

THE LANGUAGE OF LAURENCE STERNE'S

TRISTRAM SHANDY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is intended neither as a linguistic description of a body of text nor as a study of prose style but as an attempt to study the language of a novel within the disciplines and interests of literary criticism. Language, though the 'medium' of all novels, is not claimed as the only or even the first concern of novel criticism: rather, the details of language must always be studied in their place in the literary structure. The thesis therefore examines the language of Tristram Shandy initially under the three novelistic categories of commentary, character and narration, adding two further chapters on the language of sex and on satire, rhetoric and sentiment -- matters which cut across the boundaries of the earlier chapters. Tristram's various digressions are seen as an extension of the concept of authorial commentary, and 'narration' is used to include all the telling and describing in the novel; a chapter is devoted to the way the narration and the commentary are woven together.

Sterne's themes and preoccupations emerge from the study of the language and provide further ways of organizing the detailed analyses. The dialogue reflects the characters' difficulties with rational communication and the narrative typically describes them in awkward or absurd postures and movements; Tristram's own style partly

reveals and partly celebrates a freedom from rigid constraints and orderliness; sex spreads its influence throughout the novel as a major antagonist of reason; and 'gravity', Sterne's name for the hypocrisy which hides behind moral earnestness and scholarly obscurity, is attacked with the forces of innuendo, parody, wit and rhetoric. His distrust of rationality and assertion of feeling and imagination make Sterne in one sense a 'sentimentalist', but analysis of his 'sentimental' stories shows him subverting his own pathos. He always confronts us with the complex 'puzzled skein' of human experience, working through a prose which is appropriately devious and flexible and which always has the essential Shandean quality of provoking laughter.

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I: THE LANGUAGE OF NOVELS

Just heaven! how does the Poco più and the Poco meno of the Italian artists;--the insensible MORE or LESS, determine the precise line of beauty in the sentence, as well as in the statue! How do the slight touches of the chisel, the pencil, the pen, the fiddle-stick, et caetera,--give the true swell, which gives the true pleasure!--O my countrymen!--be nice;--be cautious of your language;--and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend. (II.vi.100)¹

The main body of this thesis is a study of some of the ways in which Sterne uses language in Tristram Shandy to further his literary ends. It is neither a linguistic description of a body of text, nor a study of a prose style, though it may at times make use of techniques appropriate to each. I have tried to develop what seems to me a useful and coherent approach to the language of a novel, and I would like to begin by trying to clarify some of the theoretical issues involved in making such a study. But what follows is not a rigorous analysis of the linguistic implications of the theory of fiction; rather, a setting down of the more general problems which have arisen during the course of making the study and the answers to those problems which have seemed to me most helpful.

¹ Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, Edited by James Aiken Work, New York, 1940, volume two, chapter six, page 100. All quotations are from this edition and references are given in this form.

A. The novelist as verbal artist

The fullest treatment the subject of the language of novels has yet received has been in the work of David Lodge.² In his book, The Language of Fiction, Lodge has made a survey of many of the arguments and issues involved, and often dealt with them admirably. The general drift of his argument is,

that if we are right to regard the art of poetry as essentially an art of language, then so is the art of the novel; and that the critic of the novel has no special dispensation from that close and sensitive engagement with language which we naturally expect from the critic of poetry.³

He insists that we must recognise the novelist as a 'verbal artist', and he ingeniously demonstrates that the language of novels is logically as unparaphrasable as the language of poems.

It seems to me that the basis of Lodge's case is undeniable, that it should have been obvious to start with, and that he has further substantiated it. As he says in his Preface, it is a generally agreed axiom that 'the novelist's medium is language: whatever he does, qua novelist, he does in and through language', but 'the

² See The Language of Fiction, London & New York, 1966, and 'Towards a poetics of fiction: 2) An approach through language', Novel I (1967-8), pp. 158-69.

³ The Language of Fiction, p. 47.

implications of this axiom for literary criticism are not so easily determined or agreed upon'.⁴ And it is the implications that Lodge draws from his theoretical discussions that are of most interest. His theory leads him towards a close concentration on the complex process of linguistic details that makes up the text of a novel:

the more closely we look, the more apparent it becomes that there is no aspect of Jane Austen's language that is innocent of persuasive purpose, that her choices of diction and syntax are at every point creating, ordering and judging the experience she offers to us.⁵

This is the logical outcome of his demonstration that even such a good translator as Scott Moncrieff loses much of his original, and that novels exist only as 'certain words in a certain order'.⁶ But when it comes to establishing a practical methodology, Lodge runs into the problem of size, and so he decides that the novel-critic is

compelled to select more drastically than the critic of poetry, and the alternative procedures open to him are (1) to isolate, deliberately or at random, one or more passages, and submit them to close and exhaustive analysis, or (2) to trace significant threads through the language of an entire novel. One might label these approaches 'textural' and 'structural' respectively.⁷

Having presented this dichotomy (which would appear to let in by the backdoor of 'novel-critic'/'critic of poetry' a lot that has been pushed out of the frontdoor of 'novels'

⁴ The Language of Fiction, p. ix.

⁵ 'Towards a poetics of fiction', p. 168.

⁶ The Language of Fiction, pp.20-23 and 33-8.

⁷ The Language of Fiction, p.78.

and 'poems'), he goes on to plump for the 'structural' method which removes him again from the full details of the text:

By tracing a linguistic thread or threads--a cluster of images, or value-words, or grammatical constructions--through a whole novel, we produce a kind of spatial diagram of the accumulative and temporally-extended reading experience.⁸

This is a disappointing conclusion to an extensive argument for equivalence of importance between the words in a poem and the words in a novel. The central problem in discussing the language of a novel is precisely that there are so many linguistic features which do not directly enter the larger structures of the book by virtue of being frequently repeated. I believe the discrepancy between the drift of Lodge's argument and his methodological conclusions can be explained by weaknesses in both. Most obviously, his presentation of 'alternative procedures' rests on a simple dichotomy which has no foundation other than that it comprises two extremes. Various combinations of the two procedures and the stages between them are in fact open to the critic, unless he is solely concerned with tracing 'pattern' in the novel.⁹ But in order to see how David Lodge has managed to get into the position he has it is necessary to go back over the problems of the rôle of language in novels.

⁸ The Language of Fiction, p.79.

⁹ 'Towards a poetics of fiction', p.167.

That 'the novelist's medium is language' is not only an axiom: it is a truism. By itself it means nothing more than, say, that the painter's medium is paint--and that this is as true of the 'historical' painter as it is of the 'abstract' painter. I would have thought it needed no arguing that 'all good criticism is a response to language --that it is good insofar as it is a sensitive response-- whether or not there is any explicit reference to language in the way of quotation and analysis'.¹⁰ But it is important not to make an unthinking jump from that position to the argument that therefore the critic's task is to study the language of the novel. Again, there can surely be no arguing with the critic who says that one of the novelist's essential interests for us is that he structures the experience he records, creating a complex form for his work of art. But it does not necessarily follow that he does this directly through his structuring of the language he uses. David Lodge argues:

the novel, being fictive, is committed to rendering experience with an enhanced sense of order and harmony, and this obligation pulls the novelist in the opposite direction [from the impulse to realism], towards a heightened version of experience and a heightened use of language.¹¹

The parallel phrases at the end of that statement are preparing for another leap:

¹⁰ 'Towards a poetics of fiction', p.165.

¹¹ 'Towards a poetics of fiction', p.167.

It is language--specifically the language of prose-- which has to bear the strain of reconciling the life and the pattern.¹²

The implication is that 'pattern' means 'pattern of language' --and of course most obviously pattern of imagery, since this has become one of the major preoccupations of recent criticism of longer literary forms. But it need not follow that an ordered pattern of events entails an ordered pattern of language. Of course the events can only be conveyed to us through the language, but this need not prevent our attention from being given to the events themselves. R.A. Sayce seems to make a jump similar to David Lodge's--from the fact that language is structured to the fact that the work is structured:

Beyond sentence syntax again lies what may be called the syntax of the work, though here we are perhaps on less sure ground. The basic syntactic pattern of the sentence can be applied to the work as a whole... This scheme of equivalences is not so far-fetched as may at first appear. A chapter or even a novel could obviously be summarized in a single sentence, and such a sentence gives this wider syntactic structure... We may therefore deal critically with these larger patterns without abandoning consideration of their linguistic composition, or at least without any breach of continuity.¹³

From a structural analogy Sayce has leapt to the conclusion of continuity. But in fact neither the terminology nor the analytic method for studying sentence structure would really

¹² 'Towards a poetics of fiction', p.168.

¹³ 'Literature and language', Essays in Criticism VIII (1957), pp.119-33 (pp.128-30).

be of much use in a critical discussion of the characters and events of a novel. And it certainly does not follow, as Sayce might appear to imply, that the structure of any particular sentence within the work need bear any direct relation to the structure of the work as a whole.

The analogy of sentence structure can, in fact, be used rather differently. Some linguists¹⁴ talk about a scale of rank when analysing sentences. A complex sentence may be said in the first instance to be made up of clauses, and the sentence may be analysed in terms of these clauses and their relationships. But each clause is a structure of groups, each group has its own constituent elements, and so on through the scale of rank until one arrives at the smallest units, the morphemes. Novels, of course, don't have such a strict rank scale, but we can see that a similar procedure could be applied. We may describe the plot, perhaps in its barest outline so that it could be the plot of several novels (e.g., a young girl goes through a number of testing experiences before finding the right husband). We can then break down the plot into its constituent characters and events, and further analyse these elements

¹⁴ See Robert M.W.Dixon, What Is Language?, London, 1965, p.94. Cf. M.A.K.Halliday, 'General linguistics and its application to language teaching', in Patterns of Language: Papers in General, Descriptive and Applied Linguistics (London, 1966), by Angus McIntosh and M.A.K.Halliday, pp.1-41; and John Spencer and Michael Gregory, 'An approach to the study of style', in Linguistics and Style, ed John Spencer, London, 1965.

into individual moments in the novel. In analysing sentences we have to keep a clear distinction between different ranks, between units that are functioning within a group and units that are functioning within a clause. In the novel such distinctions get blurred, but it may well be the case that a particular element--say, a scene between two characters--can only be said to fit into the total scheme of the novel by contributing towards our understanding of one of the characters. It thus functions at the level of character, and only indirectly in the whole novel.

If this analogy is correct, it follows that to call a novel a 'verbal organization' means no more than to call a sentence an 'organization of morphemes'. The description carries no automatic implications for the way the novel should be studied. Both a newspaper and a thesis are 'verbal organizations', and both should be read with great care and attention to the precise shades of meaning and the persuasive power of words--but this does not commit us to a study of the language of either as the most proper activity in trying to extend our understanding of them.

We must, then, attend to the larger form of the novel in order to see how language functions within it. The words may be logically prior to the characters or the plot, and it may be true that we attend first to the words and only gradually build up our abstractions such as characters,

but in fact our awareness of novels tends to be in terms of certain characters performing certain actions, undergoing certain experiences. These are the terms with which we naturally work when we wish to discuss novels, and they are clearly also the terms in which novelists work.¹⁵ If we try to formulate a description of the novel form as it is usually understood the result would be something like: a book with a plot, told to us by a narrator (though usually with a substantial measure of direct speech), of considerable length, and written in prose. Of these conditions, the last two are the crucial ones for my present purpose.

Size is a feature the novel shares with long poems, and long poems have also raised difficulties for the student of literary language. A novel may be anything from 100,000 words upwards in length, and because of this we would not expect to find the kind of sustained intensity that is most valued today in the short lyric. If the texture of a novel's language is too dense, the result will be fragmentation of the reading experience--such as Joyce provides for in the episodic structure of Ulysses. Our experience with most traditional novels is of little difficulty on the first reading, but of a continual deepening of understanding on

¹⁵ It should be obvious that I am confining my general remarks to the mainstream of European fiction, the central area of prose fiction we can all agree to call 'novels'. Special problems are raised by some kinds of modern fiction and other works on the fringes of the formal category, 'novel'.

successive readings as our attention shifts from following the bold outline to appreciating the details. With a novel like Ulysses, however, the procedure is almost reversed: we have to understand each section in considerable detail before we can get any strong sense of the total pattern. But in a general view of the history of the novel, this is exceptional. The novelist works by accretion, with the complexity of his work spread over a larger area, so that the process of reading is one of building, adding as one goes along. The novel becomes a complex interweaving of small details, each slightly modifying another. Arrest the novel at any one point, and the context is the whole novel, bearing upon that point in a way that we cannot possibly describe and cannot even be fully aware of except in the continuous process of reading.

The implications of these facts for the language of the novel, and for a study of such language, are clearly considerable. It will be misleading to look all the time for the qualities of poetic language we have learned to look for in modern poetry, for complex levels of meaning and for a word's place in a tight structure, although this may be possible in certain cases (e.g., those words which lend themselves to the 'structural approach' favoured by David Lodge, which fit into their own pattern by virtue of being repeated). Barbara Hardy has argued that in discussing scenes and events in some novels we must distinguish between

'local effect' and 'central relevance',¹⁶ and if this is true of whole scenes it must be much more so of sentences and words. They do not all fit into recognisable patterns, but they do all go to make up the total complex of the novel--even if indirectly by adding a touch of character, or added force to our sense of the novel's world--and in a good novel there will be very little that we would be prepared to jettison.

All this is a very different matter from the status of the individual word in a poem of, say, 100 words. You can't alter a syllable in a Shakespearian sonnet without altering the experience of reading it; but sometimes we may feel that we could take whole chapters out of some novels without altering the general effect,--and without wishing to say it is a bad novel. David Lodge shows what gets lost from a single sentence when Scott Moncrieff translates Proust,¹⁷ but he does not consider how we would feel if that were in fact the only sentence which is not faithfully rendered. Quantitative considerations may appear crude in literary discussion, but they cannot be simply ignored. Ultimately we must question the way we read novels. Many people may, as I do, have a (usually suppressed) guilt feeling about reading novels too quickly and not re-reading

¹⁶ The Appropriate Form, London, 1964, p.14.

¹⁷ The Language of Fiction, pp.20-23.

them often enough. Under these conditions total possession of a novel is certainly an unattainable ideal, and whatever David Lodge and J.M.Cameron may prove,¹⁸ a few altered words here and there would hardly make much difference. As literary critics we are concerned less with the absolute logic of the case than with our responses as readers.

So the size of a novel will affect both the way the writer gathers and deepens his meaning, and the kind of relevance any one small detail may have to the central concerns of the book--indeed, to anything but itself. It is for this reason that facing the critic with the simple choice between 'textural' and 'structural' criticism will not do. Both of these methods imply too severe a restriction to be acceptable as means of discussing the language of novels. A novel is not, and could not be, a big poem, any more than big poems are just big little poems. But this leads on to my other major consideration: that novels are in prose.

I use the term 'prose' in the strict sense of 'not-verse', and I do not wish to be drawn into a prose-poetry discussion, but the difference between prose and verse does have some important repercussions for any account of

¹⁸ The Language of Fiction, pp.33-8.

the language of the novel. Verse allows the writer further levels of structuring and organization mostly beyond the reach of the prose writer. Particularly, sound and rhythm play a less important part in prose-writing, and their effect is certainly much more difficult to pin down and discuss. The result of this difference is that the nature of the structure is altered, verse working fundamentally to the unit of the line. Verse has more structural elements than prose, and is thus more suited to the linguistic intensity associated with poems, and such intensity is more difficult to attain in prose. Furthermore, the physical appearance of verse acts as a signal to the reader to alter his reading habits. My own experience of presenting poems (with a not too overt rhyme-scheme) to a practical criticism class written out first as prose and then as verse has provided striking illustrations of the way verse setting affects our response. We read verse more slowly, giving the words and their patterns more attention. (Whether or not this distinction ought to obtain, novelists must write with the knowledge that it does.)

The use of prose has further effects on the novel. Ian Watt points out the connection between the use of prose and the realistic conventions of the novel,¹⁹ and Malcolm Bradbury

¹⁹ The Rise of the Novel, paperback edition, Harmondsworth, 1963, pp.28-31.

has said:

Prose, as compared with poetry, has an accentuated referential dimension: it is our normal instrument of discursive communication, is associated with our way of verifying factuality, and is thereby subject to a complex of social uses not imposed on verse.²⁰

This relationship with everyday language makes a great deal of difference in our ways of reading, and can be exploited by the novelist to bridge the gap between his fictional world and our own. Also, the novel being a narrated form, the most important relationship is often between narrator and reader, and most narrators prefer to speak to their readers in a style which the latter will recognise as closely related to their own. Most novelists work harder than poets to take the reader along with them, rather than presenting him with something he can take or leave. They start from the reader's position and work towards their own. It may be significant that the historical point at which novels start getting difficult to follow (towards the end of the nineteenth century) roughly coincides with the establishment of the novel as a recognised literary form with its own serious purposes.²¹

²⁰ 'Towards a poetics of fiction: 1) An approach through structure', Novel I (1967-8), pp.45-52 (p.49).

²¹ Cf. B.H.Bronson, Facets of the Enlightenment (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1968), p.321: 'As the novel has grown to maturity, it has gained in self-assurance as the dominant art-form. With the growth of the fiction-reading public to unimagined size, it has become evident that the competent practitioner never need worry about finding readers. Consequently he has ceased to be preoccupied with the problem of public relations, and has retreated further and further into the cave of his privacy, whence from time to time issue sibylline utterances which the eager seeker after esoteric experience may interpret how he likes.'

It would, however, be a mistake to think of prose as a uniform system of language, even though we may generalise about it. The relation of novelists' prose to 'our normal instrument of discursive language' varies considerably. Where the novelist's world seems closest to our own we are likely to find a prose closest to that of, say, good journalism, in its general appearance. But a novelist who wants to present a rather different world--a world of passion and emotion, a world of comic distortion, or the world of the subtleties of consciousness--will require a rather different language from that used everyday. We may compare the following passages, all taken from the openings of novels where the novelist is immediately concerned to set up his world, and the differences are quite striking:

1. There was no possibility of taking a walk that day. We had been wandering, indeed, in the leafless shrubbery an hour in the morning; but since dinner (Mrs Reed, when there was no company, dined early) the cold winter wind had brought with it clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating, that further outdoor exercise was now out of the question.
I was glad of it; I never liked long walks, especially on chilly afternoons: dreadful to me was the coming home in the raw twilight, with nipped fingers and toes, and a heart saddened by the chidings of Bessie, the nurse, and humbled by the consciousness of my physical inferiority to Eliza, John, and Georgiana Reed.
2. While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunshiny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour. A black servant, who reposed on the box beside the fat coachman, uncurled his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell, at least a score of young heads were seen peering

out of the narrow windows of the stately old brick house. Nay, the acute observer might have recognised the little red nose of good-natured Miss Jemima Pinkerton herself, rising over some geranium-pots in the window of that lady's own drawing-room.

3. This is the saddest story I have ever heard. We had known the Ashburnhams for nine seasons of the town of Nauheim with an extreme intimacy--or, rather, with an acquaintanceship as loose and easy and yet as close as a good glove's with your hand. My wife and I knew Captain and Mrs. Ashburnham as well as it was possible to know anybody, and yet, in another sense, we knew nothing at all about them. This is, I believe, a state of things only possible with English people of whom, till today, when I sit down to puzzle out what I know of this sad affair, I knew nothing whatever. Six months ago I had never been to England, and, certainly, I had never sounded the depths of an English heart. I had known the shallows.

4. Mr. Hackett turned the corner and saw, in the failing light, at some little distance, his seat. It seemed to be occupied. This seat, the property very likely of the municipality, or of the public, was of course not his, but he thought of it as his. This was Mr. Hackett's attitude towards things that pleased him. He knew they were not his, but he thought of them as his. He knew they were not his, because they pleased him.

Halting, he looked at the seat with greater care. Yes, it was not vacant. Mr. Hackett saw things a little more clearly when he was still. His walk was a very agitated walk.²²

In none of these passages would it seem very appropriate to refer to 'our normal instrument of discursive communication', and if the language is 'associated with our ways of verifying factuality' it just shows what varied ways of verifying factuality we have--or how multitudinous factuality is.

Nor would the following comment seem very helpful:

²² Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre, Harmondsworth, 1966, p.39; William Thackeray, Vanity Fair, Harmondsworth, 1968, p.39; Ford Madox Ford, The Good Soldier, New York, 1951, p.3; and Samuel Beckett, Watt, London, 1963, p.5.

The structure of prose is, in the widest sense of the word, logical; its statements are always ultimately reducible to a syllogistic form. A passage of prose, any passage, not even excluding so called 'poetic' prose, resolves itself under analysis into a series of explanations, definitions, and conclusions. It is by these means that the book progresses.²³

Although all these passages may be 'ultimately reducible' to logical form, such an exercise would seem remarkably pointless. The 'explanations, definitions, and conclusions' we could extract from the first passage seem much less important than the sense of the narrator's aloneness, the feeling of desolation; in the second passage we register primarily the distance between the narrator and the scene, the cluster of physical details, mostly grotesque; in the third we notice the shifts and contradictions, the note of puzzlement; and in the fourth the very concern with making logical distinctions produces a sense of great oddness, of a new slant on the world of our thoughts and perceptions. Of course, the structure of all language tends in the direction of logic in this wide sense, and most poems would be equally 'ultimately reducible to a syllogistic form'. The point is that most poems invite the reader to do more than just see the syllogistic form, and so may prose. In quoting these examples from Charlotte Brontë, Thackeray, Ford and Beckett I have deliberately avoided more spectacular openings, such as those of Bleak House or A Portrait of the Artist.

²³ F.W.Bateson, quoted in The Language of Fiction, pp.12-13.

In saying the novel is in prose, then, we must be aware that we are saying no more than that the novelist has at his command a highly flexible instrument, providing him with nearly all the resources of language. He uses his sense of 'normal discursive communication' to mark the differences of his world from the everyday world we live in. Language, as the form of thought, ultimately marks the form of our perception of the world, not only physically, but in every way. The world of Jane Eyre is one where the individual is very much on his own; it is presented to us by Jane herself, and the order of presentation is the order of her thoughts and feelings--more especially, in the passage quoted, of Jane as a child where the environment is hostile. The opening sentence is flat, gloomily emphatic, structured round a negative, and put in quite impersonal terms--'there was'. The slight tendency towards rhetorical patterning acts to stress the miserable aspects of her experience: 'clouds so sombre, and a rain so penetrating'; 'dreadful to me'; 'a heart saddened . . . and humbled'. The most vivid words are those carrying the experience of cold: 'chilly', 'raw', 'nipped'. These features of Jane's language stand out all the more clearly when they are put beside the opening of Vanity Fair, with its expansive periods and its general sense of vulgar well-being. This is a third-person novel, and so ostensibly, perhaps, more 'objective' in its descriptions, but in fact of course Thackeray's language is working just as hard as

Charlotte Brontë's. When Charlotte Brontë wants to emphasize the cold she finds a number of synonyms which allow her to return to the fact several times without being too obvious. By contrast, Thackeray makes deliberate use of repetition: 'two fat horses', 'a fat coachman', 'the fat coachman'. We become aware not only of the apparently unavoidable fatness of the coachman, but of the narrator insisting on it. Thackeray is setting up a distance between himself and the facts which is possible in the less realistic comic form of his novel but would be inappropriate for Jane Eyre. The slightly whimsical, patronising image, 'While the present century was in its teens', is part of the same effect. As in Jane Eyre, the whole of the environment seems to co-operate in establishing a unified mood, but the mood is one of youth and brightness and promise and we are more aware of the author creating it.

It is worth pointing out, however, that not everything that makes for the very different effects of these two openings can properly be attributed to the language. Within our reading of the novel, the coldness of Jane's day and the sunniness of Amelia Sedley's are facts, not flights of language. The novelists' creation of concentration on the 'leafless shrubbery' and the 'shining brass plate' are only in the strictest sense functions of their ways of using language: it could be argued that the words are not only referential but create their own referents, but having

noted this fact, there is little the literary critic can do with it.²⁴ As readers we note the appropriateness of the leafless shrubbery, and we may go on to describe it as a symbol of the sterile, loveless house that Jane is confined to; but these are functions of the fact that the shrubbery is leafless, not of the word 'leafless'. I shall return briefly to this question in my chapter on narration (chapter four), because the confusion is easily made between details revealed by a close study of the text and the workings of language as language. It is a confusion more easily made if we refer to the novelist's 'style', for 'style' can easily mean 'manner' and thus 'technique'. In practice, of course, it may not often be important to distinguish between the details of narrative technique and the details of linguistic manipulation: close criticism of the novel may wish to attend to both: but the importance of such details cannot be used as evidence for the importance of language in prose fiction.

I have argued that the sheer size of novels and the fact that they are in prose must both affect our attitude towards the importance of studying their language. Both factors militate against density of texture, and one of the great dangers facing the critic of a novelist's language is obviousness. Much of the time in most novels the language

²⁴ Cf. The Language of Fiction, pp.33-8.

is doing little that would not be obvious to any sensitive reader. Thus one reason for the discrepancy between David Lodge's theoretical claim that every word counts and his practical decision to follow a 'thread' of language is that he claims too much. A novel does indeed consist of 'these words in this order', but that doesn't necessarily make the words themselves amenable to detailed study.

One direction out of this dilemma would be to establish a generalized basic 'style' for a novelist, or a novel: that is, to extract from the complex of the text typical language patterns which tell us about the ways the novelist has of thinking or observing. The assumption is that these patterns inform the text throughout and that individual occurrences all point in the same direction. This is basically the method of students of 'prose style', whether they work by carefully chosen samples or the intuitive selection of particularly interesting features.²⁵ But it is significant that studies of prose style have usually been confined to

²⁵ See for example, Leo Spitzer, Linguistics and Literary History, Princeton, 1948; Stephen Ullman, Language and Style, Oxford, 1964; and W.K. Wimsatt, Jr., The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, New Haven and London, 1941. Vernon Lee, in The Handling of Words (London, 1923), has shown what can be done for novelists in style studies when the techniques are sensitively handled, but she seems happy to apply her work equally to novels and other prose works. The symposium, Style in Prose Fiction, English Institute Essays, 1958, ed Harold C. Martin (New York and London, 1959), shows a wide range of approaches to its subject, and much of the best work in the volume ventures far and frequently from the details of language.

writers on the fringes of literature, such as Addison, Johnson and Hazlitt, rather than novelists. For such a method leads away from the appreciation of the novel as a structured work of art, treating it rather as a direct expression of the author's personality, or his world-view, or whatever. In particular, it is obviously important that the distinctions the novel draws between characters should be observed. But any approach to literature carried out with sufficient sensitivity and tact can prove fruitful, and within a particular novel the methods of stylistics can be applied usefully.

Because Sterne has always occupied an uneasy place in literary history, having written a novel which at times reads more like a collection of essays, and because his use of language is often eccentric and highly individual, he has been somewhat more subject to descriptions of his 'style' than most novelists.²⁶ Before describing the method used in the rest of this thesis, I would like to include a brief discussion of some approaches to Sterne's style and some of the generalizations that can be made about the language of Tristram Shandy.

²⁶ See particularly Eugene Hnatko, 'Studies in the prose style of Laurence Sterne', unpubl. diss. from the University of Syracuse, 1962; also chapters on 'Style' in J.M. Stedmond, The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne, Toronto & London, 1967; Henri Fluchère, Laurence Sterne: from Tristram to Yorick, trans. and abr. by Barbara Bray, Oxford, 1965; and Alice G. Fredman, Diderot and Sterne, New York, 1955.

B. Style and 'Tristram Shandy'

Sterne has long been recognised as a 'stylist', and there is no shortage of passing comments on his more obvious mannerisms, though Tristram Shandy has received no detailed attention to the way language is used throughout the work for specific effects. Recently, two critics of Sterne have based their approach specifically on his use of language. R.A. Donovan writes:

Literary criticism, obviously, must begin with the linguistic surface of any work it proposes to examine, but in dealing with most novels, the critic can, indeed must, pass very quickly to the things which language signifies, specifically, thought, character, events. Even the most mannered novelists generally expect us to look through their words to the 'realities' they convey. But with Sterne the case is different. We always have the sense, in reading Tristram Shandy, that Sterne is deliberately holding our attention on the surface of the novel so to speak, on the words which compose it. We are continuously made conscious of the ways in which words (or other signs) impinge on what Sterne would call the 'Sensorium'.²⁷

He goes on to develop the idea that it is really language that Sterne is most interested in: 'The novel's deepest meaning, perhaps, as well as its principle of organization, may be sought in the commentary it offers on its own medium'.²⁸ But after this interesting beginning Donovan's concern with the language of Tristram Shandy remains very much at the general level. He refers to the way the reader

²⁷ The Shaping Vision, Ithaca, 1966, p.90.

²⁸ The Shaping Vision, p.95.

is brought in, to the illusion of spontaneity, to the delight in strange words, the use of non-verbal communication and the Rabelaisian catalogue. His further pursuit of the subject by a division of language into the 'expressive' and the 'evocative' is interesting, but without satisfactory support from the novel, and his essay tends to dissolve into discussion of the characters. Both Sterne and his narrator, Tristram, are undoubtedly sensitive to the possibilities and the limitations of language: a large number of Tristram's recorded opinions are about the problems of writing, and many of these are naturally about language, such as the one quoted at the beginning of this chapter. However, I think that Donovan over-emphasizes the novel's concern with itself, and his failure to pursue the subject to a satisfactory conclusion is a result of this misconception. The style will not provide sufficient basis for a total interpretation of Tristram Shandy.

An altogether more interesting and convincing account is offered by Ian Watt in his essay, 'The Comic Syntax of Tristram Shandy'.²⁹ Watt sets out to re-examine the problem of unity in the book from the point of view of the language, and he says:

We can probably recognise a passage taken at random from Tristram Shandy more quickly than one from any

²⁹ In H. Anderson and J.S. Shea, eds, Studies in Criticism and Aesthetics, 1660-1800, Minneapolis, 1967, pp.315-31.

other book. The tone, the style, the attitude toward the reader, and the events, all are quite special; and they don't vary substantially from page to page or from beginning to end. One thing that is consistent in Tristram Shandy is its narrative voice.³⁰

He claims that the organization of the book is 'rhetorical' rather than 'fictional'. This is rather reminiscent of John Traugott, who however takes the idea even further, losing altogether any conception of the book as a novel with independent characters.³¹ Even Ian Watt's argument seems at times to verge on this position:

Where he is recounting the actions and dialogues of the Shandy household, multiple impersonation is called for; and Tristram is as expert in vocal mimicry as in the external description of the dialogues between his characters.³²

At this point Watt seems to be denying the fictional existence of the other characters almost entirely, whereas the experience of most readers is surely the opposite. We are never aware of Tristram 'impersonating' his uncle or his father (as logically, as autobiographer, I suppose he should be). He is much more of a compère than an impersonator. But on the whole Ian Watt's argument rests on a secure foundation: the most outstanding feature of Tristram Shandy is its narrator, and his relationship with his

³⁰ 'Comic Syntax', p.316.

³¹ See Tristram Shandy's World, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1954, p.xiii.

³² 'Comic Syntax', p.322.

readers. This relationship may be called 'rhetorical' rather than 'fictional' as long as we remain aware that Tristram, the narrator, is himself a fictional character. We then see that this is not a special case, but rather an extreme form of what happens in many or most novels: the narrator takes upon himself not only to tell a story, but to comment on it, explain it, and so on.³³ It is often easy to distinguish between narrative and commentary, but in Tristram Shandy it is less so (in A Sentimental Journey, almost totally a one-person novel, distinctions between character, narrative and commentary become still further blurred). According to Ian Watt:

the main dialogue which Tristram carries on is with the reader; at least half of Tristram Shandy is taken up not with narrative but with direct address to the audience by Tristram, often about matters only tangentially related to the story.³⁴

But it is impossible to make a satisfactory distinction between 'narrative' and 'direct address to the reader', for this is what the narrative becomes as well. According to my own rough count, more than half of Tristram's passages could reasonably be called narrative, and add to these the passages of direct dialogue (which probably make up nearly

³³ This is the point Wayne Booth makes in The Rhetoric of Fiction, Chicago & London, 1961, pp.221-34. More recently, John Preston, in The Created Self, London, 1970, has traced the rhetorical designs on the reader of Defoe, Richardson and Fielding, as well as Sterne.

³⁴ 'Comic Syntax', p.322.

one-third of the book) and the commentary can be seen in perspective. However, if we consider a typical passage of narrative we can see that it usually has the feel of being directed at the reader:

My father at that time was just beginning business in London, and had taken a house;--and as the truest friendship and cordiality subsisted between the two brothers,--and that my father thought my uncle Toby could no where be so well nursed and taken care of as in his own house,---he assign'd him the very best apartment in it.--And what was a much more sincere mark of his affection still, he would never suffer a friend or an acquaintance to step into the house on any occasion, but he would take him by the hand, and lead him up stairs to see his brother Toby, and chat an hour by his bedside. (I.xxv.'79)

The conversational rhythms are always there, the comment slips in ('And what was a much more sincere mark of his affection still'), and we are not aware of any marked change of style. Tristram is always talking to us, sometimes telling his story, sometimes commenting on it, sometimes talking about other things altogether (giving us his 'opinions', as promised).

