "HUMOUR is the Groundwork and chief Substance, and WIT happily spread, quickens the whole with Embellishments."³³ Addison, in his description of the different facets of humour, reflected the yet indistinct impression of humour, even while indicating the many possibilities inherent in it. At the same time, his underlining of the assumed seriousness of humour, the concept of the jest with a straight face, suggested the connection between humour as a literary expression and the Jonsonian

³²Addison, Spectator No. 35, I, 104-7.

³³As quoted in Tave, p. 120.

character-excess, the former being based upon the original unconscious ridiculousness of the humorous character.

The Spectator's contribution to the development of humour was not limited to a theoretical interpretation of it. The promising alliance of the concepts of humour as a dominant characteristic and "good humour", as an indication of good nature, was given concrete and palpable expression in the character of Sir Roger de Coverley, who was often described in a humorous, i.e., comical, manner. Sir Roger, an instructive as well as an amusing character, was "something of an Humourist", for "his Virtues, as well as Imperfections, are as it were tinged by a certain Extravagance, which makes them particularly his, and distinguishes them from those of other Men."³⁴ Sir Roger's humour, attributed tentatively to his unfulfilled passion for the beautiful widow, was innocent and agreeable: "this Humour creates him no Enemies, for he does nothing with Sourness or Obstinacy; and his being unconfined to Modes and Forms, makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all who know him."³⁵ In fact, "the general good Sense and worthiness of his Character, make his Friends observe these little Singularities as Foils that rather set off than blemish his good

³⁴Addison, Spectator No. 106, I, 325.

³⁵Steele, Spectator No. 2, I, 6.

Qualities."³⁶

Sir Roger's individual virtues were numerous and were enhanced by his cheerfulness and benevolence. Sir Roger had "such an Air of Cheerfulness and Good-humour"³⁷ that he immediately endeared all fellow-beings (except the widow) to him, regardless whether the relationship was the close one of friendship in the Club or the superficial one of coffee-room waiter and customer. Sir Roger's "Humanity and Good-nature" were especially evident in his relationship with his servants and tenants. He was "the best Master in the World"³⁸ and in spite of his remonstrances during the church services, was beloved of all his dependents. His squiredom was an exemplary one and understandably so, for:

A Man who preserves a Respect, founded on his Benevolence to his Dependants, lives rather like a Prince than a Master in his Family; his Orders are received as Favours, rather than Duties; and the Distinction of approaching him, is part of the Reward for executing what is commanded by him.³⁹

Sir Roger, always sympathetically presented, was the embodiment of the new concept of the humorous amiable character. Although possessing the potential of being

³⁶Addison, Spectator No. 112, I, 341.

³⁷Addison, Spectator No. 269, II, 304.

³⁸Addison, Spectator No. 106, I, 325.

³⁹Steele, Spectator No. 107, I, 327.

ridiculous, he was never made to look so. His rustic and peculiar behaviour both during the church services and at the theatre was described in a humorous manner, which prompted a reaction of sympathetic, rather than derisive laughter. Sir Roger, neither a satirized nor a seriously virtuous character, was the result of the change in the concepts of laughter and humours in the Restoration and Augustan periods. Possessing harmless eccentricities which were simultaneously ludicrous and lovable, Sir Roger was instructive by virtue of his benevolence and "good humour" and amusing by his unconscious manifestations of little follies which were delightful for their own sake and indicative of his English birthright. No longer the schematized flat character originally associated with comedy, Sir Roger, in his complex and very human characterization, anticipated the full development of humorous characters in later literary works, such as Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy.

Before humour could come of age, however, the theoretical distinction between the humorist as a passive possessor of a humour and the humorist as one who was able to assume a humour for the delight of others, had yet to be formulated. In Corbyn Morris' An Essay towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Raillery, Satire, and Ridicule. To Which is Added an Analysis of the Characters of an Humourist, Sir John Falstaff, Sir Roger de Coverly,

and Don Quixote, this distinction was made in the course of a synthesis and clarification of the existing ideas on comic theory in the early eighteenth century. Morris' seven point explanation of the superiority of humour over wit identified humour with personality and passion, and allied it with benevolence and love. Relegating wit to the realm of art, Morris described humour as nature unembellished, universally felt and understood because of its more complete and satisfying representation of character. Furthermore, Morris' distinction between the "Man of Humour" and the "Humourist" expressed the duality of the notion of humour:

It may be also proper to describe a Man of Humour, and an Humourist, which are very different persons.

A Man of Humour is one, who can happily exhibit a weak and ridiculous Character in real Life, either by assuming it himself, or representing another in it, so naturally, that the whimsical Oddities, and Foibles, of that character, shall be palpably expos'd.

Whereas an Humourist is a Person in real Life, obstinately attached to sensible peculiar Oddities of his own genuine Growth, which appear in his Temper and Conduct.

In short, a Man of Humour is one, who can happily exhibit and expose the Oddities and Foibles of an Humourist, or of other Characters.⁴⁰

Although Morris, in his definition, affixed labels which differ from the modern usage of these terms, his description of the active "Man of Humour", as opposed to the passive "Humourist", points directly to the specialized

⁴⁰As quoted in Cazamian, p. 410.

usage of the term "humorist" today. The modern humorist, like Morris' "Man of Humour", portrays the humours or oddities of other characters and often assumes a humour himself, pretending an unconsciousness of the laughter he evokes by means of his humour. Mark Twain, in "How to Tell a Story", describes the modern humorous narrator as one who assumes a guileless inadvertence of manner and an air of innocent foolishness. The basis of the art of humorous narration is: "To string incongruities and absurdities together in a wandering and sometimes purposeless way, and seem innocently unaware that they are absurdities".⁴¹ The simulated unconsciousness of the humorist is especially important with regard to the comic effect of his story and is cloaked usually in a feigned gravity: "The humorous story is told gravely; the teller does his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it".⁴² The humorous narrator, according to Twain, often affects the exaggerated characteristics of a well-defined, easily identifiable character, such as a dull-witted old farmer, whose "simplicity and innocence and sincerity and unconsciousness. . . are perfectly simulated, and the result is a performance which is perfectly charming

⁴¹Mark Twain, "How to Tell a Story" in The Complete Essays of Mark Twain, ed. C. Neider (New York, 1963), 158.

⁴²Ibid., p. 156.

and delicious".⁴³ The assumed peculiarities of the modern humorist's manner are, thus, the outgrowth of the original humours of Jonson's characters, divested of their narrow satirical intent and associated with harmless, lovable and laudable eccentricities. The modern notion of humour, traced through its historical development, is the result of the evolution of the term "humour" from the medieval physiological theory from which it derived its name, through its Jonsonian adaptation to the realms of character and comedy, to become, after subsequent changes during the Restoration and Augustan periods, the controlling force and stylistic technique of a particular variety of the comic which we designate as humorous.

The modern notion of humour, as a subspecies of the comic, is an outgrowth of the eighteenth century theoretical interpretations of humour and the practical utilization of humours in actual literary works. The modern concept of humour is characterized essentially by the correct strategy of the humorist and by the inclusion of feeling in the humorous insight. The humorist's assumed gravity in presenting his narration, as noted by Twain, corresponds to the serious aspect of True Humour in Addison's analysis and to Kames' formulation of the literary humorist as: "an author,

⁴³Mark Twain, "How to Tell a Story", 158.

who, affecting to be grave and serious, paints his objects in such colours as to provoke mirth and laughter."⁴⁴ The humorist's "jest with a sad brow"⁴⁵ is, moreover, an outcome of the underlying suffering in the humorous vision which results in an evocation of a sympathetic involvement of the reader, as opposed to the distancing necessary to the corrective function of comedy.

The modern concept of humour emphasizes its undercurrent of suffering and painful effects. Freud, in his discussion of wit, comedy and humour, attributes the origin of humorous pleasure to "an economy of expenditure in feeling", as opposed to wit's "economy of expenditure in inhibition" and comedy's "economy of expenditure in thought".⁴⁶ The emphasis in humour upon feeling is derived from the stimulation of painful emotions inherent in humour. Freud's examples of Galgenhumor describe concretely a distressing situation which prompts a sympathetically humorous reaction. Although observing that the process of humour consummates itself in a single person, wit requiring a triangular and

⁴⁴As quoted in Cazamian, pp. 207-8.

⁴⁵William Shakespeare, King Henry IV, Part II, V, i, 79-80.

⁴⁶Freud, p. 803.

comedy a dual relationship, Freud adds that the pleasure of humour can be derived also from an onlooker's entering into a sympathetic understanding with the humoristic person. In the case of Galgenhumor, the onlooker, observing the grim setting of the execution, identifies sympathetically with the condemned man. Mobilizing a feeling of pity and emotional energy for the suppression or avoidance of painful affects, the onlooker, confronted subsequently with the superior triumphant attitude of the gallows' victim, finds that both his pity and prepared suppression of painful emotions are unnecessary. The superfluous energy is consequently released in laughter and the feeling of pity is transformed into an admiration of the condemned man's triumphant greatness of soul in the face of his execution.

Freud's interpretation of humour in terms of feeling and suffering is expressed in a literary context by George Meredith. Meredith, in his distinction between various subspecies of the comic--satire, irony and humour--emphasizes the sympathetic and pathetic elements of humour as its defining characteristics. Meredith's concept of comedy, derived from its familiarity with the tradition of English humour, is generally more tolerant and sympathetic than Bergson's automatism theory, which is based essentially on the French comedy of manners. Meredith, upon describing the characteristics of humour, notes significantly that comedy,

"the perceptive,. . .the governing spirit, awakening and giving aim to these powers of laughter" is not to be confused with satire, irony or humour. Comedy is the larger category to which these three laughter-evoking powers belong, satire, a sharp chilling form of ridicule, irony, an inverted form, and humour, a form verging upon tenderness, being distinct from it. Comedy differs from satire "in not sharply driving into the quivering sensibilities, and from humor in not comforting them and tucking them up, or indicating a broader than the range of this bustling world to them". To Meredith, if in describing a ludicrous person, "you laugh all round him, tumble him, roll him about, deal him a smack, and drop a tear on him, own his likeness to you, and yours to your neighbor, spare him as little as you shun, pity him as much as you expose, it is a spirit of Humor that is moving you."

Yet Meredith also believes that humour at times may go too far. It may become unjust in its partiality, bacchanalian in its excess and too sentimental in its evocation of feeling. Humour, for this reason, is superior when controlled by the comic spirit, which is the expression of men's minds working in conjunction and is subsequently marked by more moderation, good taste and restraint. The humorist of a high order, however, "has an embrace of contrasts beyond the scope of the comic poet". The loftiest moods of humour view man in his primitive state during the seasons of festival and

embrace both finite and infinite, lending the humorist "a two-edged thought that peeps out of his peace-fullest lines by fits". The great humorist, "with lights of tragedy in his laughter", presents man in all aspects of his existence, whereas the comic poet, enclosed in the narrow field of the society he depicts, "is not concerned with beginnings or endings or surroundings",⁴⁷ but merely with the operations of the social world upon the concrete situation in which his characters are described.

Cazamian, in his analysis of English humour, on the other hand, emphasizes the assumed gravity of the humorist's manner, which consists of "a certain twist, a queer reserve, an inappropriateness, and as it were an unconsciousness of what we all the time feel it to be". The humorist, "a man with an eye for the potential fun of life", specializes in "that which consists in being apparently impervious to fun". The humorist's necessary mastery over his own feelings and his agility which allows him to think simultaneously on two different planes result in an art-form which has a whole range of effects. The humorist's trick of inversion is bound up with "a mood in which the stimulus of unexpectedness" is cared for and sought after. Humour often suggests

⁴⁷Meredith, pp. 44-6.

a topsy-turvy universe, topsy-turviness offering "a delicious release in extravagance" to mankind, that is "driven and vexed under the iron laws of things". Humour, in its inverted manner, also demands the full co-operation of the audience for the perception of the humoristic intent, for it "does not yeild all its flavor at the immediate moment of tasting."⁴⁸

The modern concept of humour, often combined successfully with wit, satire and comedy, thus bears the mark of an actively analytical mind in touch with the concrete and nourished with direct experience. The modern humorist is cognizant of the frailties and tribulations of man, for he also has known the pain and sorrows which are an inextricable part of the human predicament. The modern humorist does not look at man from the outside; he discloses his own shortcomings and indecencies together with that of his characters. Yet he does not reject the human condition. He accepts it tolerantly and compassionately in a manner possible only after an intimate knowledge of life and a profound insight into its realities. The humorist's sympathizing, delighting and sorrowing with man in his human condition are based fundamentally on a total acceptance of man, the emotional attitude of humour being positive and expansive rather than negative and contractive. The inclusion of the pathetic element and the frequent underlying tragedy of the humorous vision result in the commingled laughter and

⁴⁸Cazamian, pp. 5-6.

tears of the humorous response. The topsy-turvy universe often suggested by humour offers an emotional and intellectual release in extravagance, which recreates artistically the mood of the saturnalia. Yet even in moments of simple release, the background of humour reveals another plane of consciousness which implies a more sober and serious mood, founded upon an awareness and acceptance of the human condition in its relation to the infinite.

The concept of modern humour, moreover, in its essential characteristics as formulated by Meredith, Cazamian and Twain, is a more fully developed and more sophisticated version of the theories of humour which evolved during the eighteenth century. The emphasis upon feeling and sympathy in modern humour is an outgrowth of the eighteenth century notion of amiable humorous originals, who in their laudable qualities were differentiated from Jonson's satirically treated humours. The sympathetic element of humour was made possible by the shift in the concept of laughter from a scornful derisive expression of superiority to an affectionate good-natured expression of benevolence. The modern notion of the correct strategy of the humorist, his assumed gravity for comic effect, was formulated as early as in the writings of Addison and Kames, and is based essentially on the development in the Restoration and Augustan periods of a self-conscious assumption of the original Jonsonian character-

excess for the purpose of evoking a ludicrous response. The background of tragedy in modern humour, although not formulated in eighteenth century theoretical writings, is, however, the result of critical analyses of actual literary humorous works of the period, such as Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, which, itself at the center of the controversy about humour, reflected the eighteenth century developments of humour and indicated in a concrete manner the many possibilities inherent in it.

CHAPTER II

THE HOBBY-HORSE: HUMOUR OF CHARACTER

The new art form of the novel, developed in the eighteenth century, incorporated and reflected the changed concepts of laughter, comedy and humour of the period. In the comical works of Fielding, Smollett, Goldsmith and Sterne, the notion of humours as the bases of character delineation, the Jonsonian humour metamorphosed by the eighteenth century connotations of the term, played an especially prominent role. The theory of the predominant passion, the accepted dictum of the age, became the basic principle of the fictional characters who tended to be composites of a type, exemplars of human nature used for a didactic purpose. Pope's formulation of the ruling passion as the key to the study of character:

Search then the RULING PASSION: There, alone,
The Wild are constant, and the Cunning known;
The Fool consistent, and the False sincere;
Priests, Princes, Women, no dissemblers here.
This clue once found, unravels all the rest,¹

was utilized in the presentation of both major and minor

¹Alexander Pope, "Moral Essays, Epistle I" in Alexander Pope, Selected Poetry and Prose, ed. W. K. Wimsatt, Jr. (New York, 1964), 177.

characters in the new fictional form. The new concept of the good-natured benevolent man resulted in the creation of a variety of humorous fictional heroes of this type.