Our sense of the 'style' of Tristram Shandy, then, is controlled by Tristram's voice. In this sense it is reasonable to refer to a 'uniform' style,³⁵ although if we look closer, as I shall be doing in the rest of this thesis, we shall see that there is considerable variation

³⁵ See Leonard Lutwack, 'Mixed and uniform prose styles in the novel', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism XVIII (1960), reprinted in The Novel: modern essays in criticism, ed Robert Davis, Englewood Cliffs, 1969, pp.254-66. See especially pp.257 and 261.

within the general style adopted. (The inclusion of parodic oddments such as the Marriage Settlement does not really affect this sense of a uniform style; the basic uniformity is an essential part of the satiric effect of drawing attention to other forms of language.³⁶) Moreover, Tristram's style is a highly distinctive one, which has successfully eluded all imitators.³⁷ It is well described by Ian Watt: he discusses the tendency to make action subordinate to reflection about it, the slight sense of symmetry concealed by the 'tone of conversational abandon', the spontaneity, the uncertainty, the dislocation of logic, the direct address (Watt is the only critic I have come across who has recognized that the reader does not identify with the 'Sir' and 'Madam' addressed in the book, but with the narrator against them), and the insistence on apparently contradictory views of the same events. Fundamental to all this, as I will argue in my second chapter, is a subversion of order and rigidity. The sentences, like the chapters and the plot, refuse to go in straight lines, and assert the value of spontaneity and unpredictability. These values are similarly seen in the whole of the Shandy world, where the heroes are absurd and yet great in their irrationality, where the enemy is 'gravity' (especially as

³⁶ But for a contrary opinion, see Donovan, The Shaping Vision, p.92.

³⁷ See Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, pp.236-7, for a comparison of Sterne with his predecessors and imitators.

exemplified in dry scholarship, and most dangerously when applied to religion and morality), where sentiment triumphs over reason and, more importantly, benevolence over meanness and bad temper (the opposite to benevolence ought to be malevolence, but that word is too strong to apply to the Shandean world), and where the primary symbol of humanity is a hobby-horse.

This insistence on what may conveniently be labelled irrationality seems to me to underlie all the most obvious features of the style of Tristram Shandy. Ian Watt remarks:

Tristram's voice is by no means an irrational one, but a rational instrument for the revelation of human irrationality. Belonging to the Age of Reason helped Sterne to see and demonstrate that human behaviour is not based on reason.³⁸

He is here primarily concerned with showing that Tristram Shandy cannot be seen simply as a precursor of the 'stream of consciousness' novel, or based just on the association of ideas, and he does go on to say that Sterne's 'account of the non-rational aspects of human behaviour does not condemn them',³⁹ but the initial remark is a misleading one which seems to confuse Tristram with Sterne. There is a perpetual ambiguity in Tristram's language. Clearly, he is consciously on the side of irrationality, against the rule-makers and the grave ones, and he is often in control

³⁸ 'Comic syntax', p.328.

³⁹ 'Comic syntax', p.328.

of his demonstration of human irrationality; but at the same time we feel that his own language reflects a lack of order and control which, while supporting his views, is not so much an intentional demonstration of them as a direct product of his personality. Only when we get right back out of the novel to Sterne can we say that he has created a style which demonstrates the non-rational aspects of human behaviour; Tristram at the same time both demonstrates and reveals them.

Ian Watt's essay seems to me to be a good example of the way we may describe the 'style' of a novel. In an earlier influential essay he has performed a somewhat similar task for The Ambassadors,⁴⁰ generalizing from the first paragraph, and most of the work so far carried out on the language of novels has been along these lines. But what I have said here of the 'style' of Tristram Shandy has emerged for me as the product of the detailed work for the whole of this thesis, and the thesis is partly a demonstration in detail of the way the language creates and embodies the values I have been discussing. But my main concern has not been to attempt a description of Sterne's 'style', and it remains for me to explain what I have tried to do.

⁴⁰ 'The first paragraph of The Ambassadors', Essays in Criticism X (1960), pp.250-74.

C. Methods of study

I have suggested that David Lodge's account of the rôle of language in novels suffers from laying too much stress on the importance of each verbal detail, but I have rejected both the generalizing technique of stylistics and the schematizing technique that Lodge himself adopts. I have indicated that the main danger of style studies is their tendency away from the individual work of art and its formal organization, whereas I am interested in the way the novelist creates his novel through language, not just the way he writes.⁴¹ A full study of the language in a novel requires a more flexible approach than David Lodge has suggested, open to the individual moment as well as the pattern, to the importance of the unique as well as of repetition.

In particular, it seems to me that a study of the way a novelist uses language must recognise and take into account the broad formal divisions of the novel: narration, commentary and character. We cannot assume that a passage of dialogue will show the same features as a passage of narration: if it does, that fact is itself interesting. Support for this view comes from Ian A. Gordon, a linguist examining the history of English prose:

⁴¹ I owe the clarification of this distinction to my brother's work on Tennyson. See Alan Sinfield, The Language of Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', Oxford, 1971, especially pp.3-4.

Viewed (so to speak) anatomically, a novel consists of four prose 'systems': dialogue, narrative, description, and commentary.⁴²

He adds the interior monologue as a fifth, later 'system'. It is not entirely clear what Gordon means by 'system' in this context, but his brief descriptions of the different modes are interesting. Dialogue, he says, echoes the accepted speech of the day, but always with the tendency to a wider social and regional range than the conversational prose of the essayists. Narrative,

on the other hand, has been written almost exclusively on the basis of educated speech--the writer tends to identify himself with the more educated of his audience, and the voice of the author as narrator is indistinguishable from his authentic voice as it can be heard in (e.g.) Thackeray's letters or Trollope's Autobiography.⁴³

He points out interestingly that Nelly Dean, the narrator in Wuthering Heights, does not have the same degree of regional/class accent as a character like Joseph, as this would get in the way of telling the story.⁴⁴ Description he identifies with 'the exploitation of setting and scenery to evoke atmosphere and mood',⁴⁵ but commentary he finds more varied:

Till late in the nineteenth century the normal device was the appearance of the novelist in his own pages (on his own stage, so to speak) as commentator and

42 The Movement of English Prose, London, 1966, p.162.

43 The Movement of English Prose, p.163.

44 The disappearance of some of Trim's individual speech traits in a passage of extended narrative is noted below, chapter 3, p.150

45 The Movement of English Prose, p.164.

discursive moralist. There is very frequently a sharp change in vocabulary and sentence-structure between narration and commentary. As narrator, the novelist is merely telling a tale, in their own terms, to an audience of his peers. As commentator he assumes a persona, moralising, sermonising, registering commendation or distaste for what he portrays.⁴⁶

Gordon's comments suggest a highly simplified version of what goes on in a novel, but his relative lack of critical sophistication (identifying the author with the narrator, ignoring indirect free speech, and so on) should not obscure the value of the distinctions he is making or of the witness of a linguist to perceptible shifts in language between narration and commentary.

Gordon is describing novels at a fairly general stylistic level, within his different categories. In studying a particular novel we will want to take his divisions as a starting point, and then concentrate on specific effects. It will be possible to describe the narrator's style in its general outline and then to show how individual features are used on different occasions. Similarly, each major character will probably have his own peculiar tricks of speech which can be seen as part of the novelist's technique for revealing and realizing aspects of character. Here the method of the stylisticians for showing how a linguistic feature can be expressive of a mental pattern or a general outlook will come into its own. Gordon's

⁴⁶ The Movement of English Prose, p.165.

distinction between narrative and description doesn't seem to me to have the same force as the others. It is the narrator telling us about his world, whether about the static or the active features of it; and at time, as in Tristram Shandy where the smallest movement may become a major event, the distinction between telling and describing is likely to become difficult to maintain.

I would suggest, then, that the first step in studying the language of a novel is to recognise the kind of distinctions I have been making. Different novels may require shifts of emphasis: the proportion of commentary may be small, the language of the characters may be relatively un-individuated, and so on. But the novel will have its divisions which it will impose on the critic. Thereafter, it seems to me, he is much on his own, following his critical sense of what seems to be important. He will take what help he can from the work of linguists, who are now beginning to turn their attention to the history of written English,⁴⁷ and whose descriptive terminology may eventually settle down to a point where it can be generally used. We are currently in a difficult period, where most practising critics were brought up on the old school grammar and the new ways of describing the structure of sentences are not sufficiently known to be used without lengthy explanations.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Gordon, The Movement of English Prose; also A.C. Partridge, Tudor to Augustan, London, 1969.

But one at least cannot afford to be unaware of the more rational understanding of the way the language works that linguists have made available. The old ideas are no longer sufficient. Still, the activity I am proposing is literary criticism, not linguistics, and the process of noticing and selecting important linguistic features will differ accordingly.⁴⁸

The kind of approach I am suggesting may deepen our understanding of the novel studied--one must hope it will--but it should especially help us to understand more fully the novelist's art: very often the critic of language will not be revealing new insights, recording new effects, but explaining how such effects have been achieved. It seems to me that there is a general critical consensus on Tristram Shandy; that in the last thirty or forty years we have shed a lot of misconceptions and come to know fairly well what Sterne was doing; the differences now are largely

48 See G.L.Brook, The Language of Dickens, London, 1970, for a linguist's approach to a novelist, using the novels as texts for the collection of linguistic features. Cf. Roger Fowler's description of linguistics approaching literature: 'It is a developing discipline hoping to learn about language by turning its attention to those texts called "literary"', 'Linguistic theory and the study of literature' in Essays on Style and Language, ed Roger Fowler, London, 1966. My emphasis is rather on learning about literature by turning our attention to language.

questions of detail or emphasis.⁴⁹ It is not my concern here to produce a startlingly new interpretation of Tristram Shandy, but to investigate Sterne's achievement as a master of the English language and in the process, and by close study of the text, perhaps to clear up some details and reveal others.

I have indicated the general methodological approach that seems to me most helpful. Tristram Shandy is something of a special case amongst novels, partly because Sterne's language is so idiosyncratic and draws attention to itself in a way that many other novelists' language does not, and partly because of the book's lack of obvious structure. Most novels organize their materials in a clear way, and guide the reader around their carefully laid out parts; they have developments, climaxes and so on. Facing Tristram Shandy, with its 'exploded' plot, its digressions, its unending weave of situation, narration, commentary and character, the critic may well be bewildered. In practice I found that the division into character, narration and

49 Most of the important work on Tristram Shandy is recorded in my book list. See also Lodwick Hartley, Laurence Sterne in the Twentieth Century, Chapel Hill, 1966. The unanimity of contemporary critics of Sterne is amply demonstrated in The Winged Skull: Papers from the Laurence Sterne Bicentenary Conference, ed Arthur H. Cash and John M. Stedmond, London, 1971. In particular, the excerpts from a seminar entitled 'New directions in Sterne criticism', pp.76-93, reveal a lack of dissent from prevailing orthodoxies.

commentary which I have recommended provided a useful breakdown of the mass of the material, and it remains the foundation of the structure of the thesis. I have taken the idea of authorial commentary as the basis of Tristram's retailing of his opinions by digression: it seems to make sense to see the digressions as an extension (ad absurdum) of this normal feature of novel technique (particularly if Sterne's near-contemporary Fielding is taken as exemplifying the commenting narrator), and in this way my methodology keeps closer to a generally applicable method. This chapter on commentary naturally comes first, as it establishes Tristram as the main character in the novel and the closest thing we have within it to a linguistic norm. The chapter on the speech of the characters is confined to the three characters who have most to say in the novel, and are the most vividly realized. My study of language and narration starts with a chapter devoted to Tristram's most characteristic narrative style--his attention to details of movement and gesture. The next chapter leads from the narration back towards the commentary, particularly through an examination of some of the complexities of Volume VII: commentary and narration cannot be kept apart for long in Tristram Shandy, and much of what is said about Tristram's style in chapter 2 must be assumed as a basis for chapters 4 and 5.

In the event, the simple three-fold division did not prove totally sufficient. Sterne's treatment of sex cut

across these boundaries in a way that would have made for tedious repetition if it had been dealt with in every chapter, and the question of sentimentalism and sentimentality seemed to fit in best with a description of the way Sterne embodies some of his moral themes in the language of the novel. These subjects demanded chapters on their own--

I question first by the bye, whether the same experiment might not be made as successfully upon sundry other chapters---but there is no end, an' please your reverences, in trying experiments upon chapters---we have had enough of it--So there's an end of that matter. (IV.xxv.313)

The Sentimental Journey is strictly outside the scope of this thesis, and I found that any attempt to include it satisfactorily would have nearly doubled the length of the study. But I have included in an Appendix the result of some forays I made into the way Sterne treats 'sentiment' in the later work, where I think some of the similarities and differences with Tristram Shandy become apparent.

I have attempted in each chapter to relate the detailed study of the language to more general themes in the novel. Even in a full-length study of this kind no complete account can be rendered of the language of a novel the size of Tristram Shandy, and a thematic selection seemed the most interesting. Thus, in discussing Tristram's commentary I have dwelt particularly on the way his language subverts any notion of strict order or rigidity, giving full play to the informal and the irrational; in treating the language

of the characters I have concentrated on the way the ob-
sessional hobby-horse conditions speech and conversation;
I have examined Tristram's narrative style mainly through
his attention to the minutiae of everyday experience, and
his assertion of the importance of the small and apparently
trivial event; and I have shown how he weaves together the
various elements of his work into a linguistic maze which
defies the simplifications of literary analysis and challenges
conventional fictional assumptions. But these themes and
preoccupations emerged from the study of the language, not
the other way around, and if the arrangement has led to
inevitable simplifications and exclusions I hope there are
no more than would have been entailed in any other method
of proceeding. I believe that the material has largely
shaped itself, and this is as it should be. Anyone who
has attempted to organize a work of this kind must believe
that, for all his attacks on them, Sterne comes as close
as anyone to understanding the predicament of literary critics:

I declare, I do not recollect any one opinion or passage
of my life, where my understanding was more at a loss to
make ends meet, and torture the chapter I had been writing,
to the service of the chapter following it. (VIII.vi.545)

II: COMMENTARY AND LANGUAGE -- Tristram's attack on order

I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also. (I.vi.10)¹

Great Apollo! if thou art in a giving humour,--give me,--I ask no more, but one stroke of native humour, with a single spark of thy own fire along with it,--and send Mercury, with the rules and compasses, if he can be spared, with my compliments to--no matter.(III.xii.182)

It is often remarked that the full title of Tristram Shandy bears little relation to the actual book--that we only get five years of Tristram's life and most of the opinions are his father's. This is not strictly accurate: we get a large number of Tristram's opinions, on almost every conceivable subject--it is this retailing of his opinions that largely accounts for the peculiar structure of the book--and if we do not get a conventional chronological account of his life (he tells us that it has been largely insignificant), we do know a good deal about the adult Tristram, and we develop a closer relationship with him than with any other character in the novel. Sterne has taken the intrusive technique Fielding used and pushed it a stage further. Tristram Shandy is focussed as much on the saga of Tristram trying to write his book as it is on the events he is writing about. It is not uncommon

¹ See above, chapter 1, note 1, (p.6) for the form of references to the text.

for novels to use the process of narration or the attitudes of the narrator as techniques for directing the reader's response: Wuthering Heights and Villette (for example) both make use of unreliable narrators and the reader is required to notice the discrepancy between event and judgment. In Ford's The Good Soldier this technique is taken a stage further, and our interest is as much in the mental process of story-telling, the present-tense story of the narrator trying to make sense of what has happened to him, as in the story he is telling. Ford has taken the implications of unreliable and self-conscious narrators² to their furthest extent, working under the influence of Jamesian theories of the 'dramatic' novel.

Sterne, of course, is working more in the tradition of A Tale of a Tub, and there are times when the unreliability of his narrator seems the product of carelessness, or of a lack of concern with the problems of realistic consistency that later novelists had to face. Nevertheless, it makes sense to keep as clear as possible a distinction between Sterne and Tristram, and it is possible to see Tristram's opinions and digressions as a development of the technique of authorial commentary. In this way the connection between Tristram Shandy and more conventional novels is maintained.

² For these terms see Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, passim.

The thematic direction of this chapter can best be explained by attention to one central group of images in Tristram's commentary: that concerned with horses and riding. The best-known of these images is the hobby-horse. As an image for a favourite subject or activity this was not totally original to Sterne,³ but the identification with the ruling passion (II.v.93) would seem to be Sterne's own, stemming from his conception of the mind as obsessional. It is a peculiarly apt image, carrying as it does associations of the imaginary (a hobby-horse is a horse only in the imagination) and the childlike (particularly appropriate for uncle Toby). Tristram always treats it very much as a live metaphor, using such terms as 'riding', 'mounted' and so on, and the horse image can be developed to characterise more precisely the kind of mental habit involved:

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...(I.vii.13)

some with large stirrups, getting on in a more grave and sober pace;---others on the contrary, tuck'd up to their very chins, with whips across their mouths, scouring and scampering it away...(I.viii.14)

...which a man makes a shift to get a stride on, to canter it away from the cares and sollicitudes of life
(VIII.xxxi.584)

³ The O.E.D. (sense 6) gives one earlier use, in 1676, and then jumps strangely to Madame D'Arblay in 1768, though it gives as Sterne's coinages 'hobby-horsical' and 'hobby-horsically'. It makes no mention of the ruling passion. The term doesn't appear in Johnson's Dictionary.

There is here a consistent and perhaps obvious use of metaphor. But it overlaps interestingly with images of the book itself as a journey:

if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out,--bear with me,--and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:--or if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road ... and as we jogg on... (I.vi.11. Italics mine.)

The image recurs at various points, for example:

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 centre of them...(III.xxiii.207)

This will not be explained the worse, for setting off, as I generally do, at a little distance from the subject. (VI.xxiii.449)

and the journey is often specifically made on horseback:⁴

What a rate have I gone on at, curvetting and frisking it away... I'll tread upon no one... I'll take a good rattling gallop... He's flung--he's off--he's lost his seat--he's down---he'll break his neck... he's now riding like a mad-cap full tilt through a whole crowd of painters, fiddlers, poets, biographers, physicians, lawyers... (IV.xx.298)

nor is it a poor creeping digression (which but for the name of, a man might continue as well going on in the king's highway) which will do the business--no; if it is to be a digression, it must be a good frisky one, and upon a frisky subject too, where neither the horse or his rider are to be caught, but by rebound (IX.xii.614)

The connection between writing and riding a hobby-horse should be clear. The book is, in a sense, Tristram's

⁴ Fielding also uses the image of the journey to characterise his novel (appropriately enough for his picaresque narrative), but where it occurs at the end of Tom Jones (Vol. XVIII, ch i) the image is of a stage coach. The difference is revealing: a stage coach is an altogether more stable and civilised affair, and it travels on a set route to a pre-determined end.

hobby-horse, and the hobby-horse is not only a hobby, but also tends to produce a kind of private madness, as with uncle Toby and Walter. The oddness of the book is hobby-horsical. The connection is made explicitly in the opening of book VII. Tristram recalls that he had said he would keep his book going for forty years 'if it pleased the fountain of life to bless me so long with health and good spirits', and he goes on to comment:

Now as for my spirits, little have I to lay to their charge--nay so very little (unless the mounting me upon a long stick, and playing the fool with me nineteen hours out of the twenty-four, be accusations)...
(VII.i.479)

His spirits have kept him writing, but in a hobby-horsical manner.

A further connection is made between the hobby-horse and the book, through the imagination. Tristram refers to:

that man whose generous heart will give up the reins of his imagination into his author's hands (III.xii.182)

The imagination is a horse which Tristram, as author, seeks to guide, but the pedantic critic (the subject of the preceding passage) will not let go of the reins.

The horse perhaps also functions implicitly in another use of the travelling metaphor:

Could a historiographer drive on his history, as a muleteer drives on his mule,--straight forward ... but the thing is, morally speaking, impossible: For, if he is a man of the least spirit, he will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make (I.xiv.36)

Tristram, as we have seen, thinks of writing in terms of

riding, and his horse is 'frisky', it may 'canter' or 'gallop', and it tends to stray out of its way or 'trifle upon the road'. This is a very different matter from the steady plodding of the mule which, we may easily see, suggests those 'grave', solemn writers, the 'Dutch commentators' and mechanical critics he so often berates. On another occasion he calls them 'cabbage planters', and in each case he is talking about travelling in straight lines--something he finds impossible. But that impossibility, surely, lies in the nature of his material as much as in any constitutional deficiency. He asserts, through these metaphors, the variety, unpredictability, and essential vitality of human experience which cannot be reduced to rigid formulae and rules. And not only through the metaphors, but in the very structure of the book. The digressions, both large and small, themselves become images of the variety and unpredictability of life, and the shape of the book mirrors the reality portrayed within it.

For Sterne, and for Tristram, the insistence on humanity entails an attack on order, on formality and rigidity. We may choose to see this as part of the Romantic or pre-Romantic attack on neo-classicism, but the sort of writer Sterne is attacking has always existed, as have those who confuse solemnity with seriousness. I wish to suggest that this attack accounts for a large part of the peculiarity of Tristram's language. It is not, of course, confined to his

commentary: it invades his narrative and may be seen at work in his characters, but the commentary affords a convenient place to study its effects, where it works more completely, and where it is found in one of its most typical forms, the digression. For most of the commentary is digression.

Most readers of Tristram Shandy have been struck by the strong impression Sterne achieves that Tristram is actually talking to us. It has become commonplace to refer to his style as 'conversational'.⁵ I therefore begin with this aspect of Tristram's language, and try to show how certain features help to create the illusion of speech. In particular, the apparent spontaneity, the lack of premeditation, in his sentences and paragraphs is appropriate to language in the actual process of creation such as we associate with a speaking rather than a writing situation. Tristram often plays ostentatiously with the idea of the narrative present, but it informs more of his writing than just the overt tricks and jests.

⁵ See Eugene Hnatko, 'Sterne's conversational style', in The Winged Skull, ed Cash and Stedmond, pp. 229-236. This account, which was published after the substance of my chapter had been written, has a different emphasis but comes to somewhat similar conclusions. Hnatko's stress on the illusionistic quality of many of Sterne's effects seems to me particularly valuable.

There are other marks of speech in Tristram's style, but the apparently uncontrolled, spontaneous structures which seem indicative of a spoken language are also relevant to an examination of the way Tristram records in his digressions the workings and wanderings of his mind. We would, of course, expect a man's way of talking to reflect his method of thinking, but in this case we have the further complication that Tristram's mind often works with a minimum of rational control, so that his thoughts take forms similar to the general tendencies of speech. There is, then, a certain amount of overlap between my first section, which concentrates on Tristram's conversational style, and my second section, which turns to some of the ways in which his language reveals the pattern of his thoughts. But the latter section also goes beyond the matter of Tristram's ramblings to his subjection to impulse and his attempts to imitate the movements of feeling.

The final section of the chapter deals with various typographical techniques where Tristram, for one reason or another, leaves the normal methods of language. Sometimes he is merely making a point in an unusual way, or just being funny, but these techniques also show him moving completely beyond the realms of experience amenable to rational expression in conventional language. The tendency to disintegration in his style noted earlier as conversational spontaneity or psychological fidelity here becomes a total sub-

version of our normal expectations about rational communication. Finally, the most outstanding feature of Tristram's imagery--its unexpectedness--is also seen as a movement away from strictly rational modes of thought and expression.

A. Conversational style

Tristram rejects any kind of formal relationship between himself and his reader:

As you proceed further with me, the slight acquaintance which is now beginning betwixt us, will grow into familiarity; and that, unless one of us is in fault, will terminate in friendship. (I.vi.11)

He thinks of writing as a species of conversation (II.xi.108), and he writes accordingly. The relationship between the writer and the reader is further complicated by his way of behaving, not only as if he were talking to us, but as though we were listening to him. Thus the first reason for referring to Tristram Shandy as conversational is that Tristram insists on a conversational situation.

The most obvious case of this is when one of his readers asks him a question, perhaps the most extreme example being when 'Madam' misses one of Tristram's hints:

----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...

I have imposed this penance upon the lady, neither out of wantonness or cruelty, but from the best of motives; and therefore shall make her no apology for it when she returns back. (I.xx.56)

Here we are clearly in a situation in which Tristram is addressing an audience and one of our number has been caught out, and sent off, while the rest of us are lectured about the right and wrong ways of reading a book. This sense of physical presence is quite common:

do,--pray, get off your seats, only to take a view of it (III.xx.201)

We'll not stop two moments, my dear Sir,--only, as we have got thro' these five volumes, (do, Sir; sit down upon a set--they are better than nothing)...(VI.1.408)

no, Madam,--not there--I mean at the part I am now pointing to with my forefinger...(VIII.iv.542)

and it may be subtly reinforced by the imagery:

Now if you will venture to go along with me, and look down into the bottom of this matter (II.ii.85)

I beg the reader will assist me here, to wheel off my uncle Toby's ordnance behind the scenes...(VI.xxix.455)

This idea that we are in the presence of a speaking narrator is supported by continual direct address to the reader, to an individual or to a type:

good folks (I.i.4)

Sir (III.xviii.188)

your worships and reverences (V.vii.361)

Madam (VI.xvi.434)

gentle reader (VII.vi.486)

and one might also mention the numerous verbs of speech-- I say, I speak it, I told, etc.--but these are common to many writers and do not carry much force; and Tristram does

also refer to his activity as 'writing' on many occasions. Nevertheless, we are given a strong impression that the author is talking to us, and it is reinforced by his use of language.

The history of English prose may be seen as a series of oscillations between the poles of formality and informality.⁶ The Augustan period saw a movement towards 'speech-based' prose, away from the stylization of Milton and Browne and towards the 'familiar style'. Addison is often mentioned as a master of the familiar style, and a quotation from one of his more personal passages will serve to point up the distinctiveness of Sterne's conversational manner:

When I want Materials for this Paper, it is my Custom to go abroad in quest of Game; and when I meet any proper Subject, I take the first Opportunity of setting down an Hint of it upon Paper. At the same Time I look into the Letters of my Correspondents, and if I find any thing suggested in them that may afford Matter of Speculation, I likewise enter a Minute of it in my Collection of Materials. By this Means I frequently carry about me a whole Sheet full of Hints, that would look like a Rhapsody of Nonsense to any Body but my self: There is nothing in them but Obscurity and Confusion, Raving and Inconsistency. In short, they are my Speculations in the first Principles, that (like the World in its Chaos) are void of all Light, Distinction, and Order.⁷

We notice here the general shortness of the sentences, the smooth flow, the lack of imagery and of diction remarkable

⁶ See Ian A. Gordon, The Movement of English Prose, passim.

⁷ The Spectator, ed Donald F. Bond, Oxford, 1965, vol.I, no.46, pp.195-6.

either for raciness or elevation. It can only correspond to 'the conversation of gentlemen'⁸ in an ideal or abstract way. A written record of actual speech, with its pauses, ums, unfinished sentences, changes of direction, and dependence on voice inflection and physical gesture, would be virtually incomprehensible, but Sterne comes very close to it at times.⁹ He thus takes the cosy relationship Fielding established with his readers a stage further. To the idea of conversation he adds the idea of speech, and his language alters accordingly.

Several linguistic features can be identified which contribute to this impression. Probably the most obvious is the structure of Tristram's sentences. The impression of spontaneous speech is achieved by the denial of premeditation, resulting in an accretive sentence-structure in which an idea or qualification is added as an afterthought rather than worked into a total pattern beforehand:

I wish I had been born in the Moon, or in any of the planets, (except Jupiter or Saturn, because I never could bear cold weather) for it could not well have

⁸ See James Sutherland, 'Some aspects of eighteenth-century English prose', in Essays on the Eighteenth Century, Presented to David Nichol Smith, Oxford, 1945, pp.94-110. Cf. Gordon, The Movement of English Prose, p.137: 'The periodical essay of Addison and Steele ... was essentially a conversation.'

⁹ 'The writer who thinks too fast for his pen is apt to scatter his thoughts disconnectedly on the paper; although the ideas that enter his mind too rapidly to be written down may easily be skimmed off in conversation', James Sutherland, On English Prose, Toronto & London, 1957, p.10. It sounds like a description of Tristram!

fared worse with me in any of them (tho' I will not answer for Venus) than it has in this vile, dirty planet of ours,--which, o' my conscience, with reverence be it spoken, I take to be made up of the shreds and clippings of the rest;---not but the planet is well enough, provided a man could be born in it to a great title or to a great estate; or could any how contrive to be called up to publick charges, and employments of dignity or power;---but that is not my case;---and therefore every man will speak of the fair as his own market has gone in it;---for which cause I affirm it over again to be one of the vilest worlds that ever was made; (I.v.10)

The parentheses are an obvious case in point, but the lack of premeditation informs the whole structure. It starts with a free clause which is followed by a dependent clause, introduced by 'for'. The sentence then takes off from the end of this dependent clause, from one nominal group within it, leading from the relative pronoun 'which' into a new statement, which then becomes the subject for a qualification ('not but...'), which is finally denied ('but that is not my case'). At this point the word 'therefore' seems to suggest some logical connection, but in fact it does not have the logical force it pretends to: the statement does not follow from the preceding ones, but rather stands as an explanation of them. The 'therefore' works backwards, if at all. Similarly, 'for which cause' relates not to the preceding statement but rather to the general idea of the sentence, which Tristram still holds in his mind. The whole sentence (though in fact this is only part of it, it goes on again, 'for I can truly say...') revolves around a central idea, or group of ideas. The thought does not move violently off course, but it moves at odds with the syntax. Syntactically,

the main part of the sentence is the free clause at the beginning; but the main weight is thrown onto the modifications and qualifications. The whole could be refashioned into a more orderly sentence, whereas in its present state it suggests that it was not all present in Tristram's mind when he started. An orderly sentence would relate cause to effect, main point to subsidiary point, in a logical fashion. Tristram retains the appearance of logical thought by use of connectives such as 'for', 'therefore' and 'because', but fails to produce a logical sequence.¹⁰

A somewhat similar effect can be seen in another typical structure which shows Tristram starting his sentence before he has thought out what he wants to put in it:

¹⁰ This use of logical connectives in a non-logical way has (like several of the techniques described in this chapter) been identified as a feature of the 'baroque style'. See M.W.Croll, 'The baroque style in prose', in K.Malone and M.B.Ruud, Studies in English Philology; Minneapolis, 1929, pp.427-56. Croll remarks of this style: 'It appears characteristically in writers who are professed opponents of determined and rigorous philosophical attitudes', p.444. For Sterne's connections with this style see J.M.Stedmond, 'Style and Tristram Shandy', MLQ XX (1959), pp.243-51. But cf. Brian Vickers, Francis Bacon and Renaissance Prose, Cambridge, 1968, pp.106-17, for a critique of Croll's theories. Vickers knocks large holes in Croll's theory, and rightly casts suspicion on any simple correlation of style and philosophical position. But he is perhaps over-subtle in insisting that 'artifice' is the same for Ciceronian and anti-Ciceronian prose: the impression of spontaneity is surely stronger with 'baroque' style, even if it is only an illusion. Certainly Sterne uses linguistic disorder (or apparent disorder) in conjunction with a preference for spontaneity and an attack on rationality.

There was not any one scene more entertaining in our family,--and to do it justice in this point;---and I here put off my cap and lay it upon the table close beside my ink-horn, on purpose to make my declaration to the world concerning this one article, the more solemn,--that 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.

Not any one of these was more diverting, I say...
(III.xxxix.236)

This is a classic kind of Shandean digression, here working on a small scale. The question is not one of what should or should not be included, but the order it appears in.

There are three points to be got across. One is the narrative matter of the entertaining family scenes arising from the question of noses; the second is the whimsical nature of the family generally; and the third is Tristram's declaration of seriousness. It is a normal process for novelists, and a frequent one for Tristram, to introduce a particular situation with a generalization, and it would be quite simple to organize the material here so that the generalization about the family preceded the comment on noses. This would be a typical pattern, seen in many other places in the novel (see, for example, I.xii.27-8; VI.xiv.432; IX.xxvi.636). The declaration could then be tolerated as an interruption, although it would be better still at the very beginning. But Tristram starts his narrative and

then remembers his generalization, and then makes his declaration, so having to start a new paragraph again for his original point. The whole would actually be considerably tidier if only the first eleven words were omitted.

The conversational structure further affects the sentence, in that the original syntax gets lost. The 'that' in the sixth line of my quotation follows from the interruption ('this one article ... that'), whereas the sentence should be following on from before the interruption, without any conjunction. As in speech, strict grammar is lost as the mind changes course, and one sentence is in fact replaced by another. Similarly, the syntax is strained where we find 'for this end' and 'such exquisite scenes' referring back to 'entertaining' in the long lost opening of the sentence. We may also notice in passing how the expansive tendency of Tristram's language--

supreme Maker and first Designer
made or put ... together
cast or contrasted
the capacities ... and the powers...
lodged and intrusted

--overburdens the already feeble structure, accentuating the sense of loss of direction. I shall return to this feature of Tristram's language later in the chapter.

Colloquial expressions occur throughout Tristram's commentary, and there are few passages which do not provide at least one example:

you could not say more for your life (I.x.18)

but that's neither here nor there (III.xl.237)

what a junketting piece of work of it there is (V.vii.361)

I had nothing else for it, but to say some smart thing
upon the occasion (VII.xxv.527)

any one is welcome to take my pen (IX.xxiv.627)

Such expressions work in with and contribute to the sense of spoken rhythm which is so common in these passages. It is very difficult to pin down a prose rhythm, but it is possible to look at the use and placing of emphatic words, which have considerable effect. Words such as 'now', 'too', 'I think' and other emphatic elements in the sentence play an important part in establishing these rhythms:

which is, I think, very right (I.xi.25)

and a devil of a one too (V.iii.350)

Now as widow Wadman did love my uncle Toby (VIII.xi.549)

They give the sentence a more distinct accentuation, such as we associate with spoken rather than written utterances. This sense of intonation can be achieved through a variety of techniques, often a number of small effects working together:

I call all the powers of time and chance, which severally check us in our careers in this world, to bear me witness, that I could never yet get fairly to my uncle Toby's amours, till this very moment, that my mother's curiosity, as she stated the affair,--or a different impulse in her, as my father would have it--wished her to take a peep at them through the key-hole. (IX.i.599)

This is not one of the more markedly conversational passages, but again the distribution of emphasis in 'never yet

get fairly' and 'this very moment' suggests the sound of the speaking voice.

Punctuation plays a very important part in establishing Tristram's speech rhythms. Professor Work comments: 'The punctuation is oral rather than syntactical; Sterne was a talker, not a grammarian',¹¹ and this is not only a matter of the dash. Syntactical punctuation guides the reader to the logic of the sentence; Tristram's punctuation marks the pauses of speech, usually for emphasis. Commas appear in apparently the most odd places:

I declare, I do not recollect any one opinion or passage of my life, where my understanding was more at a loss to make ends meet, and torture the chapter I had been writing, to the service of the chapter following it, than in the present case: one would think I took a pleasure in running into difficulties of this kind, merely to make fresh experiments of getting out of 'em.
(VIII.vi.545)

Even allowing for historical changes of practice, the commas in this passage seem to have a peculiar effect, although only those after 'life', 'writing' and 'kind' are unusual. They mark pauses for emphasis. It is worth remembering that the use of the 'Shandean dash' affects the operation of the comma, making it a lighter pause than it usually is today; but this passage also shows, I think, the weakness of the comma compared with the dash, for Sterne's purposes. It is a blunt instrument.

¹¹ Tristram Shandy, 'Note on the Text', p.lxxv.

It is the dash which most corresponds to the pauses of the speaking voice:

When Tully was bereft of his dear daughter Tullia, at first he laid it to his heart,--he listened to the voice of nature, and modulated his own unto it. --O my Tullia! my daughter! my child!--still, still, still,--'twas O my Tullia!--my Tullia! Methinks I see my Tullia, I hear my Tullia, I talk with my Tullia.--But as soon as he began to look into the stores of philosophy, and consider how many excellent things might be said upon the occasion--nobody upon earth can conceive, says the great orator, how happy, how joyful it made me. (V.iii.351-2)

Here we see the comma dash, the stop dash and the plain dash, and also the effect it has on the comma. It is perhaps worth printing the passage without dashes to show the effect:

When Tully was bereft of his dear daughter Tullia, at first he laid it to his heart; his listened to the voice of nature, and modulated his own unto it. O my Tullia! my daughter! my child! Still, still, still, 'twas O my Tullia! my Tullia! Methinks I see my Tullia, I hear my Tullia, I talk with my Tullia. But as soon as he began to look into the stores of philosophy, and consider how many excellent things might be said upon the occasion, nobody upon earth can conceive, says the great orator, how happy, how joyful it made me.

I have attempted to replace the dashes with punctuation marks producing as near as possible the same effects, but I don't think there can be any doubt that a good deal of subtlety has been lost and the style appears more stilted. One misses particularly the dash after 'still', which marks a different pause from that between the repetitions; the dash before 'But', which prepares for the turn of the thought; and the dash after 'occasion', which prepares for the climax and at the same time eases the transition from

third to first person.¹² Also, the full stop after 'child' fails to give the sense of continuity which is there in the original, and a semi-colon would not be much better.

The kind of grammatical effect seen in this passage is quite common: the full stop is much less frequent in Sterne than in most other writers. Incomplete sentences can be juxtaposed without the sense of jerkiness that would be produced by ordinary punctuation:

What a conjuncture was here lost!--My father in one of his best explanatory moods,--in eager pursuit of a metaphysic point into the very regions where clouds and thick darkness would soon have encompassed it about;--my uncle Toby in one of the finest dispositions for it in the world;---his head like a smook-jack;--the funnel unswept, and the ideas whirling round and round about in it, all obfuscated and darkened over with fuliginous matter!--By the tomb-stone of Lucian...
(III.xix.191)

The dash is an important means of liberating language from its usual grammatical patterns of expectation, so that we most probably pass over the lack of finite verbs with never a thought. This kind of truncated structure is typical of speech, and not infrequent in Tristram Shandy.

But discussion of the dash leads into the second part of this chapter. I have tried to show some of the features which encourage us to speak of a 'conversational' style in

¹² See Ian Watt, 'The comic syntax of Tristram Shandy', pp.320-21, for an excellent discussion of the dash, especially of its use for this kind of shift. Professor Work's edition is seriously unreliable in its printing of dashes (as has been pointed out by J.M. Stedmond in The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne) and I have accordingly corrected my quotations by the Penguin English Library edition, ed Graham Petrie, Harmondsworth, 1967.

Tristram Shandy, taking it for granted that this will most be the case in those places where the narrator talks to us directly--the commentary. Crucial is the kind of relationship the narrator establishes with us, the tone he takes up. For much of the time, and in the most outstanding parts of the book, Tristram goes out of his way to erase all traces of formality in this relationship, to reduce much of the distance between writer and reader imposed by the conditions of writing to an unseen and unknown audience. It might be better, in the description of his style, to replace the word 'conversational' by 'chatty'. But this would be to overstress certain aspects of Tristram's language at the expense of others and ignore the immense range of voice tones that Tristram can produce. Not only are there considerable passages of parody (some of which are examined in chapter seven below), but Tristram slips in and out of various degrees of intimacy with his reader depending on the subject matter. The voice can rise from casual chattiness to a much more formal rhetoric, whether it be mock-rhetoric:

stop! my dear uncle Toby,---stop!--go not one foot further into this thorny and bewilder'd track,--intricate are the steps! intricate are the mazes of this labyrinth! intricate are the troubles which the pursuit of this bewitching phantom, KNOWLEDGE, will bring upon thee (II.iii.90)

or what I take to be more serious (even though half-ironic) moments:

O Garrick! what a rich scene of this would thy exquisite powers make! and how gladly would I write

such another to avail myself of thy immortality, and secure my own behind it. (IV.vii.278)

That kind BEING, who is a friend to the friendless, shall recompence thee for this. (VI.viii.424)

It is the conviction of the speaking voice behind these more elaborate passages, the sense of the narrator present before us, that integrates the various levels of formality into the novel. He may leave 'conversation' proper to put on a little performance, but the personal relationship has been established.

B. Psychological registration

Since Sterne was 'rediscovered' in the twentieth century he has been particularly prized for his psychological awareness, and his own description of Locke's Essay as 'a history-book ... of what passes in a man's own mind' (II. ii.85) has often been applied to Tristram Shandy. The unity of the book lies in Tristram's consciousness, we are told. I think there is a considerable danger of reading more of the twentieth century into the novel than is really there, and of overlooking the moral and literary concerns of Tristram Shandy by concentrating too hard on the psychological ones. Nevertheless, Sterne does expend considerable ingenuity on the registration of consciousness, especially in the language of his narrator.

For Locke, thought association was a species of madness, a disordering of the mind which prevents it from working properly.¹³ The classic instance of this in Tristram Shandy is Mrs Shandy's question in the first chapter: she is unable to think of one thing without the other coming into mind. Uncle Toby shows a variation on this process: certain words for him have only one area of meaning, and set his mind working along military lines because of his over-riding interest in his one subject, his hobby-horse. Trim doesn't have quite the same problem, but he finds it difficult to stop talking once he has started. Walter Shandy has his own hobby-horse, but it is less specific than Toby's: he is a speculative philosopher, and any event produces in him a chain of thought, not always very logical or closely connected with reality, which he finds totally absorbing (as, for example, his behaviour over Tristram's circumcision, V.xxvii-xxviii.384-7).¹⁴

Each of these characters, then, has his particular mental aberration, a more or less mechanical reaction to experience. Tristram is most like his father, though he

¹³ See Arthur H. Cash, 'The Lockean psychology of Tristram Shandy', ELH XXII (1955), pp.125-35. See also Ernest Lee Tuveson, The Imagination as a Means of Grace, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1960, ch.1, especially pp.32-41, for the way Locke's discussion of the association of ideas became a source of the recognition that rational orderly processes do not sufficiently account for the human mind.

¹⁴ See below, chapter 3, passim.

doesn't show quite the same scholastic bent. He would, I think, agree with Walter that 'every thing in this world ... is big with jest,--and has wit in it, and instruction too,--if we can but find it out' (V.xxxii.393); he certainly seems to find it difficult to mention anything without commenting on it, explaining it, or qualifying it. He faces the artistic problem of selection, and shows himself very aware of it. This problem underlies much of the peculiar structure of the book: the material that might be included is infinite, and this raises problems both of what to select and reject and of how to arrange his material once selected.¹⁵ He finds it impossible to establish a satisfactory system of priorities; he cannot accept that the sort of adventures that formed the basis of most eighteenth-century novels are necessarily more important than small gestures such as the snapping of a tobacco pipe, or conversations by the fire. This insistence on the trivia of everyday life is part of Tristram's general approach to his book, his denial of gravity, of order, of formality: they all are alien to his vision of life as it is lived. But his inability or refusal (I think it is something of each) to reduce the multiplicity of experience produces continual problems, not only of narration, but of communication of any kind. It results in three particular tendencies in his commentary: firstly, his attention may be caught by any stray

¹⁵ Cf. Christopher Ricks, 'Introduction' to the Penguin English Library edition of Tristram Shandy, esp. pp.18-22.

idea, for he lacks any clear sense of subject, any strict rule of relevance; secondly, as any statement is selective, and only an approximation to the complexity of reality, it is likely to be in need of qualification or restatement in different words; and thirdly, he is inclined to follow his impulses at any moment rather than repress them for the sake of clarity or order.

Tristram shows his awareness of the problem of selection:

My mother, you must know,---but I have fifty things more necessary to let you know first,--I have a hundred difficulties which I have promised to clear up, and a thousand distresses and domestic misadventures croud-
ing in upon me thick and three-fold, one upon the neck of another,---a cow broke in (to-morrow morning) to my uncle Toby's fortifications, and eat up two ratios and . . . half of dried grass, tearing up the sods with it, which faced his horn-work and covered way.--Trim insists on being tried by a court-martial,--the cow to be shot,--Slop to be crucifix'd,--myself to be tristram'd, and at my very baptism made a martyr of...
(III.xxxviii.235)

The succession of phrases and sentences imitates the rush of ideas in Tristram's mind; the collapse of grammar ('the cow to be shot') matches the loss of control. But particularly interesting is the way the initial sentence breaks down. Tristram has been describing the different theories of noses that his father espoused, culminating in Paraeus's belief in the importance of the softness of the mother's breast, and he is about to tell us of the family discord resulting from Walter's acceptance of this theory. From the censor's point of view it is no doubt in the interests of propriety that this narration is interrupted, and on one

level this passage thus functions as an authorial joke.¹⁶ But for Tristram the interruption is a normal mental process: the words 'you must know' remind him of other things the reader needs to know, and so he follows up this second idea, leaving the first one suspended, never to be returned to. It is a different process from the way uncle Toby latches on to certain words, for the result is not a mechanical train of thought but an upsurge of whatever ideas are lying at the back of the narrator's mind at this particular moment.

An even more extreme example of the same kind of process occurs later on:

I am a Turk if I had not as much forgot my mother, as if Nature had plaistered me up, and set me down naked upon the banks of the river Nile, without one.--Your most obedient servant, Madam--I've cost you a great deal of trouble,--I wish it may answer;--but you have left a crack in my back,--and here's a great piece fallen off here before,--and what must I do with this foot?--I shall never reach England with it.

For my own part I never wonder at any thing;--and so often has my judgment deceived me in my life, that I always suspect it, right or wrong,--at least I am seldom hot upon cold subjects. For all this, I reverence truth as much as any body; and when it has slipped us, if a man will but take me by the hand, and go quietly and search for it, as for a thing we have both lost, and can neither of us do well without,--I'll go to the world's end with him:--But I hate disputes,--and therefore (bating religious points, or such as touch society) I would almost subscribe to any thing which does not choak me in the first passage, rather than be drawn into one--But I cannot bear suffocation,--and bad smells worst of all.--For which reasons, I resolved from the

16 For discussion of the sexual implications of this passage see below, chapter 6, p.267.

beginning, That if ever the army of martyrs was to be augmented,--or a new one raised,--I would have no hand in it, one way or t'other. (V.xi.367)

I am not here particularly concerned with the first paragraph, which is clearly self-conscious and humorous: the process is not unusual, Tristram uses an image and then follows up the implications of it, leaving the original subject behind. But this is not the wandering of the mind so much as the conscious awareness of the possibility of a joke. More interesting is the transition to the second paragraph. Very often a paragraph break in such a place would mark a return to the original subject, but not here. Tristram has left his subject to indulge his joke about spontaneous generation, and he now goes on to comment on the latter, in a much more serious tone of voice. It may well take most readers more than one reading to see the connections in this chapter at all. We are given no clues as to how Tristram's mind is working, and we have to reconstruct it: spontaneous generation may seem a ridiculous idea, but he is prepared to accept anything, he doesn't put much faith in his own judgment, and is unwilling to get worked up about something that isn't worth it. But in case this suggests total indifference, he goes on to explain that he is always ready to undertake a quiet and sensible search for the truth. But he hates disputes, so unless the subject is something of utmost importance, he won't enter an argument; and he sees no value in martyrdom for its own sake.

The argument is really quite easy to follow, once we have caught it, but to do so we have to be alive to possible implications all the time. We must be thinking of spontaneous generation as something to wonder at, something to exercise one's judgment over; we must see that distrust of one's judgment might mean a lack of concern for truth. Perhaps even more subtle is the transition at the end of the paragraph, effected through the imagery. Conventionally enough, he refers to an unacceptable doctrine as something which will 'choak' him 'in the first passage'. So when he says, 'But I cannot bear suffocation' he seems to be referring back to this idea, and we would presumably take 'bad smells' as a derogatory description of rotten doctrines. He would seem to be insisting again that there are certain ideas he cannot accept. But then he goes on to say that it is for these 'reasons' that he will not be a martyr, and 'suffocation' and 'bad smells' are seen to refer also to the image of a martyr at the stake. So the image is curiously ambiguous: it could refer either to his inability to accept certain ideas, or to his refusal to be martyred for his beliefs. Perhaps we can say that this ambiguity reflects his own attitude to the problem of truth and belief. But the mind slips so easily from one idea to another that we cannot be sure where one ends and the next one starts.

Four chapters in Vol. IX are taken up with a very self-conscious introduction of a digression:

Upon looking back from the end of the last chapter and surveying the texture of what has been wrote, it is necessary, that upon this page and the five following, a good quantity of heterogeneous matter be inserted, to keep up that just balance betwixt wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year. (IX.xii.614)

There is here a serious point: 'wisdom and folly' are concepts closely related to 'wit and judgment', and the novel both insists on and demonstrates the way they go together.¹⁷ There is, of course, also a joke in that the preceding chapters were hardly full of wisdom or judgment; but nevertheless, we may accept the general point as part of the attack on gravity. It may also be noticed that this opening theme doesn't get entirely lost, for the main part of the digression comprises a discussion of the value of shaving in order to write well, and we realize that the whole is a fantasia on the theme of 'long beards'. But my particular interest here is in the structure of the digression. Having spoken of the need for 'heterogeneous matter' he goes on to discuss the problems of providing it:

The only difficulty, is raising powers suitable to the nature of the service. (ibid)

He then goes through the possibilities of prayer, argument, the practice of virtue and finally shaving: as usual we are following the wanderings of Tristram's mind, which is pursuing its own way through the implications of the initial statement about making a digression. But in fact, although at the beginning of chapter xiv Tristram is still

¹⁷ See below, chapter 7, pp. 300-303.

talking about 'preparation', we have moved unnoticed into the substance of the digression. We may accept as genuine Tristram's surprised comment at the end ('in talking of my digression--I declare before heaven I have made it!'), and notice here again Sterne's authorial skill in manipulating the random workings of the narrator's mind so that the work is 'digressive, and it is progressive too' (I.xxii.73). The book is saved from total chaos by such submerged structures and Sterne manages mostly to have the advantages of disorder without the disadvantages.

It is, however, an essential part of a book telling both life and opinions that the narrator employs to the full his right to comment on anything that arises, and it is one of the benefits of a situation in which 'nothing which has touched' the narrator 'will be thought trifling in its nature, or tedious in its telling' that any opinion or thought becomes fit matter for the book. Usually such matter is introduced either as direct comment on the action, or arising from that comment in an easy and natural, if disorderly, way--as we have seen. But the degree of the connection can vary, and Tristram's mind wanders very easily, especially when something is worrying him. For example:

As Mrs. Bridget's finger and thumb were upon the latch, the Corporal did not knock as oft as perchance your honour's taylor--I might have taken my example something nearer home; for I owe mine, some five and twenty pounds at least, and wonder at the man's patience--
 --But this is nothing at all to the world: only 'tis a cursed thing to be in debt... (IX.xvii.619-20)

A totally gratuitous comment on his own simile leads him into a discussion of his finances. The critic is hardly in a position to say: this is relevant, that is not; but digressions of this sort do seem to increase towards the end of the book, and there would seem to be some justification in assertions that Sterne's invention began to flag. In fact, rather than, as he predicted, trifling incidents becoming more important as we get to know him better, they become less so, as they lose their function of helping us to get to know him. Thus, while we accept the wandering mind as a reasonable insistence on the true nature of man there does remain an artistic limit on what we are happy to put up with from its wanderings. They must remain lively or interesting or funny in their own right if they are to work.

In discussing Tristram's tendency to wander we have inevitably noticed his need to qualify his statements. In the Shandy family communication is notoriously difficult: everyone misunderstands everyone else. So it is not surprising to find Tristram highly aware of the possibility of being misunderstood. Sometimes he uses this awareness for comic effect, as in his elaborate efforts at defining a nose, but qualification forms one of the most common complications in his sentence-structure. Often the result is only a temporary suspension, not drastically altering the drift of the sentence but contributing each time it

occurs to our impression of the complexity of affairs in Tristram's mind:

In all disputes,--male or female,--whether for honour, for profit, or for love,--it makes no difference in this case...(III.i.157)

I am so impatient to return to my own story, that what remains of young Le Fever's, that is, from the turn of his fortune, to the time my uncle Toby recommended him for my preceptor... (VI.xi.426)

...and for which (unless you travel with an avance-courier, which numbers do in order to prevent it)--there is no help (VII.xvi.496)

I defy, notwithstanding all that has been said upon straight lines in sundry pages of my book--I defy the best cabbage planter that ever existed, whether he plants backwards or forwards, it makes little difference in the account (except that he will have more to answer for in the one case than in the other)--I defy him... (VIII.i.539)

The last example shows the qualification beginning to become a threat to coherence, so that 'I defy' has to be repeated twice to maintain the sense of direction. The structure thus becomes a demonstration of the point Tristram is making (and it looks as though the nonsensical qualifications have been inserted purely for this reason). There are many cases where things get even more out of hand, and a new paragraph may be required:

In the case of knots,--by which, in the first place, I would not be understood to mean slip-knots,--because in the course of my life and opinions,--my opinions concerning them will come in more properly when I mention the catastrophe of my great uncle Mr. Hammond Shandy,--a little man,--but of high fancy:--he rushed into the duke of Monmouth's affair:--nor, secondly, in this place, do I mean that particular species of knots, called bow-knots;--there is so little address, or skill, or patience, required in the unloosing them that they are below my giving any opinion at all about them.--But by the knots I am speaking of, may it please your reverences to believe, that I mean

good, honest, devilish tight, hard knots, made bona fide, as Obadiah made his;--in which there is no quibbling provision made by the duplication and return of the two ends of the strings through the annulus or noose made by the second implication of them--to get them slipp'd and undone by--I hope you apprehend me.

In the case of these knots then... (III.x.167-8)

Tristram, of course, is not being entirely serious here --the last part of the sentence is a virtuoso exercise in the description of knot-tying, and the syntax is appropriately tied into knots to dramatise the point--but the majority of this paragraph provides a fine example of qualification at its most excessive. The first sentence, though punctuated extremely skilfully and kept up brilliantly, is grammatically incomplete, as Tristram gives up and provides a full-stop before he continues with the positive side of his qualification. So we are given two examples of what he does not mean, followed by a description of what he does, before he starts the sentence all over again in a new paragraph. Moreover, he not only excludes unwanted meanings, but has to explain why each is excluded.

This passage also demonstrates another typical feature of Tristram's language. In the word groups, 'address, or skill, or patience' and 'good, honest, devilish tight, hard' there is a considerable amount of overlap between the various terms, and we might reasonably feel that only one would have done. But like the need for qualification, this expansiveness is the result of Tristram's awareness of the danger of words, and their limited capacity to

express experience.¹⁸ So, although the repetition involved in such groups makes for emphasis it is the differences between the words rather than the overlaps which are most important; the differences may be very slight, but then the novel works on a miniature scale much of the time, and is concerned with nuances:

O my countrymen!--be nice;--be cautious of your language;--and never, O! never let it be forgotten upon what small particles your eloquence and your fame depend. (II.vi.100)

This tendency to word-pairing makes a considerable contribution to the sense of looseness and loss of direction in sentences already affected by qualification and other interruptions:

There are a thousand resolutions, Sir, both in church and state, as well as in matters, Madam, of a more private concern;--which, though they have carried all the appearance in the world of being taken, and entered upon in a hasty, hare-brained, and unadvised manner, were, notwithstanding this, (and could you or I have got into the cabinet, or stood behind the curtain, we should have found it was so) weighed, poized, and perpended--argued upon--canvassed through--entered into, and examined on all sides with so much coolness, that the GODDESS of COOLNESS herself (I do not take upon me to prove her existence) could neither have wished it, or done it better. (VI.xvi.434)

A number of features here help to create a typical Shandean sentence--the direct address, the qualification, the sentence-structure hanging from a relative pronoun--but the expansive repetition is most noticeable, rising to seven

¹⁸ For a full discussion of word-pairing, and incidentally an example of how one linguistic feature can have very different effects and implications in different contexts, see W.K.Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, ch.1.

nearly synonymous verbal phrases ('weighed...'etc.). In this case the repetitive groups are used less to present different nuances of meaning than to enact the process they describe of examining something on all sides. Such expansiveness is also active in giving the sentence a typically Shandean rhythm, and the enlarging of the central part of the sentence perhaps helps (paradoxically) to keep the asides and qualifications under control.

It would, however, be unwise to make too much of this element of Tristram's language, for word- or phrase-pairs, and sometimes triplets, are found throughout the language of Tristram Shandy, affecting not only the rhetoric of Walter:

sins and follies
 misfortune or disaster
 unmechanize thy frame, or entangle thy filaments
 care and attention
 dispersed, confused, confounded, scattered, and sent
 to the devil (IV.xix.296-7)

and of Yorick:

crafty and designing
 dark arts and unequitable subterfuges
 ignorance and perplexities
 poor and needy
 the inexperience of a youth, or the unsuspecting temper
 of his friend (II.xvii.130)

but even uncle Toby's generally simple speech:

the good and quiet of the world
 lives and fortunes
 humanity and fellow feeling (IX.viii.609-10)

Only Trim seems relatively free of this tendency, so that it appears a natural habit of Sterne's rather than a lin-

guistic mannerism given to Tristram. Nevertheless, he does exhibit it in great degree and it does harmonize with other features of his language.

I have so far examined several features which impede any attempt to produce a simple, ordinary sentence and threaten a loss of direction. It is therefore worth looking at the one place where Tristram really does get lost:

I told the Christian reader--I say Christian--hoping he is one--and if he is not, I am sorry for it--and only beg he will consider the matter with himself, and not lay the blame entirely upon this book,--

I told him, Sir--for in good truth, when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the reader's fancy--which, for my own part, if I did not take heed to do more than at first, there is so much unfixed and equivocal matter starting up, with so many breaks and gaps in it,--and so little service do the stars afford, which, nevertheless, I hang up in some of the darkest passages, knowing that the world is apt to lose its way, with all the lights the sun itself at noon day can give it--and now, you see, I am lost myself! (VI.xxxiii.462)

The first thing to be remarked about this passage is that Tristram is not really lost at all: the original sentence is in no worse a state than that on knots was (see above, pp.76-7), and could be similarly rescued. To save it grammatically the 'so little' of the last part needs completing with a 'that' clause, and then a dash and a repetition of 'I told him' (possibly on a new line for clarity) and the sentence could go on. And, of course, it is always open to Tristram to forget the syntactical demands of the sentence altogether, as he does elsewhere, and solve it in

any way he pleases. But it will not have escaped notice that this breakdown occurs while he is talking about the difficulty of keeping everything together: Tristram is again setting up a demonstration of his subject.

Nevertheless, it is a particularly fine example of the way in which his sentences are threatened--the picking on a word ('Christian') and following its implications, the justification of what he is saying, the slipping away from the real subject through the easy connection of 'which' or a participle ('knowing'), the pause of the dash used as a kind of hinge on which the writer swings off in another direction, the doubling of nouns and adjectives. It is a very skilful piece of self-parody. In passing it is worth noticing Fluchère's use of this passage to illustrate the importance of the Shandean dash:

It may seem rather specious to say that if the passage is obscure, if the author himself gets so hopelessly lost in it that he has to begin the chapter all over again, it is because he has not put in the necessary number of dashes. But in fact it is very easy to succumb to verbal dizziness: words carry one away by the force of their own acceleration, and unless writing is just a purely formal exercise (which is not the case here, as Sterne is trying to express an idea that he sincerely believes in) it is necessary to provide breathing spaces for oneself, respites, rests, after which one can grasp one's thought, and cause it to be grasped, better than before.¹⁹

This is astute comment on the general value of the dash, but

¹⁹ Henri Fluchère, *Laurence Sterne: from Tristram to Yorick*, p.424.

even if we knew where to put them dashes would not particularly help here. In passages of short staccato sentences they provide a more fluid organization than the more usual punctuation marks, but where the grammatical connections are already clear they act more to break up the line of the sentence than to reinforce it. In this case they could only further break the line of thought. The existing dashes clearly mark the changes in direction, and more would only confuse the issue.

So far I have illustrated the effect on Tristram's language of his tendency to stray from the subject and his excessive qualification. The other mental habit I shall examine is the way he is overcome by emotional impulse. Such impulses do not seem to strike him very often, but they are clearly related to his general digressive practice:

let that be as it will, Sir, I can no more help it than my destiny:--A sudden impulse comes across me --drop the curtain, Shandy--I drop it--Strike a line here across the paper, Tristram--I strike it--and hey for a new chapter!

The duce of any other rule have I to govern myself by in this affair--and if I had one--as I do all things out of all rule--I would twist it and tear it to pieces, and throw it into the fire when I had done--Am I warm? I am, and the cause demands it--a pretty story! is a man to follow rules---or rules to follow him? (IV.x.281)

Tristram not only writes by impulse, but approves of it (while at the same time treating it comically). I am here interested in those moments when Tristram breaks into an emotional outpouring regardless of the situation. Like the other digressions, they always arise out of the matter

in hand, but they may entail a complete change of mood. A good example is the apostrophe to uncle Toby which follows Tristram's mention of how his father ridiculed the collection of military books:

Here,--but why here,--rather than in any other part of my story,--I am not able to tell;---but here it is,---my heart stops me to pay to thee, my dear uncle Toby, once for all, the tribute I owe thy goodness. --here let me thrust my chair aside, and kneel down upon the ground, whilst I am pouring forth the warmest sentiments of love for thee, and veneration for the excellency of thy character, that ever virtue and nature kindled in a nephew's bosom. (III.xxxiv.224)

As I have suggested, we can begin to answer the question, 'Why here?', for Tristram has been thinking benevolently of his uncle's hobby-horse, its innocence, and the persecution he suffered for it from his brother. These warm thoughts tap his standing reservoir of sentiment for uncle Toby, and out it all comes. But the questioning is rather different from Tristram's usual speculations on the organization of his material. It is, for Tristram, part of the value of the feeling that it arises apparently unprompted, that it is not allotted a place in the scheme but is quite spontaneous. Thus, though we can trace it to the movement of his mind in the preceding paragraph we can go no further.

Tristram's posture during this effusion is ridiculous enough--the sheer impossibility of his writing the passage on his knees contributes to the effect--but it would be a mistake to say that this makes the whole thing superficial or, to use a tricky concept, 'insincere'. Sentiment in

Sterne is usually rather absurd, but this need not reduce its value. Indeed, in the face of 'gravity', of 'great wigs' and 'long beards' it may enhance it. Dignity is not of great importance in the Shandean world; if it were the outlook would be bleak indeed--for Walter with his left hand in his right coat pocket, for Toby on his bowling green, for Yorick on his horse. Shandean man is absurd much of the time, and since 'everything in this world is big with jest' there is no reason why this should exclude even the hallowed ground of sentiment. It is the sense of absurdity that often manages to preserve Sterne's sentiment from becoming sentimentality.²⁰ We may also notice that as the passage goes on it gains in strength, as we transfer our attention from the 'warmest sentiments' 'pouring forth', from Tristram on his knees, to uncle Toby himself. The passage continues:

Peace and comfort rest for evermore upon thy head!--
 Thou envied'st no man's comforts,--insulted'st no man's
 opinions.--Thou blackened'st no man's character,--
 devourest no man's bread: gently with faithful Trim
 behind thee, didst thou amble round the little circle
 of thy pleasures, jostling no creature in thy way;--
 for each one's sorrows, thou had'st a tear,--for each
 man's need, thou hadst a shilling. (ibid)

I would also suggest that simple sentimentality here is kept at bay by the suggestion of the hobby-horse image in 'amble round the little circle of thy pleasures': it is one of the features of a hobby-horse than it tends to go round in

²⁰ See below, chapter 7, pp. 319-35, for further discussion of these issues.

circles. So again, benevolence and absurdity are yoked together.

Such outbursts are evoked only by moral qualities; it is an essential part of Sterne's 'sentimentalism' that it always has this moral aspect. One of the two positive virtues attributed to Toby is shedding a tear for other people's sorrows. In his response to uncle Toby Tristram shows that he has much of the same moral/sentimental make-up, and I think the obvious moral basis of these impulsive moments suggests the ultimate moral sanction of the whole attack on order and formality which I see underlying Tristram's language.

Before leaving the question of the psychological aspects of Tristram's language I shall examine briefly the imitation of the movement of thought and feeling. Something of this has inevitably already been seen: the way his sentences reflect the movement of his mind from one thing to another, the way his emotional outbursts arise from a stirring of his feelings by what he has been saying. But there are two more linguistic devices which are of particular importance in this respect. One is the kind of connectives he uses, and the other is the Shandean short sentence.

We have seen that Tristram's mind wanders easily from

one subject to another. This movement is matched by weak syntactical links, the two most important of which are the participle and the relative pronoun:

Now, before I venture to make use of the word Nose a second time,--to avoid all confusion in what will be said upon it, in this interesting part of my story, it may not be amiss to explain my own meaning, and define, with all possible exactness and precision, what I would willingly be understood to mean by the term: being of opinion, that 'tis owing to the negligence and perverseness of writers, in despising this precaution, and to nothing else,--That all the polemical writings in divinity, are not as clear and demonstrative as those upon a Will o' the Wisp, or any other sound part of philosophy, and natural pursuit; in order to which, what have you to do, before you set out, unless you intend to go puzzling on to the day of judgment,--but to give the world a good definition, and stand to it, of the main word you have most occasion for,--changing it, Sir, as you would a guinea, into small coin?--which done,--let the father of confusion puzzle you, if he can; or put a different idea either into your head, or your reader's head, if he knows how. (III.xxxi.217-8)

The structure of the thought here is a familiar one: Tristram announces what he is going to do, and then slides off into his justification for this decision by commenting on what others have failed to do, and then explaining how they should do it, and what the result will be. It is not a wildly digressive passage, no syntactical structure is left incomplete, and all of it relates to one central area of meaning, the definition of terms. Nevertheless, it is an incredible sentence. And it is important to insist that it is a sentence. It would be unwise to ignore Tristram's punctuation and to divide his long periods into 'actual sentences' by normal standards, for his is not normal

language.²¹ The full stop here marks the end of one (curvy) line of thought, with one idea running into another. This continuity is achieved through weak syntactical links, just as the thought links are weak. The opening part of the sentence stands complete, up to the colon. Tristram then launches into a digression, taking off from an absolute participle which only loosely connects with the previous statement. The semi-colon appears to mark the end of a parenthetical statement, the curious phrase 'in order to which' being used as a glance back to the beginning of the whole. It is slightly unclear which verbal phrase it refers back to, but it is either 'to avoid' or 'to explain ... and define': if the latter, the whole sentence becomes highly tautologous. The relative pronoun is at best a weak link for the larger units of sentence structure, for it commonly relates to only one element in the rest of the sentence rather than to the whole idea (unlike subordinating conjunctions such as 'when' or 'because').²² The obscurity of the syntax here typically enacts the looseness of Tristram's thought. Before the sentence is finished it is added to by yet another

21 For the distinction between 'indicated' and 'actual' sentences see Wimsatt, The Prose Style of Samuel Johnson, p.63.

22 This is what linguists call 'rank-shifting'--see R.H.W.Dixon, What Is Language?, p.95. I have generally avoided introducing technical terms from linguistics which do not enjoy wide currency, as it would only complicate the analysis and divert attention from the text to the description of it. Nor am I sufficiently acquainted with linguistic terminology to use it consistently throughout.

present participle ('changing') and another relative pronoun ('which done'), the latter relating to the former. Furthermore, Tristram has shifted in the latter part of the sentence from the first person to the second, causing more blurring in the relations of the different parts. The dashes are used to help out the syntax, providing longer pauses and so giving support to the weak connectives. It is through such weak links that Tristram's mind so easily slides from one subject, or aspect of a subject, to another. To rewrite this sentence as, say, four sentences would be to lose the sense of fluidity, of mental process, which the language records, and to provide just that straitjacket of logical order which Tristram (and Sterne) insists is a false representation of mental experience.