The eighteenth century fictional humorists were many and were more or less fully delineated according to the purposes assigned to them by their respective authors and to the governing concept of the individual works in which they were found. Fielding's emphasis upon man's innate "good nature" and the didactic intention of his works resulted in such benevolent characters as Parson Adams, Tom Jones and Squire Allworthy, all three of whom were treated sympathetically by the author, their benevolence implying a norm by which characters exhibiting a negative ruling passion, as Peter Pounce's avarice, Lady Booby's lust and Blifil's ruthless hypocrisy, were to be judged. Smollett's emphasis upon satire and the picaresque tradition produced many characters who acted as devices to expose the evils of society, but Smollett also portrayed more fully developed eccentrics like Matthew Bramble, a humorous quarrelsome hypochondriac who affected misanthropy "in order to conceal the sensibility of a heart, which is tender, even to a degree of weakness".² Goldsmith also utilized humours in the presentation of his

²Tobias G. Smollett, The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker (New York, 1962), p. 28.

characters, such as the Vicar of Wakefield and his monogamist theories, but only in a minor way for comic purposes, combining a gently ironic and a sentimental treatment of character to result in a sympathetic humorist with amiable little oddities, the Vicar's description of Sir William Thornhill as "one of the most generous yet whimsical men in the kingdom--a man of consummate benevolence"³ applying to himself equally as well.

The humorist had come a long way since the Jonsonian era, yet the most consummate development of humours as the guiding principle in character portrayal occurred in Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, the characters of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy exhibiting humours which were used as the bases for psychological analysis, the author not merely delineating the characters externally, but delving inside them in order to show the motivations for their behaviour. The humours in the characters of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy were utilized both to emphasize the individuality of the characters, their predominant passion accounting for their difference from other men, and to typify them in a manner characteristic of eighteenth century fictive character portrayal. The

³Oliver Goldsmith, The Vicar of Wakefield (New York, 1963), p. 13.

humours, used as the main motivating force of the characters, were developed to their utmost complexity and were combined with minor characteristics and personality traits in a way which resulted in psychologically realistic characters, fixed and predictable in one sense yet completely unpredictable insofar as their individual reactions to the monumental or minor crises of life were concerned.

Sterne's assignation of the term "hobby-horse" to humours was a metaphorical representation of the ruling passion. Using the terms hobby-horse and ruling passion interchangeably, Sterne affirmed their essentiality to character portrayal in a letter written shortly after the publication of volumes I and II of Tristram Shandy: "The ruling passion et les egarements du coeur, are the very things which mark, and distinguish a man's character;--in which I would as soon leave out a man's head as his hobby-horse."⁴ Sterne, generally regarding the hobby-horse as a gentle obstinacy on the part of the mind refusing to submit to the cool dictates of reason, or rather of the reasons of others, developed a theory of the ruling passion which

⁴The recipient of this letter, dated January 30, 1760, is tentatively identified by Curtis as Dr. Noah Thomas. See: Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. Lewis P. Curtis (Oxford, 1935), p. 88.

was in the mainstream and to a great extent a product of the eighteenth century evolution of the concept of amiable humours, and which was opposed to Pope's interpretation of the ruling passion as a "Mind's disease"⁵ to be condemned as a serious infringement of the sovereignty of reason. In the development of his theory of hobby-horses in Tristram Shandy, however, Sterne did not entirely cast aside the possibility of harmful ruling passions which were to be satirized albeit gently, while at the same time emphasizing the harmless eccentricities, which were not only the amusing aspects of a person's character, to be praised and laughed at sympathetically rather than to be condemned and ridiculed derisively, but were also the imaginative reality of a person that imparted a magical quality to his existence and accounted largely for his happiness and well being in it.

In his first introduction of hobby-horses in Tristram Shandy, Sterne placed his description of the positive aspects of hobby-horses in a satirical context which would imply that hobby-horses could possibly have a negative connotation. Sterne's initial description of hobby-horses affirms their universality and harmlessness:

⁵Pope, "An Essay on Man, Epistle II", 142.

Nay, if you come to that, Sir, have not the wisest of men in all ages, not excepting Solomon himself,---have they not had their HOBBY-HORSES;---their running horses,---their coins and their cockle-shells, their drums and their trumpets, their fiddles, their pallets, ---their maggots and their butterflies?---and so long as a man rides his HOBBY-HORSE peaceably and quietly along the King's highway, and neither compels you or me to get up behind him,---pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?⁶

Tristram himself confesses to the possession alternately of the hobby-horses of fiddling and painting and affirms, as there is no disputing about tastes, so can there be no disputing against hobby-horses. Yet directly before his description of hobby-horses, he speaks of Didius' amendment to the midwife's licence, couching his reference in sexual terms, and of Dr. Kunastrokius' voluptuous tendencies with regard to asses tails. Similarly, the description of hobby-horses is followed by a gently satirical depiction of "great Lords and tall Personages" (p. 14) mounted on their various hobby-horses, the inference being made that the truly great and noble Lord should dedicate himself to more worthy pursuits for both his personal glory and the glory of his country. Sterne, thus, in his initial reference to hobby-horses, allows himself the possibility of a subsequent

⁶Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. James A. Work (New York, 1940), p. 13. All subsequent citations from the novel and parenthetical page notations will refer to this edition.

treatment of hobby-horses in both positive and negative lights. The negative treatment of hobby-horses, however, although occurring slightly in the characterizations of Dr. Slop and Walter Shandy, gives way almost entirely to the positive aspects of this phenomenon delineated in the actual description of hobby-horses quoted above. Tristram's facetious dedication of all hobby-horsical references in his book to the lord who will buy his dedication subsequently proves to be a greater bargain for the buyer than would seem at first.

Sterne's significant description of hobby-horses occurs in volume VIII of Tristram Shandy. The description, formulated after rather than before its practical application to the book, is consequently a more reliable indication of Sterne's utilization of hobby-horses in the novel. Interestingly enough, Sterne again introduces the description after a sexual reference, this time, however, emphasizing the difference between the hobby-horse and any association of it that might have been made with the passions. Sterne's differentiation between the hobby-horse and Walter Shandy's libelling of "the desires and appetites of the lower part of us" as man's "ass" (p. 584) clearly indicates the turn which the hobby-horse has taken throughout the course of the book, a turn not completely foreseeable in Sterne's initial representation of the concept. As Sterne's plan for the composition of his work, although ordered in its main

outlines, was also to take in "not only, the Weak part of the Sciences, in w^{ch} the true point of Ridicule lies--but every Thing else, which I find Laugh-at-able in my way",⁷ it is quite possible that the hobby-horse, initially intended for a greater satirical purpose, developed during the course of the actual writing of the novel into a vehicle for a complex and subtle portrayal of character and for an incisive insight into the human condition.

Sterne, in his second and final verbalization of the qualities of hobby-horses again reiterates their harmless character, now emphasizing, however, their beneficial aspects for man:

For my hobby-horse, if you recollect a little, is no way a vicious beast; he has scarce one hair or lineament of the ass about him---'Tis the sporting little filly-folly which carries you out for the present hour---a maggot, a butterfly, a picture, a fiddle-stick---an uncle Toby's seige---or an any thing, which a man makes a shift to get a stride on, to canter it away from the cares and sollicitudes of life---'Tis as useful a beast as is in the whole creation---nor do I really see how the world could do without it---. (p. 584)

The hobby-horse, in this description as in its application to Uncle Toby's character, is a means by which a man may retreat from the painful boring reality of his existence. Like Yorick's escape into Shakespeare's Much ado about Nothing

⁷Letter to Robert Dodsley, dated May 23, 1759. As quoted in Curtis, p. 74.

during a complicated passport entanglement totally incomprehensible to him, the hobby-horse offers man an avenue of escape from the difficulties of life into a private world of illusion:

Sweet pliability of man's spirit, that can at once surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation and sorrow of their weary moments!--Long--long since had ye number'd out my days, had I not trod so great a part of them upon this enchanted ground: when my way is too rough for my feet, or too steep for my strength, I get off it, to some smooth velvet path which fancy has scattered over with rose-buds of delights; and having taken a few turns in it, come back strengthen'd and refresh'd--When evils press sore upon me, and there is no retreat from them in this world, then I take a new course--I leave it. . . .⁸

The function of Sterne's hobby-horse in the lives of its possessors then is to impart zest and illusion to life. That man's happiness is greatly dependent upon the creation and sustainment of illusions is noted by Swift in his "Digression on Madness": "happiness. . . is a perpetual possession of being well deceived. . . .How fading and insipid do all objects accost us, that are not conveyed in the vehicle of delusion?"⁹ Sterne's hobby-horse, a salutary madness in man, is that little insanity which in fact aids him in maintaining

⁸Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy (London, 1968), p. 87.

⁹Jonathan Swift, "A Tale of a Tub" in Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston, 1960), 332.

a mental balance in the midst of a difficult world. It is that little eccentricity of man, in the pursuit of which he expresses the unique part of his soul and transforms his mundane existence into a magical one. Sterne's hobby-horse yields happiness for man, making his daily life more bearable by allowing him a respite from it.

Sterne's interpretation of hobby-horses in terms of laudable eccentricities contributing to man's well-being is a direct outgrowth of the notion of the peculiarly English humorist, formulated and popularized by Sir William Temple and other Restoration and Augustan writers. That Sterne was aware of the derivation of his concept is evident from Tristram's several references to the role of the English climate in producing whimsical eccentrics. Tristram, about to embark upon a description of Uncle Toby's character, enters into a digression on the antecedents of this character. He traces the evolution of the concept of the laudable English humorist by noting that the observation first made by one man, whose name Tristram cannot remember, "That there was great inconstancy in our air and climate", resulted in another man's corollary that "it is this which has furnished us with such a variety of odd and whimsical characters". The next step was Dryden's affirmation "that this copious storehouse of original materials, is the true and natural cause that our Comedies are so much better than those of France,

or any others that either have, or can be wrote upon the Continent" (p. 63). Tristram draws his own whimsical conclusion based upon the observations of his predecessors:

. . .that this strange irregularity in our climate, producing so strange an irregularity in our characters,---doth thereby, in some sort, make us amends, by giving us somewhat to make us merry with when the weather will not suffer us to go out of doors,---that observation is my own;---and was struck out by me this very rainy day, March 26, 1759, and betwixt the hours of nine and ten in the morning. (p. 64)

Tristram's digression on the evolution of English humorists is very necessary to his portrayal of Uncle Toby and is related directly to the characterization of him. Uncle Toby's "humour was of that particular species, which does honour to our atmosphere" (p. 65). The specific quality of this atmosphere is its encouragement of the expression of all sorts of notions. Tristram later refers to "this clear climate of fantasy and perspiration, where every idea, sensible and insensible, gets vent", contrasting it with that of "Freeze-land, Fog-land and some other lands I wot of" (p. 539), which encourage rational lucidity and adherence to rules. Denmark's preponderance of moderate level-headed inhabitants, characterized by "cold phlegm and exact regularity of sense and humours", is contrasted to England's inclination to extremes---great geniuses, great dunces and blockheads---for nature "in this unsettled island" is "most whimsical and capricious" (p. 25) in her distribution

of gifts and qualities. In Tristram's misplaced preface, during his discussion of wit and judgment, England's production of abundant humours is again reaffirmed; in "this warmer and more luxuriant island. . .the spring tide of our blood and humours runs high" and "as our air blows hot and cold,---wet and dry, ten times in a day, we have them in no regular and settled way" (p. 197).

Sterne's humorous characters, devoted so energetically to the pursuits of their hobby-horses, are not only related generally to the tradition of English humorists, but are also typical manifestations of the Shandy family's propensity to eccentricity. The singularity of Uncle Toby's humour, as Tristram notes, is derived more from blood than from the effects of the atmosphere. Tristram's own eccentricity, like Uncle Toby's and Walter Shandy's, is accounted for by the fact that "all the SHANDY FAMILY were of an original character throughout;---I mean the males,---the females had no character at all" (p. 65), excepting, of course, the notorious Aunt Dinah. Sterne's centralization of the concept of English humours in the members of the Shandy family reinforces the notion of the prevalence of English humours, while at the same time imparting individualistic aspects to them in their embodiment in the Shandy household.

Sterne utilizes hobby-horses in Tristram Shandy for the delineation of character and for comic effects. In

basing his characterizations of Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby on hobby-horses, Sterne creates humorous characters who are comical in their individual hobby-horsical automatism and in the misunderstandings which arise during the interaction of the hobby-horses. *Sterne, in employing his hobby-horses to a comical end, combines their salubrious function of providing an antidote to the pains and difficulties of life with their comical function of actually causing many of the misfortunes in life through the collision of the separate hobby-horses and through the clash of the illusive and real worlds. Hobby-horses are also used by Sterne to depict the essential isolation of man, serving to emphasize the impregnable confines of man's mind and soul and while seeming to facilitate communication between men, proving in actuality to be a disastrous barrier to it.

Sterne, in creating his hobby-horsical characters, makes them more believable and also more comical,¹⁰ by displaying before the reader the actual growth of the hobby-horse. Theoretically and metaphorically, as Tristram affirms,

¹⁰Bergson, in his discussion of laughter and comedy, maintains that the comical effect of automatism is enhanced if the cause of the automatism is a natural one and is described in its development, as in the case of the depiction of the origin of an individual's absent-mindedness. Bergson's observation points to the increased comicality of Uncle Toby's hobby-horse through the reader's detailed knowledge of its origin and development. See Bergson, p. 68.

the acquiring of a hobby-horse takes place in the manner of electrified bodies, that is: "by means of the heated parts of the rider, which come immediately into contact with the back of the HOBBY-HORSE.---By long journies and much friction, it so happens that the body of the rider is at length fill'd as full of HOBBY-HORSICAL matter as it can hold" (p. 77). The origin of Uncle Toby's hobby-horse is connected directly with the wound on his groin, which he received at the seige of Namur. Uncle Toby's attempts at relating to his condoling visitors the exact circumstances of the infliction of his wound, resulted in such confusing and obscure accounts that he was of necessity forced to apply himself to a painstaking study of the subject in order to overcome his frustration, which certainly did little to enhance the healing process of the wound. Uncle Toby, thus introduced to the study of military terminology and strategy, became so involved in the subject that he slowly and systematically procured himself a hobby-horse:

. . .the desire of knowledge, like the thirst of riches, increases ever with the acquisition of it. The more my uncle Toby pored over his map, the more he took a liking to it;---by the same process and electrical assimilation, as I told you, thro' which I ween the souls of connoisseurs themselves, by long friction and incumbition, have the happiness, at length, to get all be-virtu'd,---be-pictur'd,---be-butterflied, and be-fiddled. (p. 88)

Uncle Toby's dedication to his hobby-horse, during the eleven year period from his first appearance on the bowling green to the time of the peace of Utrecht when he was forced to

give up his hobby-horse by the cessation of continental military activities, resulted in his construction, with Trim's help, of metaphorical representations of reality in the intricate successive reproductions of various battle-fields in Europe, including replicas of a handsome sentry-box, draw-bridges, moveable houses, a church with a steeple and even ammunition..