The broken succession of short sentences is one of the more remarkable features of the language of Tristram Shandy. It may be used to register the wavering of feeling:

The moment I pronounced the words, I could perceive an attempt towards a vibration in the strings, about the region of the heart.---The brain made no acknowledgment.--There's often no good understanding betwixt 'em.--I felt as if I understood it.--I had no ideas.--The movement could not be without cause.--I'm lost. I can make nothing of it,-- (IV.i.273)

Tristram is describing a stirring of incoherent feeling; it comes in short spurts, repeatedly impinging on his consciousness, although he doesn't understand it. The lack of cooperation from the brain makes the development of a longer sentence impossible: sentences are the product of the

brain, ratiocinative, logical. The feelings do not take readily to sentence form, and so produce a succession of simple sentences--the most primitive form of structure. Tristram's word 'vibration' is very apt as a description of the prose rhythm. It could be described as an attempt to capture the movement of the pulse.

But though the broken rhythm may be well fitted for this kind of occasion it is not an automatic mimetic form. It can be adapted for various situations:

To conceive this right,--call for pen and ink--here's paper ready to your hand.--Sit down, Sir, paint her to your own mind--as like your mistress as you can--as unlike your wife as your conscience will let you--'tis all one to me--please but your own fancy in it.
(VI.xxxviii.470)

Here the form doesn't even mark a series of ejaculations. Rather, the sentences mark Tristram's reactions to his reader's actions--he pauses as the reader gets ready to do his drawing. It certainly doesn't record the movement of feeling. Many other examples of different uses of the form could be found in the narration. So, similarly, the present participle and the relative pronoun do not automatically represent a wandering mind. But in each case Tristram uses the form to his own ends, and in both cases it is a form which makes little use of the regular connections of syntax, probing behind the organization of language to the original movements of the mind.

C. Beyond verbal experience

Broken passages such as that examined above show language in the process of dissolution. Tristram is trying to convey an essentially non-verbal experience. In this section I propose to look at some of the instances where he takes this process a stage further, producing those quirks and tricks which have helped to make the book notorious: there is scarcely a summary of Tristram Shandy which does not mention the black page. Such features carry to the furthest extreme the attack on formality and on the normal expectations of readers, and they are particularly likely to provoke the 'graver' gentry whom Tristram sees as his chief enemies.

We are confronted with a paradox in Tristram's approach to his situation. As I have tried to show earlier, he often acts as though his readers were all present with him in the room and he were talking to them, rather than writing something they will later have to read. This entails an assumption that, once said or written, nothing can be withdrawn:

I wish I never had wrote it: but as I never blot anything out--let us use some honest means to get it out of our heads directly. (VII.xxvi.511)

The tricks I am concerned with here tend, on the other hand, to insist on the physical fact of the book, or on the reader's visual awareness. This paradox reaches its height

when ten pages are torn out of the book. It is an extension of the idea that there is no time gap between the writing and the reading, that the writing goes straight into the finished book, but it is now transferred to the physical sense of the book as an artifact. The joke is perfected by printing the numbering with ten numbers missing, so that it really appears that Tristram has gone through every copy tearing out pages, (or, perhaps, as though the individual reader has the only copy of the book). It is one of the many ways Tristram presents us with his problems as an author: it gives us a concrete illustration of the problem of literary judgment, and provides an opportunity for Tristram to comment on these problems. It may alienate us from the story of uncle Toby and Walter, and it may destroy the illusion of the narrator talking to us directly, but it brings us closer to the other side of the story, the adult Tristram and his struggles as a writer.

There are one or two occasions on which the extra-verbal techniques could be seen as corresponding to oral transmission of the story. When Toby opens the letter telling of Bobby's death he does not read it all out loud:

my uncle Toby hummed over the letter.

----- --he's gone! said my uncle Toby. (V.ii.350)

The dashes here represent Toby's 'humming' rather than total silence, which is elsewhere represented by one long dash

(after Phutatorius's 'Zounds!', IV.xxvii.318) or--as is usual when something is missing--the asterisks which mark Trim's 'aside' (V.xxxvii.398). So we could take this as more of an oral than a written joke.²³

Similarly, there is a strong oral element in Tristram's 'tuning up' passage. The many stage images in the book here come to the surface:

Had this volume been a farce, which, unless every one's life and opinions are to be looked upon as a farce as well as mine, I see no reason to suppose --the last chapter, Sir, had finished the first act of it, and then this chapter must have set off thus.

Ptr..r..r..ing--twing--twang--prut--trut--'tis a cursed bad fiddle.--Do you know whether my fiddle's in tune or no?--trut..prut...--They should be fifths. --'Tis wickedly strung--tr...a.e.i.o.u.-twang. The bridge is a mile too high, and the sound-post absolutely down,--else--trut..prut--hark! 'tis not so bad a tone.--Diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle, dum. There is nothing in playing before good judges, ... --Twaddle diddle, tweddle diddle,--twiddle diddle,--twoddle diddle,--twuddle diddle,--prut-trut--krish--krash--krush... (V.xv.371)

We can distinguish between plucked strings (twing, twang, prut, trut), running up a scale (a.e.i.o.u.) and playing a brief tune (diddle diddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle, dum). Tristram relies here largely on sound rather than

²³ But total consistency in sign language is not to be expected from Tristram. Dashes seem to represent silent reading in VII.xxxv.528, when Tristram is presented with the bill in Lyons. They are, however, regular dashes, unlike uncle Toby's. (We cannot be sure how much control Sterne had over such details but we know that he always came up to London to supervise the printing. See Work's 'Note on the Text', Tristram Shandy, p.lxxv.) For the use of asterisks for sexual innuendo see below, chapter 6, pp.248-50.

appearance, but at one point at least the look of the words becomes important:

krish--krash--krush

This is a brilliant onomatopoeic imitation of an excruciating noise, but notice how much less effective it would be if written:

crish--crash-crush

Just as the sequence of vowels can represent a sequence of notes so an unusual (and thus ungainly) group of letters can suggest playing out of tune. The 'c' spelling would produce two recognisable words, imposing order where there should be chaos. It is also, perhaps, interesting to note how the chapter finishes:

O! there is--whom I could sit and hear whole days,
 --whose talents lie in making what he fiddles to be
 felt,--who inspires me with his joys and hopes, and
 puts the most hidden springs of my heart into motion.
 --If you would borrow five guineas of me, Sir,--
 which is generally ten guineas more than I have to
 spare--or you, Messrs. Apothecary and Taylor, want
 your bills paying,--that's your time. (V.xv.372)

We see here not only the connection between generosity and movement of the emotions, and the insistence on the emotional effect of art, but its conjunction with one of the passages where Tristram attempts to present non-verbal experience. As I have suggested before, formal prose appears as a barrier to this kind of sentimental experience, and its breakdown is part of Tristram's attempt to get beyond it.

Strange techniques often appear as an attempt to com-

municate non-verbal experience. Thus the line marking the flourish of Trim's stick corresponds to the original gesture, which itself goes beyond verbalization:

A thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms
could not have said more for celibacy. (IX.iv.604)

The Widow Wadman's blushes are 'translated' by Tristram:

'L-d! I cannot look at it--
What would the world say if I look'd at it?
I should drop down, if I look'd at it--
I wish I could look at it--
There can be no sin in looking at it.
--I will look at it.' (IX.xx.623)

As an exercise of Walter's auxiliary verbs this is brilliant, but the peculiar lay-out not only emphasizes the progression through the verbs, it also marks the representation of something which is not really verbal. So the blank page stands as a testament to Tristram's inability to describe the Widow in words, leaving the work to the imagination of the reader.²⁴

The black page is a rather different matter. It is a prime case of the insistence on the physical qualities of

²⁴ Sterne's attempts to stimulate the reader's imagination, of which there are many examples, could be a reflection of the tendency in eighteenth-century aesthetics towards emphasizing the spectator's rôle in artistic effects. Cf. Walter J. Bate, From Classic to Romantic, paperback edition, New York, 1961, p.156. A non-historical phenomenological account of the technique is given by John Preston in The Created Self. The connection has also been suggested by Marcia Allentuck, 'In defense of an unfinished Tristram Shandy; Laurence Sterne and the Non Finito', in The Winged Skull, ed Cash and Stedmond, pp.145-55, but only in relation to Sterne's larger structures.

the book: we are presented with a page of mourning to mark the death of Yorick. This has no oral equivalent, and though it could be taken as a representation of Tristram's feelings on the death of someone he so much admired, I think it is more of a bow to convention. It is certainly a very different matter from the use of a similar device in B.S.Johnson's Travelling People,²⁵ where wavy lines gradually merge into complete blackness, marking the passing of consciousness in one of the characters.

The marbled page with its swirling pattern is, as Tristram says, an emblem of his book, and there is some truth in his saying that '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' (III.xxxvi.226), for only a well-read person would immediately recognise it as the inside of the cover of a book. It is thus an emblem, not only in its motley design, but in its position, representing the formlessness of the whole structure. The representation of the lines of the book (VI.xl.473-4) can be seen as a concrete expression of the lines/journey imagery which runs through the whole work. It is peculiarly apt that it should come just before the beginning of Volume VII, apparently the greatest digression of them all.

²⁵ B.S.Johnson, Travelling People, London, 1963.

The list form presents an even more dead expression than the formal sentence. It tends to be used satirically, as when describing the items of clothing Walter found in the scholar Rubenius (VI.xix.439-42). It represents exhaustive, useless scholarship of the kind that would appeal to Walter.²⁶ Similarly, it appears in the journey through France where Tristram is satirising dull travel-writers who attend only to physical facts and ignore their human experience. Thus we are given a list of the twenty quarters of the city and the number of streets they contain (VII.xviii.500-501). Another example is slightly different in import:

de Montreuil à Nampont - poste et demi
de Nampont à Bernay - - -poste
de Bernay à Nouvion - - -poste
de Nouvion à Abbeville - - poste (VII.x.491)

In true scholarly fashion we are referred to the appropriate edition of the Book of French post-roads from which the list is taken, and the sense of satire is inescapable; but this way of describing the journey also fits the way it was made: the next stop of interest was Abbeville, and the places in between were no more than stages on a journey.

The alphabetical list describing love is rather different again. There is as usual a sense of satire. Earlier Tris-

²⁶ Cf. Joyce's use of the catechism form in the penultimate episode of Ulysses, where living experience is similarly anaesthetized (New Edition, London, 1964, pp.776-871). Joyce also shares Sterne's delight in strange jargons and styles.

tram has given us some of the silly metaphysical notions that philosophers have produced, and commented:

I am not obliged to set out with a definition of what love is; and so long as I can go on with my story intelligibly, with the help of the word itself, without any other idea to it, than what I have in common with the rest of the world, why should I differ from it a moment before the time? (VI.xxxvii.469)

The alphabetical list shows the kind of mechanical division that Tristram derides but the diction, rather than being that of the schoolmen, is that of Tristram at his most whimsical:

A gitating
 B ewitching
 C onfounded
 D evilish affairs of life--the most
 E xtravagant
 F utilitous
 G alligaskinish
 H andy-dandyish
 I racundulous (there is no K to it) and
 L yrical of all human passions: at the same time, the most
 M isgiving
 N innyhammering
 O bstipating
 P ragmatical
 S tridulous
 R idiculous--though by the bye the R should have gone first
 (VIII.xiii.551-2)

We see here some of that Rabelaisian delight in funny words, that element of pure play, which informs much of Tristram's book and has only an indirect connection with the attack on order. It is part of Tristram's complaint against 'gravity' that it makes no allowance for the value of this kind of experience, but the list exists primarily for its own sake to be enjoyed by the reader. More than anything, the breakdown of the sentence here is an expression of high

spirits. The opening of the eighth volume is marked by a collection of greetings which I take to be of the same order.

Finally, a few comments on Tristram's imagery. The very reliance on rhetorical modes of thought shows a rejection of rationalism and of rigid views of the world. Thus Locke distrusted 'wit' and preferred 'judgment'--and Tristram attacks him for it.²⁷ But Tristram not only relies on metaphor and the cutting across normal categories of thought and perception that it entails; he also tends to favour the most odd images. Thus he again exhibits his defiance of all the rules, by indulging in 'false wit';²⁸ and as with many of the other techniques examined in this chapter he startles his reader and attacks his normal expectations while at the same time amusing him.

Most obviously this is a matter of 'heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together'--a jester and a mortgager, a writer and a bridegroom, wit and judgment and chair knobs, Time and a gutter²⁹--but the real surprise (and delight) lies in the way the comparisons are worked out, elaborated

²⁷ See Tristram's 'Preface' (III.xx.) and below, chapter 7, p.300.

²⁸ See Eugene Hnatko, 'Tristram Shandy's wit', JEGP LXV (1966), pp.47-64.

²⁹ See I.xii.27-8; I.xxii.73; III.xx.200-201; & IX.viii.610.

and developed. Thus it would be reasonable to express surprise at the comparison of Fortune to a duchess, but it is much more startling to find the duchess hiding round corners and pelting things:

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. (I.v.10)

'Ungracious' indeed! But the image is not simply whimsical. It is just the undermining of dignity expressed in the image that Tristram is talking about, and so it is curiously appropriate.

The basic process in the handling of this image is one of concretization. The rather faded notion of Fortune as a lady is given physical presence by depicting her in action. The same process is used in the next example:

the circumstances with which every thing in this world is begirt, give every thing in this world its size and shape;--and by tightening it, or relaxing it, this way or that, make the thing to be, what it is--great--little--good--bad--indifferent or not indifferent, just as the case happens. (III.ii.158)

Tristram starts from a concealed etymological pun in the word 'circumstance', thus arriving at the fitting word, 'begirt'. But the pun is not really noticeable in the first part of the sentence: 'size' and 'shape' seem to be being used in a fairly conventional metaphorical way. It is in the extension of the image that we realize that there is a physical image of a girdle or a belt involved, and this is then extended into the convenient ambiguity of "great-little",

which can be either physical or moral qualities.

This strong physical sense recurs in many places in the novel:

The differant weight, dear Sir--nay even the different package of two vexations of the same weight...(IV.xvii.292)

What is the life of man! Is it not to shift from side to side?---from sorrow to sorrow?---to button up one cause of vexation!---and unbutton another! (IV.xxxi.336)

she turns the pannier upside down, looks at it--considers it--samples it--measures it--stretches it--wets it--dries it--then takes her teeth both to the warp and weft of it...(IX.xxi.625)

The last example is somewhat dubiously attributed to Slawkenbergius, probably because Tristram would not want to be associated with its horrifying sexual implications.

Tristram's father has a penchant for a similar kind of wit, though his is not usually so startling.³⁰ It is Tristram's ability to surprise the reader into mental acrobatics that makes his wit another useful weapon in the attack on formality and order. He undermines decorum and imposes irrational connections between things where language normally carefully distinguishes them. In this respect his imagery functions like the other linguistic features I have analysed above--the direct address to the reader, the disruption of logical order, the false starts, the dashes, the slippery syntax, the intrusive qualification, and the impulsive interruptions. Formal relationships are broken down,

³⁰ See below, chapter 3, pp.111-13.

language is adapted to follow the wanderings of the mind, and the reader is taken beyond verbal experience by lines and shapes and disconnected prose forms. In these ways Tristram attacks the order which men have imposed on the chaos of the world,--though always with that Shandean humour which complicates and qualifies any assertion of value in Tristram Shandy.

III: CHARACTER AND LANGUAGE -- The hobby-horse

When a man gives himself up to the government of a ruling passion,--or, in other words, when his HOBBY-HORSE grows head-strong,--farewell cool reason and fair discretion! (II.v.93)

When Tristram wants to describe his uncle Toby's character he reviews a number of possible methods, and concludes:

I will draw my uncle Toby's character from his HOBBY-HORSE (I.xxiii.77)

The hobby-horse is, in fact, his principal means of characterization throughout the book, for it shows the irrationality and privacy of men's minds that Sterne is interested in. His explanation of why it is a good method provides a figurative account of the way the hobby-horse can take over the mind and completely dominate it:

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. (I.xxiv.77)

The hobby-horse can sound quite innocent and harmless:

'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 siege--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. (VIII.xxxi.584)

But it produces a mental aberration which can isolate a man from his fellow human beings. It dominates his thought and assimilates everything it can into itself. All the

major characters of Tristram Shandy are in some degree hobby-horsical and their hobby-horses help to shape their distinctive speech-styles.¹ Each character has his own beliefs and ways of thinking, and these may also impede communication. In this chapter I shall examine the influence of hobby-horses and mental patterns on the language of the characters, and then I shall illustrate some of the ways in which rational communication is frustrated.

A. Walter Shandy

Tristram says of his father:

he had a thousand little sceptical notions of the comick kind to defend,---most of which notions, I verily believe, at first enter'd upon the footing of mere whims, and of a vive la Bagatelle; and as such he would make merry with them for half an hour or so, and having sharpen'd his wit upon 'em, dismiss them till another day (I.xix.53)

and he goes on to warn the reader against 'the indiscreet reception of such guests',

who, after a free and undisturbed enterance, for some years, into our brains,--at length claim a kind of settlement there,---working sometimes like yeast;--but more generally after the manner of the gentle passion, beginning in jest,--but ending in downright earnest. (ibid)

¹ I have taken Walter, Toby and Trim as the major characters of the novel (excluding Tristram). Some critics have included Yorick, but in fact he appears infrequently and says little. Some commentary on his language, and on that of Dr Slop, appears in chapter 7. See below, pp. 303-12 and pp.298-9.

This is just like the description quoted above of how the hobby-horse takes over a man's mind. For Walter's 'little sceptical notions' are his hobby-horse: he is 'a philosopher in grain,--speculative,--systematical' (I.xxi.68). Just as Toby whenever possible relates everything he hears to his sieges, so Walter transforms everything that comes his way into a theory. His theories cover the life of man from conception and gestation to death and the situation of the soul, and spread over into politics, economics, engineering and philosophy. As Tristram points out, all this places a considerable strain on his persuasive powers, for he always wants to convince others of the rightness of his theories. The result is that he becomes a masterly orator:

Persuasion hung upon his lips, and the elements of Logick and Rhetorick were so blended up in him,-- and, withall, he had so shrewd a guess at the weakness and passions of his respondent,---that NATURE might have stood up and said,--"This man is eloquent".²
(I.xix.52)

It is as an orator that we primarily think of him, and it is his tendency to make orations that leaves the strongest mark upon his speech.

² Incidentally, there is an allusion here to Mark Antony's final speech in Julius Caesar. There are at least two other such Shakespearian allusions in the book, not noted by Professor Work and not often remarked upon. They both occur in the early story of Yorick, and thus are close to the direct reference in his name to Shakespeare. The first, I.x.23 ('But there is a fatality...') alludes to Hamlet V.ii. The second, I.xii.30 ('When he thought, good easy man...') is very close to Wolsey's famous soliloquy in Henry VIII, III.i. All three allusions are to well-known passages and do not imply any special influence.

Tristram draws attention to many of Walter's rhetorical techniques: the argumentum ad hominem, the epiphonema or erotesis, the sorites or syllogism, the prolepsis, and the argument ad crumenam (though this term is used ironically). The erotesis, or rhetorical question, is a particular favourite and occurs frequently:

How many CAESARS and POMPEYS, he would say, by mere inspiration of the names, have been render'd worthy of them? And how many... (I.xix.50)

What a teasing life did she lead herself... (V.xix.297)

Wherefore, when we go about to make and plant a man, do we put out the candle? (IX.xxxiii.645)

This device is particularly significant in the context of Tristram Shandy, where communication is so rare. It is a kind of perversion of language, the asking of a question while not wanting an answer, and it typifies the way Walter talks at his listeners rather than to them.

He makes considerable use of repetition in his speeches, and parallelism:

'Tis the same, he would say, throughout the whole circle of the sciences;--the great, the established points of them, are not to be broke in upon.--The laws of nature will defend themselves;--but error --(he would add, looking earnestly at my mother) --error, Sir, creeps in thro' the minute holes, and small crevices, which human nature leaves unguarded. (II.xix.146)

It is not clear whether the actual repetition of the word 'error' should be attributed to Walter or to Tristram, who often does repeat words when he has interrupted the flow of a character's sentence, but the effect is the same. And

notice how Walter repeats the thought in slightly different terms:

the minute holes, and small crevices

the great, the established points of them, are not to be broken in upon.--The laws of nature will defend themselves.

The whole speech could be reduced considerably without seriously affecting the thought content, but the effect would be much altered, the emphases would be lost. The repetitions also affect the flow of the sentence, and help to establish Walter's typical speech rhythms.

His rhetoric is commonly built up out of such parallels and repetitions:

Unhappy Tristram! child of wrath! child of decrepitude! interruption! mistake! and discontent! What one misfortune or disaster in the book of embryotic evils, that could unmechanize thy frame, or entangle thy filaments! which has not fallen upon thy head, or ever thou camest into the world--what evils in thy passage into it!--What evils since!--produced into being, in the decline of thy father's days--when the powers of his imagination and of his body were waxing feeble--when radical heat and radical moisture, the elements which should have tempered thine, were drying up... (IV.xix.296)

This is quite unlike the periodic oratory associated with Cicero and most of the masters of rhetoric. It is much more like the anti-Ciceronian or 'baroque' style of the seventeenth century, and in this it is like Tristram's language.³

Instead of structuring the main elements of what he has to say, and disposing the minor elements within a suspended

³ See above, chapter 2, p.58, note 10.

structure, Walter just goes on adding phrases and ideas, so that the climaxes are rather more random, and the piece breaks up into a series of ejaculations. Although 'My Father's Lamentation' is set aside with its separate heading, and not a normal part of the conversation, yet Walter is improvising as he goes along, and so we would not expect him to produce anything too formal.

In other passages we can see syntactical features which correspond to those identified with the 'baroque' style:

That provision should be made for continuing the race of so great, so exalted and godlike a Being as man-- I am far from denying--but philosophy speaks freely of everything; and therefore I still think and do maintain it to be a pity, that it should be done by means of a passion which bends down the faculties, and turns all the wisdom, contemplations, and operations of the soul backwards--a passion, my dear, continued my father, addressing himself to my mother, 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. (IX.xxxiii.644-5)

The logical connectives, 'but' and 'therefore' are used without their proper logical force. 'But' is marking the distinction between 'I am far from denying' and 'I still think', but it occurs in the wrong place for this function. Similarly, 'therefore' joins Walter's own views to his generalization about philosophy, so justifying what might seem an unacceptable topic of conversation in mixed company. But the logical force of the word is displaced, for the relationship is not what it implies. The generalization refers not to what he thinks but to his right to say it.

Further, the sentence is strictly speaking 'asymmetrical' --the main subject is carried in the subordinate clauses rather than in the main clause, with the climax tacked on the end. The rhetoric is at odds with the grammar.

This kind of style has been identified with the empiricists and sceptics of the Renaissance, who used it to attack the system-builders and formalists of the middle ages,⁴ But Walter is not in that tradition. He is rather one of those it attacks:

He was systematical, and, like all systematick reasoners, he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature to support his hypothesis. (I.xix.53)

There would seem to be a problem here, but I think it can be explained. In the first place, the 'baroque' style is the basic style of the book: anyone who talks at length slips into it, not only Tristram, but also Yorick. If Walter were to talk in a totally different style his language would stand out so much that it would look like total parody and Walter would be isolated from the comic world of the novel into a satiric limbo. His language must be inflated, and funny, but not totally unlike the linguistic norms of the book, for he is a three-dimensional comic character, not simply a satiric butt. Secondly, we see him talking rather than writing or actually delivering set orations. The

⁴ See above, chapter 2, note 10, p.58, for details of this theory and recent criticism of it.

rounded oratorical period would thus appear even more extraordinary if it were used and would prevent his speech from appearing that of a natural orator who just happened to be a very persuasive speaker. His speeches are not prepared in advance, but have something of the spontaneity of the speech-situation.

For both these reasons a certain amount of the looseness and asymmetry of the baroque style is necessary in Walter's speech. But in fact although we can identify the linguistic features which connect him with this style the final effect is not exactly of spontaneity and the immediacy of thought. The rhetorical techniques which Walter uses to convey his theories are obtrusive enough to dominate the impression he makes, and we are struck more by the patterning of his phrases, the carefully timed pauses, the rhetorical questions and telling images than by the sense of asymmetry. Thus in the speech on sex quoted above we notice the opening inversion ('that provision ... I am far from denying'), the emphatic parallelism ('I still think and do maintain'), the picking on one member of his audience ('a passion, my dear...'), and the subtle appropriateness of the imagery ('bends down the faculties', 'caverns and hiding-places').⁵ The rhetorical climax is more important than the grammatical structure: the syntactical asymmetry

⁵ For discussion of the imagery in the following part of this speech, see below, chapter 6, pp.254-5.

is hardly noticeable. Furthermore, Walter's speech is never as loose and twisty as Tristram's usually is: in the linguistic perspective of the novel his speech-style appears more formal.

In discussing Walter's rhetorical force I mentioned his imagery. At one point in the novel he says, 'The highest stretch of improvement a single word is capable of, is a high metaphor' (V.xliii.405) and although he goes on to deprecate figurative language he is rather good at it himself. My own impression of Walter's speech was that it is highly metaphorical, but a rough frequency count showed no higher result than for Corporal Trim. The explanation lies in the peculiarity of many of the images, which makes them stand out. Sometimes the image itself is startling:

The force of this engine, added my father, is incredible, in opening a child's head. (VI.ii.409)⁶

Silence, and whatever approaches it, weaves dreams of midnight secrecy into the brain. (VIII.xxxiv.592)

The surprising delicacy and fancy of this latter image is used for high comic effect, as Walter continues:

For this cause, if thou canst help it, never throw down the tongs and the poker. (ibid)

He also favours extended analogy, which at times has almost the feel of medieval allegory, and can be taken to epic lengths:

⁶ There are a number of images which thus make use of or recall actual events in the novel. Cf. Hnatko, 'Tristram Shandy's wit', p.57.

Mr. Shandy, my father, Sir, would see nothing in the light in which others placed it;--he placed things in his own light;--he would weigh nothing in the common scales;--no,---he was too refined a researcher to lay open to so gross an imposition.--To come at the exact weight of things in the scientific steel-yard, the fulcrum, he would say, should be almost invisible, to avoid all friction from popular tenets; --without this the minutiae of philosophy, which should always turn the balance, will have no weight at all. Knowledge, like matter, he would affirm, was divisible ad infinitum;--that the grains and scruples were as much a part of it, as the gravitation of the whole world.--In a word, he would say, error was error,--no matter where it fell,--whether in a fraction, --or a pound,--'twas alike fatal to truth, and she was kept down at the bottom of her well as inevitably by a mistake in the dust of a butterfly's wing,--as in the disk of the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven put together. (II.xix.145)⁷

The ingenuity with which the figure is sustained is quite remarkable, at the same time breathing life into such phrases as 'turn the balance' and 'no matter where it fell'. Notice also how Tristram anticipates the figure when he says, 'he would weigh nothing in the common scales'.

A third kind of oddness found in Walter's imagery relates it to Tristram's.⁸ He will take what is often quite an ordinary image and give it a peculiar twist or elaboration to produce a striking effect:

Why is Peireskius or any man else, to be abused for an appetite for that, or any other morsel of sound knowledge. (II.xiv.117. Italics mine.)

No wonder the intellectual web is so rent and tatter'd as we see it; and that so many of our best heads are

⁷ Cf. I.xviii.45-6 (the distemper image), and IV.viii.278-9 (the vehicle image).

⁸ See above, chapter 2, p.99.

no better than a puzzled skein of silk...(II.xix.51.
Italics mine.)

Now as I consider the person who is to be about my son, as the mirror in which he is to view himself from morning to night, and by which he is to adjust his looks, his carriage, and perhaps the inmost sentiments of his heart;--I would have one, Yorick, if possible, polished at all points, fit for my child to look into. (VI.v.414. Italics mine.)

In each of these cases it is the way the image is extended that makes it remarkable, as in the animating juxtaposition of the two dead metaphors 'appetite' and 'morsel', and the context provided for the social metaphor 'polished'. Walter, like Tristram, tends to be very aware of the literal origins of even the deadest metaphors. But the finest of these examples is the very complex second one. The idea of the mind as a web is quite common, not only in Walter's speech, but in Tristram's and also Yorick's.⁹ I think it refers, in the first place, to the idea of all the nerves meeting in one place and so being woven together, though it also has obvious affinities with the Lockean concept of knowledge. It carries connotations of fragility, which Walter makes use of here. But it can also imply something rather muddled, and this is developed here in the related idea of the 'skein of silk'. And then, on top of this, the term metaphorically applied to the skein of silk, 'puzzled', is itself taken

⁹ See for example IV.xix.297 and VIII.xxxiv.592; V.xvi.372-3 and VI.xxxiii.462-3; and II.xvii.126. Interestingly, Tristram also uses the image for his book, e.g., 'unraveled', II.xix.154, and 'bale ... thread', VII.xxvii.513; cf. chapter 5 below, pp.237-8.

from the vocabulary of the mind, which was originally the tenor of the figure.¹⁰ The image thus doubles back on itself--we could say, thus enacting the mental muddle which is its subject. This is a kind of elaborate wit not found in the speech of Toby or Trim, where it would be inappropriate; and it helps to illustrate Walter's scholastic mind.

Walter's theories carry with them a vocabulary of their own. His jargon terms are less homogeneous than his brother's, as his subjects are more wide-ranging. Whatever the subject, Walter can be depended upon to produce the appropriate scientific terms, e.g.: Q.E.D., cerebellum, sensorium, os pubis, os coxygis, trine and sextil aspects, lords of the genitures, 'thy opium,--thy salt-petre,--thy greasy unctions,--thy daily purges,--thy nightly glysters, and succedaneums' (V.xxxiv.395), vervain, hanea, 'cucumbers, melons, purslane, water-lillies, woodbine, and lettuce' (VIII.xxxiv.593). Obscure words seem to be a source of delight to both Sterne and Tristram, as well as an object of satire. To Walter they are part of the system he will erect around any subject that comes his way. For the reader they

¹⁰ The O.E.D. does give a possible literal use of the word 'puzzled': 'b. of a thing: Made puzzling; involved, complicated, intricate; tangled (obs.)'. But this is clearly a metaphorical application, and the relevant citation is from Tillotson's Sermons: 'Like a puzzled lump of silk, so that a man cannot draw out a thought to any length'. It seems altogether likely that Tillotson is the source of Sterne's use of the image, but 'skein' is much the finer word in the context. (For Tillotson's influence see L.v.d.Hammond, Laurence Sterne's 'Sermons of Mr Yorick', New Haven, 1948.)

can also become part of the language of double-entendre, as much of Toby's hobby-horsical language does, their very oddness being suggestive.¹¹ One aspect of the scholastic frame of mind is a heavy reliance on traditional authority, and Walter can produce lists of scholars:

Alphonsus Tostatus ... Grotius, Scioppius, Heinsius, Politian, Pascal, Joseph Scaliger, Ferdinand de Cordouè... (VI.ii.410-11)

Or his references will take him to ancient nations:

the EGYPTIANS,--the SYRIANS,--the PHOENICIANS,--
the ARABIANS,--the CAPADOCIANS,-- ... the COLCHI,
and TROGLODYTES (V.xxvii.385)

All this is very much part of the lumber of scholasticism, and we find Tristram satirizing other representatives of these ways of thought throughout the book.¹² But Walter is more than just a representative of false learning set up as a satiric butt. On other occasions we find him using colloquial expressions such as 'whistled up to London', 'a pudding's end', and 'that precious noddle of thine'. And, despite all protestations to the contrary,¹³ he frequently uses oaths--especially 'By Heaven!'--backed up by a range of expressive sounds: Pugh! Pish! Pshaw! and Humph! As a fully rounded character he has to have a widely-ranging language to cope with the different kinds of situations he finds himself in. But his hobby-horse is such that most of

¹¹ The sexual implications of jargon terms are explored more fully in chapter 6 below, esp. pp.277-81.

¹² See below, chapter 7, pp.295-9.

¹³ See III.x.169 and III.xli.240. But by contemporary standards Walter may be restrained.

the time he can assimilate any subject into it, and so his most typical speech style is the mixture of speculation and rhetoric I have examined above.

Burton, Bacon and Death: A note

It is well known that Sterne relied mostly on secondary sources for the out-of-the-way material he included in his book, and at one point he plays with his own plagiarism, lifting from Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy a complaint against lifting material from one book to another:

Shall we for ever make new books, as apothecaries make new mixtures, by pouring only out of one vessel into another?

Are we for ever to be twisting, and untwisting the same rope? for ever in the same track--for ever at the same pace? (V.i.343)

Professor Work comments:

Sterne expected his learned readers to recognize his source,¹⁴

and the same is probably true when he makes Walter drag up from his memory everything he can remember about death (V.iii.353-7). Tristram remarks:

Philosophy has a fine saying for every thing.--For Death it has an entire set; the misery was, they all at once rushed into my father's head, that 'twas difficult to string them together, so as to make any thing of a consistent show out of them.--He took them as they came. (V.iii.353)

This is an ideal situation which allows Sterne to throw

¹⁴ Tristram Shandy, p.342, note 1.

in the largest single collection of borrowings in the whole book, without having to worry too much about working them into the text. But in fact he doesn't take them simply as they come. Most of the material comes from the Anatomy of Melancholy, II.iii.5, with a little added from Bacon's essay, 'Of Death',¹⁵ and parallel texts are given in full below in Appendix B.¹⁶ Sterne has practised not only considerable selection but also rearrangement. Walter's speech is about 700 words long, and about 550 of them are taken from Burton, the rest from Bacon. The latter passage is used almost complete except for its Latin quotations, but there is some rearrangement of the order in which the anecdotes appear. The source in Burton, however, is nearly 4,000 words long and most of Sterne's borrowing is from a passage of about 1700 words. A count of the words actually copied reveals no more than 187 out of the 550. Of the eleven short passages taken from Burton three occur in a different order from the original.

Sterne, then, has been at pains to select the material he wants and to order it as he wants it. But more interesting

¹⁵ The sources are identified by Professor Work, Tristram Shandy, p.353 note 5, p.354 note 6 and p.356 note 8. For a fuller (but incomplete) discussion of Sterne's borrowings see J.M.Stedmond, 'Sterne as plagiarist', ES XLI (1960), pp.308-12. Quotations here are from the Everyman edition of Burton, London, 1932, pp.176-85, and the J.M.Robertson edition of Bacon's Works, London & New York, 1905, p.737.

¹⁶ See below, pp.356-62.

for the purposes of this study is the way he has changed the language. Hardly any sentences are quoted verbatim. In some cases the alterations are slight, but even in the acknowledged quotation from Servius Sulpicius ('Returning out of Asia...') there are alterations to the wording, which might be interpreted as Walter misquoting from memory--a touch of realism. Interestingly enough, the first and last quotations from Burton are transcribed almost exactly.

Very often the language is made more witty and metaphorical:

Burton: Tombs and monuments have the like fate.

Walter: To die, is the great debt and tribute due unto nature: tombs and monuments, which should perpetuate our memories, pay it themselves; and the proudest pyramid of them all, which wealth and science have erected, has lost its apex, and stands obtruncated in the traveller's horizon. (p.353)

Burton: what flourishing towns heretofore, now prostrate and overwhelmed before mine eyes

Walter: What flourishing towns now prostrate upon the earth. (p.354)

Burton: tired traveller

Walter: galled traveller (p.356)

Or the alteration may produce something peculiar to Walter's way of thinking:

Burton: the names only are left

Walter: The names only are left, and those (for many of them are wrong spelt) are falling themselves by piece-meals to decay. (p.354)

Bacon: Groans and convulsions, and a discoloured face, and friends weeping, and blacks, and obsequies, and the like, show death terrible.

Walter: There is no terror, brother Toby, in its looks, but what it borrows from groans and convulsions --and the blowing of noses, and the wiping away of tears with the bottoms of curtains in a dying man's room. (p.356)

At one point we can see Sterne concerned to maintain the context within which the harangue is taking place, by introducing a new idea which appeals to uncle Toby:

Kingdoms and provinces, and towns and cities, have they not their periods? and when those principles and powers, which at first cemented and put them together, have performed their several evolutions, they fall back.-- Brother Shandy, said my uncle Toby, laying down his pipe at the word evolutions--Revolutions, I meant, quoth my father,--by heaven! I meant revolutions, brother Toby--evolutions is nonsense.--'Tis not nonsense--said my uncle Toby. (p.353. 'Evolutions' here refers to the movement of troops.)

Finally, as can be seen in the quotations already given, Walter tends to be more expansive than Burton. He often breaks down Burton's jerky rhythms into something more flowing and more like his own usual style, e.g.:

Burton: The Thracians wept still when a child was born, feasted and made mirth when any man was buried.

Walter: The Thracians wept when a child was born ... and feasted and made merry when a man went out of the world. (p.355)

Burton: kingdoms, provinces, towns, and cities have their periods

Walter: Kingdoms and provinces, and towns and cities, have they not their periods? (p.353)

This last example also shows Walter indulging his favourite device, the rhetorical question.

Most of the reworking produces fine Shandean comedy, as in the new emphasis given to Seneca's marvellous tautology:

for consider, brother Toby,--when we are--death is not;
 --and when death is--we are not. My uncle Toby laid
 down his pipe to consider the proposition. (p.356)

As Professor Work remarks of an earlier borrowing, Sterne
 'has made the passage incontestably his own' (p.342 note 1).

B. Uncle Toby

We have seen how Walter Shandy's hobby-horse easily assimilates any subject it meets with. It is a style of thinking more than anything else. With uncle Toby the situation is rather different. His hobby-horse is a single subject, and although it invades other areas whenever it gets a chance it is in some ways less pervasive than Walter's --despite the fact that the concept of the hobby-horse is primarily associated in the book with Toby. It certainly has less effect on his language than we have seen in Walter's case, so that it becomes not only possible but necessary to distinguish between Toby's 'normal' language and his 'hobby-horsical' language. This situation requires a little explanation.

Walter's hobby-horse, his system-building, is a purely mental operation, and as such it is intimately connected with his language. Indeed, we have seen that Tristram has to explain its effect on his language, requiring of him a peculiar eloquence, so that we could almost say his hobby-

horse is speech-making and arguing. Uncle Toby's hobby-horse, on the other hand, grew out of his very difficulty with language (II.i-ii.81-7), and is primarily an active, practical affair carried on in his bowling green. It has involved him in study, and he has a hobby-horsical library, but in his Cervantic relationship with the Quixotic Walter he is the man of action, the soldier, not the scholar.¹⁷

Much of our impression of uncle Toby's hobby-horse comes from Tristram's narration rather than from his own speech. His mind is, of course, dominated by the hobby-horse and some of the most famous misunderstandings in the novel arise from Toby's tendency to interpret where possible in a military sense. I shall discuss these misunderstandings at the end of this chapter in my section on 'Dialogue'. But most of the most common features of Toby's speech style appear to be related to other aspects of his character, and when the language becomes truly hobby-horsical it shows as a special aberration. After telling the story of uncle Toby and the fly Tristram remarks:

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 HÖBBY-HORSICAL likeness;--this is a part of his moral character. (II.xii.114)

In the same way, uncle Toby's 'normal' speech is part of his 'moral character'. The subject matter may be military (and

¹⁷ In his relationship with Trim, of course, Toby is the Quixotic partner, and he shares Don Quixote's idealism and generosity of sentiment. But in the novel he also serves to puncture Walter's more imaginative flights of theory.

this may slightly affect the vocabulary) but it is only in the longer passages that the hobby-horse really takes over Toby's speech.

Uncle Toby very rarely makes a long speech: he is not by nature eloquent and issues are, for him, usually quite simple:

In my plain sense of things, my uncle Toby would answer,--every such instance is downright MURDER, let who will commit it.--There lies your mistake, my father would reply;--for, in Foro Scientiae there is no such thing as MURDER,--'tis only DEATH, brother. (I.xxi.69)

This brief exchange gives us the essential conflict between the brothers Shandy. Walter is fully aware of the difference caused by changing the name of something; Toby has a 'plain sense' which calls a thing by its 'true' name with no prevarication. Moral problems are thus simple and all discussion likely to be irrelevant. It is at this point that Tristram first introduces us to uncle Toby's technique of whistling 'Lillabullero' when something strikes him as nonsensical. It is a further demonstration of Toby's lack of facility with words and unwillingness to argue. His straightforward judgments are usually expressed in simple sentences:

The best hearts, Trim, are ever the bravest. (VI.xv.432)
The form is emphatic, like the judgment. And when a more difficult problem arises, rather than waste words pondering it Toby has a short answer:

We'll ask somebody about it. (III.xxv.214)

We will send for Mr. Yorick. (IV.xix.298)

The first of these is a military problem and the second a religious one, but in each case Toby turns to the appropriate authority.

Even when uncle Toby's utterances are somewhat longer than these short statements they are rarely syntactically involved or peculiar or rhetorically structured. A typical example:

Corporal Trim, ... if any thing can be said to be a fault, when the service absolutely requires it should be done,--'tis I certainly who deserve the blame,-- you obeyed your orders. (V.xxi.379)

By Shandean standards this is quite a short sentence and a completely orderly one. Two subordinated clauses in their normal places, carefully organizing the matter in hand. But there is nothing very complicated or difficult to follow, and the sentence shows a tendency to slip back into parataxis of a more clipped, military style. The style remains much the same for totally non-military subjects:

For my own part, Trim, though I can see little or no difference betwixt my nephew's being called Tristram or Trismegistus--yet as the thing sits so near my brother's heart, Trim,---I would freely have given a hundred pounds rather than it should have happened.
(IV.xviii.294)

There is no subtle or tortuous thought-process twisting the syntax, no expansive repetition or parallelism of phrases; but uncle Toby is quite capable of producing an ordered complex sentence, and by comparison with Mrs Shandy in con-

versation with her husband he has a reasonable command of the language.

We can similarly place Toby's range of vocabulary by comparison with other characters. He can manage somewhat better than Trim:

Call it ichnography (II.v.96)

Thou wouldst have said chronology (VIII.xix.563)

but this is with military terminology, and he is more often found out of his depth when in company with the more learned characters:

Pray, Mr. Yorick ... do tell me what a polemic divine is. (V.xxix.387)

I beseech you, doctor Slop ... to tell me which is the blind gut; for, old as I am, I vow I do not know to this day where it lies. (VIII.xv.553)

Sometimes he will pick up a word used by someone else, but usually with caution:

what my brother calls the radical moisture (V.xxxviii.399)

nolens, volens, that is, whether I would or no (VIII. xxxiii.586)

His main problem with words arises when they are ambiguous, and I shall discuss this in the section on 'Dialogue'. When Tristram says:

'Twas not by ideas,--by heaven! his life was put in jeopardy by words (II.ii.87)

he is referring specifically to Toby's attempts to describe the siege of Namur, and that problem was solved by the growth of the hobby-horse. How far this represented a true solution should become apparent when we turn to the hobby-

horsical language.

Leaving aside the military jargon, the first dozen words of Toby's I find in the novel which could be called at all difficult or unusual are the following:

contrivance, conceive, misfortune, prodigious, subordination, cerebellum, succession, entail (noun), signifies, proportions, infinite, cowardice.

It will be apparent that I have erred if anything on the side of inclusiveness, and that in itself is an indication of the general level of Toby's vocabulary. These dozen words take us well into volume four (IV.iv.275). The contrast with Walter or Tristram or even Yorick is, I think, obvious and it seems fair to describe Toby's diction as simple. It also tends to be specific and concrete. When he does use abstractions they mostly relate to his moral and religious concerns: modesty, principle, cowardice, goodness, Religion, bravery, prudence, compassion, humanity. And even with these subjects uncle Toby is more likely to talk about 'an honest fellow' than about 'honesty'. His immersion in the concrete instance is particularly contrasted again with Walter's speculation--an activity Toby doesn't really understand:

Did'st thou ever see a white bear? cried my father, turning his head round to Trim, who stood at the back of his chair:--No, an' please your honour, replied the corporal.--But thou could'st discourse about one, Trim, said my father, in case of need? --How is it possible, brother, quoth my uncle Toby, if the corporal never saw one? (V.xliii.406)

Uncle Toby is also unlike the other Shandys in that he doesn't have any special feeling for metaphor. Figures of speech are relatively rare in his conversation and of those there are about a third are so common as to be almost clichés, for example:

I know no more which it is, than the man in the moon
(II.vii.102)

my heart panted for war (VI.xxxii.461)

Nearly half the images he uses draw their vehicles from military matters--which is the main intrusion of the hobby-horse into the 'normal' speech style. But even the military metaphors are rarely elaborated or even particularly vivid. One interesting case is worth noting. Toby is not particularly given to hyperbole, preferring plain statement, but we would normally take the following as hyperbolic speech, albeit not a very original form of it:

I declare, quoth my uncle Toby, my heart would not let me curse the devil himself with so much bitterness. (III.xi.179)

Presumably Dr Slop takes it this way, and he is being sarcastic when he points out to Toby that the devil 'is cursed, and damn'd already, to all eternity'. But there is no doubting uncle Toby's sincerity when he replies:

I am sorry for it. (ibid)

What would be hyperbole with anyone else becomes literal statement with Toby, the exaggeration lying in his moral generosity, not in his language.

All the features I have identified in uncle Toby's 'normal' speech have suggested that as a style it would be placed somewhere between the 'middle' and the 'plain': sentences short and uncomplicated but not completely disjointed or non-logical; diction simple and specific; imagery scarce and not very startling. Much of the description of it inevitably takes a negative form, defining it by what it doesn't have or doesn't do. It is easy to see how the style reflects aspects of his character: his simplicity and innocence, his moral rectitude, his suspicion of hair-splitting and argument, his moral and military plainness. We can say that it is the kind of language we would expect uncle Toby to use--but we should also remember that his continual use of this kind of language helps to form our conception of his character.

The hobby-horsical speech contrasts sharply with this 'normal' language, but before passing on to it, I would like to pause at one of the rare moments when uncle Toby spins a longer sentence than usual, for it is rather peculiar. Trim is telling the story of how he fell in love, and he describes his nurse as 'one of those kind of nuns ... which they let go loose'. Toby interrupts him with a correction:

By thy description, Trim, said my uncle Toby, I dare say she was a young Beguine, of which there are none to be found any where but in the Spanish Netherlands --except at Amsterdam--they differ from nuns in this, that they can quit their cloister if they choose to marry; they visit and take care of the sick by profession. (VIII.xx.571)

There is no complication of thought here--virtually no hypotaxis--but the tone is curiously odd for Toby. The pedantry of 'except at Amsterdam', the pedagogic tone of 'in this, that', the non-conversational formality of 'of which there are none', and the generally incohesive style suggestive of itemized information all point to what I would call an encyclopaedic manner. Toby is talking like a pedant, which normally he does only when he has got astride of his hobby-horse. His military studies would hardly be likely to include information on nuns--although they might entail a special knowledge of the Netherlands. Toby has been previously interrupting Trim with a niggling pedantry--a sign of his nervous disquiet at the removal of his hobby-horse by the Peace of Utrecht--but the style in this particular passage is quite surprising. I cannot pretend to unravel this problem, merely to point to it. It looks to me like one of Sterne's rare slips, where he has not stayed to transform the information he wants to include (information allowing him to make the young woman both a nun and not a nun) into the character's idiolect.

I suggested above that Toby is a man of few words, and the effect of his hobby-horse on his language is first marked by the extent to which it loosens his tongue. He has about a dozen longish speeches in the novel, and I propose to examine two of the longest, where the linguistic

tendencies are most fully developed. Readers of Tristram Shandy usually remember uncle Toby's military jargon, but in fact he doesn't use it very often. Tristram introduces the hobby-horse in jargon terms, by presenting us with the confusion of thought and language that uncle Toby was suffering from before he developed his hobby:

he could not retreat out of the ravelin without getting into the half-moon, or get out of the covered way without falling down the counterscarp, nor cross the dyke without danger of slipping into the ditch... (II.i.82-3)

As a kind of verbal slap-stick this has a limited appeal and Sterne is careful not to use it too often: his description of Toby's campaigns concentrates on comedy of character rather than of language. But the occasions when the siege jargon is indulged are mostly moments of high comedy; and the further dimension of sexual innuendo adds a comic edge which makes them more memorable. Both Walter and Tristram enjoy the ambiguities of Toby's jargon,¹⁸ but Toby remains largely ignorant of them, and this fact in itself is a further indication of his essential innocence. But on one occasion on which he really does let fly it is in response to Dr Slop's overt crude pun--producing, of course, further puns in his attempt to clarify and purify his meaning.

The passage (II.xii.111-2) is rather long to quote in full. Professor Work in his notes tells us that Sterne

¹⁸ See below, chapter 6, p.278.

here has been using Chambers' Cyclopaedia, and if we turn to that work we find quite a rich source of military jargon. The following selection gives those sentences and phrases which have found their way more or less garbled into uncle Toby's lecture:

CURTIN, CURTAIN, OR COURTIME, in Fortification, that part of a wall, or rampart, which is between the two bastions; or which joins the FLANKS thereof.

Du Cange derives the word from the Latin, cortina... he adds, that the curtains of beds take their name from the same origin...

Besiegers seldom carry on their attacks against the curtin; because it is the best flanked of any part.

RAVELIN is now a detached work, composed only of two faces, which make a salient angle, without any flanks; and raised before the curtin on the counterscarp of the place. ... What the engineers call a ravelin, the soldiers generally call a demi-lune, or half-moon.

DEMI-LUNE, Half-Moon, ... an outwork ... consisting of two faces, and two little flanks; frequently built before the angle of a bastion, and sometimes also before the curtin, though now much disused. The gorge terminates in a crescent or half-moon, whence the denomination demi-lune...

...Half-moons are sometimes raised before the curtain when the ditch is wider than it ought to be; in which case it is much the same with a ravelin; only that the gorge of a Half-moon is made bending in like a bow, or crescent, and is chiefly used to cover the point of the bastion, whereas ravelins are always placed before the curtain.--But they are both defective, as being ill-flanked.

HORN-work ... a sort of out-work, advancing towards the field, to cover and defend a curtin, bastion, or other place suspected to be weaker than the rest...

It consists of two demi-bastions ... joined by a curtin ... Its sides or flanks are usually parallel...

When the flanks are too long, they sometimes make epaulements to flank them...19

¹⁹ Ephraim Chambers, Cyclopaedia; or, An Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences. Quotations are taken from the second edition (London, 1738) which Sterne almost certainly possessed (see A Facsimile Reproduction of a Unique Catalogue of Laurence Sterne's Library, London, 1930, and cf. J.M.Stedmond, 'Sterne as plagiarist'.)

Even from this selection it is apparent that Sterne has restrained himself and restricted his quotations. The original contains plenty of self-parody and many of Toby's phrases come straight out of Chambers. We also find here, by comparing the entry for 'ravelin' with that for 'demi-lune' (half-moon), the source of Toby's magnificent confusion:

The common men, who know very little of fortification, confound the ravelin and the half-moon together,--tho' they are very different things;---not in their figure or construction, for we make them exactly alike in all points;--for they always consist of two faces, making a salient angle, with the gorges, not straight, but in form of a crescent.---Where then lies the difference? (quoth my father, a little testily.)--In their situations, answered my uncle Toby:--For when a ravelin, brother, stands before the curtin, it is a ravelin; and when a ravelin stands before a bastion, then the ravelin is not a ravelin;--it is a half-moon; --a half-moon likewise is a half-moon, and no more, so long as it stands before its bastion;--but was it to change place, and get before the curtin,--'twould be no longer a half-moon; a half-moon, in that case, is not a half-moon;--'tis no more than a ravelin---(II.xii.111-2)

Having read Chambers we must sympathize with Toby's attempts to make some sense of a distinction with hardly a difference.

Most of the speech is much closer to the original, but often with a slight exaggeration of the pedantic tendencies.

The Cyclopaedia's:

which is between the two bastions; or which joins the flanks thereof

becomes in Toby's version:

which lies between the two bastions and joins them thus becoming more tautologous. Redundancy is the most obvious feature of this kind of language, and Sterne has added

his own touches:

wall or rampart
fossé or ditch
cover or defend

and especially:

As for the horn-works ... they are called by the
French engineers, Ouvrage à corne.

We may also notice in Toby's version the way his obsession alters Du Cange's assertion of equal derivation for military and bedroom 'curtains' so that the military sense is given etymological primacy!

The interesting point about Sterne's use of his source here is that he has made use of its academic language rather than translating it into uncle Toby's normal style. When Toby gets on his hobby-horse he does become academic. And he can produce such a stream of words because they are not really his: he has learned them off by heart from the books he has been reading. The problem then is one of selection. Most of what we are told in this speech has no relevance to Dr Slop's pun whatsoever, but it seems that once Toby has started he can't stop. He delivers a full account of various military terms, including identical details about their uses and methods of construction--just as though one had looked them up in a handbook of fortification. All this information comes out partly, of course, because Toby is interested in it and cannot conceive that anyone else is less interested. But I think we see clearly the mechanical nature of fixed habits of association: one

piece of information naturally follows another. It is like turning a tap on and there is no reason why Toby should stop at all--so Walter has to stop him. The only part of the speech that seems at all like Toby's own style, his own thoughts, is the digression quoted above on the difference between the ravelin and the half-moon--and that shows total confusion.

My other example is similar, though more varied. It occurs while Trim is attempting to tell the story of the King of Bohemia (VIII.xix.563-5). Toby continually interrupts: he is agitated and despondent and the result is this slightly neurotic behaviour. So it only needs one of the corporal's characteristic slips with a technical word to release three full paragraphs of uncle Toby's hobby-horse: on the uses of geography, on Marlborough's campaign, and on the discovery of gunpowder. Each paragraph has its own stylistic traits but they are all markedly unlike the 'normal' style I identified for uncle Toby above.

The first paragraph works by a number of repeated formulae:

he must be acquainted...
 he should know...
 he should be able...

and

what is its name
 in what mountain it takes its rise
 what is its course

and

their produce, their plants, their minerals ... etc. It reads, in fact, like some kind of mechanical division, a sort of catechism which provides an instant breakdown of a landscape, a geographical naming of parts, not unlike Walter's auxiliary verbs. It is easy to feel that Toby is relating this just as he learnt it.

The second paragraph is even more empty of thought, being little more than a list of names, perhaps taken from the Gazette. But it clearly has an incantatory effect-- 'here the corporal could sit no longer'--and rises to a kind of climax where it breaks out from prepositional phrases into clauses:

from Balmerchoffen to Skellenburg, where he broke in upon the enemy's works; forced his passage over the Danube; crossed the Lech--pushed on his troops into the heart of the empire, marching at the head of them through Friburg, Hokenwert, and Schonevelt, to the plains of Blenheim and Hochstet? (p.564)

It looked for a moment as though some positive action was about to be described, but the verbs only indicate apparently meaningless movement. Again, the language seems to be working mechanically, one name automatically following another. But for Toby and Trim the names obviously have a semi-magical significance, each one a moment of British glory. It would not be difficult to find here a satiric deflation of Marlborough's campaigns, but I think our attention is directed rather towards Toby and Trim.

The second half of the second paragraph combines with the third paragraph to make up the third section of Toby's lecture. It is perhaps the most curious part, being the most academic and the least military of the three. It is not surprising that Toby should have learnt all about gunpowder, but we might not have expected such strong stylistic traces to be left by such historical study. The clauses show a degree of subordination and amplification not met with elsewhere in Toby's speech:

I own that ... it seems ...
 was it not for ...
 the execution of which ...
 renversing ...
 has become ...
 changing so ...
 and awakening so ...
 that the world cannot be too ...
 or too ...
 in knowing what great man
 and what occasions ...

It all rolls out in one quite intricately ordered sentence. The diction similarly differs from uncle Toby's normal simplicity (see above, p.124), the passage being crammed with words like 'renversing', 'aera', 'ascertaining', 'controverting'. The tone is pedantic: 'that in the year of our Lord 1380, under the reign of Wenceslaus, son of Charles the fourth--a certain priest, whose name was Schwartz...' And perhaps even more striking is the sense of academic community with other scholars and writers:

I am far from controverting ... what historians agree in...

if we are to believe Don Pedro...

And all the world knows, that Friar Bacon had wrote...

This is quite unlike Toby the plain man who knows nothing of what Walter is talking about and cannot understand the point of scholarship and controversy. When astride of his hobby-horse Toby is like a man possessed: he has the gift of tongues. But he is also like an inexhaustible machine, going on and on until he is interrupted and switched off.

One passage which doesn't quite fit into either of the categories--'normal' and 'hobby-horsical'--under which I have considered Toby's language is his Apologetical Oration (VI.xxxii.459-62). Tristram introduces it as linguistically abnormal:

I told the reader, this time two years, that my uncle Toby was not eloquent; and in the very same page gave an instance to the contrary:--I repeat the observation, and a fact which contradicts it again.--He was not eloquent,--it was not easy to my uncle Toby to make long harangues,--and he hated florid ones; but there were occasions where the stream overflowed the man, and ran so counter to its usual course, that in some parts my uncle Toby, for a time, was at least equal to Tertullus--but in others, in my own opinion, infinitely above him. (VI.xxxi.458)

And he gives the speech a title and a chapter to itself. In its style it is clearly elevated above Toby's normal discourse, which, as we have seen, operates at a very simple level. This elevation is apparent in the opening sentence:

I am not insensible, brother Shandy, that when a man, whose profession is arms, wishes, as I have done, for war,--it has an ill aspect to the world;--and that, how just and right soever his motives and intentions may be,--he stands in an uneasy posture in vindicating himself from private views in doing it. (p.459)

There is a marked increase in words like those I picked out above (p.124) as more 'difficult' or 'unusual' than most. And there is a new sense of rhythm, as each half of the sentence has a subordinate clause preceding a free clause:

when a man ... it has...
and
how just and right soever ... he stands...

The result is an elegant symmetry.

This kind of patterning continues throughout the chapter, as in the build-up in the second paragraph:

enemy ... friend ... brother
and again:

I hope ... I know ... I think.

We notice the emotive repetition:

Tell me then, my dear brother Shandy, upon which of them it is ... --Tell me, brother Shandy, upon what deed of mine do you ground it? (p.460)

Then there is the long sequence in which he produces his evidence, each item followed by a rhetorical question.

In fact, what we have here is a rhetorical technique similar to that seen in Yorick's Sermon²⁰--which is to say, of course, similar to Sterne's own. As we have seen, Tristram explains the rhetoric as the natural welling-up of emotion

²⁰ II.xvii.125-40. See below, chapter 7, pp.307-12, for an analysis of some of Yorick's rhetorical effects.

('the stream overflowed the man'), and he similarly describes Walter's technique as natural rather than acquired.²¹ We are, I think, required to accept this kind of patterned speech as the natural language of feeling: Sterne draws no distinction between oratory and eloquence.

However, the presentation of the Apologetical Oration is not quite as simple as that. Sterne makes some attempt to bridge the gap between this oratory and Toby's normal style, one method being to bring the discrepancy to the surface:

O brother! 'Tis one thing for a soldier to gather laurels,--and 'tis another to scatter cypress.--
/ Who told thee, my dear Toby, that cypress was used by the ancients on mournful occasions? / (p.461)

Walter's commentary interrupts the flow of eloquence and slightly undercuts its effect, I think, as does his previous interruption. More importantly, it prevents us thinking Sterne hasn't noticed the change in Toby's style. Another complication is Toby's tendency towards the ridiculous, as in his picture of his childhood:

When Guy, Earl of Warwick, and Parismus and Parismenus, and Valentine and Orson, and the Seven Champions of England were handed around the school,--were they not all purchased with my own pocket money? (pp.460-61)

Toby's adherence to the romances ridiculed by Cervantes in Don Quixote inevitably detracts from his attempted solemnity

²¹ I.xix.52. See below, chapter 4, pp.202-6, for a discussion of Walter and rhetoric.

--while on another level, of course, it further reinforces our impression of his essential innocence and so makes his point for him. Again, Sterne punctures the elaborate rhetoric with his own more realistic kind of observation of the effects of grief:

And when king Priam came to the camp to beg his body, and returned weeping back to Troy without it,--you know, brother, I could not eat my dinner. (p.461)

Finally, Sterne returns us to the bowling green and the usual perspective on uncle Toby's hobby-horse, and Toby's peroration captures the ambivalence of the whole chapter:

And heaven is my witness, brother Shandy, that the pleasure I have taken in these things,--and that infinite delight, in particular, which has attended my sieges in my bowling green, has arose within me, and I hope in the corporal too, from the consciousness we both had, that in carrying them on, we were answering the great ends of our creation. (p.462)

From one point of view this claim for uncle Toby's miniature hobby-horse is ridiculous: his pretensions are totally deflated by the weight of the phrase, 'great ends of our creation'. But at the same time, we are asked by Sterne to recognise that in the fullness and vitality of his imaginative life as well as the guileless innocence of his moral nature, uncle Toby is a great man and is fully acting out his nature on his bowling green. Thus his Apologetical Oration is both absurd and dignified, funny and moving. (We may notice that it is essential to the effect of Toby's final sentence that Tristram closes the chapter without comment and starts the next not only with a change of subject, but with a total change of mood created by one of

his most extreme acts of narrative clowning. Toby's claim is left clear to reverberate in our minds.)

Taken altogether uncle Toby's speech patterns both reflect and help to create his character. He is both Shandean moral hero and hobby-horsical near-lunatic. The virtues of his normal speech signify his moral virtues: unaffected, plain, trusting, direct. The limitations--of intellectual scope, of wit, of control--are those which Sterne recognises as accompanying Toby's kind of goodness. But his normal style of speech also serves to set in relief the peculiar effects of his hobby-horse on his thought-patterns and his language. The mechanically voluble, irrelevantly digressive Toby is recognisably not only a member of the Shandy family but an inhabitant of the Shandean world, where rational speech is always in short supply.

C. Corporal Trim

Corporal Trim ... by four years occasional attention to his Master's discourse upon fortified towns, and the advantage of prying and peeping continually into his Master's plans, &c. exclusive and besides what he gained HOBBY-HORSICALLY, as a body-servant, Non Hobby-Horsical per se;---had become no mean proficient in the science; and was thought, by the cook and chamber-maid, to know as much of the nature of strong-holds as my uncle Toby himself. (II.v.95)

Trim's existence in the novel is almost totally defined by

his relationship with uncle Toby (although he occasionally clashes with Walter and with Doctor Slop, as well as the cook and the chamber-maid); his hobby-horse is virtually the same as Toby's; so our main concern here will be to see how far Sterne has created for Trim his own language which distinguishes him from his master.

Most obviously, Trim has his own habitual phrase-- 'the eternal interlardings of your Honour' (II.v.95)-- which occurs in nearly all his speeches and even allows Sterne occasionally to let him speak without naming him-- a technique he uses very rarely. But the distinctiveness of Trim's speech goes far beyond such crude identification, affecting his diction and imagery, his volubility and his syntax.

I suggested that uncle Toby's diction was normally simple, rarely straying from the most common words.²² This is even more true of Trim, whose education must have been minimal (though sufficient for him to read Yorick's sermon): but it is matched by an increase in vivid, colloquial words and turns of phrase, for example:

fiddle-faddle (II.v.96)

Souse! over head and ears! (VIII.xix.568)

a good thundering attack (VIII.xxviii.581)

²² See above, p.124.

The difference in this respect between Trim and Toby is well illustrated when together they describe their method of fighting the French:

There is no way but to march coolly up to them
 [says Toby] --receive their fire, and fall in
 upon them, pell-mell--Ding dong, added Trim.--
 Horse and foot, said my uncle Toby.--Helter
 skelter, said Trim.--Right and left, cried my
 uncle Toby.--Blood an' ounds, shouted the cor-
 poral. (V.xxi.380)

Toby's phrases have a remnant of appropriate meaning, but Trim's are purely emotional exclamations denoting conflict.

Uncle Toby is very little given to figures of speech, and in this respect Trim is more like one of the family. He uses common or clichéd images less than Toby, although some remain, such as:

I would work ... like a horse (II.v.97)

softer than satin (VIII.xxii.574)

that would melt a heart of stone (IX.vi.606)

I suppose this list should include the biblical images Trim uses when moved to speak on man's mortality:

are we not like a flower of the field (V.ix.364)

but more or less consciously he even adds to this, developing it in his own distinctive manner:

is not all flesh grass?--'Tis clay,--'tis dirt. (*ibid*)

He moves from the reflection on transience--all flesh is grass--to the idea of clay--derived, it seems, from grass by association but also a common metaphor for mortal flesh, especially in a biblical context--and from clay to dirt,

which is surely peculiar to Trim as a description of human flesh, and brings into his discourse quite other ideas from those he had set out with.

What we see here is the imagery taking over from the meaning and working under its own impetus. A related case is the highly unsuitable simile Trim, under the pressure of excitement, produces for his favourite king:

Brave! brave by heaven! cried my uncle Toby--he
deserves a crown--As richly, as a thief a halter;
shouted Trim. (VIII.xix.568)

Trim's image-making faculty appears to be out of control and the result is rather like watching Toby on his hobby-horse: it is another example of the mental aberrations produced by uncontrolled associative thought.

But mostly Trim's images are not common, nor do they depend for their effect on misapplication or elaboration. It is the unusual comparison that strikes us. Even those that are not completely odd often have a slightly surprising effect, e.g.:

as warm as a stove (V.xl.401)

as rotten as dirt (VIII.xxxiv.589)

He is particularly given to hyperbole:

I will be shot by your Honour upon the glacis of
it, if I did not fortify it to your Honour's mind. (II.v.96)

I would not read it myself for a Colonel's pay (II.xvii.139)

he would march up to the mouth of a cannon, though
he saw the lighted match at the very touch-hole (V.x.366)

It will have been noticed that these are military images. Much of Trim's conversation takes a military turn--partly conditioned by the situations he is shown in, and partly because the army has been even more responsible for his education than it has for uncle Toby's. Trim talks out of his experience. He can produce quite memorable images from non-military matters:

taking care ... to season what he had to say upon
sausages, rather under, than over (IX.vii.608)

but this image, with the metaphor growing out of the subject-matter, has a very Sternean ring to it suggestive of the creator close at hand--we may feel it is too clever for Trim.

It is Trim who develops the idea of love as warfare. He had first introduced the idea to uncle Toby when he was describing his own experiences:

Love, an' please your honour, is exactly like war.
(VIII.xxi.572)

When uncle Toby reproduces the analogy it is in very conventional romance terms:

She has left a ball here--added my uncle Toby--pointing
to his breast (VIII.xxviii.581)

Taking that image in isolation we would have no reason to suspect that the speaker was a military character. But Trim never speaks of the business in any terms other than attack:

she can no more ... stand a siege, than she can fly (ibid)
and his natural use of such imagery opens the way for Sterne's

use of innuendo and double entendre:²³

We'll march up boldly, as if 'twas to the face of a bastion; and whilst your honour engages Mrs. Wadman in the parlour, to the right--I'll attack Mrs. Bridget in the kitchen, to the left; and having seiz'd that pass, I'll answer for it, said the corporal, snapping his fingers over his head--that the day is our own. (VIII.xxx.583)

Trim is largely as unconscious of the implications of the images as uncle Toby is--the dialogue could hardly be kept up on any other basis--although he manages very well with innuendo when dealing with Bridget.

Perhaps the best military metaphor Trim produces is the one that is saved for his last utterance in the novel. Like much of the last volume it looks back to the beginning of the book. In Volume II, chapter xii, uncle Toby was set off on one of his longest rides by Dr Slop finding a pun in 'curtins and hornworks'. We may have been surprised to find that Toby, with his famous modesty, recognised the pun at all, but he punished it by sentencing Slop to a military lecture. At the end of the novel the time has come for Toby's moment of disillusion, and it is Trim who has to provide the metaphorical language to explain the true extent of woman's 'compassion':

The knee is such a distance from the main body--
whereas the groin, your honour knows, is upon the
very curtin of the place. (IX.xxxi.643)

So--although in 'fact' this takes place long before Dr Slop's pun--the tables are turned on Toby, and his refusal to accept

²³ The development of military imagery in Toby's amours is discussed more fully below in chapter 6, pp. 283-8.

the duality of words like 'curtain' has led to a rude shock.