The importance of the hobby-horse to Uncle Toby's life is depicted by the change which the hobby-horse effected in his existence and by his extreme dejection when deprived of it by the treaty of Utrecht. Uncle Toby's long confinement, characterized by passive submission to his lot, was both lightened and brightened by his increasing involvement in the subject of sieges, so much so that he forgot to concern himself about his wound and sighed deeply for recovery. The escape from the reality of the confinement into the illusory world of projectiles and fortifications resulted in what must have been a rather sudden recovery, for Tristram notes the surgeon's surprise when pronouncing that Uncle Toby's wound was almost well. Uncle Toby's boundless enthusiasm with regard to bowling-green projects and his heated enjoyment of any new development therein only serve to emphasize his languid lowness of spirits when flung by his hobby-horse. Tristram describes Uncle Toby's appearance at consultations about the demolition of Dunkirk after the Utrecht treaty: "STILLNESS, with SILENCE at her back, entered

the solitary parlour, and drew their gauzy mantle over my uncle Toby's head;---and LISTLESSNESS, with her lax fibre and undirected eye, sat quietly down beside him in his arm chair" (p. 465). Uncle Toby, without his hobby-horse, could no longer pass the French lines while eating his egg at supper, nor could he "fall asleep with nothing but ideas of glory" in order to dream "he had fixed the royal standard upon the tower of the Bastile, and awake with it streaming in his head" (p. 466). Sterne's description of Uncle Toby's half-suppressed sighs and Trim's "air the most expressive of disconsolation that can be imagined" (p. 557) after the final destruction of the Dunkirk fortification shows the gaping emptiness in the lives of persons even temporarily bereft of their hobby-horsical illusions.

The growth of Walter Shandy's hobby-horse, the origin of which is not represented directly, is depicted, however, in Walter's assimilation of minutiae of knowledge into his theories. Walter Shandy's hobby-horse, although seemingly more complex than Uncle Toby's in that it gallops over all roads of human knowledge, whereas Uncle Toby's runs only in the track of sieges and fortifications, nevertheless reveals the same single-minded dedication to a sole pursuit, in Walter's case, the formulation of hypotheses. Walter's theories, established as Tristram conjectures, by his making merry with whimsical sceptical notions and then assimilating bits of proof to them systematically until the notions gain

a serious footing in the brain, are not as comical in themselves as is Uncle Toby's siege bias. Walter's hypotheses, "as sceptical, and as far out of the high-way of thinking" (p. 145) as can be imagined, are neither funny nor absurd considered simply as ideas, as scraps of truth that have gone wrong. It is Walter's attempts to regulate his own conduct and that of others by a priori principles of action based upon hypotheses and his irascible response to the conflict between hypothesis and reality that constitute the comic element in his hobby-horse. Walter's exerted effort at controlling the future, as opposed to Toby's retreat into an imaginary world based upon the heroic real world in which he used to live, is thwarted constantly by the nature and order of things in the real world, seemingly governed by a decree of the destinies who insist upon sending a tide of little evils and distresses upon him.

Walter's actual hypotheses range from the serious role of Christian names, noses, conception and birth procedures in governing the development of a person's character to the ideas of duration, population and traffic distribution, and monarchical system of government. His theories, although gently satirized by Sterne, are not a mere caricature of reasoning in that they arise from an elementary logic. However, the logic is stretched to a breaking point, beyond which Walter's propositions have nothing to do with the nature of things. Although proudest of his reasoning faculty of all

the characters in the novel, Walter is the one most suffering from confusion, disorder and error. His inability to realize that the connection of his hypotheses with life is only imaginary and that hypotheses cannot be substituted for reality results in continual frustration and recurrent disappointments in the face of the refusal of reality to present itself to him in the way in which he chooses to imagine it. Just as the Tristra-poedia is rendered obsolete by the rapidly growing Tristram, so are Walter's other theories rendered obsolete in their confrontation with the reality of the events in the Shandy household. Walter's query: "What is the character of a family to an hypothesis? . . . Nay, if you come to that---what is the life of a family" (p. 69) is answered by the succession of events in the Shandy family, which while overthrowing Walter's hypotheses, nevertheless affirm, contrary to his question, his generosity and humanity.

Sterne's stroke of genius, in relating the domestic misadventures of the Shandy family, consists in his dramatic juxtaposition of the hobby-horses of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, each of which, while galloping full tilt on its own road, acts as a vexing check on the other. Tristram himself affirms the suitability of his hobby-horsical family to portrayal in a story:

I believe in my soul, (unless my love and partiality to my understanding blinds me) the hand of the supreme Maker and first Designer of all things, never made or put a family together, (in that period at least of it, which I have sat down to write the story of)---where the characters of it were cast or contrasted with so dramatic a felicity as ours was, for this end; or in which the capacities of affording such exquisite scenes, and the powers of shifting them perpetually from morning to night, were lodged and intrusted with so unlimited a confidence, as in the SHANDY-FAMILY.
(p. 236)

The most marked contrast in the "whimsical theatre" (p. 236) of the Shandy family is centered in the "contrariety of humours betwixt my father and my uncle" that are "the source of many a fraternal squabble" (p. 68).

Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, each dedicated to the pursuit of his hobby-horse, can never meet either on an intellectual or hobby-horsical level. Speaking different languages formed by their individual backgrounds, words for Uncle Toby relating to military terminology and for Walter Shandy to a philosophical meaning which he thinks should be perfectly evident to the person with whom he is conversing, the brothers show a lack of communication that might have been tragic if not for Sterne's lightness of touch and for his insistence upon the efficacy of communication upon the level of human sympathy. The two brothers, moreover, repeatedly reveal a mutual irreverence and antipathy toward one another's respective hobby-horses, the hobby-horse, as Tristram affirms, being as tender a part as a man has about him. Walter's attitude toward Uncle Toby's hobby-horse is

one of condescending indulgence or at times of peevish ridicule:

My father, as you have observed, had no great esteem for my uncle Toby's hobby-horse,--- he thought it the most ridiculous horse that ever gentleman mounted, and indeed unless my uncle Toby vexed him about it, could never think of it once, without smiling at it,---so that it never could get lame or happen any mischance, but it tickled my father's imagination beyond measure;. . . (p. 210)

Likewise Uncle Toby, generally unable to comprehend the subtle intricacies of Walter's hobby-horse, retreats into his customary retort of whistling Lillabulero to express his opinion of Walter's theorizing, the song being "the usual channel thro' which his passions got vent, when any thing shocked or surprised him;---but especially when any thing, which he deem'd very absurd, was offered" (p. 69).

Uncle Toby's propensity for riding vigorously his hobby-horse at critical moments in the life of the Shandy family, that is, when Walter's hypotheses are upset, results usually in Walter's immediate outbreak into "that little subacid soreness of humour which, in certain situations, distinguished his character from that of all other men" (p. 612). Indeed, Tristram's amusing descriptions of Uncle Toby on his hobby-horse, assisted by Trim, reveal such an overwhelming concentration on the task at hand that it is not surprising that Walter should be annoyed. The tragic period following Tristram's misnaming, during which Uncle

Toby and Trim irreverently jump on their hobby-horses instead of commiserating with Walter, is a typical example of the normal procedure in the Shandy household. The passage is so delightful that it must be quoted almost in its entirety:

And for my own part, said my uncle Toby, though I should blush to boast of myself, Trim,---yet had my name been Alexander, I could have done no more at Namur than my duty---Bless your honour! cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, does a man think of his christian name when he goes upon the attack?---Or when he stands in the trench, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking firm---Or when he enters a breach? said Trim, pushing in between two chairs---Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up and pushing his crutch like a pike---Or facing a platoon, cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock---Or when he marches up the glacis, cried my uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool.---

CHAP. XIX.

My father was returned from his walk to the fish-pond---and opened the parlour-door in the very height of the attack, just as my uncle Toby was marching up the glacis---Trim recovered his arms---never was my uncle Toby caught riding at such a desperate rate in his life! (p. 295)

The characters of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, so amusing individually and in their interplay on the hobby-horsical level, transcend portrayal, however, in terms of mere humorous types. Although Tristram, in his defence of the hobby-horse technique as a sound guide to man's soul, comically implies that the eccentricity is the whole man, Sterne belies this notion in his endowment of the hobby-horsical brothers with subtle and complex secondary qualities.

After the incident of Uncle Toby's humane treatment of the fly, Tristram himself notes that his portrait of Uncle Toby cannot be drawn solely in terms of the hobby-horse: "I could not give the reader this stroke in my uncle Toby's picture, by the instrument with which I drew the other parts of it,---that taking in no more than the mere HOBBY-HORSICAL likeness;---this is a part of his moral character" (p. 114). The moral part of Uncle Toby's character and to a much lesser extent of Walter Shandy's lies in the area of benevolence and good-nature, Uncle Toby being the embodiment of the eighteenth century notion of the benevolent, good-humoured and good-natured man and thus a direct descendent of the Spectator's Sir Roger de Coverley.

Sterne's emphasis upon Uncle Toby's humanity occurs throughout the entire novel, this quality in Uncle Toby's character being fully as important as his hobby-horse. Tristram repeatedly couples Uncle Toby's name with the epithet "good-natured", as in his references to Uncle Toby's "countenance spread over with so much good nature" (p. 115) during the Stevinus affair, Uncle Toby's looking into Widow Wadman's eye "with twice the good nature that ever Gallileo look'd for a spot in the sun" (p. 577), and Uncle Toby's "goodness of. . .nature" to which "there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him" (p. 426), in his vigilance at Le Fever's deathbed.

Recognizing his brother's salutary qualities, Walter, were he an Asian monarch, would procure the most beautiful women in his empire for his brother in order that he should people the land with monthly offspring, as Toby possesses "so much. . .of the milk of human nature, and so little of its asperities" (p. 586).

Uncle Toby's benevolence, humorously depicted in Tristram's enactment of the metaphor that his uncle would not even hurt a fly, is presented in a more serious vein in the Le Fever episode in Volume VI. Hearing about the sick soldier from Trim, Uncle Toby characteristically expresses his empathy with deep sighs and the occasional tear. Always a simple man, he immediately thinks in terms of concrete help for Le Fever, offering his house, money, Trim's services as a nurse and even his own assistance in the position of servant. Turning his thoughts entirely toward Le Fever's distressful suffering, Uncle Toby makes the supreme sacrifice possible to him by giving up the siege of Dendermond, even though the allies pressed theirs on so vigorously that he, just previous to the Le Fever incident, had not even had time to eat his dinner. Toby's assistance to the sick soldier and his son is not, moreover, a short-lived one; he shows a paternal kindness to the Le Fever boy throughout the course of the novel, educating him, equipping him for the army and again resuming active assistance to him after

the boy's unfortunate military adventures. Uncle Toby's philanthropy, characteristic of the eighteenth century benevolent man, is based upon a solid religious foundation. He rarely, as Walter states, neglects the duties of religion, his faith in God's justice being as simple and unquestioning as is his response to Le Fever's suffering.

Walter Shandy, though certainly not the ideally good-humoured man, does, nevertheless, have a fundamental generosity of spirit which is usually masked, as in Smollett's *Matthew Bramble*, by an outward acidness of manner. Walter's whole-hearted love and tenderness for his brother, shown concretely by his affectionate care and concern for him during his convalescence, are often emphasized by Tristram, as in the description contrasting his father's character with that of Toby:

My father, in this patient endurance of wrongs. . . was very different, as the reader must long ago have noted; he had a much more acute and quick sensibility of nature, attended with a little soreness of temper; tho' this never transported him to any thing which looked like malignancy;---yet, in the little rubs and vexations of life, 'twas apt to shew itself in a drollish and witty kind of peevishness:---He was, however, frank and generous in his nature;---at all times open to conviction; and in the little ebullitions of this subacid humour towards others, but particularly towards my uncle Toby, whom he truly loved;---he would feel more pain, ten times told. . . than what he ever gave. (p. 115)

Walter, possessing much more complicated characteristics than the simple gentle Toby, gives the impression, through his

unpredictability in action and his exasperated irritative irruptions of temper, of a more fully developed character than Toby. Walter's constant changeability, his different airs and attitudes, do not, however, constitute growth during the course of the novel. Walter, a complex flat character, shows as little development as Toby and, in spite of his inconsistent reactions to untried occurrences of life, is more consistently portrayed than his brother, Toby's shrewdly cynical suggestion of the restrictive marriage articles clause being, as Work notes, rather improbable in an artless innocent person who doesn't know the wrong end of a woman from the right end. Although the character of Uncle Toby is extolled by countless critics as being the supreme portrayal of a humour in a novel, it is Walter, with his faults, self-recriminations and oddities, who is the more human and better-developed character in Sterne's fictional work. Both the characters of Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby, however, are more human and believable in that they are based upon fundamental paradoxes which complicate their characterization and endow their basically humorous characters with a power which is not inherent in the simple humour. Uncle Toby, formerly a soldier bent on the art of killing, even though upon the principles of liberty and honour, is so kind-hearted and benevolent that he wouldn't harm a fly. Walter Shandy, on the other hand, a retired Turkey merchant,

is so obscure and unrealistic in his hypotheses that one wonders how he managed to survive within a commercial environment.

Sterne's utilization of humours with regard to the minor characters of Tristram Shandy is largely insignificant. As Tristram affirms, Trim is "Non Hobby-Horsical per se" (p. 95), gaining hobby-horsically only insofar as he is Toby's body-servant and accomplice. Collaborating with Uncle Toby to keep up the illusions of his campaigns, Trim manifests a consciousness of the discrepancy between the dream world and the real world upon which Toby's illusions are projected. The function of Trim's character is to bring to mind, often with comic effect, the world of reality infringing upon Uncle Toby's make-believe one, as in Toby's plans for the demolition of Dunkirk: ". . .then we'll demolish the mole,---next fill up the harbour,---then retire into the citadel, and blow it up into the air; 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" (p. 464). Trim, with a realistic purpose in mind, attempts to outfit Uncle Toby in the most practical manner for the siege of the fair citadel of Widow Wadman, insisting that Toby's red plush breeches will be too clumsy and his sword will only get in the way. He reluctantly bursts the bubble of Uncle Toby's illusions with regard to the Widow's inquisitive interrogation

about the nature of Toby's wound, attributing point-blank the Widow's "compassionate turn and singular humanity" (p. 642) of character to her very realistic concern about the sexual aspect of marriage. Trim's obsessions during the Sermon with his brother Tom's torturings through the agency of the Inquisition and his overflowings of heart and tears corresponding to that of his master, place him in the mainstream of generosity which flows throughout the novel, serving to underline Uncle Toby's humanity and, in spite of Sterne's frequent comical treatment of Trim's simple-minded reactions to his brother's suffering, registering an authentic protest against an unjust cruel world.