When introducing Trim Tristram says that the only 'dark line' in his character is that 'The fellow lov'd to advise, --or rather to hear himself talk; ... set his tongue a-going, --you had no hold of him;--he was voluble' (II.v.95). His volubility also marks him off from his reticent master and it is perhaps the most obvious feature of his speech. He appears in the novel much less frequently than uncle Toby, but he says as much. On his first appearance (II.v.94-8) he only once speaks less than eighteen words together, whereas uncle Toby only three times exceeds seven words. Sterne makes linguistic comedy out of Toby's attempts to interrupt, using a pattern of variations to emphasize the continual attempts:

Trim ... thou hast said enough
Trim ... say no more
 Say no more, Trim
 Thou hast said enough, Trim
 Say no more, Trim. (pp.97-8)

Brief examination of two of Trim's longer speeches should reveal his method of keeping going, the syntactical relations usual in his style.

My first example is not only an interruption but a misunderstanding of Yorick's irony and a lengthy digression from the subject under discussion, which is Tristram's circumcision and the measuring of responsibility for it.

Yorick, by referring to the battle of Steenkirk, unlooses a

flood of memory and judgment from Trim:

Saved! cried Trim, interrupting Yorick, and finishing the sentence for him after his own fashion,--he had saved five battalions, an please your reverence, every soul of them:--there was Cutts's--continued the corporal, clapping the forefinger of his right hand upon the thumb of his left, and counting round his hand,--there was Cutts's--Mackay's,--Angus's,--and Graham's--and Leven's, all cut to pieces;--and so had the English life-guards too, had it not been for some regiments upon the right, who marched up boldly to their relief, and received the enemy's fire in their faces, before any one of their own platoons discharged a musket,--they'll go to heaven for it,--added Trim.--Trim is right, said my uncle Toby, nodding to Yorick,--he's perfectly right. What signified his marching the horse, continued the corporal, where the ground was so strait, and the French had such a nation of hedges, and copses, and ditches, and fell'd trees laid this way and that to cover them; (as they always have.)--Count Solmes should have sent us,--we would have fired muzzle to muzzle with them for their lives. --There was nothing to be done for the horse:--he had his foot shot off however for his pains, continued the corporal, the very next campaign at Landen. (V.xxi.379-80)

Sterne must have had his source for this passage, as for uncle Toby's lecture,²⁴ but there is no need to make any comparisons: the language is quite obviously Trim's own.

The imagery is his:

a nation of hedges and copses

and the turn of phrase:

every soul of them

we would have fired muzzle to muzzle with them for their lives

as well as the incidental judgments.

The sentence structure is also clearly not that of a

²⁴ See Theodore Baird, 'The time scheme of Tristram Shandy and a source', PMLA LI (1936), pp.803-20, for the source of Sterne's historical details.

history book. Much of the passage consists of disconnected clauses, particularly the last few lines. Trim adds a clause as he thinks of it, piling them up at random, and he uses a similar method where he seems to embark on a longer complex sentence:

there was Cutts's ... all cut to pieces;--and so had the English life-guards too, had it not been for some regiments upon the right, who marched up boldly to their relief, and received the enemy's fire in their faces, before any one of their own platoons discharged a musket.

The first part of the sentence is merely an expanded subject-group and has been omitted. That first clause is not strictly grammatically correct, but is colloquially acceptable. The grammatical failure in the second clause ('so had the English life-guards') can be put down to Trim's excitement. But the feature that I particularly want to draw attention to is the post-modification. A clause-analysis would reveal quite a complex system of subordination, but this does not indicate a complex thought-process, for each clause modifies the one before it (or something in the one before it)--never the one after. In other words, Trim is just adding to his sentence as he goes along, as with the string of free clauses: he doesn't anticipate what he is going to say next. The other longer sentence in the passage:

What signified his marching the horse ... where the ground was so strait, and the French had such a nation of hedges, and copses, and ditches, and fell'd trees laid this way and that to cover them; (as they always have)

quite clearly derives its length from a simple process of addition.

What this passage shows, then, is that Trim's volubility has nothing to do with linguistic organizing ability or mental complexity. Rather, his language is very much a stream, one thing after another, one idea suggesting another. As I have pointed out, this passage is highly digressive. It is, in fact, remarkably like uncle Toby's hobby-horsical speeches: not that it is full of jargon words or suggests parrot-fashion learning or differs from a 'normal' style: but that it is self-engrossing, losing sight of its starting place, and self-generating, liable to go on until stopped externally. (In some respects my description resembles what I have said of Tristram's style in the previous chapter, but there is always a hint of self-conscious artistry about Tristram's language which would be quite foreign to Trim's natural flow.)

My other example of Trim speaking at length shows his narrative style. Sterne quite often uses him to tell stories. It is a facet of his character that he likes to hear his own voice, and to talk about himself; and uncle Toby likes to listen to him:

--Thou hast many excellencies, Trim, said my uncle Toby, and I hold it not the least of them, as thou happenest to be a story-teller, that of the number thou hast told me, either to amuse me in my painful hours, or divert me in my grave ones--thou hast seldom told me a bad one.
(VIII.xix.558)

But it is also noticeable that Trim's stories increase towards the end of the novel. Possibly Sterne is looking round for fresh kinds of amusement for his readers; possibly he feels we begin to need a rest from Tristram's continual self-

interruptions; possibly he feels that even the digressive structure he has created will not bear the direct jump to stories from Trim's past--still less from Trim's brother's past. Be that as it may, he develops a convenient narrative style for Trim. The following comes from the early part of Trim's love story:

The anguish of my knee, continued the corporal, was excessive in itself; and the uneasiness of the cart, with the roughness of the roads which were terribly cut up--making bad still worse--every step was death to me: so that with the loss of blood, and the want of care-taking of me, and a fever I felt coming on besides--(Poor soul! said my uncle Toby) all together, an' please your honour, was more than I could sustain.

I was telling my sufferings to a young woman at a peasant's house, where our cart, which was the last of the line, had halted; they had help'd me in, and the young woman had taken a cordial out of her pocket and dropp'd it upon some sugar, and seeing it had cheer'd me, she had given it me a second and a third time--So I was telling her, an' please your honour, the anguish I was in, and was saying it was so intolerable to me, that I had much rather lie down upon the bed, turning my face towards one which was in the corner of the room--and die, than go on--when, upon her attempting to lead me to it, I fainted away in her arms. She was a good soul! as your honour, said the corporal, wiping his eyes, will hear.

...
By the persuasion of the young woman, continued the corporal, the cart with the wounded menset off without me: she had assured them I should expire immediately if I was put into the cart. So when I came to myself--I found myself in a still quiet cottage, with no one but the young woman, and the peasant and his wife. I was laid across the bed in the corner of the room, with my wounded leg upon a chair, and the young woman beside me, holding the corner of her handkerchief dipp'd in vinegar to my nose with one hand, and rubbing my temples with the other. (VIII.xx.570-71)

This is a remarkably quiet, fluent narrative style. There are the occasional interruption from uncle Toby and the occasional 'an' please your honour', so that we do not entirely forget the context of the novel, but these are kept to a

minimum. Similarly, Tristram rarely interrupts with a 'quoth Trim'. The cohesion and flow of the passage rest very largely on conjunctions (there are ten 'and's, excluding those within phrases) and participles: making, seeing, turning, attempting, holding, rubbing. These fit in easily with the tendency to use the past continuous tense. By these devices, particularly prominent in the second paragraph, the various events are bound together into one framework of recapitulation and addition, avoiding the tedium of an 'and then ... and then' pattern. Sterne also achieves a freedom of movement by making use of the colloquial situation to break the syntactical pattern when he wishes--as at the end of the first paragraph.

All this makes for an uncluttered, easy prose, ideal for getting the story told simply. The diction would hardly draw attention to itself, and there is a lack of imagery. In fact, there is little sign of the most distinctive features of Trim's usual style, though nothing that is positively out of character. The way the narrative order is varied at the beginning of the second paragraph, subordinating minor details to the main fact of the young woman and the moment of fainting away, is subtle technique, but it is presented more as the vagaries of Trim's conversational mode. It is in some ways reminiscent of the tricks of Tristram's style as seen in my previous chapter, but the general impression is very different. Sterne here produces a neutral narrative

style which cannot be identified with the narrative style of the novel. For one thing, there is little narrative as such in the book. But what there is bears strong marks of Tristram's personality, and is altogether more lively, more intellectually alert and more vigorous in its rhythms, than the language here. (There is quite a shortage of dashes in the passage.) Trim does have his own narrative style, then: but it is only negatively in character.

My account of Trim's speech patterns has revealed much what we would expect from the other indications of his character. His language is fundamentally simple and informal, rarely showing signs of complex organization; but his diction and imagery are usually vivid and racy. He shares with uncle Toby the preoccupation with military subjects and with Walter Shandy a sheer enjoyment of talking, and these two features (together with his respectful devotion to uncle Toby) dominate his character and thus his speech. They do not really make up a hobby-horse proper, but between them they produce a tendency towards a semi-mechanical, uncontrolled spate of language which is similar to the effects of the hobby-horse.

D. Dialogue

I think we tend to remember the 'action' of Tristram Shandy as a series of conversational situations centred on a few off-stage events: Tristram's birth, Bobby's death, Tristram's circumcision, Le Fever's death, the Peace of Utrecht and Toby's amours. These conversational situations are often of a markedly theatrical nature: Walter and Toby (usually) sit in the parlour while other characters enter and exit. Such conversations (including the minor narrative interruptions but excluding major digressions) take up about a third of the novel.

But they are often not conversations at all in any normal sense of the word: Walter lectures to an uncomprehending Toby, Toby rehearses the material he has learnt from his military books, Trim tells his stories. Most of the minor characters are similarly self-absorbed and either unable or unwilling to attend to anyone else. Walter's 'conversations' with Mrs Shandy are a classic case in point; or there is the famous scene in the kitchen where each recipient of the news interprets it totally idiosyncratically. Yorick is probably the only character in the novel who shows an abiding capacity for attending to others.

In the case of conversations between Walter and Toby several different causes of breakdown can be distinguished.

One is lack of understanding. Toby often just cannot follow Walter's train of thought, even if he wants to:

I never understood rightly the meaning of that word,--
quoth my uncle Toby. (II.vii.102)

Do you understand the theory of that affair? replied
my father. Not I, quoth my uncle Toby. (III.xviii.189)

In the first case it is the word 'analogy' and in the second it is 'the succession of our ideas' (both, incidentally, relevant to Toby's problems of misunderstanding). But Toby's ignorance is not restricted to Walter's more philosophical subjects: it particularly afflicts any attempted discussion of sexual matters. Misunderstanding is not more common as a cause of breakdown, but it tends to produce a more radical confusion, and thus to be more memorable. It often arises from Toby's problems with language, one word being quite sufficient to lead his thoughts in the wrong direction. We saw that Toby rarely indulges in figures of speech, and it is often Walter's metaphors that defeat him: 'solution' (III.xli.239), 'lashes' (IV.iii.274), 'evolutions' (V.iii.353), and 'ass' (VIII.xxxii.584-5). Figurative language is inherently ambiguous, and it is not only Toby's hobby-horse that leads him astray in these examples: he just takes the literal meaning as the obvious one in each case. But it is worth pointing out that there are moments when the two brothers can work in intellectual harmony,²⁵ and the most remarkable of these actually reverses the usual pattern of misunder-

²⁵ E.g., II.xiv.117 and III.xvi.187.

standing, with Toby carefully distinguishing between military and non-military meanings in a word:

The Danes, an' please your honour, quoth the corporal, who were on the left at the siege of Limerick, were all auxiliaries.--And very good ones, said my uncle Toby.--But the auxiliaries, Trim, my brother is talking about,--I conceive to be different things.--
--You do? said my father, rising up. (V.xlii.405)

Conversations may also break down through disagreement between the two brothers. They hold different beliefs and approach life from radically different outlooks and temperaments: the conflict is usually between Toby's pious religious beliefs and Walter's rationalism--and usually ends in 'Lillabullero'.²⁶

Examination of two conversations should illustrate how the features of the brothers' speech styles identified in this chapter affect their communication. Uncle Toby rarely leads in a conversation: he may occasionally mount his hobby-horse and so dominate the dialogue for a while, but the result is hardly a conversation. Of course, much the same can be said for Walter when mounted, but the different nature of his hobby means that he tends to demand a (limited) response from his listeners. In my two examples Toby has rather more to say than is often the case;²⁷ they were chosen to show both speakers:

²⁶ See I.xxi.68-9; III.vi.163-4; and III.xli.240-41.

²⁷ Cf. III.xviii.188-91; IV.xix.296-8; VI.ii.409-12; and VIII.xxxiii.585-8.

...I hate perpetuities as much as any man alive, cried my father,--but these jack-boots, continued he, (smiling, though very angry at the same time) have been in the family, brother, ever since the civil wars;--Sir Roger Shandy wore them at the battle of Marston-Moor.--I declare I would not have taken ten pounds for them.--I'll pay you the money, brother Shandy, quoth my uncle Toby, looking at the two mortars with infinite pleasure, and putting his hand into his breeches-pocket, as he viewed them.--I'll pay you the ten pounds this moment with all my heart and soul.--

Brother Toby, replied my father, altering his tone, you care not what money you dissipate and throw away, provided, continued he, 'tis but upon a SIEGE.--Have I not a hundred and twenty pounds a year, besides my half-pay? cried my uncle Toby.--What is that,--replied my father, hastily,--to ten pounds for a pair of jack-boots? --twelve guineas for your pontoons;--half as much for your Dutch-draw-bridge;--to say nothing of the train of little brass-artillery you bespoke last week, with twenty other preparations for the siege of Messina; believe me, dear brother Toby, continued my father, taking him kindly by the hand,--these military operations of yours are above your strength;--you mean well, brother, --but they carry you into greater expenses than you were first aware of,---and take my word,---dear Toby, they will in the end quite ruin your fortune, and make a beggar of you.--What signifies it if they do, brother, replied my uncle Toby, so long as we know 'tis for the good of the nation. (III.xxii.205-6)

Here, as usual, Walter has all the long speeches. His first speech shows typical expansiveness and looseness of connection: three short statements are connected by nothing but apposition and the pronoun 'them'. Of more interest here is the way that Toby--who is not fully attending, his mind being largely taken up with the mortars which he is viewing with such pleasure--picks up only the last few words of what Walter is saying, and misunderstands them at that. The price that Walter puts on the boots is a figure of speech which Toby, as is his way, takes literally; but even then, he is offering to pay Walter a price he has just said is

less than he would accept. But although it is nonsense, Toby's reply sets the conversation off in a new direction. Walter could have saved it by insisting that the money was not the point, but he is too concerned with what he obviously considers a more serious matter. This shift is brilliantly and economically captured by Tristram:

Brother Toby, replied my father, altering his tone...
The use of the appellation at the beginning of the sentence for new emphasis, and the narrative interruption after it which throws even more weight onto these two words, give us the alteration of tone almost before it is announced. The narrative interpolations are usually carefully used to mark the speaker's rhythm, an added aid to the dashes and other punctuation:

provided, continued he, 'tis but upon a SIEGE.
There is no doubt as to who is speaking, we do not need to be told that Walter is continuing, but we are given what is no doubt Walter's own pause for emphasis.

After a short exchange Walter takes over for most of the rest of the dialogue, developing his speech as he goes along in the way we have seen before, repeating himself with slight variation, both at word and clause level:

dissipate and throw away

quite ruin your fortune; and make a beggar of you

these military operations of yours are above your strength they carry you into greater expenses than you were first aware of.

Walter may speak at much greater length than Toby, but it is doubtful whether he has much more to say. Shifts in tone are again marked by the use of an appellation as well as narrative comment ('taking him kindly by the hand'). Thus the 'Brother Toby' of the opening of the paragraph modulates to 'dear brother Toby' as Walter's rhetoric shifts from reproof to friendly persuasion.²⁸ The passage concludes, as often, in an impasse, caused on this occasion by Toby's unanswerable nonsense, goodness of heart and simplicity, making Walter's concern appear materialistic by comparison with this Quixotism.

If the previous example showed Walter trying to undermine his brother's hobby-horse, this next one shows Toby (if less consciously) doing the same in return. It is rather long to quote in full, for it takes up two chapters, vii and viii, of Volume IV (pp.277-9). The conversation has great trouble in getting started. Walter himself starts twice, using a different metaphor each time, the second of which runs into the common difficulty of Toby's misunderstanding:

when I consider, brother Toby, how oft we eat the bread of affliction, and that we are born to it, as to the portion of our inheritance---I was born to nothing, quoth my uncle Toby, interrupting my father--but my commission. (p.277)

²⁸ There are other examples of the expressive use of a particular appellation, although often the changes seem merely a response to the need for variation. Cf. III.vi.163 ('brother Toby ... dear Toby'); IV.xxv.314 ('my dear brother Toby'); and VIII.xxxiii.586 ('my dear brother Toby').

Walter again falls into the trap of Toby's digression, but regains his original subject, and starts again, with yet another metaphor. This time Toby follows the argument quite well, so that he is able to anticipate Walter's conclusion with his own, producing four short sentences in a row. Sterne is playing about here, for Walter's reflections come from one of his own sermons²⁹ and Toby's religious solution is thus the one that originally went with the reflections, whereas Walter rejects it. This religious dispute could well end the conversation, but Walter avoids a crisis by asking Toby's leave to continue, which is willingly granted. And so, after a narrative interpolation, Walter starts again with a new chapter and a fourth metaphor which will see him right through what he wants to say. It provides a fine example of Walter's extended imagery and in the course of its elaboration it picks up words as it goes along, binding them all together:

vehicle, frame, totteringly, jerks and jostlings,
journey, overset, spring, shock.

It is ultimately a clever and unusual twist on the common idea of life as a journey.

This new attempt of Walter's to expound his theory again nearly founders on Toby's religious beliefs. A short sentence from Walter, 'Will that set my child's nose on?',

²⁹ This connection is pointed out by J.M. Stedmond, 'Sterne as plagiarist'. See Sterne's Sermons (London, 1769), Vol. VI, p.7.

indicates momentary anger, but he regains his composure as his rhythms broaden out again with 'dear Toby' and 'for aught I know', and he recaptures his metaphor and manages to complete the sentence. In the course of this exchange a curious linguistic joke takes place:

Which spring, said my uncle Toby, I take to be Religion.
 --Will that set my child's nose on? cried my father ...
 --It makes every thing straight for us, answered my
 uncle Toby--Figuratively speaking, dear Toby, it may,
 for aught I know, said my father... (pp.278-9)

It is unthinkable that Toby is here making a religious pun --it's really not the kind of thing he would do. The pun is Sterne's rather than Toby's, and is picked out for us by Walter in case we miss it. I have remarked before how Toby doesn't often notice metaphors, and it seems likely that on this occasion he has trotted out a religious cliché (which is not to suggest he doesn't believe it) without noticing its peculiarly apt literal application to the situation. Walter's objection, however, adds a further complication: for he himself has no more than a figurative answer to the problem of Tristram's nose, and where Toby speaks of religion Walter prefers 'the magic bias which good or bad names irresistably impress upon our characters and conducts' (p.279). So that, while Walter may dominate the argument and pour scorn on Toby's 'pun', Sterne subtly undermines his position by putting it linguistically on the same level as Toby's, resting as it does on the 'vehicle' metaphor discussed above. The reader is thus left a free choice between the two.

The next paragraph marks the first step forwards the discussion has taken: Walter having now managed to complete his opening reflection can go on to his conclusion. As he is 'coming closer to the point' he is allowed to reach his climax (or anti-climax) without interruption from Toby--he interrupts himself enough with digressions and qualifications. He concludes with a triumphant short sentence and the whole conversation (and the chapter) is brought to a close by Toby's reply:

He shall be christened Trismegistus, brother.

I wish it may answer--replied my uncle Toby, rising up.(p.279)

It is the moment towards which Walter has been working for two chapters. If we were unsure exactly what effect it would have on Toby and at a loss to provide the exact tone of voice in which he gives his answer, all uncertainty is removed by Tristram's description of him: 'rising up' gives us Toby's impatience with great economy.³⁰

These two examples show something of the way the speech styles of Walter and Toby interact and the sort of problems their conversations run into. With Toby and Trim the causes and patterns are different, and communication is not impossible. There is little clash of belief or even knowledge, nor is misunderstanding frequent. The problem, as I have already shown, is that Trim talks too much: when set going

³⁰ The way physical movements accompany movements of feeling is discussed below, chapter 4, pp. 167-8. Walter's position and movements in this episode are analysed in the same chapter, pp.203-6.

he is difficult to stop, and at times exactly the same can be true of Toby. Moreover, much of what Trim has to say is narrative rather than conversational, and in these cases (his encounter with Le Fever, with the Beguine, his story of Tom and the widow) he is left to get on with it, for the story is included for the reader's benefit more than Toby's and the dialogue that does take place is little more than a way of weaving these stories into the fabric of the novel and reminding the reader of the narrative context.

One characteristic type of dialogue which shows, if not a failure in verbal communication, at least a lack of it in any normal sense, is the result of the very similarity of Toby's and Trim's interests and beliefs:

'Tis all a fancy, an' please your honour--I fought just as well, replied the corporal, when the regiment called me Trim, as when they called me James Butler--And for my own part, said my uncle Toby, though I should blush to boast of myself, Trim,--yet had my name been Alexander, I could have 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. (IV.xviii.295)

This is a kind of antiphonal chant in which their common ground of opinion is divided into two and expressed by each of them in turn. As so often in this novel, no one is telling anyone anything, but a formula is being rehearsed, in

this case by two of them together. (A similar technique is used to express disagreement in the often quoted passage about Le Fever's death, VI.viii.424-5.)

But if there is nothing here we could call verbal communication yet there is harmony between the two men, and a transmission of sympathy. In the same way there is what may be called 'sentimental communication' between Toby and Walter on several occasions, where their brotherly feeling overrides all intellectual barriers:

my uncle Toby leap'd up without feeling the pain in his groin,--and, with infinite pity, stood beside his brother's chair, tapping his back with one hand, and holding his head with the other, and from time to time, wiping his eyes with a clean cambrick handkerchief, which he pull'd out of his pocket.--The affectionate and endearing manner in which my uncle Toby did these little offices,---cut my father thro' his reins, for the pain he had just been giving him.
(III.xxiv.211-12)³¹

Without this, life in the Shandy world would be bleak indeed, with each character locked in his own world, with his own jargon, his own speech habits, his own need to express himself to an uninterested or uncomprehending audience. For Sterne has carefully given his major characters speech characteristics which clash when put together and which express the irrationality he sees as fundamental to human nature.

³¹ Cf. II.xii.115; III.v.162-3; III.xxii.206; IV.ii.274; and VIII.xxxiii.586; and see chapter 4 below, pp. 166-70, for the interpretation of gestures in the novel.

IV: NARRATION AND LANGUAGE (I) -- The comedy of gesture

Ten thousand, and ten thousand times ten thousand (for matter and motion are infinite) are the ways by which a hat may be dropped upon the ground, without any effect.--Had he flung it, or thrown it, or cast it, or skimmed it, or squirted, or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under heaven, --or in the best direction that could be given to it--had he dropped it like a goose--like a puppy--like an ass--or in doing it, or even after he had done, had he looked like a fool,--like a ninny--like a nincompoop--it had fail'd, and the effect upon the heart had been lost. (V.vii.362)

One of the most obvious features of Tristram Shandy is that nothing happens. It is a tragi-comedy of incompleteness and frustration, and the digressive structure of the novel and its paragraphs and sentences enacts this incompleteness. The novel itself, whether or not Sterne had finished it,¹ is a monument to the impossibility, in the Shandean world, of getting anything done. There are no major events--the common fictional pattern of 'Life and Adventures' is replaced by 'Life and Opinions'--and relatively minor domestic details are given extended treatment. The correlative of this lack of events is the closeness of Tristram's narrative focus. A novelist may treat his action from almost any distance: he may detail every movement, or record only public events. Sterne is in this sense at the naturalistic end of the scale,

¹ See Wayne C. Booth, 'Did Sterne complete Tristram Shandy?', MP XLVIII (1951), 172-83.

concentrating on the individual gesture, the slight movement, the detailed expression, and asserting the importance of the everyday world--though of course 'naturalism' is hardly the term for a writer still so strongly influenced by concepts of comic types, humours, and so on. But the result of Sterne's technique is certainly an intense, if eccentric, realism.² We are immersed in the life of the Shandys, and we become close observers of the scene as two or three characters talk, watching every little thing that happens. The attention to detail also affects the time-sense of the novel, helping to produce the leisurely, expansive feeling critics have noticed,³ both in that Tristram can give such lavish attention to small things and in that if every detail of movement is to be described then the smallest events or conversations will take a long time to read.

I am using the term 'narration' to cover all the telling and describing in Tristram Shandy, although much of it is not 'narrative' in the ordinary sense of the term, but is largely an elaborate concentration on detail. As I have

² Ian Watt discusses Sterne's realism in The Rise of the Novel, chapter ten.

³ See particularly Edwin Muir's suggestive essay, 'Laurence Sterne', in Essays on Literature and Society (London, 1949). A.A. Mendilow, in Time and the Novel (London & New York, 1952), attributes the time-sense of Tristram Shandy to a concentration on 'the internal event ... the free evocation of the fluid, ever-changing process of being' (p.166). This account seems to me to make Sterne sound too much like Virginia Woolf and insufficiently like Samuel Richardson.

suggested, such details become the 'events' of the book. In this chapter I shall be concerned with the way the language is used to convey this preoccupation, especially where the linguistic forms become active in the process of telling and describing. The next chapter will also be concerned with Tristram's narration, but will attempt to relate it back to its place in the flow of the book, tracing out its linguistic connections with the commentary and the presentation of Tristram as a character. Aspects of the narrative language will also be discussed in the two final chapters.

A. Gesture as language

Unlike most novelists, Sterne gives us little in the way of scene-setting: we know virtually nothing about the physical appearance of Shandy Hall or its environs, and little about the characters, apart from the occasional distinguishing feature. Sterne seems to be uninterested in static visual details, concentrating on movements and gestures. His characters rarely keep still, and it is common to find that the narrative introduction of dialogue includes a present participle giving the action accompanying the speech:

Because, continued Dr. Slop (turning to my father)...
(III.xvii.187)

...said Didius, half rising from his chair, in order to remove a bottle and a tall decanter, which stood in a direct line betwixt him and Yorick (IV.xxvi.317)

Were one sure, said my father to himself, scratching his eyebrow...(IV.xiv.287)

In the third example the gesture has an unusual but apposite expressiveness, reinforcing Walter's words. I shall begin by examining the expressive function of gestures and movements.

Sterne and Tristram show themselves aware both of the possibilities of this kind of communication (as in the fuss made about the way Trim dropped his hat) and of its limitations:

There was not a soul busied in all these various reasonings upon the monosyllable which Phutatorius uttered,--who did not take this for granted, proceeding upon it as from an axiom, namely, that Phutatorius's mind was intent upon the subject of debate which was arising between Didius and Yorick; and indeed as he looked first towards the one, and then towards the other, with the air of a man listening to what was going forwards,--who would not have thought the same? ... So that notwithstanding he looked with all the attention in the world, and had gradually skewed up every nerve and muscle in his face, to the utmost pitch the instrument would bear, in order, as it was thought, to give a sharp reply to Yorick, who sat over-against him--Yet I say, was Yorick never once in any one domicile of Phutatorius's brain. (IV.xxvii.319)

Tristram sets up the whole case: Phutatorius goes through all the motions we would associate with a man whose thoughts are running a certain way, but appearances are totally misleading. The language of gesture, like any other language in Tristram Shandy, can be misunderstood. Such cases can serve as a warning to us against rushing in to say that Sterne depends on gestures because of the dangers involved in using words. Nevertheless, Sterne knows that we do interpret gestures, and that they can offer a useful support to the resources of language, especially when it comes to expressing feelings.

Sterne associates feelings, especially sudden feelings, with movement. He has an extensive repertoire of looks and gestures and actions, ranging from the silly and frustrated stamping of Dr Slop (III.vii.164) to uncle Toby blowing his nose (VI.vii.420). Any strong excitation of the emotions seems to produce a need in the character concerned for physical movement:

quoth my uncle Toby, leaping up upon one leg,
quite overcome with rapture (II.v.98)

said Yorick, springing out of his chair, and
taking the corporal by the hand (V.xxxii.393)

cried my father, rising out of his chair, and
looking full in my mother's face, as he forced
his way betwixt her's and doctor Slop's ...
cried my father, repeating my uncle Toby's
words as he walk'd to and fro' (VIII.xxxiii.586)

Tristram himself dwells upon such a moment when he is in Lyons and wishes to bring to our attention his romantic feelings about the Tomb of the Two Lovers:

I am glad of it, said I, rising briskly from my chair, and walking across the room with strides twice as long as my usual pace--'for so much the sooner shall I be at the Tomb of the two lovers'.

What was the cause of this movement, and why I took such long strides in uttering this--I might leave to the curious too; but as no principle of clock-work is concern'd in it--'twill be as well for the reader if I explain it myself...

...so taking a dozen or two of longer strides than usual across my room, just whilst it passed my brain... (VII.xxx-xxxi.520 & 522)

The connection between the emotion and the movement is made explicitly and quite clearly there is some kind of mechanical operation involved. We might suspect that Tristram is being ironic here, as he often is at the expense of scientific explanations of human phenomena, but his descriptions

elsewhere in the novel show that he really does subscribe to some theory of physical expression for mental activity. It is interesting that when he says:

what was the cause of this movement, and why I took such long strides in uttering this

he doesn't go on to explain that excitement was the cause of the movement. He explains the cause of the excitement, obviously taking the emotion and the movement as the same thing.

The 'sentimental communication' I described at the end of the previous chapter usually takes the form of touching:

as soon as my father had done insulting his HOBBY-HORSE,--he turned his head, without the least emotion, from Dr. Slop, to whom he was addressing his discourse, and 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... (II.xii.115)

Walter expresses his love for Toby by taking his hands. But it is also interesting to remark, from this passage, that the face--which is the most expressive part of the body--is the least useful for Sterne's rhetoric of gesture. To describe Toby's look he has to resort to abstract moral qualities directly: he cannot find the terms to provide a facial description that would work as an objective correlative for Toby's benevolence.

Sterne is particularly good at capturing moments of embarrassment and the way people avoid one another:

he was confounded, and continued looking with that perplexed vacuity of eye which puzzled souls generally stare with,--first in my uncle Toby's face --then in his [Walter's]--then up--then down--then east--east by east, and so on,--coasting it along by the plinth of the wainscot till he had got to the opposite point of the compass,--and ... he had actually begun to count the brass nails upon the arm of his chair... (III.i.158)

The passage is not weakened by our being told first the motive behind Dr Slop's movements, but more often we are left to work out for ourselves the precise mental equivalent of the physical manifestation:

O Jonathan! 'twould make a good-natured man's heart bleed, to consider, continued the corporal, (standing perpendicularly) how low many a brave and upright fellow has been laid since that time! (V.ix.364)

Provided, said my uncle Toby, looking earnestly towards Dunkirk and the mole again--provided it is not a merry one. (VIII.xix.559)

In this latter example, as in Dr Slop's case, Sterne particularly makes use of the object the eyes light on. The brass nails are expressive because of their very irrelevance; the 'mole' is the immediate stimulus of Toby's sadness. The technique provides a ready opportunity for sexual ambiguity and innuendo:⁴

Mrs. Wadman naturally looked down, upon a slit she had been darning up in her apron, in expectation every moment, that my uncle Toby would go on. (IX.xviii.633)

The non-sexual side of the ambiguity is just like Dr Slop and the brass nails--an acute observation of the way people focus on some object when they want to avoid someone's face--

⁴ See below, chapter 6, for a fuller treatment of this aspect of Sterne's narrative language.

but this time the object has a further relevance all of its own. The faint aura of ambiguity surrounding Mrs Wadman makes it impossible for us to say with any certainty whether she is herself aware of the appropriateness of what she is doing. But on another occasion Sterne plays on the very discrepancy between the sexual innuendo in the object and the character's lack of awareness of it:

Methinks, brother, replied my father, you might, at least, know so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong.

It is said in Aristotle's Master-Piece, 'That when a man doth think of any thing which is past,---he looketh down upon the ground;---but that when he thinketh of something which is to come, he looketh up towards the heavens.'

My uncle Toby, I suppose, thought of neither, for he look'd horizontally.--Right end, quoth my uncle Toby, muttering the two words low to himself, and fixing his two eyes insensibly as he muttered them, upon a small crevice, form'd by a bad joint in the chimney-piece.---Right end of a woman!---I declare, quoth my uncle, I know no more which it is, than the man in the moon;---and if I was to think, continued my uncle Toby, (keeping his eye still fix'd upon the bad joint) this month together, I am sure I should not be able to find it out. (II.vii.101-2)

It is quite clear here from what Toby says, and from what we know of him elsewhere, that he is blissfully unaware of the symbolic significance of the bad joint he has fixed his eyes upon. Rather than using the image to explain the sexual thoughts at the back of Toby's mind, Sterne is using it to emphasize the lack of them: if Toby had the slightest idea of the right and wrong ends of a woman he would not look a moment longer at the crevice in the chimney. The introductory quotation functions to direct our attention especially to what Toby was looking at.