The depiction of Dr. Slop, Sterne's satire of Dr. John Burton, descends to the level of caricature and if it were not for Sterne's farcical treatment would manifest a biting condemnation of obstetrics in the eighteenth century, Catholicism and Burton himself. The bumbling man-midwife, hobby-horsical with regard to his precious instruments of salvation and deliverance, positioned significantly "betwixt thy two pistols, at thy bed's head" (p. 110), is together with his religion ridiculed repeatedly throughout the course of the novel. Slop's ignominious muddying, his "hinder parts. . . totally besmear'd" (p. 107) in an excremental manner, would be pathetic rather than funny, but for his ostentatious pomposity and his bawdy coarseness of manner.

Slop's ridiculous physical appearance, the only physical description in the book, thereby drawing attention to his physicality and implying a corresponding lack of spirituality, is matched by his ridiculous professional attitude. Regarding himself as an "Accoucheur." (p. 113), Slop insists, though Mrs. Shandy is in critical condition, on the propriety of having the midwife come down to him, instead of vice versa, and reveals his professional inefficiency by crushing poor Tristram's nose and by suggesting a feet-first delivery, which although complying with Walter's theories, would have resulted in* * * * * by the forceps. Sterne's treatment of Slop's character, farcical in the tradition of stage comedies, prompts a deep belly-laugh from the reader, as in the pure "slapstick" of the cataplasm-throwing incident with Susannah and in Slop's encounter with Obadiah.

The remaining characters of the novel, excepting the narrator Tristram, are not characterized in terms of humours at all, Mrs. Shandy, ever the echoing non-assertive wife, being significant in her lack of qualities and Widow Wadman in her perfect womanhood to be painted by the reader himself on the basis of his mistress or wife. Parson Yorick, like Tristram, an extension of Sterne's own character, partakes of some of Tristram's qualities, such as a whimsical gaiety of heart, although, unlike Tristram, he is not de-

lineated in as complex a manner. Didius, Phutatorius and their companions are described only sufficiently to be recognizable as objects of satire and do not achieve the dimensions of living beings. The reader, assuming various faces in accordance with Sterne's intentions, is a composite of various characters, the possibility of his possession of a traditional humour being admitted by Tristram in his reference to the reader's "mercurial" or "cholerick temper", or "grave and saturnine cast" (p. 50).

Sterne's treatment of humours then is centered in his two main characters, Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, the depiction of whom, as Coleridge states, constitutes the superior form of humour in the novel, as opposed to the more questionable humour to be found in Sterne's manner and style. Coleridge's attribution of true humour to the interplay and development of the characters, who are based upon a thorough knowledge of human nature, points to what Priestley terms the highest form of English humour, which is "at its best and is really most characteristic of the national mind when it. . .deals with character",¹¹ English humour being marked by a "curiously private and domestic"¹² turn in contra-

¹¹J. B. Priestley, English Humour (London, 1929), p. 15.

¹²Ibid., p. 5.

distinction to the public air characteristic of French wit. Sterne's use of hobby-horses in the depiction of the characters of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy yields sympathetic lovable eccentrics, the interplay of whose automatic hobby-ridden actions prompts a friendly affectionate laughter in the reader. Sterne's endowment of hobby-horses with a more serious function both in the lives of their possessors and in their indication of his view of isolated man reveals a complex and most effective use of what was previously a simple basis of characterization for the purpose of satirical exposure.

CHAPTER III

TRISTRAM: THE MAN OF HUMOUR

Sterne's novel, according to its title-page, sets out ostensibly to describe the life and opinions of its main character and hero, Tristram Shandy. From the first sentence of the book, however, Tristram establishes himself not only as a character within the novel, but also as its narrator and commentator. On one level, reproaching his parents in a joking manner and on another, challenging the destiny which plays so important a role in his story, Tristram begins his narrative in a bold, directly familiar tone which places him in the tradition of essayists and story-tellers, and which also makes his presence evident as a humorous narrator. Tristram's narrative function in Sterne's novel is complicated, moreover, by what Coleridge terms the felt presence of the narrator's own oddity. Distinguishing between the humorist, who notices and brings forward into "distinct consciousness those minutiae of thought and feeling which appear trifles" and have "the novelty of an individual peculiarity" as well as "the interest of a something that belongs to our common nature", and the man of humour, who possesses "the superadded power

of so presenting them to men in general",¹ Coleridge notes the large effect in Sterne's writing arising from the man of humour's assumption of the humorist's oddity in presenting his comic story. Coleridge's distinction, an outgrowth of Morris' wider definition of the man of humour as one who assumes a ridiculous character himself or represents another in it, indicates the double aspect of Tristram as the humorous narrator of Sterne's work.

Tristram, as the man of humour, is a fully-characterized narrator whose consciousness is the medium through which Sterne presents his work. Tristram, as the character within the novel, on the other hand, is a hero of a very minor stature, an anti-hero, in fact, whose life, although described with all the pomp and wealth of detail of an epic hero's, yields no lofty deeds nor large actions. Although Tristram is the main character of the novel, the reader paradoxically enough learns little about his life beyond the few years of his childhood. The action is instead centered upon the two Shandy brothers, the interplay of whose hobby-horses, together with Uncle Toby's amours with Widow Wadman, constitutes the main part of the book. Tristram, the character in the novel, is used largely as a springboard for Walter Shandy's theories and as a vehicle for Sterne's satire on conventional "life

¹As quoted in Allan B. Howes, Yorick and the Critics (New Haven, 1958), p. 116.

and adventures" novels, which begin with the birth of their hero and trace in chronological order the events of his childhood and adult life until his marriage or death.

Tristram, as a character within the novel, is used by Tristram, the man of humour, to play with the reader's normal expectations with regard to the plot and hero of his book. Beginning his narrative with Tristram's unfortunate conception, Tristram, the man of humour, traces the pre-natal origin of his hero in a parody of the epic tradition of beginning the hero's history ab ovo. Interpreting Horace's phrase literally instead of metaphorically, Tristram describes the mechanical sexual routine which resulted in his birth, implicitly contrasting it with the usual intervention of the gods in the epic hero's conception. The pre-natal accident, through which Walter's animal spirits are dispersed, is of no significance in itself, yet it takes on a full exemplary value in the context of the whole process of irreversible determinisms which guide Tristram's fate. The ironical respect imparted toward the homunculus also attains significance in that man is subjected to the tyranny of events as soon as the possibility of existence opens before him. The homunculus is, thus, ultimately taken seriously as a hidden but real individuality, which in its future existence will enjoy no more rights than it does now.

The events of Tristram's life are few and are a mockery of action as such. After much ratiocination, Tristram is finally born in volume three, his mother being denied a London lying-in because of her fruitless trip to the capital the preceding year. Doomed by the marriage articles to have his nose squeezed flat against his face by Dr. Slop's deadly forceps, Tristram is born in a manner which, according to Walter's hypothesis, is not conducive to a salutary future development, his cerebellum being squeezed and propelled toward the cerebrum in his head-first delivery. In volume four, Tristram is christened, again tragically, for his Christian name, so significant in Walter's scheme of things, denotes a sorrowful being, as opposed to his intended name, Trismegistus, which would have equipped him for as salubrious a destiny as that of Hermes Trismegistus.²

Tristram's unexpected circumcision occurs in volume five and he is put into breeches in volume six, his education, to be based on his father's Tristra-poedia, being neglected because of Walter's concentration on the writing of his work. Little else is made known about Tristram's life. Physically, he is described only in his tallness for his age as a child and in

²Work identifies the name of Hermes Trismegistus as "the Greek name of Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom, inventor of arts and sciences, and reputed author of the forty-two encyclopaedic 'Hermetic' sacred books of ancient Egypt, of which fragments. . .are yet extant". See Tristram Shandy, n. 2, pp. 279-80.

his lean frame during his adult life, his constitution being weakened by the asthma which he contracted by skating against the wind at Flanders. Tristram, the hero, also made a grand tour of Europe, attended by most of the Shandy household, except Mrs. Shandy, who was occupied with knitting a pair of breeches for her husband, another tour of Europe apparently as tutor for Lord Noddy's son, and a later journey through France and Italy, which Tristram, the man of humour, describes simultaneously in volume eight.

Tristram, constantly buffeted by fortune, cuts a sorry figure in the world, for as he affirms:

I have been the continual sport of what the world calls fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil;---yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, that in every stage of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small HERO sustained. (p. 10)

Not destined for greatness even in his misfortunes, Tristram's minor accidents, comic as they may seem, are the irritating inconveniences which may entail grave consequences in a person's life. His history, broken off before he is mature enough in a literary sense to become a fully-developed character, nevertheless includes the truly decisive incidents that, according to Walter Shandy and significantly, to modern psychology, which Sterne prefigures in this sense, more or less settle Tristram's subsequent character and

fortune. A hero without heroic qualities, Tristram's only claim to fame is his susceptibility to fortune's whims and his singularity observed by Walter Shandy: "That I should neither think nor act like any other man's child" (p. 6).

Tristram, the narrator, on the other hand, is a middle-aged man who, while occasionally donning the fool's cap, preserves generally the sober appearance characteristic of the man of humour.³ Although much has been made by critics, such as John M. Stedmond and Henri Fluchère, of Tristram's role as a clown or jester, this aspect of Tristram's character is rather a functional one, than one based upon the actual manner of the presentation of his story. Tristram does claim the fool's prerogative of wisdom through mockery and he does ally himself with the jester's tradition of treating dogmatism with arbitrariness and ridicule, yet in his demeanor, he is differentiated from Yorick's and the jester's outward gaiety of manner. Tristram, although occasionally given to open clowning with his apostrophes and experiments on chapters, nevertheless generally assumes an apologetic stance with regard to his own person and a grave manner with regard to the audience to which he directs his discourse.

³See chapter I, p. 29ff.

Tristram's art of narration, as he acknowledges, is linked to the art of conversation, so cultivated during the eighteenth century: "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" (pp. 108-9). Tristram, in presenting his life history to an audience composed of various elements, as indicated by his repeated references to "dear sir", "madam", "your reverences" and "your worships", must preserve the rules of propriety and polite restraint. He must also attract and sustain the attention to his discourse of all members of his audience. Tristram, thus, must present a varied bill of fare, yet one which is socially acceptable to his audience. His manner must be an engaging one and while laughing inwardly and occasionally clowning outwardly, Tristram's general facade must, of necessity, be one of politeness and restraint.

Tristram, in characterizing himself before the reader, presents himself as a man of learning. He refers to himself "as a scholar" (p. 103), "as a man of erudition" (p. 85), and as "an historian" (p. 207). He takes pride in the "expensive education bestowed upon me, both at home and abroad" (p. 114), manifesting vanity in his reference

to it and to his learning. He regards his book as being didactic as well as entertaining, affirming that it would infallibly impart "deep erudition and knowledge" (p. 56) if read properly, since it is a "cyclopaedia of arts and sciences" (p. 122) and since he has written his "life for the amusement of the world, and. . .opinions for its instruction" (p. 215). His father's true son, Tristram displays the same intellectual oddities and whimsical tastes as Walter Shandy. He delights in literary and scientific eccentricities, formulating his own hypotheses, which differ from those of his father, as in the question of the relation of common oaths and imprecations to Ernulphus' curse. Although generally castigating pedantry, Tristram is prone to academic references, as in his discussion of Locke's theories to explain "the true cause of the confusion in my uncle Toby's discourse" by showing "what it did not arise from" (p. 86). He is also prone to imposing his own patterns upon things, as in his reduction of art to a set of principles on digressions, in which he regards his work as a machine with two contrary motions: "I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going" (p. 73).

Tristram, a comically persecuted character who seeks an explanation of the humiliations inflicted on him since the very hour of his conception, repeatedly reproaches and laments his fate. Inferring that he is not an eminent successful personage from his first mention of animal spirits, Tristram, who is "begot and born to misfortunes" (p. 41), suffering "so many of the whips and short turns, which in one stage or other of my life have come slap upon me from the shortness of my nose" (p. 230), speaks of himself as a victim of "the unavoidable distresses with which, as an author and a man", he is "hemmed in on every side" (p. 545). The "tragicomical completion" (p. 600) of Walter Shandy's prediction, Tristram, as the narrative progresses, becomes afflicted with a serious illness, as a result of his asthma. Tristram's reference to his cough and his dramatic escape from death in volume seven suggest a funereal background to his narrative, which, like Yorick's skull in Hamlet, epitomizes the undercurrent of suffering and painful effects in humour. Although temporarily resisting death, Tristram becomes increasingly aware of his mortality and of the swift passage of time. Noting that Jenny's lock of hair grows grey before his eyes and that his own beard has grey hairs in it, Tristram complains of breaking a vessel in his lungs and of losing "some fourscore ounces of blood this week in a most uncritical fever" (p. 627).

Yet in spite of his grave narration about the ill hand of fate in his life and even while complaining of his misfortunate childhood, hinting about his impotence in "what had not passed" (p. 518) with Jenny, and running a hectic race with death, Tristram maintains his good spirits. Tristram's mischievousness, which continually bubbles beneath his grave manner and which sometimes erupts in open clowning, seems frequently to be at odds with his decorous facade, yet his qualities of gaiety and gravity are not ultimately incompatible, for both are integral aspects of the man of humour, as delineated by Cazamian and Twain. Tristram's frolicsome gaiety is the humour which he manifests to indicate his own peculiar type of eccentricity, while his grave bearing and apologetic posture are the mask which he employs to feign an unconsciousness of the comical effect he is creating by means of his oddity. Tristram's eccentricity, exhibited in open clowning with blank and black pages, asterisks and a generally irreverent attitude even while pretending to be respectful and serious, is not of the same quality as the hobby-horses of Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy. The humours of the brothers are employed in a more complex manner, their comical function being inextricably combined with their more serious purpose of indicating the imaginative reality of an individual that isolates him from others and causes many of the misfortunes of life while,

at the same time, yielding its greatest pleasures. Tristram's eccentricity, on the other hand, is utilized strictly for a comical end, which is not realized, moreover, in the manner of hobby-horsical automatism. Tristram's eccentric clowning affords the pure release of primitive humour on one level, but on another level, it is a compendium of the techniques of the traditional humorist by means of which his reader or audience is induced to a response of laughter. Tristram manifests also an irresponsibility and spontaneity which are more apparent than real, his narrative indicating a constant self-consciousness with regard to its effect upon the reader. Tristram's feigned irresponsibility and pretended spontaneity are employed rather to conceal his very skilfull and calculated humoristic techniques in order to present them under the guise of eccentric foolery.

Tristram's affected irresponsibility and irreverence are most clearly evident in his pronouncements on the subject of the composition of his novel. Claiming to write entirely without a plan: "Now consider, sir, what nonsense it is, either in fighting, or writing, or any thing else. . .which a man has occasion to do---to act by plan" (p. 575), Tristram claims alternately that he is governed only by his pen and that he begins "with writing the first sentence---and trusting to Almighty God for the second" (p. 540). He portrays himself comically half-rising in his chair to catch

the inspiration wafting through the air above him or changing his clothes and shaving his beard to attain a cleanly and fit quality of writing. He leaves his mother eavesdropping at the parlour door for nine chapters and is so busy when Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy are descending the stairs for four chapters that he must finally pay "a day-tall critick" (p. 285) a crown to get them off the stairs and to bed. Likewise, unable to decide where to place the account of Trim's encounter with Bridget at the subsequently destroyed bridge, Tristram asks his audience to help him:

---What would your worships have me to do in this case?

---Tell it, Mr. Shandy, by all means.---
You are a fool, Tristram, if you do. (p. 207)

Being in no better position with the audience's advice than without it, Tristram comically appeals to the muses to help him out of his predicament:

O ye POWERS! (for powers ye are, and great onestoo)---which enable mortal man to tell a story worth the hearing. . . I beg and beseech you, (in case you will do nothing better for us) that wherever, in any part of your dominions it so falls out, that three several roads meet in one point, as they have done just here,---that at least you set up a guide-post, in the center of them, in mere charity to direct an uncertain devil, which of the three he is to take. (p. 207)

Tristram's apparent lack of adherence to rules is reflected in his creation of a comically chaotic "form" which, although giving the impression of utter disorder and confusion, is not nevertheless devoid of plan. Tristram's

rambling, disjointed narrative is based primarily upon the association of his own ideas⁴ and those of his characters. The mental connections formed by Tristram and his characters result in countless digressions on various subjects. Yet this very type of digressive narrative is also typical of a humorist's method, which as Twain maintains,⁵ consists of stringing incongruities together in a wandering and seemingly purposeless way. Tristram, throughout his narrative, is very conscious of the manner of his narration, even while seeming only to display his whimsical and eccentric humour. While relating his story, he employs very subtle and skilfull humoristic techniques which in turn emotionally seduce, surprise and shock the reader, all for the purpose of evoking a response of laughter.

A great part of Tristram's narration is of an anecdotal form, his digressions lending themselves to separate incidents which are self-contained, but which, at the same time, contribute to the effect of the narrative as

⁴Sterne's use of the principle of the association of ideas is derived from Locke's Essay upon the Human Understanding, in which Locke views consciousness in terms of the spontaneous associations of ideas, rather than logical continuities. Sterne utilizes this concept both in his narrative method and in the hobby-horsical automatism of Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby.

⁵See chapter I, p. 29.

a whole. Tristram's account of his life and his family consequently includes heterogeneous matter, such as Slawkenbergius's Tale, the Fragment upon whiskers, the abbess of Andouillet's story and the tale of the Lyons' lovers. These stories, unlike such episodes as the reading of the sermon, brother Tom's courting of the Jewish widow in her sausage shop and the story of Le Fever, have little connection with the Shandy family and do not contribute even indirectly to the revelation of character. The intention of these stories is solely the double one of humour and satire, the stories being marked by the techniques of a humorous narrative and usually possessing a parodic function or including satire on pedantry. The stories, moreover, are contrasted with the more subtle humour of character in the novel, in their evocation of a direct spontaneous laughter, as opposed to the amused appreciative smile prompted by the humorous delineation of character, the effect of surprise and shock being more easily attainable in a shorter narrative than in a continuous one.

An excellent example of Tristram's humoristic techniques is found in the story of Amandus and Amanda which, because of its brevity, can be examined in detail. The story is a parody of romantic fiction; this type of narrative, according to Tristram, serves as "pabulum to the brain" at a certain period "in every gentle mortal's life"

(p. 521), yet the brain which is appealed to is like a pulpy pap, the inference being made that it would be more advantageous to fill it with more bracing matter. The names of the two lovers, indicating their worthiness to be loved, are verbal echoes of one another and their vertical juxtaposition on the printed page serves to enhance in a visual way their comical verbal effect. The story itself is dramatically cast, the repeated reiteration of the two lovers' names, Amandus' name to be wailed plaintively and forlornly, contributing to its comicality. Yet the whole point of the story, toward which the narrative is directed continuously by its lack of full stops, is its surprise ending. The nub of the story, a complete reversal of most romantic fictional endings, is so unexpected and is dropped in such a carefully casual manner by the narrator that the inattentive reader might easily miss it completely. Yet the shock of it can prompt nothing but a spontaneous chuckle, just as the entire episode, told gravely with proper pauses and voice effects, can be exceedingly funny and can, in fact, be easily imagined as part of the repertoire of a sophisticated stage humorist. The story must be quoted in its entirety to gain its full effect:

O! There is a sweet aera in the life of man,
when, (the brain being tender and fibrillous, and
more like pap than any thing else)---a story read
of two fond lovers, separated from each other by
cruel parents, and by still more cruel destiny---

Amandus---He

Amanda---She---

each ignorant of the other's course,

He---east

She---west

Amandus taken captive by the Turks, and carried to
the emperor of Morocco's court, where the princess
of Morocco falling in love with him, keeps him
twenty years in prison, for the love of his Amanda---

She---(Amanda) all the time wandering barefoot,
and with dishevell'd hair, o'er rocks and mountains
enquiring for Amandus---Amandus! Amandus!---making
every hill and vally to echo back his name---

Amandus! Amandus!

at every town and city sitting down forlorn at the
gate---Has Amandus!---has my Amandus enter'd?---
till,---going round, and round, and round the
world---chance unexpected bringing them at the same
moment of the night, though by different ways, to
the gate of Lyons their native city, and each in
well known accents calling out aloud,

Is Amandus

Is my Amanda

} still alive?

they fly into each others arms, and both drop down
dead for joy. (pp. 520-1)

The longer, more satirical Slawkenbergius's Tale,
with its phallic connotations, manifests a more sustained
utilization of similar humoristic techniques. The tale,
emphasizing the futility and absurdity of pedantic dialectic,
satirizes religious orders, the medical profession, scientists,
logicians, lawyers and university scholars. The many argu-
ments about the possibility and origin of the stranger's
nose are reduced to absurd conclusions, as in the rational-
izing of the civilians, which ends in proving that "the
stranger's nose was neither true nor false" (p. 260) and the

reasonings of the medical faculty, which stubbornly clings to a pedantic logic directly contrary to realistic phenomena: "---It happens otherways---replied the opponents.---It ought not, said they" (p. 259). The whole tale, moreover, is again a parody of romantic fiction. The innocent purity of the courteous stranger, bent religiously upon the preservation of his nose, is matched by the perseverance of his Julia, who tries to follow her Diego through all the thorny tracks of love. Diego's movements throughout the story are comically stylized, as exemplified by his reaction to the conversation between the trumpeter and his wife: "No! said he, dropping his reins upon his mule's neck, and laying both his hands upon his breast, the one over the other in a saint-like position (his mule going on easily all the time)" (p. 247), only to later uncross "his arms with the same solemnity with which he crossed them" (p. 249). The traditional romantic reliance upon chance, as shown in the tale of the Lyons' lovers by their accidental meeting at the gates of their city, is manifested in the fateful meeting of Diego and Fernandez at the same inn, the hazards of chance being emphasized by Fernandez' original bypassing of the inn.

Slawkenbergius's Tale, although logical and ordered in its construction, is nevertheless rambling and seemingly aimless. The aura of mystery around the stranger and his

nose is, however, increased systematically with each confrontation between Diego and the citizens of Strasburg. The characters in the story and the reader are alike teased with the possibility of a revelation which repeatedly results in no new knowledge: "It never shall be touched, said he, clasping his hands and bringing them close to his breast, till that hour.---What hour? cried the inn-keeper's wife. ---Never!---never! said the stranger, never till I am got ---For heaven sake into what place? said she.---The stranger rode away without saying a word" (p. 251). The suspense is accumulated continuously until countless citizens of Strasburg pour out on the road to Frankfort to meet the courteous stranger, who meanwhile has departed with Fernandez for Spain. Yet the story is not completed until its totally unexpected ending, which supplies a moral with regard to pedantry and which is completely superfluous to the anticipated unravelling of the mystery of the stranger's nose. The city of Strasburg is invaded by the French, for: "The French indeed, who are ever upon the catch, when they saw the Strasburgers, men, women, and children, all marched out to follow the stranger's nose--each man followed his own, and marched in" (p. 271).

The sentimental situations in Tristram's narrative are described with a reliance upon similar humoristic techniques. Tristram, by his assumed seriousness of manner, involves the reader emotionally in the episodes, only to

surprise him by the unexpected mischievous endings.

Tristram's first pathetic story of Parson Yorick's death is a sentimentally sad one, its mood enhanced not broken, as Dilworth maintains, by the dying Yorick's Cervantic jest, the tone of the parson's last comment serving to increase the pathos of the situation by reminding the reader of Yorick's mettlesome spirit. Just as the reader's heart is melting in sympathetic vibrations with Eugenius' weeping, Tristram, the man of humour, completely undercuts the pathos of the situation with two black pages. The shock of the reader's confrontation with these pages can prompt nothing but a surprised spontaneous burst of laughter. Tristram's account of Uncle Toby's benevolence to the fly is absurdly comical in itself, yet Tristram skilfully manages to sustain a sentimental mood in spite of this. The reader finds himself accepting the ludicrous situation in a seriously emotional manner, regarding Uncle Toby's biblical addressing of the fly as "thee" and his comment about the hair on the fly's head as beautiful and strangely enough, completely appropriate references. The tone is not broken until the sudden intrusion of Tristram's pointed index-finger and copy-book reference: "This is to serve for parents and governors instead of a whole volume upon the subject" (p. 114). Tristram, moreover, frequently reminds the reader of the original fly incident, thus, enhancing the pleasure

of it, as in Trim's reference to "a poor negro girl, with a bunch of white feathers slightly tied to the end of a long cane, flapping away flies---not killing them" and in Uncle Toby's humorously naive retort: "'Tis a pretty picture!. . . she had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy---" (p. 606).

Tristram's parody, in the ass of Lyons' episode, of his own reliance upon gestures for the psychological revelation of his characters' inner states is again surprisingly undercut by the unexpected ending of having his breeches torn "in the most disastrous direction you can imagine" (p. 534). Tristram's and the reader's sympathetic involvement with the distresses of Maria is similarly undercut, this time in a more gentle manner, by Maria's alternate shift of gaze, as in the glove episode in A Sentimental Journey, and by Tristram's retort:

Maria look'd wistfully for some time at me, and then at her goat---and then at me---and then at her goat again, and so on, alternately---

---Well, Maria, said I softly---What resemblance do you find? (p. 631).

The episode of Le Fever's death, utilized by Tristram the narrator for the more serious intent of emphasizing Uncle Toby's true benevolence, is nevertheless also employed for a humorous purpose. Tristram, breaking in on the reader's involvement at the end of the narration by refusing to go on with the story, also prevents the reader's complete identi-

fication with the story by the running joke of Le Fever's surname, which obviously refers to the disease from which he died.

Tristram's utilization of sentimental stories for a humorous end is not antipathetic to the general concept of humour which is, in fact, characterized by its emphasis upon feeling. The sympathy and pathos which Tristram evokes in the sentimental episodes of his narrative, although eventually undercut by his over-riding humoristic purpose, are not negated by their dissolution into laughter. Tristram, evoking pathos and laughter alternately or simultaneously in the reader, underlines the close association of humour and pathos, each of which is founded firmly on a strong sympathy with the feelings of others. The reader's emotional involvement in the sentimental stories is employed by the narrator to enhance, by contrast, the pleasure of the ludicrous response, the comprehensive emotional appeal of the narrative running the gamut of emotions in the reader.

The sentimental incidents, however, do not maintain an equal balance between pathos and humour, nor are they consistently successful. The superb description of Uncle Toby and the fly, maintaining an even proportion between humour and pathos, is matched only by the tender story of Le Fever, which, although predominantly pathetic, is humorous in the responses of Uncle Toby and Trim to the

soldier's suffering and in the joke regarding his name. The pathetic and humorous elements of the story are handled with a graceful delicacy, which evokes a response of tearful laughter and warm, tender fellow-feeling. The passage of Uncle Toby's oath, reprinted in The Beauties of Sterne and quoted so often in Sterneian criticism, is surely the highlight of the Le Fever episode, the finely delineated description of the effect of Toby's oath in the heaven's chancery being perfectly prepared for by his stubborn insistence that Le Fever would march again, accompanied by his own comical corresponding marching, "though without advancing an inch" (p. 425). The incident of Maria and the goat is, on the other hand, flat and heavy-handed. Maria and her woes are described too superficially to prompt much reaction from the reader, other than one of wonder at Tristram's excessive emotional response, which is too broadly delineated and presented in too cumbersome a manner for the evocation of a corresponding feeling in the reader. The humour of Tristram's unexpected comment, although temporarily redeeming the episode, is subsequently flattened by his apology for making a joke of Maria's woes, his usual humorous technique of surprise being weighted by the faulty timing of the too lengthy insistence upon gravity at the end of the episode.

Tristram's playing upon the feelings of the reader

and his skilful evocation of a varied emotional response from his audience is facilitated by his intimate relationship with it. The development and sustainment of a vital relationship of a humorist with his audience is a necessary requirement for the full appreciation of humour, the effect of which depends on the humorist's manipulation of the feelings of his audience and on the audience's awareness of his assumed gravity, which is employed for a humoristic end. Tristram exhibits a knowledge of his audience in directing various parts of his narrative to specific groups within it, matters of hypotheses and learning, of greater interest to men, being addressed to the masculine section of the audience, while more personal and sexual matters are referred to the feminine part. Tristram in turn praises and chastizes his audience; he shows a deferential respect to its wishes yet does not stint in making it the butt of his wit.

Tristram regulates his discourse in accordance with its effect upon the audience and attempts artfully to steer the reader away from misinterpretations of his narrative, while, at the same time, subtly indicating the meaning he actually intends. Tristram also instructs his reader in the proper attitude toward his work in order to facilitate his communication with the reader and thus to enhance the possibility of the reader's perception of his purpose.