These last examples have brought us to the question of Sterne's sexual imagery and ambiguity, which will be considered separately in another chapter. But they are the first cases which have really been concerned with Sterne's use of narrative language. I have suggested that Sterne uses these movements and gestures as a kind of language, exploiting their expressive possibilities, and this is an interesting and important part of his narrative technique. It is one of the ways he makes meanings in his novel, and it is also one of the ways of making meanings that he interests himself in. But it can only figuratively be called 'language'. The movements, gestures, facial expressions and so on are actually part of the stuff of the novel, the realistic detail, the events which the narrative language must describe. The distinction I am making has already been made in Chapter 1,⁵ but it becomes particularly important when the subject is narration. As long as the language in the novel is used purely referentially to convey to the reader the fictional world and its events then our interest is not in the language as such, but in that world and its events. As long as the language is doing its normal work efficiently and effectively it holds little interest for the literary critic. It is only when the language does more than this, when the writer creates or exploits extra expressive dimensions that we become interested in it. Thus, the use of expressive details

⁵ See above, pp.24-5.

I have discussed so far has really been a feature of Sterne's narrative technique--not his narrative language.

This distinction can easily become blurred, and it is not perhaps always essential to maintain it. Detailed discussion of the logical status of images and symbols is beyond the scope of this study. But consider the following:

Now my uncle Toby had one evening laid down his pipe upon the table, and was counting over to himself upon his finger ends, (beginning at his thumb) all Mrs. Wadman's perfections one by one; and happening two or three times together, either by omitting some, or counting others twice over to puzzle himself sadly before he could get beyond his middle finger--Prithee, Trim! said he, taking up his pipe again,--bring me a pen and ink: Trim brought paper also.

Take a full sheet--Trim! said my uncle Toby, making a sign with his pipe at the same time to take a chair and sit down close by him at the table...

The Corporal made no reply to my uncle Toby's protestation, but by a short cough--he dip'd the pen a second time into the inkhorn; and my uncle Toby, pointing with the end of his pipe as close to the top of the sheet at the left hand corner of it, as he could get it--the Corporal wrote down the word...

The Corporal had advanced too far to retire--in three words he told the rest--

My uncle Toby laid down his pipe as gently upon the fender, as if it had been spun from the unravellings of a spider's web---

---Let us go to my brother Shandy's, said he. (IX.xxxi.641-3)

I have selected from this famous scene the references to uncle Toby's pipe leading up to the climactic image of the spider's web. The pipe is used in the novel for various effects, particularly as a sexual symbol,⁶ and a careful reader may well have carried some of these effects in his

⁶ See below, chapter 6, pp.267-9, for the sexual uses of pipe imagery.

head when he comes to this passage. And insofar as any of these references to the pipe carries a symbolic as well as a literal meaning the language at that point has, in a way, become more than simply referential. But it seems to me that it is very much the pipe itself--the fictional object--which takes on expressive life, verging on becoming a symbol for Toby's state of mind; and it is not really any peculiar use of the word 'pipe', or even any special arrangement of the words around it, which makes it stand out. The rôle of language in creating an aura of suggestibility around the pipe is minimal, and it may thus occasionally be necessary to avoid any easy assimilation of literary symbolism into the category of linguistic activity. The sexual symbolism exists outside the realm of language, and mere reference (combined with the coincidence of the two areas of meaning in a particular event) is sufficient to evoke it.

If, however, we turn our attention from the pipe to the spider's web then we are properly concerned with Sterne's use of language: in particular, with his imagery. The spider's web has no 'real' existence in the fictional world of the novel: its status in this sentence is totally figurative. (And it is the use of this figure that draws our attention to the metaphorical implications of 'laid down'.) If we go on to examine the image's suggestiveness and its relation to other uses of the 'web' in the novel then we are examining Sterne's use of language. By using the words

figuratively, Sterne has added to their usual referential dimension: it is a linguistic technique.⁷

The quotation standing at the head of this chapter (p.163) neatly makes the point. Tristram, discussing Trim's dropping of his hat, says:

Had he flung it, or thrown it, or cast it, or skimmed it, or squirted, or let it slip or fall in any possible direction under heaven... (V.vii.362)

It is one of Sterne's virtuoso passages of writing, describing the various expressive possibilities of a gesture with the hat. If we concentrate on the actions Trim might have made then we go beyond ordinary language to non-verbal communication. But if we examine the passage as a remarkable collection of verbs of propulsion and relate it to Tristram's use of the list-form, if we note the rhythms built up and the various parallels of word and phrase, if we see that Sterne, as often, is imitating in verbal form the physical actions he is describing--then we are studying the language of the passage. The two following sections of this chapter will show in more detail the ways in which narrative language becomes particularly interesting.

If I have seemed to labour this point it is partly because the disentangling of it has cost considerable effort.

⁷ A fine analysis of this image is given by Christopher Ricks in his 'Introduction' to the Penguin English Library edition of Tristram Shandy, p.23.

It has proved surprisingly difficult often to separate narrative language from narrative technique. The recognition that the novelist has other ways of making his meanings than by the manipulation of language seems to me crucial to the understanding of the rôle played by language in the novelist's art. And it is a problem that arises most acutely when the narrative and descriptive parts of the novel are discussed. Having made the important distinction I shall now pass on to a discussion of what seem to me the most interesting aspects of Sterne's use of language in his narrative and descriptive passages: mimesis and evaluation.

B. Mimesis

The language of a novel becomes particularly interesting to the literary student when it is more than merely referential. One of the most striking features of Sterne's concentration on detail is the way that it draws attention to itself: we take in not only the action or scene that is being described but the description itself. And very often we find there is a correlation between the two, that the language mirrors the action in itself as well as presenting it through itself. This effect is what I am calling 'mimetic language'.

One result of Sterne's closeness of focus is the extraordinary delicacy he can sometimes achieve. By observing

the smallest gestures he attunes his reader to a level of nuance in the language and minuteness in movement which permits effects closed to most novelists:

My mother was going very gingerly in the dark along the passage which led to the parlour, as my uncle Toby pronounced the word wife.--'Tis a shrill, penetrating sound of itself, and Obadiah had helped it by leaving the door a little a-jar, so that my mother heard enough of it, to imagine herself the subject of the conversation: so laying the edge of her finger across her two lips--holding in her breath, and bending her head a little downwards, with a twist of her neck--(not towards the door, but from it, by which means her ear was brought to the chink)--she listened with all her powers. (V.v.357)

We would normally be inclined to say that Mrs Shandy puts her finger on her lips, but Tristram, describing the same movement, says that she laid the edge of her finger across her two lips. Each of the words I have picked out marks the exactness of the observation and description involved: and this exactness mirrors the quiet delicacy with which Mrs Shandy performs the movement. The sentence structure also contributes towards the sense of stillness that Sterne is creating: he piles up the preparatory details before coming to the main clause at the end ('she listened with all her powers'), syntactically enacting the suspension of all movement.

It is such delicacy of touch that allows Tristram the conceit of the Recording Angel dropping a tear on Toby's name as he writes: only in Tristram Shandy could a tear fall that accurately. And the delicacy can affect not only accuracy but pressure:

In saying this, my father shut the book,--not as if he resolved to read no more of it, for he kept his forefinger in the chapter:--nor pettishly,--for he shut the book slowly; his thumb resting, when he had done it, upon the upper-side of the cover, as his three fingers supported the lower-side of it, without the least compressive violence. (V.xxxiii.394)

Again, the effect here is obtained partly through the precision of detail and partly through the elaboration of the sentence. By rehearsing the possibilities that did not occur Tristram spreads out the description, dwelling on it with a kind of care that matches the care with which the book is being held.

Tristram's precision of language, however, need not be used in this way. The physical comedy in the novel extends from such minute touches at one extreme to the broadest farce at the other, and one of Sterne's peculiar achievements is his ability to render physical farce--essentially a visual kind of humour--in verbal terms. He produces again a mimetic language which enacts the physical properties of the situation. There are several examples of classic farcical situations:

The table in my uncle Toby's room, and at which, the night before this change happened, he was sitting with his maps, &c. about him,--being somewhat of the smallest, for that infinity of great and small instruments of knowledge which usually lay crowded upon it;--he had the accident, in reaching over for his tobacco-box, to throw down his compasses, and in stooping to take the compasses up, with his sleeve he threw down his case of instruments and snuffers;--and as the dice took a run against him, in his endeavouring to catch the snuffers in falling,---he thrust Monsieur Blondel off the table and Count de Pagan o' top of him. (II.v.93-4)

The main weight of this passage is carried, as we would expect in physical farce, by the verbs. Tense is firmly controlled to distinguish the different movements. After 'he had the accident ... to throw down' the accidental actions are all couched in the definite past tense ('he threw down', 'he thrust'), while the other actions, which precipitate the accidents, are given participles ('in reaching', 'in stooping', 'in his endeavouring to catch'), thus expressing the simultaneity of the intentional and the accidental in each case. Also the choice of verb matches the action: 'throw down' occurs twice because, in the way that is characteristic of this kind of situation, he does make the same mistake twice; it is then replaced by 'thrust ... off', for when he manages to avoid one kind of accident he immediately causes another. When he has 'thrown down' he has to 'take up'. The adverbs are similarly precise: over, down, up, down. The mild wit of the narrator in naming the books as though they were their authors is appropriate to the comedy of the situation, and adds to the sense of clownishness. Tristram is thus enabled to convey the farce exactly, not only by the close focus of the novel which allows him to dwell on the details, but by the witty precision of his language which matches the action at every point.

Mimetic language of this kind can work on a very small scale. There is the appropriateness of a single word:

...of about four feet and a half perpendicular height
(II.ix.104)

'Perpendicular', not strictly necessary next to the term 'height', manages to explain to the reader that there might be some confusion between Dr Slop's height and breadth, at the same time adding emphasis to his shortness.

...upon the vertebrae of a little diminutive pony
(II.ix.105)

'Vertebrae' for back gives precisely the skinniness of the pony: the doctor is sitting directly on its bone structure, which presumably can be seen through its skin.

...and making all practicable speed the adverse way
(II.ix.105)

'Adverse', while acceptable as a synonym for opposite, carries further overtones, giving not only the direction but the sense of collision, of two men bound to come into conflict.

These three examples all come from the same passage. It is one on which Sterne clearly exerted considerable care and effort, and I shall return to the rest of it later, but the occasional particularly apt word can be found elsewhere as well:

He walked composedly out with it to the fish-pond
(IV.xvii.293)

Here it is not so much the word ('composedly') itself but its position in the sentence, breaking as it does the collocation, 'walked out', and thus bringing particular emphasis on itself. It could be argued that the word is only in its proper place, but I think the collocation is strong enough to give a sense of oddness which produces the appropriate emphasis. There is another, slightly different, case of emphasis:

to give the action still more emphasis,--he started up upon both his legs to do it (II.vii.101)

The significant word here is 'both'. We would hardly expect Walter to stand on one leg (Toby is a different case, because of his lameness, see II.v.98). 'Both' adds emphasis to the sentence, thus matching the emphasis which the action it describes added to Walter's gesture.

Sentence structure may also be used mimetically in describing actions:

I think, answered Trim, stooping to take it up,--
'tis more like a sermon. (II.xv.119)

The placing of the description would match exactly a pause in Trim's speech. He says 'I think' as he is stooping and on standing again he complete his sentence. This is a small instance, but there are many of this kind in the novel,⁸ adding to that dramatic sense which is so strong in many places, and giving an extra force to the language, providing a kind of wit by its very aptness. But there are also larger scale examples, one of the most famous of which is the description of Walter Shandy's explosion during his discussion with Toby on noses:

---My father thrust back his chair,---rose up,--put on his hat,---took four long strides to the door, ---jerked it open,--thrust his head half way out, --shut the door again,--took no notice of the bad hinge,--returned to the table,--pluck'd my mother's thread-paper out of Slawkenbergius's book,---want hastily to his bureau,--walk'd slowly back, twisting

⁸ See above, chapter 3, p.156.

my mother's thread-paper about his thumb,--unbutton'd his waistcoat,--threw my mother's thread-paper into the fire,--bit her sattin pin-cushion in two, fill'd his mouth with bran,--confounded it... (III:xli.239)

The syntactical form is clearly mimetic: the one subject predicating a series of actions, all the verbs in parallel form, without any connectives. Thus we are given a series of actions which have no apparent connection with each other, and the jerky rhythm matches the spasms of action. The parallelism gives the only kind of connection there is: all the actions stem from the same feeling. Most of the verbs describe violent action: 'thrust', 'jerked', 'shut',⁹ 'pluck'd', 'twisted', 'threw', 'bit'--but with his usual skill Sterne interpolates on variation. Walter went hastily to his bureau, but walked slowly back, clearly becoming pensive for a moment. Another interesting variation is that, despite its syntactical similarity, 'took no notice' is a rather different kind of action, not because it is negative (it seems to imply a positive refusal to take any notice), but because it must be a mental rather than a physical action. Apart from the syntactical similarity, these actions are also alike in that they are all totally non-productive. He walks but returns, he opens but he shuts, he puts his head only half way out of the door, he goes to his bureau but does nothing when he gets there, he picks up the thread-paper only to twist it and throw it away. It is perhaps not too far-

⁹ 'Shut' is not necessarily a verb of violent action, but the context (both of meaning and of sound and rhythm) brings out the sharpness of its sound.

fetched to suggest that this consistent theme of frustrated actions mirrors Walter's intellectual frustration at the failure of his attempt to explain his hypothesis to uncle Toby.

Mimetic sentence structure need not take such obvious form. When Walter wants to illustrate the theory of expressive gesture he says, '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' (VI.v.414-5). In a way typical of the interweaving of ideas and motifs through the novel, this echoes an earlier scene where Tristram shows his father going in and out of the room and taking up and laying down his hat:

--Make tea for yourself, brother Toby, said my father, taking down his hat--but how different from the sallies and agitations of voice and members which a common reader would imagine!

--For he spake in the sweetest modulation--and took down his hat with the gentlest movement of limbs, that ever affliction harmonized and attuned together...(IV.xvi.292)

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! Alas! my uncle Toby! had not a weightier matter called forth all the ready eloquence of my father--how hadst thou then and thy poor HOBBY-HORSE too have been insulted!

My father hung up his hat with the same air he took it down; and after giving a slight look at the disorder of the room, he took hold of one of the chairs which had formed the corporal's breach, and placing it over-against my uncle Toby, he sat down in it, and as soon as the tea-things were taken away and the door shut, he broke out in a lamentation as follows... (IV.xix.295-6)

There are a number of interesting features in this passage,

but I want to begin with the final paragraph. The main action is given in four parallel, co-ordinated clauses: 'My father hung up his hat ... he took hold of one of the chairs ... he sat down in it ... he broke out in a lamentation'. The parallelism of structure (which is not exact, but close enough to give the impression of repetition) suggests the even flow of the movements, the similarity of mood and mien in carrying them out, further supported by the smooth flow of the sentence (notice the absence of dashes). The placing of the clause 'after giving a slight look' between the connective 'and' and the sentence it is introducing gives us the pause Walter makes to look round the room. This and the later interruption as the tea-things are removed not only suspend the main body of the sentence but suggest Walter's self-control in suspending his outburst. For his lamentation is not a spontaneous outburst of feeling but a highly rhetorical set-piece which he has presumably been composing by the fish-pond and which he will not deliver till all is ready. (The separate heading Tristram gives to the Lamentation furthers this impression.)

There are several other effects used in this passage, as well as the deployment of sentence structure. One of the chapters missing from the centre of my quotation describes Toby and Trim in a mock battle, and this is what Walter interrupts on his return: the occasion, remember, is the very serious one of Tristram having been given his disastrous name.

Sterne has brilliantly manipulated a clash of the two hobby-horses and the reader naturally expects the conflict between the two brothers to reach a crisis. The clash is dramatized by using two levels of description--the literal world of Walter ('the fish-pond', 'the parlour-door') and the imaginative world that Toby and Trim have disappeared into ('the very height of the attack, just as my uncle Toby was marching up the glacis'). Sterne goes on, of course, to produce an anti-climax, thus achieving a more complex comic effect: it is one of the paradoxical abiding features of Walter's character that he never responds as you expect him to, and in fact the comedy and the characterization at this point lie in his ability to ignore the scene he has walked into (which has doubtless ruined an intended highly theatrical entrance) and behave as though nothing is going on. But in the final paragraph, where Walter's reactions are described, Tristram reminds us of the potential clash of hobby-horses again by referring to the chairs as 'the corporal's breach'.

The opening paragraphs are also interesting. Tristram could have conveyed the manner in which his father took down his hat by an elaborate description, utilizing the resources of language in the way we have seen elsewhere. But he chooses rather to use the most neutral description--'taking down his hat'--and then comment on the manner afterwards. Presumably he does so because he wants to draw attention to the surprising elements in Walter's actions, and for this purpose an extended

commentary is more useful than a mimetic description. And having thus drawn particular attention to the manner of the action he can easily refer back to it two chapters later to make a point about the continuity of Walter's mood. Mimetic language is thus not always the most useful technique for the novelist, although it may be the most interesting part of the narrative to the student of language. A more 'dramatic' novel of the Jamesian variety would limit the possibilities of commentary, thus throwing much more weight onto the expressive possibilities of descriptive language.

One frequent ingredient of these descriptions which should not be forgotten is the sheer delight which Sterne and Tristram take in the intricacies of movement and physical detail, especially in comic situations. Such is Obadiah's tying of the knots around Dr Slop's bag:

taking hold of the bag and instruments, and gripeing them hard together with one hand, and with the finger and thumb of the other, putting the end of the hat-band betwixt his teeth, and then slipping his hand down to the middle of it,--he tied and cross-tied them all fast together from one end to the other (as you would cord a trunk) with such a multiplicity of roundabouts and intricate cross turns, with a hard knot at every intersection or point where the strings met,-- that Dr. Slop must have had three fifths of Job's patience at least to have unloosed them. (III.viii.166)

The detail with which Tristram describes this process corresponds to the meticulous way in which Obadiah tied the knots. It provides the reader with a dramatic presentation of the complexity of knots. Also, this passage is interpolated into the description of Dr Slop stamping and cursing

and trying to undo the knots. So the magnitude of Slop's problem is presented to the reader by an interruption during which time we can imagine him still working at the problem.

A similar delight in details obviously informs Tristram's description of the Widow Wadman's ritual with her night-gown, but in this case the description serves several purposes:

as soon as Mrs. Wadman was put to bed, and had got her legs stretched down to the bottom of it, of which she always gave Bridget notice--Bridget with all suitable decorum, having first open'd the bed-cloaths at the feet, took hold of the half ell of cloath we are speaking of, and having gently, and with both her hands, drawn it downwards to its furthest extension, and then contracted it again side long by four or five even plaits, she took a large corking pin out of her sleeve, and with the point directed towards her, pin'd the plaits all fast together a little above the hem; which done she tuck'd all in tight at the feet, and wish'd her mistress a good night. (VIII.ix.547-8)

After the wanderings of Volume VII Tristram is bringing his readers back to a concrete situation in the love story he has interrupted, and the circumstantial realism marks this return. He is also re-establishing the close focus which is essential to the main events of his story, and drawing attention to the night-shift which will be the central part of the symbolic action showing the widow's love. But the description is, in its entirety, mimetic like other passages I have examined in that it rehearses every detail of the process with the same exactitude that Bridget has done every night. Tristram tells us that Bridget may stand, kneel or squat, but 'in every other respect the etiquette was sacred, and might have vied with the most mechanical one

of the most inflexible bed-chamber in Christendom' (ibid). It is a ritual, 'mechanical' process, and the description is appropriately detailed and exact. By this means it also gives the reader the impression of stability and permanence which it had for Mrs Wadman and Bridget. All this could, of course, be achieved by a statement from Tristram about the ritualistic details, the permanence, and so on. He does, indeed, make such statements but he also provides a dramatic enactment--dramatic, in this case, not in presenting us with the scene of a particular occasion, but in giving the general description of a habit with all the circumstantial detail of a particular occurrence.

In noting some of the functions of this description we have begun to move away from the simple question of mimesis, but before following this line of development there are one or two other examples which deserve attention. As I have said, it is rare to find static description in this novel, but two particular examples stand out. In such a context, where visual description of objects is rare anyway, it is most surprising to find such detailed description as the following:

a very handsome demi-peak'd saddle, quilted on the seat with green plush, garnished with a double row of silver-headed studs, and a noble pair of shining brass stirrups, with a housing altogether suitable, of grey superfine cloth, with an edging of black lace, terminating in a deep, black, silk fringe, poudré d'or,--all which he had purchased in the pride and prime of his life, together with a grand embossed bridle, ornamented at all points as it should be. (I.x.18-19)

Such description, as I say, is remarkable, but then of course

that is the whole point. The saddle is remarkable; unlike the horses Yorick rides, it is worth describing in detail, it has a richness of detail which Tristram reproduces for us in his description. A similar point may be made about the tobacco-pipes and the Montero-cap which Trim is so proud of: his pride in them is matched by the time spent in the description (VI.xxiv.449-50).

The description of the Widow Wadman's eye is rather different. It fills up the period while Toby is looking into the eye, and is in a sense a description of what he sees, although not strictly presented as such. Such expansiveness of descriptive detail could also be seen to correspond to the concentration exerted by Toby in trying to find the mote in the pupil, and as Tristram rules out various possibilities, gradually arriving at a true definition of the qualities of the eye, so Toby must have learned, as he looked, of those qualities, and fallen in love with them:

Now of all the eyes, which ever were created--from your own, Madam, up to those of Venus herself, which certainly were as venereal a pair of eyes as ever stood in a head--there never was an eye of them all, so fitted to rob my uncle Toby of his repose, as the very eye, at which he was looking--it was not, Madam, a rolling eye--a romping or a wanton one--nor was it an eye sparkling--petulant or imperious--of high claims and terrifying exactions, which would have curdled at once that milk of human nature, of which my uncle Toby was made up--but 'twas an eye full of gentle salutations--and soft responses--speaking--not like the trumpet stop of some ill-made organ, in which many an eye I talk to, holds coarse converse--but whispering soft--like the last low accents of an expiring saint--"How can you live comfortless, captain Shandy, and alone, without a bosom to lean your head on--or trust your cares to?" (VIII.xxv.578)

The mimesis here is rhetorical: Tristram sets out to reproduce in the reader the effect the eye had on Toby. The word 'eye' is repeated eight times in an almost hypnotic way. Considerable use is made of alliteration: rolling - romping, petulant - imperious, full - gentle - salutations, soft - responses, whispering - soft, like - last - low. The mellifluous 'l's and soothing 's's go far to reinforce the effect Tristram is describing, contrasting with the 'r's and 'p's of the earlier part. It is one of the most remarkable passages in a book full of stylistic tours de force, and Tristram shows his awareness of what he is doing in a characteristically humorous comment:

It was an eye--
But I shall be in love with it myself, if I say
another word about it. (ibid)

Also, he seems to have it in mind when he produces another contrast, in describing his mother's eye as it presented itself to Walter:

as he turned his head, he met her eye---Confusion again! he saw a thousand reasons to wipe out the reproach, and as many to reproach himself--a thin, blue, chill, pellucid chrystal with all its humours so at rest, the least mote or speck of desire might have been seen at the bottom of it, had it existed --it did not--and how I happen to be so lewd myself...
(IX.i.599-600)

The reference to the 'mote or speck' seems a clear reference back to the Widow Wadman, and interestingly suggests a further interpretation of the 'mote' in the widow's eye--a 'speck of desire'.¹⁰ The contrast could not be clearer

¹⁰ I think this interpretation works at the level of suggestiveness even though there is actually not a mote in the widow's eye: it becomes a spiritual rather than a physical mote, sufficiently disguised so that Toby cannot find it. The well-known biblical passage (Matthew VII.iii) colours the use of the word 'mote'.

between the two women, the one all 'concupiscence', the other almost totally asexual (notice the word 'chill'), the one devious, the other innocent; the contrast could, in fact, be carried still further. For Walter has been accusing his wife of something worse than sexual curiosity:

I could like, said my mother, to look through the key-hole out of curiosity--Call it by it's right name, my dear, quoth my father--
And look through the key-hole as long as you will.
 (VIII.xxxv.594)

But on looking into her eye he is smitten with how unfair he has been. However, the whole stumbling block to uncle Toby's romance with the widow is precisely her sexual curiosity, which he innocently takes as Humanity. It would have taken somebody more experienced than Toby to see the mote in the Widow Wadman's eye when he looked into it.

C. Evaluation

By using the word 'mote' to describe the speck in Mrs Wadman's eye (as equally in parts of the description of her bed-time ritual) Sterne goes beyond imitation of an action or a scene to implicit commentary on it: the words chosen for the description give us the narrator's attitude towards what he is describing and thus condition our response. There are more obvious and more extended examples of this process in the novel. For example, the central part of the description of Dr Slop's fall from his horse is physical farce similar to Toby's accidents with his instruments and books:

for in crossing himself he let go his whip,---and in attempting to save his whip betwixt his knee and his saddle's skirt, as it slipp'd, he lost his stirrup,---in losing which, he lost his seat;---and in the multitude of all these losses (which, by the bye, shews what little advantage there is in crossing) the unfortunate doctor lost his presence of mind. So that, without waiting for Ob-adiah's onset, he left his pony to its destiny, tumbling off it diagonally, something in the stile and manner of a pack of wool, and without any other consequence from the fall, save that of being left (as it would have been) with the broadest part of him sunk about twelve inches deep in the mire. (II.ix.106)

But if we look more closely at this passage we find that there are traces of two possible interpretations of what happened to Dr Slop. If he 'lost his seat' and tumbled,--like a pack of wool, moreover--it would seem to be an accidental fall. But if he 'lost his presence of mind' and 'left his pony to its destiny', and if, moreover, it is reasonable to talk of the 'consequence' of his action, then it would seem to be intentional. There is, however, no need here to suppose confusion on Sterne's part, or that this problem has to be resolved one way or the other. The situation is confused in itself, and Slop's fall is a mixture of intention and accident. The signs that it was intentional only serve to help the narrator in his general amusement at the doctor's predicament. When uncle Toby knocked everything off his desk we were told that the dice had taken a run against him. When Dr Slop falls we are told he is like a pack of wool, and we remember that at the beginning of the chapter he was described as a 'fardel' on his pony. These marks of dehumanisation suggest the presence of satire, whereas uncle Toby's accident was matter for pure comedy. The

dehumanization is carried further in the mechanistic images surrounding the passage I have quoted, where Tristram makes use of Whiston's theory of comets: the approach of Obadiah is a 'phaenomenon', with a 'vortex', an 'axis' and a 'nucleus', and after the accident he is carried on by the 'momentum' of his horse. This imagery not only compares the characters with non-human events--a typical technique of the satirist--but brings the trifling affair of Slop's fall into relationship with the cosmos. This deflation of the characters by inflation of the language is another common technique and it is in fact what often happens in Tristram's minute descriptions: by paying so much attention to small details he inflates the description which, by losing proportion with the event described, has a similar effect to the mock-heroics of Fielding.¹¹

However, nothing is ever simple with Sterne. On most of the issues which arise in the novel he takes an ambiguous attitude (which is one of the qualities which has recommended

¹¹ Sterne's awareness of what he is doing here is revealed in a letter written to a friend who had seen the manuscript: 'I will reconsider Slops fall & my too Minute Account of it--but in general I am perswaded that the happiness of the Cervantic humour arises from this very thing--of describing silly and trifling Events, with all the Circumstantial Pomp of great Ones--perhaps this is Overloaded--& I can soon ease it', Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed L.P.Curtis, Oxford, 1935, p.77. We do not know whether Sterne did alter the passage, but it doesn't now seem overloaded.

his work so highly to twentieth-century critics). So although he uses the techniques of the satirist to diminish his characters he also insists on a true relationship between the infinitely small and the infinitely great. He insists on the importance of the accidents of his everyday world as contrasted with the great events and adventures of other novelists. He insists on the revelatory value of small gestures, on the symbolic value of uncle Toby's compassion towards the fly. As A.D.McKillop has said:

We may say that Sterne assumes that experience symbolizes or epitomizes reality, as memory epitomizes a span of time, or Hamlet's nutshell includes infinite space. Reality is not simply built up out of single units; it is contained in the given unit. The individual experience somehow images in little and simultaneously a moral order and a cosmic order, the world of conscience and consciousness and the world of microscope and telescope.¹²

There is perhaps a danger of becoming too serious about Tristram Shandy, but Sterne does manage to convince us of the totality of his world, despite its close focus.

However, in the case of Dr Slop there is little question of insisting on the cosmological importance of his fall from his horse (although there may be some suggestion of disparagement towards the science of comets). Dr Slop is a caricature, a figure of satire, and the deflationary elements in the description of his fall are repeated, with a different image, when he enters the parlour:

¹² A.D.McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction, Lawrence, Kan., 1956, p.196.

Obadiah had led him in as he was, unwiped, unappointed, unanealed, with all his stains and blotches on him.-- He stood like Hamlet's ghost, motionless and speechless, for a full minute and a half, at the parlour door (Obadiah still holding his hand) with all the majesty of mud. (II.x.107)

Here the element of mock-heroic is very clear. From the textual references to Hamlet Sterne develops his picture away from the facts of the play to suggest a comparison with a murdered king carrying the signs of his wounds. The 'stains and blotches', while a possible reference to King Hamlet's 'imperfections' suggest to me the stains of blood ('majesty of mud' sounds as though it should be an allusion to 'majesty of blood', but I am unaware of a source for this). The point is, of course, that not only was Slop's fall undignified and inglorious but he was not really hurt by it at all, and instead of the blood of a hero he has the mud of a buffoon. The final touch, and perhaps the most brilliant, is the vision of this mock-hero, covered in mud, holding hands with Obadiah.

Dr Slop is continually caught in ridiculous positions, and much more the subject of farce than any of the other characters. Apart from being made to cut his thumb he is caught at the end of the Ernulphus episode:

Dr. Slop drew up his mouth, and was just beginning to return my uncle Toby the compliment of his Whu--u--u--or interjectional whistle,--when the door hastily opening in the next chapter but one--put an end to the affair. (III.xi.179)

So the doctor is frozen in the attitude of a whistler without making a sound and he is, moreover, kept in that attitude all through the next chapter. He is similarly unfortunate

when he tries to triumph over Toby by producing his forceps from his bag:

Dr. Slop fumbled so vilely in pulling them out, it took off the whole effect, and what was a ten times worse evil (for they seldom come along in this life) in pulling out his forceps, his forceps unfortunately drew out the squirt along with it. (III.xv.186)

It is perhaps slightly surprising that Sterne gives up the opportunity to describe more minutely Slop's fumbling; he chooses rather to take the direct route of comment, thus enabling himself to use the ambiguous word 'vilely'. But the language does enact the next catastrophe, as we see first Slop's hand pulling out the forceps, and then the forceps (this being the force of the repeated word) pulling out the squirt in its turn. Also, Dr Slop (although he is not entirely alone in this) has some very peculiar gestures:

but this, continued he, lifting both hands, comes from the liberty of the press... (II.xvii.126)

Here the staginess and absurdity of the gesture comment on the absurdity of what he has to say. It is thus significant that he returns to the gesture to support his encomiums on the recent advances made in obstetrical science (II.xviii.144), when he is about to say that he cannot understand how the world has ever managed without them.

In these cases the gestures made by Dr Slop serve as a criticism of what he is saying, and his general physical suffering in the book is a mark of his position as satiric butt, representing, as he does, two of Sterne's enemy camps: the Roman Catholic church and the pedantry of the learned

professions. (He is also said to be modelled, in the first instance, on one of Sterne's local enemies.)¹³ But he is not the only character who gets himself into silly positions. Uncle Toby can be found, 'throwing himself back in his arm-chair, and lifting up his hands, his eyes, and one leg' (I. xxi.69), and both Walter and Trim are subjected to long analyses when they get themselves into awkward positions.

Walter and Trim are orators, although Tristram draws an important distinction between them:

My father--a man of deep reading--prompt memory--with Cato, and Seneca, and Epictetus, at his fingers ends.--

The corporal--with nothing--to remember--of no deeper reading than his muster-roll--or greater names at his finger's end, than the contents of it.

The one proceeding from period to period, by metaphor and allusion, and striking the fancy as he went along, (as men of wit and fancy do) with the entertainment and pleasantries of his pictures and images.

The other, without wit or antithesis, or point, or turn, this way or that; but leaving the images on one side, and the pictures on the other, going straight forwards as nature could lead him, to the heart. (V.vi.359)

It is perhaps with this distinction in the command of language in mind that Sterne provides almost no visual effects during Walter's harangue on death, but makes the dropping of the hat the centre point of Trim's speech. Trim's lack of verbal felicity throws him on the mercy of gesture and, indeed, it serves him very well. And we may also notice in this connection

¹³ See Work's note, Tristram Shandy, p.104; cf. Arthur H. Cash, 'The birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr Burton', in Studies in the Eighteenth Century: papers presented at the David Nichol Smith Memorial Seminar, Canberra, 1966, ed R.F.Brissenden, Canberra, 1968, pp.133-54.

that Tristram tells us that it is Trim who goes 'strait forwards as nature could lead him, to the heart'. Those two important words, 'nature' and 'heart', show a very clear preference on Tristram's part, and reflect his prejudices against learning and cleverness in contrast to simplicity.

But both Trim and Walter have their ideas of the stance required for true oratory, and in both cases the result is stiffness and awkwardness. Trim's great moment is the reading of the sermon. Tristram gives us an elaborate description of the way he stands,

otherwise he will naturally stand represented, by your imagination, in an uneasy posture,--stiff,--perpendicular,--dividing the weight of his body equally upon both legs;--his eye fix'd, as if on duty;--his look determin'd,--clenching the sermon in his left-hand, like his firelock:--In a word, you would be apt to paint Trim, as if he was standing in his platoon ready for action:--His attitude was as unlike all this as you can conceive. (II.xvii.120-22)

Having described how he does not stand Tristram goes on to say how he does:

He stood before them with his body swayed, and bent forwards just so far, as to make an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon;--which sound orators, to whom I address this, know very well, to be the true persuasive angle of incidence...