Tristram demands a constant attention from his audience not only to satisfy his pride through its understanding and appreciation of his account, but also to enable it to perceive and enjoy his humoristic method, for as Uncle Toby maintains, "a man should ever bring one half of the entertainment along with him" (p. 559) to a merry work. Tristram chastizes inattentiveness in the reader, as in his sharp rebuke to Madam, in which she is used as an exemplum to emphasize the point that his work is to be read carefully and not merely for the adventures described therein:

---How could you, Madam, be so inattentive in reading the last chapter? I told you in it, That my mother was not a papist.---Papist! You told me no such thing, Sir. Madam, I beg leave to repeat it over again, That I told you as plain, at least, as words, by direct inference, could tell you such a thing.---Then, Sir, I must have miss'd a page.---No, Madam,---you have not miss'd a word.---Then I was asleep, Sir.---My pride, Madam, cannot allow you that refuge.---Then, I declare, I know nothing at all about the matter.---That, Madam, is the very fault I lay to your charge; and as a punishment for it, I do insist upon it, that you immediately turn back, that is, as soon as you get to the next full stop, and read the whole chapter over again. (p. 56)

Tristram also exhorts the reader to read profusely and diligently for only thus will he be able to comprehend Tristram's many allusions and perceive his humoristic techniques:

Read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader! read,---or by the knowledge of the great saint Paraleipomeinon---I tell you before-hand, you had better throw down the book at once; for without much reading, by which your reverence knows, I mean much knowledge, you will no more be able to penetrate the moral of the next marbled page (motly emblem of my work!) than the world with all its sagacity has been able to unravel the many opinions, transactions and truths which still lie mystically hid under the Dark veil of the black one. (p. 226)

Tristram's close relationship with his audience is most clearly exemplified in his attitude toward Madam. Most of the references to Madam are made with regard to the sexual double entendres within the novel. Tristram takes great care in steering "my dear girl" away from his equivocal passages in order to make his narrative socially acceptable. Madam, however, displays an even greater interest in these passages. At the beginning of the novel, she indicates clearly her position with regard to sexual matters. "Fy, Mr. Shandy" (p. 49), she says, when Tristram attempts to explain the ties binding him to his Jenny. Yet Madam is very curious about matters which she would be quick to censure had she been told about them explicitly. After the narration of Slawkenbergius's Tale, she twice interrupts Tristram with the question of whether the stranger's nose was a true or false one. Madam constantly misunderstands Tristram, jumping to wrong conclusions, as in his discussion of the relationship between love and cuckoldom: ". . .and so long, as what in this vessel of the human frame, is Love---may be

Hatred, in that---Sentiment half a yard higher---and
Nonsense-----no, Madam,---not there---I mean at the part
 I am now pointing to with my forefinger---how can we help
 ourselves?" (p. 542).

Tristram's addressing of the sexual matters of his narrative to Madam rather than to the masculine part of his audience is indicative of the usual course of events in the formation of obscenely tendentious wit, as formulated by Freud. A triangular relationship is necessary, according to Freud, for the development of obscene wit: the narrator of the wit, the object of sexual aggressiveness and a third person in whom the aim of producing pleasure from the witty remark is fulfilled. An integral condition for the development of smutty wit is the inflexibility of the woman, who inhibits the narrator's libidinal impulses and prompts his development of a hostile trend toward her. The narrator, through his obscenely witty speech, exposes the woman before the third person who, originally the intruder, is now accepted as a confederate and is bribed as a listener by the easy gratification of his own libido. Freud notes that obscene wit arises only in a refined and cultured social stratum, "the higher degree of culture and education" correspondingly increasing "the inability of the woman to tolerate stark sex matters". The openly smutty speech, accepted by common people as an expression of good humour,

must be transformed in a cultured society into a witty obscenity, the technical means of which is allusion, i.e.: "substitution through a trifle, something which is only remotely related, which the listener reconstructs in his imagination as a full fledged and direct obscenity". Freud further maintains that: "the greater the disproportion between what is directly offered in the obscenity and what is necessarily aroused by it in the mind of the listener, the finer is the witticism and the higher it may venture in good society".⁶

The triangular relationship set up by Sterne for the obscene allusions in his novel is basically the same as that delineated by Freud, although its perspective is widened by its literary aspect. Tristram the narrator, inhibited by Madam, cannot speak openly with regard to sexual matters, yet his repressions are caused not by Madam as such, but by the social conventions which she represents. Tristram, thus, before an implicit audience of males--"your worships", "your reverences", "dear sir"--embarrasses Madam during the course of his narrative by exposing her sexual and social inhibitions. Madam, like most of Tristram's readers, is satirized for her sexual hypocrisy, which prompts her to censure sexual references while being very much aware of them and wishing to be excited sensually by them. Tris-

⁶Freud, p. 696.

tram simultaneously titillates the tastes of his audience, while satirizing these tastes. Tristram's audience in the novel, moreover, is characteristic of the reading public of Sterne's day, as indicated by the description in John Browne's An Estimate of the Manners and Principles of the Times (1757):

A strong Characteristic, this, of the Manners of the Times: The untractable Spirit of Lewdness is sunk into gentle Gallantry, and Obscenity itself is grown effeminate.

But what Vice hath lost in Coarseness of Expression, she hath gained in a more easy and general Admittance: In ancient Days, bare and impudent Obscenity, like a common Woman of the Town, was confined to Brothels: Where as the Double-Entendre, like a modern fine lady, is now admitted into the best Company; while her transparent Covering of Words, like a thin fashionable Gawze delicately thrown across, discloses, while it seems to veil, her Nakedness of Thought.⁷

Tristram himself characterizes his audience, when attempting to suitably express the two words which prompt a French post-horse into motion:

. . .now as these words cost nothing, I long from my soul to tell the reader what they are; but here is the question---they must be told him plainly and with the most distinct articulation, or it will answer no end---and yet to do it in that plain way---though their reverences may laugh at it in the bed-chamber---full well I wot, they will abuse it in the parlour: . . . (p.: 503)

⁷As quoted in John M. Stedmond, The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne (Toronto, 1967), p. 57, n. 8.

Tristram ultimately discloses the two words in his elaborate off-colour anecdote of the Abbess of Andouillet, the obscenity of which is rendered less objectionable by being linked with a conventional attack on popery and with pedantic quibbles about matters of doctrinal interpretation.

Tristram's attitude with regard to the many veiled obscenities in the novel is manifold. Although he utilizes obscenities in a varied way, many of them releasing a comic reaction by their sudden intrusion into and incongruity with the more serious train of thought they break in upon, Tristram often pretends an innocence of the obscene allusions in his narrative. He constantly turns the smutty interpretation of his words upon the reader himself, frequently presenting his obscenities by means of the technique of double entendre with an allusion,⁸ in which both meanings of his reference are not equally obvious, the commonplace meaning having more prominence and the sexual meaning being covered and hidden, easily escaping the notice of the unsuspecting person altogether. Tristram's ironical pretence that his narrative is devoid of obscene allusions serves, therefore, to make his readers see and admit the contradiction behind which he is hiding, and by extension, to

⁸This technique is discussed by Freud during his analysis of wit. See Freud, p. 652ff.

realize their own hypocrisy. His pretence is the means by which he overthrows the social obstacles which prevent him from discussing the matter openly with his reader and results ultimately in revealing the truth which he professes to conceal. Tristram's obscene references, moreover, would not threaten the completely innocent reader. Contrary to much of the contemporary criticism of Sterne's work, which includes among more serious critical comments, the couplet:

If poor weak women go astray,
Shandy's Stars are to blame, and not they. . . ,⁹

Tristram's obscenities would not incite sexual desire in the reader, for they present sex in too ludicrous a light and as Walter Shandy maintains: "there is no passion so serious, as lust" (p. 592).

Tristram's sexual references in the novel range from the theme of procreation to countless plays upon words, to a whole mass of sexual symbols, as noses, whiskers, button-holes and sausages. Tristram's preoccupation with sex, admitted openly by him, indicates the fact that he is not at the mercy of obscenity, but rather handles it consciously for his complex purpose. Describing Mrs. Shandy's eye, he states that it had not "the least mote or speck of

⁹As quoted in Howes, p. 38.

desire" in it, further adding: "and how I happen to be so lewd myself, particularly a little before the vernal and autumnal equinox-----Heaven above knows---My mother---madam ---was so at no time, either by nature, by institution, or example" (p. 600). Tristram's lewdness, certainly not derived from the apathetic, indifferent and temperate Mrs. Shandy, can, however, be viewed as his legacy from his Aunt Dinah, just as his wit is his inheritance from Walter Shandy.

Tristram's sexual references, however, are used not only to satirize the reader's hypocrisy. They are often used to further the delineation of character, Tristram's saucy picture, for example, of Uncle Toby's staring "upon a small crevice, form'd by a bad joint in the chimney-piece" (p. 102) while declaring his innocence of the wrong end of woman from the right end, serving to bring out Toby's ingenuousness. Tristram's sexual puns, such as his reference to the difference between "an old hat cock'd---and a cock'd old hat" (p. 549) are used generally to provide incidental comedy, albeit of an inferior kind, during the course of his narration. Tristram's scatological references, although never combined with sexual allusions, are employed in a similar manner for a comic purpose. They are used by Tristram to point an already comical catalogue, as in the list of names he will be called for misplacing chapters:

"And here, without staying for my reply, shall I be call'd as many blockheads, numsculs, doddypoies, dunderheads, ninny-hammers, goosecaps, joltheads, nicompoops, and sh--t-a-beds" (p. 632). They are also employed for a purely comic effect, as in Tristram's reference to "seeing a cardinal make water like a quirister (with both hands)" (p. 545), the intrusion of which in the midst of Tristram's description of the increasing seriousness of his disease providing comical relief.

Tristram's all-inclusive utilization of obscene references in his narrative, like his conscious use of the humoristic technique of emotional involvement followed by an undercutting surprise to produce laughter, indicates his skill as a man of humour, his assumed gravity and decorous facade masking his complicated intent. Tristram's occasional open clowning, an expression of the eccentricity of his humour and composed in actuality of artful humoristic techniques, links him with the hobby-horsical eccentricities of Uncle Toby and Walter, which, although expressed in a different manner from Tristram's humour, are derived from the same root of the Jonsonian character-excess, stripped of its predominantly satirical intent. Tristram, although commonly designated as Sterne's mouth-piece and a direct expression of the author's personality, is nevertheless a character in his own right, the author, even while

projecting many of his own ideas and many aspects of his personality upon his narrator, creating in him a fully characterized man of humour whose function in the novel is further complicated by his added responsibility of being a character within it.

CHAPTER IV

THE HUMOROUS VISION OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

Priestley, in his analysis of the Shandy brothers, maintains that: "There may be more laughable works in English literature than Tristram Shandy, but there is none more strictly humorous."¹ Writing from the vantage point of twentieth century formulations of humour, Priestley himself defines humour as "thinking in fun while feeling in earnest".² He emphasizes the sympathetic element of Sterne's novel, as expressed especially in his treatment of character, adding, however, that the novel incorporates humour on various planes, from the lowest level consisting of "the silly tricks that need the help of the printer--the blank or blackened pages, and the dots and dashes" to the highest level, which is the humour "that plays about the figures of the Shandy household".³ Priestley's analysis, centered as it is upon humour of character, discusses only partially the defining characteristics of Sterne's work which designate it as humorous, for Sterne's novel Tristram Shandy reflects the

¹Priestley, English Humour, p. 125.

²Ibid., p. 18.

³Ibid., p. 125.

eighteenth century interpretations of humour and embodies in a concrete manner the developments of humour which were yet to be formulated by literary theorists and critics. In its humorous vision of life, it includes such eighteenth-century concepts as the assumed seriousness of humour and the delineation of character in terms of sympathetic benevolent eccentricities which are an expression of the English heritage. Tristram Shandy, moreover, initiated the discussion of the inclusion of pathos in a humorous work and contributed significantly to the formulation of the concept of commingled laughter and tears in the humorous response. Its subject-matter, which is basically sad and serious, pointed to the underlying tragedy and painful affects in humour, expressed later in a literary context by George Meredith and psychologically by Sigmund Freud.

The basic problem explored in the subject-matter of Tristram Shandy is the difficulty of communication between individuals who are alienated from one another, locked up in the confines of their own minds. Since human beings do not possess a Momus' glass in their breasts through which their secrets can be readily revealed but their minds are rather "wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood" (p. 75), they must perforce attempt to express their innermost thoughts and emotions by means of words. Yet language, according to Sterne and to Locke's philosophy

upon which his interpretation is based, is inadequate as a means of communication between men. For Locke, words are the external sensible signs whereby man's thoughts and ideas, which are hidden and invisible, may be made known to others. Yet words are only the signs of men's ideas and do not represent reality: "words in their primary or immediate signification, stand for nothing but the ideas in the mind of him that uses them".⁴ Words, moreover, are imperfect signs; often they are not completely accommodated to the ideas they are supposed to represent and at all times they are capable of various applications in the minds of those that use them. Thus, words can never be used with any certainty for although a natural connection between words and ideas is assumed, words:

. . . signify only men's peculiar ideas, and that by a perfectly arbitrary imposition, is evident in that they often fail to excite in others (even that use the same language) the same ideas we take them to be signs of; and every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for what ideas he pleases that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same words that he does. . . .⁵

The lack of access of one soul to another and of one mind to another because of the insufficiency of language is

⁴ John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. J. W. Yolton (London, Everyman's Library), II, 12.

⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

dramatized in Tristram Shandy in countless scenes. Language interposes itself between the two Shandy brothers, and between Uncle Toby and Widow Wadman. Uncle Toby, completely enclosed by the terminology of military science, meets with constant frustration in attempting to communicate his thoughts to others. Tristram, accounting for the true cause of the confusion in Toby's discourse, reinforces Locke's notion of the instability of words:

What it did arise from,. . .and a fertile source of obscurity it is,---and ever will be,---and that is the unsteady uses of words which have perplexed the clearest and most exalted understandings. . . .

Gentle critick! when thou hast. . .consider'd within thyself how much of thy own knowledge, discourse, and conversation has been pestered and disordered, at one time or other, by this, and this only:---What a pudder and racket in COUNCILS about ουσια and ὑπόστασις; and in the SCHOOLS of the learned about power and about spirit;---about essences and about quintessences;---about substances, and about space.---What confusion in greater THEATRES from words of little meaning, and as indeterminate a sense;---when thou considers this, thou wilt not wonder at my uncle Toby's perplexities,. . . 'Twas not by ideas,---by heaven! his life was put in jeopardy by words. (pp. 86-7)

Words for Uncle Toby, signifying only the ideas formed by his military background and his subsequent studying of sieges and fortifications, are constantly interpreted by him in a manner peculiar to him alone; Walter's train of ideas thus becomes a train of artillery and Dr. Slop's bridge for Tristram's nose a bridge for one of Toby's fortifications. Uncle Toby can communicate in words only with Trim. Their communication is rarely, however, an actual exchange of ideas.

It is usually based on their confirmation and echoing of one another's words in a manner which surprisingly advances the conversation and resolves the difficulty at hand. Thus, when at the misfortune of Tristram's misnaming, Trim is about to disclose the damage done by the cow's breaking into the fortifications, he realizes very quickly that he and Uncle Toby are talking of two different matters, although he does not reveal this to his master. The conversation advances in the typical manner of responsive, alternating parts, initiated by a modified echoing of the preceding line:

Your honour, said Trim, shutting the parlour door before he began to speak, has heard, I imagine, of this unlucky accident---O yes, Trim! said my uncle Toby, and it gives me great concern---I am heartily concerned too, but I hope your honour, replied Trim, will do me the justice to believe, that it was not in the least owing to me---To thee---Trim!---cried my uncle Toby, looking kindly in his face---'twas Susannah's and the curate's folly betwixt them---What business could they have together, an' please your honour, in the garden?---In the gallery, thou meanest, replied my uncle Toby.

Trim found he was upon a wrong scent, and stopped short with a low bow. . . . (p. 294)

Walter Shandy, on the other hand, is not perplexed by words in the same manner as his brother, yet his ideas are viewed so out of the common light that, as natural an orator as he is, he can never make them comprehensible to those around him. Toby finds Walter's hypotheses above him and often does not even attempt to understand them, concerned as he is with his own hobby-horse. Yet even in the rare moments when the two brothers agree verbally to a proposition,

their words stand for completely different concepts: "He was a very great man! added my uncle Toby; (meaning Stevinus)---He was so; brother Toby, said my father, (meaning Piereskus)" (p. 410). Mrs. Shandy is a constant source of frustration to her husband, for her total passivity results in her not even asking a question. Walter curses his luck in being a "master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature" while having "a wife at the same time with such a head-piece, that he cannot hang up a single inference within side of it, to save his soul from destruction" (p. 147). Mrs. Shandy limits conversations to merely an echo of each of Walter's propositions followed by his rejoinder, a pause and a renewed attempt on his part, as in the affair of Tristram's breeches conducted during one of Walter's beds of justice and in the discussion of Toby's impending marriage to Widow Wadman. Mrs. Shandy, moreover, uses words with a complete disregard for their meaning and significance. Tristram, reminiscing of his mother, describes her particular way:

. . .and that was never to refuse her assent and consent to any proposition my father laid before her, merely because she did not understand it, or had no ideas to the principal word or term of art, upon which the tenet or proposition rolled. She contented herself with. . .using a hard word twenty years together---and replying to it too, if it was a verb, in all its moods and tenses, without giving herself any trouble to enquire about it. (p. 613)

The minor characters of the Shandy household are alike isolated and confined in their own interpretations of words.

Sterne utilizes the imperfect communication of the Shandy servants in a brilliant manner which epitomizes in one scene the cross-purposes of communication presented throughout the course of the entire novel. Sterne depicts the response of the various characters in the kitchen to the news of Bobby's unexpected death. He contrasts the simultaneous actions and reactions of the characters in a contrapuntal interpenetrating manner, individualizing each of them while at the same time grouping them in a cohesive whole. The ideas in the minds of the individual characters lead to an imperfect understanding of the significance of Bobby's death; they result in an altering of the facts of the event when communicated further and in actual verbal misunderstandings between the characters:

----My young master in London is dead! said Obadiah.----

----A green sattin night-gown of my mother's, which had 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, notwithstanding Susannah made use of it herself---failed also of doing its office; it excited not one single idea, tinged either with grey or black,---all was green.---The green sattin night-gown hung there still. . . .

We had a fat foolish scullion---my father, I think kept her for her simplicity;---she had been all autumn struggling with a dropsy.---He is dead! said Obadiah,---he is certainly dead!---So am not I, said the foolish scullion.

---Here is sad news, Trim! cried Susannah, wiping her eyes as Trim step'd into the kitchen,---master Bobby is dead and buried,---the funeral was an interpolation of Susannah's,---we shall have all

to go into mourning, said Susannah.

I hope not, said Trim.---You hope not! cried Susannah earnestly.---The mourning ran not in Trim's head, whatever it did in Susannah's.---I hope---said Trim, explaining himself, I hope in God the news is not true. I heard the letter read with my own ears, answered Obadiah; and we shall have a terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the ox-moor.---Oh! he's dead, said Susannah.---As sure, said the scullion, as I am alive. . . .

(pp. 359-60)

The dialogue continues thus until Trim evokes a full comprehension of the significance of the death not by means of words, but by his dramatic gesture of dropping his hat upon the ground in a manner which epitomizes the sentiment of mortality.

Tristram the narrator is also not exempt from communication difficulties both in his personal life and in his attempt to make his audience understand the significance of his story. In his relationship with Jenny, as in the interrelations of all people, the imperfect association of words with ideas results in misunderstandings. Tristram, viewing a different facet of Jenny as Walter does of all objects, considers her in a different manner than she does herself and has great difficulties in making her comprehend this: "This is the true reason, that my dear Jenny and I, as well as all the world besides us, have such eternal squabbles about nothing.---She looks at her outside,---I, at her in---. How is it possible we should agree about her value?" (p. 382). Tristram, during the narration of his story, meets with

constant frustration in his attempt to relate all aspects of it in great detail. In striving to tell all, he is thwarted by an ever-increasing backlog of material. The longer he writes, the more he has to write and he can never hope to complete his task. Tristram, moreover, in communicating his story to his audience, is impeded by the reader's lack of attentiveness and the consequent lack of comprehension of the subtleties of his narrative. At the same time, he cannot even try to speak directly, for his discourse is obstructed by social conventions. Tristram's story is open to absurd misinterpretations, much like those satirized in "The Key" to Sterne's Political Romance; Tristram firmly denies that he intended to satirize Francis I through the episode of Walter Shandy and the christening, and the Duke of Ormond through the characterization of Trim. Yet Tristram valiantly attempts to alleviate the difficulties in communication. By means of his own digressions and those of the other characters in his story, he tries to loosen the strictness of language by employing it as a dynamic system, capable in itself of raising up new perceptions and ideas, and by rejecting the concept of thought-patterns in terms of formal logical learning. By means of double entendres and ambiguous meanings, he explores the resources of language by allowing his readers to interpret equivocal statements on various levels. Yet even here, he is hampered by the increasing critical attack of his story. The braying critics,

especially those of the Monthly Review, cut and slash Tristram's jerkin to pieces and he barely escapes with the lining to it intact.

Sterne's portrayal of alienated man in his novel would constitute a very bleak picture of the human condition if it were not for his overriding humoristic purpose, which permits the depiction of the underlying tragedy of the human predicament, while at the same time infusing it with a mirthful gay tone and with a fundamental acceptance of life with all its oddities and frustrations. Sterne's potential wasteland, according to Priestley, would lend itself easily to a nerve-jangling satire: "A satirist, loathing his species, could have taken such tragi-comical little creatures, each in the separate mechanical box of his mind, and made out of them a scene or narrative that would have jangled the nerves of a dozen generations".⁶ Sterne, moreover, could have reinforced this impression by a satiric rather than humorous portrayal of the subjection of his characters to the quirks and whims of fate. As proud a creature as man is, he is at the mercy in Sterne's work of trivial objects such as window-sashes and door-hinges. Every attempt of man to control reality and to strive after inaccessible goals, which by his very nature he must do, results in a frustrating back-firing of his intentions which is absurd when viewed in relation to man's pride and self-importance, yet pathetic when seen in terms of man's self-awareness. Sterne's novel essentially

⁶J. B. Priestley, The English Comic Characters (New York, 1925), p. 156.

portrays an absurd world, the absurdities of matter and of mind outdoing one another in ridiculousness. The absurd aspect of man's life is rendered even more so in its lack of grandiosity, in its being composed of trivial, seemingly insignificant little absurdities which nevertheless have a deep-rooted influence on man's happiness and well-being.

The tragic element in Sterne's novel is reinforced by its emphasis upon mortality. Tristram the narrator runs a frenzied race with death and although he manages to escape death's clutches, he is disease-racked by the end of the novel. The novel portrays three deaths, two of which are described fully in death-bed scenes and the third, although not depicted directly in the novel, prompting two lengthy orations on the subject of man's mortality. Trim's brother Tom, moreover, is often brought to mind in his torturing at the hands of the Inquisition. The reminder that man is constantly at the mercy of his body, which is not permanent and must someday return to its original dusty state, is continuously sustained by Sterne even in such slight touches as the resting of Walter Shandy's hand on the chamber-pot when grief-stricken about Tristram's nose-accident and in Jenny's hair turning grey before Tristram's eyes.

The novel, at the same time, points out the lack of sexual fulfillment of all the main characters depicted therein. Obadiah is the only member of the Shandy retinue who possibly achieves sexual fulfillment and Trim, although never

venturing into the married state, can at least express himself sexually with Bridget and the fair Beguine, and seems to accept his sexuality as part of his nature. Walter Shandy, although feeling the kicks of the "ass", views the passions as a negative aspect of man's being "which bends down the faculties, and turns all the wisdom, contemplations, and operations of the soul backwards. . . which couples and equals wise men with fools, and makes us come out of caverns and hiding-places more like satyrs and four-footed beasts than men" (p. 645). He regards his sexual relationship with Mrs. Shandy as a conjugal obligation which he must fulfill although it yields him "Not a jot" (p. 115) of pleasure and he relegates it to the monthly unimpassioned occurrence which coincides both in nature and in time with the mechanical winding of the family clock. Uncle Toby, on the other hand, is totally ignorant of sexual matters. Tristram suggests that Toby's hobby-horse is a compensation for his lack of sexual activity, for he often describes the pleasure which his uncle derives at his bowling-green with sexual comparisons: "Never did lover post down to a belov'd mistress with more heat and expectation, than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy this self-same thing in private" (p. 98), and intimates by extension in his reference to a "Cover'd-way" as a metaphor for "Backside" (p. 100) that this metaphorical representation could be applied to Uncle Toby's whole concern with fortifications. The impression is further reinforced by the portrayal

of Toby's courting of Widow Wadman in terms of a military siege, the two diverse activities being viewed in the same light. Toby's encounter with the lascivious Widow Wadman, who almost at first sight of the Captain symbolically knocks out the pin binding the bottom of her night-shift, results in disillusionment and continued frustration for both of them. Unable to accept the Widow's natural concern with sexuality, Toby retreats to his bowling-green as the Widow, still not enlightened with regard to Toby's indubitable suitability to the married state, returns no doubt to her previous bed-chamber ritual.

As Work maintains, the suspicion of "sexual impotence. . . hovers like a dubious halo over the head of every Shandy male, including the bull".⁷ Tristram the narrator is not exempt from this suspicion as a result of the window-sash incident, the fame of which spread with lightning speed throughout the entire neighborhood. The suggestion of Tristram's impotence is repeated, moreover, in his encounter with Jenny when he mourns over what had not passed between them, although Jenny, for her part, tries to console him by regarding the incident in a positive light.

The underlying tragedy of the humorous view of Tristram Shandy, expressed through the isolation of its characters,

⁷Work, intro. to Tristram Shandy, p. lx.

their lack of sexual fulfillment and through the awareness of mortality, is alleviated by Sterne's sympathetic treatment of character and by his emphasis upon feeling. In developing the characterization of the Shandy brothers, Sterne takes great care in making them sympathetic first and ludicrous afterwards. Presented in terms of amiable humours, Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy are delightful and lovable even while they are ridiculous in their eccentricity and hobby-horsical automatism. Sterne portrays the Shandy brothers in a manner characteristic of humour, in what Priestley terms "tender mockery", which consists of evoking a reaction toward the characters within the novel much like that prompted by the members of one's own family. The absurd traits and characteristics of both the humorous characters and one's loved ones are according to Priestley:

. . .never those that we admire, and indeed we really resent them, but because they are joined with so much that is lovable, our resentment is checked by an opposing rush of tenderness and affection, and we find ourselves laughing. Thus these characteristics, so long as we are feeling indulgent, seem delightfully ridiculous; but when we happen to be out of patience, they may appear even detestable.⁸

The sympathetic element in the characterization of the Shandy brothers is sustained primarily by their depiction in terms of eighteenth century amiable eccentrics and second-

⁸Priestley, English Humour, p. 16.

arily by their own mutual love and trust in the face of their mutual incomprehensibility. The Shandy brothers, possessing the laudable quality of benevolence--Uncle Toby being the epitome of the eighteenth century benevolent man--express this quality constantly in their relationship with one another and although unable to reach an understanding on intellectual terms, meet on the level of human sympathy, effecting through gesture and physical circumstance what words cannot. Tristram's great reliance upon gestures in his narrative technique is based upon the principle expressed by Walter Shandy that gestures are the "unnoticed openings. . . which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul;. . . a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room,---or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him" (pp. 414-5). The gestures of Walter Shandy and Uncle Toby are the means by which they are able to re-establish and reinforce their sympathy and love for one another. Tristram, in the manner of cinematic close-ups, emphasizes the glance or hand-gesture which expresses the ultimately indissoluble bond between the two brothers, as in the Stevinus misunderstanding, when Uncle Toby "look'd up into my father's face, with a countenance spread over with so much good nature;---so placid;---so fraternal;---so inexpressibly tender towards him;---it penetrated my father to his heart: He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing

hold of both my uncle Toby's hands as he spoke:---Brother Toby, said he,---I beg thy pardon" (p. 115).

The sympathetic understanding of the two brothers within the novel is paralleled by Tristram's obvious affection for both his father and his uncle, and for all human beings. Tristram accepts compassionately the faults of his family, which he perceives acutely and utilizes at times for a satiric purpose. With the superior understanding of the man of humour, he realizes that man is a mixture of both good and bad qualities; he does not wish to change man fundamentally and would certainly agree with Uncle Toby's assertion that he loves mankind more than either glory or pleasure. Tristram, in depicting the kitchen scene during the announcement of Bobby's death, generalizes about the reaction of the characters to Trim's dramatic expression of mortality. Describing Susannah's flood of tears and the inner melting of the rest of the characters, Tristram notes that man is not composed of stocks and stones. He picks this thread up later, maintaining: "I said, 'we were not stocks and stones'---'tis very well. I should have added, nor are we angels, I wish we were,---but men cloathed with bodies, and governed by our imaginations;---and what a junketting piece of work of it there is, betwixt these and our seven senses, especially some of them, for my own part, I own it, I am ashamed to confess" (p. 361). Yet noting Susannah's vanity in attributing "the finest face that ever man looked

at" to her own, Tristram verbalizes his acceptance of both the angelic and ludicrous aspects of man: "---Now I love you for this---and 'tis this delicious mixture within you which makes you dear creatures what you are---and he who hates you for it-----all I can say of the matter, is--- That he has either a punkin for his head---or a pippin for his heart,---and whenever he is dissected 'twill be found so" (p. 364).

Tristram's utilization of the pathetic element during his narrative as a part of his humoristic technique of emotional involvement followed by an undercutting surprise points to the close alliance between humour and pathos,⁹ and to the possibility of a simultaneous evocation of laughter and tears in humour. The contemporary critical reaction to Sterne's novel, as outlined by Howes, made a sharp distinction between the humour and pathos therein, seeing each as separate constituents of the work rather than as related aspects in their mutual evocation of feeling. Sterne's novel appealed to his contemporaries not in its admirable inter-relationship of pathos and humour, but strictly in its evocation of these distinct qualities, the pathetic side of Tristram Shandy winning the admiration of Richardson devotees, and the

⁹See chapter III, p. 88.

humorous and satiric elements receiving the approval of the followers of Fielding and Smollett. The pathetic side of Tristram Shandy, moreover, came to be increasingly upheld by critics such as Langhorne of the Monthly Review, who maintained that Sterne's excellence lay "not so much in the humorous as in the pathetic",¹⁰ an assertion subsequently upheld by Griffiths himself in his advice to "strike out a new plan" with "none but amiable or worthy, or exemplary characters".¹¹ The blindness of the majority of Sterne's contemporaries to his humoristic intent in the pathetic episodes of his novel was evidenced by the copious reprinting of these episodes under the title of pathos and by the frequent misspelling of Le Fever's comical name as "Le Fevre", thus negating the ludicrous aspect of the incident.

Yet even in Sterne's contemporary audience, there were individuals, although few and far between, who recognized the admirable combination of pathos and humour in Tristram Shandy, and the simultaneous response of tears and laughter evoked by the novel. Anna Seward, for example, in defending Sterne's novel before one of her friends, noted: "that happy, thrice happy, mixture of the humorous and the pathetic, in which he [Sterne] stands alone amongst all other writers out

¹⁰As quoted in Howes, p. 14.

¹¹Ibid., p. 19.

of the dramatic scale". She also wrote of: "the warm-hearted, honest, generous Toby Shandy, by whose absurdities, so happily mingling with his kindness, and with his virtues, we are betrayed at once into tears of admiration, and into convulsions of laughter".¹² By the early nineteenth century, the link between humour and pathos was popularly understood and exploited, and the acknowledged masters of sympathetic and pathetic humour were Sterne, Shakespeare and Cervantes, the contribution of Tristram Shandy to the formulation of this concept being a major one. Hazlitt thus praised highly the appeal of Sterne's humour both to the reader's sympathy and to his sense of morality, noting that in humour: "We cannot suppress the smile on the lip; but the tear should also stand ready to start from the eye".¹³ De Quincey, in an essay on Jean Paul Richter, mentioned Sterne and also discussed: "the possibility of blending, or fusing, as it were, the elements of pathos and of humor--and composing out of their union a third metal sui generis", adding that the "interpenetration of the humorous and the pathetic"¹⁴

¹²As quoted in Tave, p. 226.

¹³William Hazlitt, "On Wit and Humour" in Essays of William Hazlitt, ed. Frank Carr (London, 1889), 277.

¹⁴Thomas De Quincey, "John Paul Frederick Richter" in The Works of Thomas De Quincey (Boston, 1877), VI, 514.

was excellently managed in both Richter and Sterne. Carlyle, in his discussion of the affinity between humour and pathos, came to conclusions similar to those of De Quincey, maintaining that: "The essence of humour is sensibility" and "unless seasoned and purified by humor, sensibility is apt to run wild; will readily corrupt into disease, falsehood, or, in one word, sentimentality." Thus, "true humor is sensibility" and "springs not more from the head than from the heart; it is not contempt, its essence is love; it issues not in laughter, but in still smiles, which lie far deeper." Sterne's claim to eminence as a humorous writer is, according to Carlyle, a good one, for this specimen of British humour is "with all his faults, our best; our finest, if not our strongest; for Yorick and Corporal Trim and Uncle Toby have yet no brother but in Don Quixote" and although Cervantes is "the purest of all humorists" and Richter stands unsurpassed among the German writers for this quality, Sterne is worthy to be compared with them.¹⁵

Sterne's novel Tristram Shandy thus contributed directly to the formulation of the concept of the inter-relationship between humour and pathos, and indirectly to the inclusion of tragedy in theoretical analyses of humour. The satirical matter of Tristram Shandy, moreover, embodies in a practical manner the relationship expressed by later

¹⁵Thomas Carlyle, "Jean Paul Friedrich Richter" in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London, 1894), I, 14-5.

critics such as Meredith, between humour and satire, both being sub-species of the comic. The satiric element of Tristram Shandy consists mainly of the traditional satire on learning. Sterne introduces many of the same satiric butts as Swift and Pope, but his treatment of them differs from theirs in being much less biting, due to the enveloping of the satire in the novel by its overall humorous tone. That Sterne viewed himself and his novel in the same light as Swift and his literary productions is evident from his reference to Swift in both his letters and in Tristram Shandy. Sterne, upon receiving the advice that he should consider his clerical vocation when writing his novel, answered that his work was not as bold as Swift's: "I deny I have gone as farr as Swift--He keeps a due distance from Rabelais--& I keep a due distance from him--Swift has said a hundred things I durst Not Say--Unless I was Dean of St. Patricks--".¹⁶ Tristram, in asserting that his story is written for posterity, couples it with Swift's Tale of a Tub. His depiction of Walter and Mrs. Shandy's discussion of Trim's and Uncle Toby's slow approach to Widow Wadman's home "shall be thumb'd over by Posterity in a chapter apart ---I say, by Posterity---and care not, if I repeat the word again---for

¹⁶Letters, p. 76.

what has this book done more than the Legation of Moses, or the Tale of a Tub, that it may not swim down the gutter of Time along with them?" (p. 610).

The satire in Sterne's novel, as in the works of Swift and Pope, is written with a didactic intent. Sterne's first view in writing Tristram Shandy consisted of "the hopes of doing the world good by ridiculing what I thought deserving of it--or of disservice to sound learning".¹⁷ Sterne thus consistently satirizes pedantry, as, for example, in Tristram's description of the jargon of critics:

---And how did Garrick speak the soliloquy last night?---Oh, against all rule, my Lord,---most ungrammatically! betwixt the substantive and the adjective, which should agree together in number, case and gender, he made a breach thus,---stopping, as if the point wanted settling;---and betwixt the nominative case, which your lordship knows should govern the verb, he suspended his voice in the epilogue a dozen times, three seconds and three fifths by a stop-watch, my Lord, each time.---Admirable grammarian!---But in suspending his voice---was the sense suspended likewise? Did no expression of attitude or countenance fill up the chasm? ---Was the eye silent? Did you narrowly look?---I look'd only at the stop-watch, my Lord.---Excellent observer! (p. 180)

Tristram burlesques false learning in frequent erudite allusions to literary works and in pedantic authority-citing, as well as in the mock-learned use of footnotes. He also satirizes the conventions of the craft of novel writing in his mock-dedications and in his treatment of himself as hero

¹⁷Letters, p. 90.

of his work. Many of the extensive digressions of the novel, moreover, are purely satirical in content and function, such as the Shandy's marriage-articles, the Memoire of the Doctors of Sorbonne and Ernulphus' text of excommunication. The novel reveals an unmixed satirical intention when imposition and guile are present, as in Phutatorius' de Concubinis retinendis and in Kysarcius' treatment of the important declensions of baptismal Latin, while at the same time it exhibits a simultaneously sympathetic and satirical treatment in the rooting of ridiculous foibles in the vivid coherent characters of the Shandy household.

The satire in Tristram Shandy, however, is not the result of any great reformatory zeal on Sterne's part, in spite of his stated didactic intent. Sterne's satire lacks the high seriousness of Swift, who by means of his exposure of man's vices in a shameful ludicrous manner, wishes to shock his readers to the point where they would see themselves as they really are, stripped of all illusions. Sterne, unlike Swift, is rather trivial in his satirical butts, ridiculing the scholastic modes of thought which were already becoming obsolete in his own day. His satire indeed seems to spring, as Work maintains, from "his sense of the ridiculous, his awareness of the farcical in life".¹⁸ It is only auxiliary

¹⁸Work, p. lxv.

to his humoristic purpose and consequently gives the impression of a toying with its satirical butts in a playful rather than serious manner.

The spirit of Shandeism with which Sterne's work is infused and which he often refers to as being the controlling aspect of his own personality is one which depends essentially on the salubrity of laughter. Sterne's concept of laughter, as expressed through Tristram in his novel, links laughter with an expression of good-nature rather than with the derisive ridicule associated with the ludicrous prior to the eighteenth century discussions of it. The delineation of good and evil and the operation of judgment is moved out of the realm of laughter, and it becomes pure experience, an expression of good-humour, devoid of moral purpose. Laughter, in Sterne's dedication of his work to Pitt, is a means by which man can counteract the many adversities of life. Sterne writes that he lives "in a constant endeavour to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth; being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles, ---but much more so, when he laughs, that it adds something to this Fragment of Life" (p. 3). Tristram refers to laughter as a remedy against the spleen and speaks of his book as being written with this express purpose in mind:

If 'tis wrote against any thing,---'tis wrote,
 an' please your worships, against the spleen;
 in order, by a more frequent and a more con-
 vulsive 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. (pp. 301-2)

Tristram thus, in his notion of laughter, expresses essentially the Addisonian concept of the ludicrous, which also views laughter as a positive healthful expression of man. Laughter, according to Addison, brings "Reliefs. . .it breaks the Gloom which is apt to depress the Mind and damp our Spirits with transient unexpected Gleams of Joy".¹⁹

Shandeism, according to Tristram, has the same effect as laughter since its major component is in fact the ludicrous response: "True Shandeism, think what you will against it, opens the heart and lungs, and like all those affections which partake of its nature, it forces the blood and other vital fluids of the body to run freely thro' its channels, and makes the wheel of life run long and chearfully round" (p. 338). Tristram, moreover, expresses his idea of a Shandean book:

¹⁹ Addison, Spectator No. 249, II, 238.

I write a careless kind of a civil, non-sensical, good-humoured Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good-----

---And your heads too,---provided you understand it. (p. 436)

Tristram, were he to choose his kingdom like Sancho Panca, would have one composed of "hearty laughing subjects" infused with the spirit of Shandeism for:

. . .as the bilious and more saturnine passions, by creating disorders in the blood and humours, have as bad an influence, I see, upon the body politick as body natural---and as nothing but a habit of virtue can fully govern those passions, and subject them to reason-----I should add to my prayer---that God would give my subjects grace to be as WISE as they were MERRY; and then should I be the happiest monarch, and they the happiest people under heaven. . . . (p. 338)

Sterne's personal references to Shandeism in his letters reinforce his treatment of both laughter and the Shandean philosophy in the novel. Sterne affirms the essential role played by laughter in alleviating the miseries of his health, which he expresses in his dedication to Pitt, in a letter to Hall-Stevenson. He mentions his miseries, then states: "and if God, for my consolation under them, had not poured forth the spirit of Shandeism into me, which will not suffer me to think two moments upon any grave subject, I would else, just now lay down and die--die--".²⁰ He also

²⁰Letters, p. 139.

states in a letter to Robert Foley that the merry innocent life is "as good, if not better, than a bishoprick to me--and I desire no other",²¹ thus expressing in different words Tristram's wish for his kingdom to be populated by merry subjects. Sterne later describes to Foley the beneficial aspects of Shandeism in colouring external reality, for he states: "In short we must be happy within--and then few things without us make much difference--This is my Shandean philosophy."²² The commingling of laughter and tears essential to Tristram Shandy is also expressed by Sterne in conjunction with his view of laughter, which again emphasizes its healthful beneficial aspect: "I live altogether in French families--I laugh 'till I cry, and in the same tender moments cry 'till I laugh. I Shandy it more than ever, and verily do believe, that by mere Shandeism sublimated by a laughter-loving people, I fence as much against infirmities, as I do by the benefit of air and climate."²³

Sterne's concept of laughter is thus essentially characterized by its cathartic and healthful effect. His essential love of laughter and belief in its worth

²¹Letters, p. 208.

²²Ibid., p. 234.

²³Ibid., p. 163.

is expressed as unambiguously by no other eighteenth century novelist. Fielding, who in his preface to Joseph Andrews, speaks of the evocation by burlesque of "exquisite mirth and laughter" which "are probably more wholesome physic for the mind, and conduce better to purge away spleen, melancholy, and ill affections, than is generally imagined" and relates the ludicrous to "good humour and benevolence",²⁴ nevertheless in his Essay on the Knowledge of the Characters of Men written a year later supports Hobbes' interpretation of laughter and states that a truly good-natured man finds few days that do not incline him rather to tears than merriment. Sterne, in contradistinction to Fielding's ambiguous interpretation of laughter, maintains a consistent viewpoint toward it. He regards it always in a positive light perhaps because of his personal necessity to counteract the effects of his disease by means of laughter.

Sterne's humorous vision in Tristram Shandy thus combines both the eighteenth century and modern interpretations of humour. It develops the more refined humour of character and the humoristic techniques which infuse the novel with the atmosphere of a saturnalian release. Tristram's affected gravity, characteristic of the man of humour, is related to both the Jonsonian character-excess and to the modern humorist's manner. The underlying tragedy and the evocation of feeling

²⁴Henry Fielding, Joseph Andrews, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston, 1961), p. 9.

in the novel point to the modern interpretations of humour in terms of precisely these concepts, whereas its intermingling of pathos and humour initiates a critical reaction which subsequently accepts these two qualities as interrelated rather than separate elements that produce a superior form of humour in the evocation of simultaneous laughter and tears. The inclusion of satire widens the scope of the humorous work in opening to the reader, albeit negatively, all fields and aspects of human endeavor, and by embodying concretely the essential relationship of satire and humour as subspecies of the comic.

Sterne's view of humour, moreover, anticipates its godlike aspect, expressed by critics such as Coleridge and Meredith in their interpretation of humour in terms of the infinite. In a letter to Dr. John Eustace, written long after the publication of Tristram Shandy, thus inferring an opinion of the book developed at a distance from it, after lengthy reflection, and written also to a stranger, thereby not pandering to the tastes of its recipient, Sterne expresses a disillusionment with the world in its reception and treatment of his work. He refers to humour as being the possession of only the chosen few: "it is not in the power of any one to taste humor, however he may wish it-- 'tis the gift of God". A humorous reader, "a true feeler always brings half the entertainment along with him. His

own ideas are only call'd forth by what he reads, and the vibrations within, so entirely correspond with those excited, 'tis like reading himself and not the book."²⁵

Both the reader with a sense of humour and the man of humour with the ability to excite in him a humorous response are thus singled out, according to Sterne, in a manner which can only bring to them increased happiness, which is a mature one in its essential awareness and acceptance of tragedy and pain, and can yield exquisite pleasure in a laughter which is salubrious, good-natured and benevolent. Sterne, in his portrayal and acceptance of all aspects of the human condition, reveals in his novel Tristram Shandy a humorous vision of life which is timeless in its depiction of man and which is powerful in its evocation of sympathy, feeling and affectionate compassionate laughter. Sterne in his novel Tristram Shandy embodies, moreover, the formulations of humour by his contemporaries and foresees the inclusion of elements, which according to modern interpretations of it, designate his work as entirely and completely humorous.

²⁵Letters, p. 411.

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