The necessity of this precise angle of 85 degrees and a half to a mathematical exactness,---does it not shew us, by the way,---how the arts and sciences mutually befriend each other?...

He stood,---for I repeat it, to take the picture of him in at one view, with his body sway'd, and somewhat bent forwards,--his right-leg firm under him, sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight,--the foot of his left-leg, the defect of which was no disadvantage to his attitude, advanced a little,--not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line betwixt them;--his knee bent, but that not violently,--but so as to fall within

the limits of the line of beauty;--and I add, of the line of science too;--for consider, it had one eighth part of his body to bear up;--so that in this case the position of the leg is determined,--because the foot could be no further advanced, or the knee more bent, than what would allow him mechanically, to receive an eighth part of his whole weight under it,---and to carry it too...

So much for Corporal Trim's body and legs.---He held the sermon loosely,---not carelessly, in his left-hand, raised something above his stomach, and detach'd a little from his breast;---his right-arm falling negligently by his side, as nature and the laws of gravity ordered it,---but with the palm of it open and turned towards his audience, ready to aid the sentiment, in case it stood in need.

Corporal Trim's eyes and the muscles of his face were in full harmony with the other parts of him; --he look'd frank,--unconstrained,--something assured,--but not bordering upon assurance. (II.xvii.122-3)

To start with the actual attitude: it is, of course, nonsense. A glance at Hogarth's illustration of the scene,¹⁴ or a personal attempt by the reader to carry out Sterne's instructions should be sufficient to tell us that he is not wholly serious at this point. The left foot splayed out, and the body leaning forward are positions that would be very difficult to sustain for any length of time, and they certainly must result in just that stiffness, that 'uneasy posture', which Tristram is pretending to assure us Trim has avoided. Similarly, holding the hand facing to the front entails twisting the arm round, and even allowing for Trim's lame leg the right one will get very tired of bearing seven-eighths of the weight of his body during the whole length of the sermon reading. Furthermore, William J. Farrell has shown that the

¹⁴ From the second edition of Volume II of Tristram Shandy; reproduced in Work's edition, p.121.

instructions run contrary to those given in the well-known oratory books and rhetoric manuals: the speaker should never lean forward, the palm of the hand should not face the audience, and so on.¹⁵ So that Trim conforms neither to Tristram's ideal of ease and naturalness nor to the older rules of the rhetoricians. Presumably the posture represents Trim's own idea of a true rhetorical stance. When he hears of Bobby's death he 'instantly' falls into the same posture (V.vii.361), and on another occasion we are given a reason for taking up a similarly artificial, though not quite so absurd, stance:

so giving a stout hem! to rally back the retreating spirits, and aiding Nature at the same time with his left arm a-kimbo on one side, and with his right a little extended, supporting her on the other... (IX.vi.607)

Trim is clearly aware of the value of a good attitude, and we may presume that his sermon-reading pose is quite conscious and supposed by him to be 'the true persuasive angle of incidence' that Tristram claims it is.

But the position itself is not all there is to this description. The language of the description readily reveals itself as a parody of the over-formal, rule-conscious approach of the false critics Tristram satirizes elsewhere: 'an angle of 85 degrees and a half upon the plain of the horizon', 'sustaining seven-eighths of his whole weight',

¹⁵ William J. Farrell, 'Nature versus Art as a comic pattern in Tristram Shandy', ELH XXX (1963), pp.16-35.

'not laterally, nor forwards, but in a line betwixt them', 'his knee bent, but that not violently', 'loosely,---not carelessly'--this pedantry has its fine climax at the end of the passage:

something assured,--but not bordering upon assurance. This is just the kind of nonsense that Tristram enjoys playing with, and it is clearly quite opposed in its self-consciousness and insistence on exactitude to any concept of 'ease' and 'nature'. According to Farrell the rhetoric manuals Sterne was satirizing were out of date, the new movement in oratory, as in acting and painting, being towards naturalness and freedom.¹⁶ But then, most of Sterne's intellectual targets had passed their hey-day; and it is difficult to believe that the dull and the formal were any less prevalent in the 1760s than they have been at all times before and since, even if the neoclassical vogue for rules was past its peak.

Awkwardness is a prime source of the comedy of gesture, as when Walter is ~~caught~~ trying to take his handkerchief out of his right-hand coat pocket with his left hand. This is one of those events (if they can be called that) in Tristram Shandy which everyone remembers, yet in fact it is not the occasion for a very lengthy or minute description:

¹⁶ Cf. R.F.Brissenden, 'Sterne and painting', in Of Books and Humankind, ed John Butt, London, 1964, pp.93-108, especially for Sterne's relationship with the theories of Hogarth.

...replied my father, taking his wig from off his head with his right hand, and with his left pulling out a striped India handkerchief from his right coat pocket, in order to rub his head (III.ii.158)

The position is finely caught by Tristram, and arguably one of his funniest, but it stands out because he stops to comment on it:

--Now, in this I think my father was much to blame; and I will give you my reasons for it...

and he goes on to make several pages of digression out of it, including generalizations about circumstances, a potential digression for uncle Toby, an example of Toby's good-nature, and, by the use of the imagery of the coat and its lining, a digression on stoicism and the way the reviewers treated Tristram (or, rather, the way they treated Sterne on the publication of his Sermons¹⁷). He does return to Walter's posture in discussing, at some length, what his father should have done:

instead of taking off his wig with it, as he did, he ought to have committed that entirely to the left; and then, when the natural exigency my father was under of rubbing his head, call'd out for his handkerchief, he would have had nothing in the world to have done, but to have put his right hand into his right coat pocket and taken it out...

In this case, (unless indeed, my father had been resolved to make a fool of himself by holding the wig stiff in his left hand--or by making some nonsensical angle or other at his elbow joint, or arm-pit)--his whole attitude had been easy--natural--unforced: Reynolds himself, as great and gracefully as he paints, might have painted him as he sat.
(III.ii.159)

Here the comedy lies less in Walter's position than in the way that Tristram goes on about it in great detail. But

¹⁷ See Work's note, Tristram Shandy, p.161.

notice again the key words, 'easy' and 'natural', and in this instance 'unforced'. Despite our tendency to think of Reynolds as an academician, a rule maker, he was known in his time for introducing less artificial poses, less formality, into portrait painting,¹⁸ and it has recently been claimed that there is a marked discrepancy in this direction between his lectures and his practice, particularly that of his earlier days.¹⁹

In contrasting Walter and Trim I suggested that Trim, having less command of rhetorical language, was more in need of suitable gestures. But Walter also has his rhetorical gestures. Some of these, if they seem exaggerated in the light of the theories he is defending, at least are fairly natural:

Would you, my dear Sir, he would say, laying his hand upon your breast, with the genteelest address,--and in that soft and irresistible piano of voice, which the nature of the argumentum ad hominem absolutely requires... (I.xix.51)

But Tristram's reference to the rhetorical term undercuts any idea that this may be a spontaneous gesture--or rather, if it is, it coincides with the stylized requirements of the rhetoric manuals. The Italian term 'piano' also suggests the appreciation of an art rather than the description of a natural movement. More typical, however, is Walter's stance

¹⁸ See Farrell, 'Nature versus Art'.

¹⁹ See Nicolaus Pevsner, 'Reynolds' Discourses', The Listener, 20th February 1969, pp.234-6.

when discoursing with Toby about Chance:

he got upon his legs, and in making the third turn across the room, he stopped short before my uncle Toby; and laying the three first fingers of his right-hand in the palm of his left, and stooping a little, he addressed himself to my uncle Toby as follows...

My father instantly exchanged the attitude he was in, for that in which Socrates is so finely painted by Raffael in his school of Athens; which your connoisseurship knows is so exquisitely imagined, that even the particular manner of the reasoning of Socrates is expressed by it--for he holds the fore-finger of his left-hand between the fore-finger and the thumb of his right, and seems as if he were saying to the libertine he is reclaiming---"You grant me this--and this: and this, and this, I don't ask of you--they follow of themselves in course."

So stood my father, holding fast his fore-finger betwixt his finger and his thumb, and reasoning with my uncle Toby as he sat in his old fringed chair, valanced around with party-coloured worsted bobs--O Garrick! what a rich scene of this would thy exquisite powers make!...

Will that set my child's nose on? cried my father, letting go his finger, and striking one hand against the other...

Now, my dear brother, said my father, replacing his fore-finger, as he was coming closer to the point...

(IV.vi-viii.277-9)

Walter's first attitude is, according to Farrell, a traditional pose for starting a line of argument, but the rhetoricians recommend one finger or two laid on the palm--Walter, who exaggerates everything, uses three. We are to remember that Tristram has claimed (I.xix.52) that Walter has had no training in oratory, although, of course, he has read widely in the practice if not the theory of it. Nevertheless, we are left to suppose that Walter naturally takes up poses which conform to the stylised mannerisms of rhetorical training. This produces the peculiar effect of natural artificiality. There is no need to assume that he is not conscious of the rhetorical effect of the position, merely that he comes by it

naturally. The comedy for Sterne's readers would lie in the fact that the positions he adopts, though traditional, had fallen out of favour by the middle of the eighteenth century. The stylisation thus appears ridiculous, as does any out of date fashion, and doubly so since it is the product of nature rather than learning, and even more exaggerated than the original style.

Walter takes up this stance to start his argument, but as soon as he has obtained Toby's leave to pursue it further he changes his attitude. This middle passage is the richest of all, full of complexities. From the way Tristram introduces the pose it would be natural to conclude that Walter has seen the painting of Socrates (who, we may remember, was one of his heroes and the subject of one of his many books). Tristram does not give us the attitude first and then tell us that it conforms to that painted by Raphael. He says that Walter exchanged his position 'for that in which Socrates is so finely painted by Raffael'. Put this way there can be little doubt that this is the way in which Walter himself thinks of the attitude. It clearly shows his self-consciousness about his oratory and it also brings into the description a measure against which to set the speaker. In another place Tristram says:

A dwarf who brings a standard along with him to
measure his own size--take my word, is a dwarf
in more articles than one. (IV.xxv.316)

Walter may perhaps assume that Toby will not recognise the

source of his position, but the reader does, for he is told, and the comparison no more helps our view of Walter as a philosopher than that with Hamlet's ghost encouraged us to see Slop as a hero. Walter's pretensions to fine oratory are continually undercut by the nonsense he has to argue, in this case his theory of names. Furthermore, although Tristram takes Raphael's painting as an illustration of the doctrine of expressive gesture, Walter's mode of reasoning on this occasion is hardly Socratic: he first asserts that misfortunes can be balanced, in our minds, by further efforts and claims that if his child had had a fortunate birth he would have been content with a medium kind of name; but following a great misfortune he must have a great name. It bears little relation to the complexities of Socratic irony, and he quite fails to convince uncle Toby. Walter's choice of Socrates for his model not only casts a shadow over his own philosophic powers, but is quite inappropriate.

But then we have to take into account the fact that Walter's model is not Socrates, but Raphael's picture of him. The pose is thus one remove from actuality, transmitted through a stylised art. Tristram caps this with a reference to Garrick who, as Farrell explains, was famed for driving rhetorical stylisation from the English stage. This explains the honoured position he holds with Tristram and Sterne, who favour 'ease' and 'nature', but makes him an inappropriate choice for comparison with Walter.

So we can see that Tristram's account of Walter's position contains several modes of commentary on that position, without making any direct statement. There is the deflation by comparison with the great, the implicit comparison between the 'meaning' of the gesture and Walter's actual speech, the conflict of the stylisation with his 'natural' gifts as an orator, and the placing of that stylisation by the allusion to Garrick. Walter holds a curious position in the scheme of values in the novel. He embodies many of the things that Tristram attacks: pedantry, obscurity, artifice,--but he is also something of a hero. He is ultimately good-natured and harmless, and when necessary he can produce that 'sentimental' sympathy which, for Sterne, is the moral touchstone. And because of these sympathetic qualities, and because as a major character he is treated from the inside and developed fully as a human being (unlike Dr Slop), his false ideas and attitudes become the source of rich comedy rather than severe satire.

One of the techniques Tristram uses here is that of implicit contradiction, in this case between attitude and rhetoric. It is a device which can be seen on other occasions, working in slightly different ways. Thus we find Trim, who is always presented as a model of respect, taking up his position to read the sermon:

...replied the Corporal, making a bow, and bespeaking attention with a slight movement of his right-hand. (II.xvi.120)

Here we see him making the gesture of respect and thus ac-

knowledging his inferior position as servant (the bow), but at the same time asserting his superior position as reader, commanding attention. 'Bespeaking' is the crucially determining term. More common than this running together of two contradictory gestures is a contradiction between the movement and the way it is described. Uncle Toby's amours are presented consistently in military terms, and so it is in one sense quite appropriate that when Toby and the corporal turn round and walk off from the widow's house Tristram should say:

In pronouncing this, my uncle Toby faced about, and march'd firmly as at the head of his company--and the faithful Corporal, shouldering his stick, and striking his hand upon his coat-skirt as he took his first step--march'd close behind him down the avenue. (IX.viii.610)

They have led up to this movement by winding their discussion round to the love of Honour, and Toby's belief that the profession of arms stems from the need to curtail ambition and defend the defenceless and thus from feelings of 'humanity and fellow-feeling' (ibid). Their marching off is primarily an example of the hobby-horse at work, the imagination triumphing over the facts of their situation. But we know that Toby is full of trepidation at the prospect of having to face the Widow Wadman, and in terms of their real situation the movement is no less than a retreat. The military imagery thus becomes highly ironic, though the result is comic rather than critical.

My final example is of a very curious image. It occurs during the reading of the sermon, when Trim is so affected

by the scenes depicting the Inquisition. This scene holds a typical Shandean balance between pathos and comedy: Trim's reaction is absurd in this situation, it is a grotesquely exaggerated reaction to the rhetoric of the sermon, but not to the actual situation described, and not to his brother's fate. In this context it is very interesting to find the following description:

Here Trim's face turned as pale as ashes...
 Here the tears began to trickle down...
 D--n them all, quoth Trim, his colour returning
 to his face as red as blood. (II.xvii.138)

We may feel that 'pale as ashes' is a rather tired comparison, not compatible with a really deeply felt situation, but when we come to 'red as blood' the distance from the situation is even greater. For the colour that returns to his face is blood, or at least is produced by it, and so the description becomes curiously tautologous--hardly a comparison at all, since one can't compare a thing with itself. This brief flash of wit confirms the feeling produced by the earlier cliché: that the narrator is maintaining some considerable distance between himself and the suffering corporal, and not exerting his rhetorical powers to make us feel all the agony which Trim is going through. This, in fact, correlates with the feeling one has from the rest of this episode that the comedy outweighs the sentiment considerably, and while the point about the Inquisition is not lost, and Trim's genuine distress is not scorned, the scene is primarily a humorous one.

Sterne is not a 'dramatic' novelist. He tends to 'tell' rather than 'show'²⁰--in fact he elevates the talkative narrator/guide to the point where he becomes one of the principal subjects of the novel--and Tristram Shandy is notoriously a novel where nothing happens. Yet the narrative language as I have shown can be complex and interesting. Sterne uses his close narrative focus to exploit the expressive potential of gestures and movements but he goes beyond that in using the language of his descriptions to enact or imitate the events he is describing, and at times to direct our evaluation of those events. In most cases the implicit commentary is used to point up the absurdity of the characters' positions. For just as the people in Sterne's world are largely incapable of rational discourse so their physical activities are usually slightly out of their control. Gesture may be expressive, but the effect is not often intentional. Through his attention to such details Sterne brings us closer to the everyday world of domestic life, but it is always life seen through the distortion of his comic vision.

²⁰ For these terms see Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction, especially chapter 1.

V: NARRATION AND LANGUAGE (II) -- The puzzled skein

When a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the reader's fancy. (VI.xxxiii.462)

Now this is the most puzzled skein of all. (VII.xxviii.515)

For the purposes of analysis and study it has been helpful to separate Tristram's digressive commentary from his story-telling proper, working on the assumption that the interest for the literary critic of any detail of language is controlled by its function in the novel. But one of the most striking features of Tristram Shandy is the way the whole discourse is woven into a seamless fabric. The reading experience is of a continuity in the novel which the abstract pattern of analysis falsifies. In my second chapter on Tristram's narration, therefore, I shall concentrate mainly on the links between the narration and the commentary, on the linguistic structures and techniques which Sterne deploys to bind together the different modes in which he operates. I hope that this will in some measure redress the falsification of the rigid separation adopted so far. I continue to use the term 'narration' to apply to those passages where Tristram is telling us about the world of Shandy Hall, its people, scenes and events, and the term 'commentary' to indicate the rest of his discourse, the

opinions, literary problems, moral generalizations and so on, although this procedure can sometimes result in a stretching of the two terms beyond their most obvious meanings.

The first part of this chapter will examine the relations between narration and commentary in Tristram Shandy generally. The second part will concentrate on Volume VII, Tristram's journey through France, where the relations become particularly complex and interesting, and which is thus least amenable to the approaches used in the earlier chapters of this thesis.

A. The integration of commentary and narration

The two modes, commentary and narration, are often separated quite clearly, as by paragraphing or chapter divisions; or Tristram openly announces a change in direction:

Will your worships give me leave to squeeze in a story between these two pages? (V.iii.351)

This will not be explained the worse, for setting off, as I generally do, at a little distance from the subject. (VI.xxiii.449)

Tristram is enabled to digress in this easy manner by the generally conversational nature of much of his narration.¹

¹ Cf. above, chapter 2, pp.53-66.

It is addressed directly to the reader as part of his endless flow of talk, and it seems quite natural that Tristram should not only describe the events of the novel but pass comment on them as well. The narrative is permeated with small comments and judgments:

...and so, without consulting further with any soul living, --which, by the bye, I think is right, when you are predetermined to take no one soul's advice, ---he privately ordered Trim, his man, to pack up a bundle... (II.v.93)

Tristram is continually concerned to relate the story he is telling to the general affairs of human behaviour and he frequently introduces an incident with a generalization:

In the case of these knots then, and of the several obstructions, which, may it please your reverences, such knots cast in our way in getting through life ---every hasty man can whip out his penknife and cut through them.--'Tis wrong. Believe me, Sirs, the most virtuous way, and which both reason and conscience dictate--is to take our teeth or our fingers to them.--Dr. Slop had lost his teeth--his favourite instrument, by extracting in a wrong direction...--he tried his fingers--alas! the nails of his fingers and thumbs were cut close. (III.x.168)

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

Doctor Slop, like a son of a w---, as my father called him for it,--to exalt himself,--debased me to death,--and made ten thousand times more of Susannah's accident, than there was any grounds for. (VI.xiv.432-3)

At first sight it might appear that the generalization takes precedence over the event, but in fact we find that we are still following a continuing narrative of events, and the comment is integrated into its surroundings by its relevance to them.

The narrative is perhaps more frequently interrupted by Tristram's literary than by his moral concerns, if I may use the term 'literary' to cover both his preoccupation with the actual problems of writing and organizing, and his continual awareness of the difficulties of correctly interpreting and understanding the events he narrates. Throughout the book we find Tristram drawing attention to his methods:

I have dropp'd the curtain over this scene for a minute,--to remind you of one thing,--and to inform you of another (II.xix.144)

How my father went on, in my opinion, deserves a chapter to itself.-- (V.ii.350)

His awareness of the problems of interpretation often leads him to introduce his narrative material² by appeals or taunts directed at the reader:

The desire of life and health is implanted in man's nature;---the love of liberty and enlargement is a sister-passion to it: These my uncle Toby had in common with his species;---and either of them had been sufficient to account for his earnest desire to get well and out of doors;---but I have told you before that nothing wrought with our family after the common way;---and from the time and manner in which this eager desire shew'd itself in the present case, the penetrating reader will suspect there was some other cause or crotchet for it in my uncle Toby's head: ---There was so, and 'tis the subject of the next chapter to set forth what that cause and crotchet was. (II.iv.92)

This 'sentence' nicely indicates the kind of web which Tristram weaves from his material. In terms of grammatically distinct utterances there are four separate sentences here, the third of which has three quite distinct parts. But I

² I am treating the revelation of motives and analysis of thoughts as properly belonging to the narrated world of the novel though they may often appear digressive.

have suggested before that Tristram's punctuation should be recognised as an intentional way of dislocating the normal imposition of grammatical boundaries.³ He weaves the various units together and slides us from one to the next with the ease of a practised illusionist. The two opening statements here are couched in general terms about human nature: I mentioned above that it is common for Tristram to begin a statement about his family in this general way. He then goes on to relate his general statement to uncle Toby in particular: Toby is the subject of the chapter and so we feel ourselves back on course when he thus becomes the subject of the sentence. But the inversion of normal word order has placed the subjects of the preceding clauses (here represented by the pronoun 'these') at the beginning of the clause-- that is, in an emphatic position which diminishes the importance of the grammatical subject:

These my uncle Toby had in common...

and so they easily resume the status of subject when the sentence goes on again:

either of them had been sufficient...

But this new clause has a new implication. The verbal group, 'sufficient to account for' suggests that a need is felt to 'account for' Toby's behaviour: by implication, Tristram now has his eye not on general tendencies of 'man's nature' nor on uncle Toby but on the enquiring reader who is trying

³ See above, chapter 2, pp.86-8.

to make sense of what he has been told. Thus it is not surprising when in the next clause Tristram turns and says, 'but I have told you before', and goes on to present the 'penetrating reader' who 'will suspect there was some other cause'. Quite early on he had prepared us for the final conclusion by the use of the conditional tense: 'had been sufficient'; and he finally resolves the suspense and confusion with a terse statement: 'There was so'. But he goes on to defer further the information till the next chapter.

The intricacies of this passage show the inadequacy of such crude terms as 'commentary' and 'narration'. The narration is continuing: we are learning about uncle Toby, if only in primarily negative terms. But the majority of this paragraph is concerned with the processes of 'accounting for' behaviour, assessing evidence, and so on. On these grounds it belongs with many of Tristram's longer digressions (we are within the long digression which explains Toby's character before allowing him to ring the bell), with his continuing commentary on the actions of his characters and the literary problems they raise. I have left out of my quotation the last sentence in the paragraph which moves right away from the immediate subject of the chapter to remind us of the larger structure within which we are operating:

I own, when that's done, 'twill be time to return back to the parlour fire-side, where we left my uncle Toby in the middle of his sentence. (ibid)

This sentence, too, is wound into the general texture. The pronoun 'that' refers back to the previous clause, describing the next chapter. In a similar way, looking back at the main part of the paragraph, we find that the two opening clauses are collected together in the third to become the pronoun 'these' and in the next referred to as 'either of them'. 'His earnest desire to get well and out of doors' becomes later 'this eager desire'. The suspicion, 'there was some other cause or crotchet for it in my uncle Toby's head' is ratified by Tristram's, 'There was so', and the words are picked up again in 'that cause and crotchet'.

All these are quite normal examples of kinds of cohesion that work over and above the co-ordination and sub-ordination of clauses to bind together the elements of discourse, but they take on special significance when we are examining what I have called the 'seamless fabric' of Sterne's novel. Unobtrusively these forms tie together sentences and clauses which we may separate as being 'narrative' or 'commentatorial', and they ease the transitions Tristram is so frequently making. The concept of 'cohesion' has been developed by M.A.K. Halliday, who has listed the forms it usually takes in English.⁴ They can all be found quite frequently in Tristram Shandy

⁴ 'The linguistic study of literary texts' in Proceedings of the Ninth International Congress of Linguists, Cambridge, Mass., August 27-31, 1962, ed Horace G. Lunt (London, The Hague & Paris, 1964), pp.302-7; reprinted with revisions as 'Descriptive linguistics in literary studies' in Patterns of Language, by Angus McIntosh and M.A.K. Halliday, pp.56-69.

effecting the kind of transition that concerns me here. Halliday divides his subject first into Grammatical and Lexical, and within the Grammatical group he distinguishes 'structural cohesion'--the co-ordination and sub-ordination of clauses--from 'non-structural', and it is the latter I wish to illustrate. Pronouns and deictics (i.e., this, that, the) are often used to refer back to something already mentioned. For example, there is the relative pronoun 'which':

But there is a fatality attends the actions of some men...
Of the truth of which this gentleman was a painful example. (I.x.23)

The relative pronoun here refers back to the whole generalization, binding the two paragraphs together. The pronoun 'these' can perform the same function:

There are a thousand resolutions, Sir, both in church and state...

Of the number of these was my father's resolution of putting me into breeches. (VI.xvi.434)

Or the deictic 'this':

In all disputes ... the safest way in general to take off the force of the wish, is, for the party wished at, instantly to get up upon his legs--and wish the wisher something in return...

Dr. Slop did not understand the nature of this defence. (III.i.157)

In these latter two examples the cohesion is being used to facilitate marked shifts in tone: from great affairs to small ones in the first case and from a whimsical apparent digression back to a narrative situation in the second.

In another place Sterne uses the device to bring the philosopher Locke into relation with his father and uncle by the fireside:

Had the same great reasoner looked on, as my father illustrated his systems of noses... (III.xl.238)

The chapter as a whole again works to produce one of Sterne's complex effects of bathos through juxtaposition.

Lexical cohesion, in Halliday's terms, occurs where a word is repeated: or even where an item from the same lexical set as an earlier word is used. Often, of course, such repetitions are inherent in the subject in a way that makes the measurement of cohesion quite uninteresting. But one particularly Shandean example is worth quoting:

Now consider, sir, what nonsense it is, either in fighting, or writing, or any thing else (whether in rhyme to it, or not) which a man has occasion to do --to act by plan: for if ever Plan, independent of all circumstances, deserved registering in letters of gold (I mean in the archives of Gotham)--it was certainly the PLAN of Mrs. Wadman's attack of my uncle Toby in his sentry-box, BY PLAN--Now the Plan hanging up in it... (VIII.xxiii.575)

Here the repetition of a word carries the shift from general comment to specific narrative situation, and then further play is made with shifts in the meaning of the word: 'by plan' refers both to acting according to a plan and to making use of a physical plan, and Tristram dodges bewilderingly from one sense to another, referring the whole passage out to his general assertion of the value of spontaneity and improvisation.

The linguistic concept of cohesion, then, is particularly useful for analysing Sterne's characteristic manoeuvres. He is continually concerned with binding together the rambling

parts of his discourse. Something like the same process only working on a larger scale takes place when an apparent digression turns out to be quite an integral part of the narrative. In telling us of his father's slow progress with the Tristrapaedia Tristram introduces a comparison with John de la Casse:

My father gave himself up to it, however, with the most painful diligence, proceeding step by step in every line, with the same kind of caution and circumspection (though I cannot say upon quite so religious a principle) as was used by John de la Casse, the lord archbishop of Benevento, in compassing his Galateo; in which his Grace of Benevento spent near forty years of his life; and when the thing came out, it was not of above half the size or the thickness of a Rider's Almanack.--How the holy man managed the affair, unless he spent the greatest part of his time in combing his whiskers, or playing at primero with his chaplain,--would pose any mortal not let into the true secret; --and therefore 'tis worth explaining to the world, was it only for the encouragement of those few in it, who write not so much to be fed--as to be famous.
(V.xvi.373)

Tristram then launches into a longish paragraph giving the details of this matter, having first prefixed it with a further insistence that it is the intrinsic value of the incident that justifies its inclusion, for he says that if the archbishop had been slow and stupid, 'the phaenomenon had not been worth a parenthesis'. This would appear then to be one of those cases where Tristram has been distracted by something interesting and amusing in a small part of his secondary material and so turns aside to explore it, letting the narrative stand still until he is ready to return to it. But when we get to the end of the paragraph we find the following return to the story:

My father was hugely pleased with this theory of John de la Casse, archbishop of Benevento; and (had it not cramped him a little in his creed) I believe would have given ten of the best acres in the Shandy estate, to have been the broacher of it. (V.xvi.374)

So we find that instead of being totally extrinsic to the narrative and expounded for its own sake the theory was known to Walter Shandy and used by him as an explanation: 'he took up with the allegory of it', and the techniques of cohesion are extended beyond the initial use of the anaphoric deictic 'this' to a reworking of some of the details of the previous paragraph to fit Walter's allegory.

In this example, then, an apparent digression (treated in a separate paragraph and introduced as of intrinsic merit) is worked back into the story, and the line between narration and commentary is further blurred. A similar effect earlier in the book is also worth mentioning. Tristram, having introduced Dr Slop, asks the reader to fill in for himself some of the narrative details. This is in itself one of the mixed modes of narrative that Tristram delights in and that facilitate his slipping in and out of different kinds of discourse. Here he uses it for dramatic effect, by building up the action and then interrupting it with one of his most distinctive ways of breaking up the narrative line, the apostrophe:

let him imagine the doctor wash'd,--rubb'd down,--condoled with,--felicitated,--got into a pair of Obadiah's pumps, stepping forwards towards the door, upon the very point of entring upon action.

Truce!--truce, good Dr. Slop!--stay thy obstetric hand;--return it safe into thy bosom to keep it warm;

--little dost thou know what obstacles;--little dost thou think what hidden causes retard its operation! --Hast thou, Dr. Slop,--hast thou been intrusted with the secret articles of this solemn treaty which has brought thee into this place?--Art thou aware that, at this instant, a daughter of Lucina is put obstetrically over thy head? Alas! 'tis too true.--(II.xi.109)

So far this apostrophe is rather like that to uncle Toby (II.iii.90) in that its relation to the actual narrative is tenuous. In fact it becomes clear in Toby's case that he actually did stop his researches into ballistics at the point at which Tristram implores him to (see II.iv.91), so we may read the apostrophe as an elaborate way of conveying narrative information as well as the narrator's emotion, although Tristram obviously finds it necessary to support it with straight narrative to make himself clear. (We may even read the apostrophe as marking the author's decision not to allow his character to pursue the subject further: but such thoughts take us into regions of fictional theory beyond the scope of this chapter.) In the case of Dr Slop the apostrophe carries information but it is information the reader already possesses. It could be Tristram's way of relating to us the moment when Slop finds out about the midwife, but in fact that moment occurs much later (II.xviii.143), and so any narrative material this first part of the apostrophe carries is at best highly indirect. In other words, it is a digression, moving away from the telling of the story to Tristram's emotions during writing it. But the apostrophe goes on:

Besides, great son of Pilumnus! what canst thou do? --Thou hast come forth unarm'd;--thou hast left thy tire tête,---thy new-invented forceps,--thy crotchet, --thy squirt, and all thy instruments of salvation

and deliverance behind thee.--By heaven! at this moment they are hanging up in a green bays bag, betwixt thy two pistols, at thy bed's head!-- Ring;--call;--send Obadiah back upon the coach-horse to bring them with all speed. (ibid)

Here, although the mock-rhetoric of the apostrophe may appear to be the same as in the previous part, a subtle change takes place. The content changes from that which Slop does not know--and which cannot influence the action until he does--to something which at least he can know; and it becomes increasingly apparent that what we are being given through the vocative style is Slop's own realization of what he has done. 'By heaven!' could easily be the exclamation marking the character's own discovery, and the resulting fusion of author's voice and character's thought could be described as a variety of free indirect speech. So the apostrophe changes from rhetorical questions to commands which can be converted into action ('Ring;--call'), and the digressive style thus shifts back into narrative. The movement is given final clarification by the new paragraph, which shifts into normal dialogue form:

--Make great haste, Obadiah, quoth my father, and I'll give thee a crown;--and, quoth my uncle Toby, I'll give him another. (II.xi.110)

Uncle Toby's repetition of the syntactical formula provides a satisfying cadence to bring the chapter to an end.

This example is like the previous one in that an apparently digressive structure turns back into a narrative one. But this passage goes beyond the other in that it blurs the

distinction we usually make between the narrator and his characters. Tristram behaves as though he can talk directly to Dr Slop, and even intervene in the events, although they happened some forty years before he is writing. (We can also see the apostrophe as the outburst of an author regaining control over the movements of his characters after having handed them over to the imaginations of his readers.) It is one of Tristram's literary jokes with a serious application to our understanding of the nature of fictions. When he comes to describe his journey through France, in Volume VII, such confusions of levels of literary reality become more frequent and the interweaving of the narrative (of the adult, commenting Tristram) with the commentary (of the same character) becomes more complex and extravagant.

B. The narrator as character

In Volume VII of Tristram Shandy the journey images which Tristram has been using to characterize his progress⁵ take on three-dimensional existence as Tristram sets off on his flight from Death--a flight both literal and metaphorical. He himself now becomes the centre of his story for the first time in the novel: the technique changes from third- to first-person narrative. But perhaps more importantly the

⁵ See above, chapter 2, pp.47-50.

time-scheme changes so that the events Tristram is describing are now in the immediate rather than the distant past; and so whereas elsewhere in the novel there are two plots--the story of the Shandy family and the story of Tristram trying to write his book--they here coalesce into one. As Tristram goes along he is writing his 'remarks', and he describes himself as one of those who 'for more expedition than the rest, have wrote-galloping' (VII.iv.482). Although we are now concerned with Tristram as a character in his own right, then, he is a special kind of character, and the events of the journey are largely mental events: he travels as a writer looking for material, and a large part of the narration conveys his comment-making activities.

These new conditions provide Tristram with scope for new experiments with narrative technique and new ways of playing with our fixed notions of reality. His use of the dramatic present, which elsewhere can only operate through the digressions in his dialogue with the reader,⁶ is here given wider scope, and he can develop his use of sound effects and broken sentences to the full:

Crack, crack--crack, crack--crack, crack--so this is Paris! quoth I (continuing in the same mood)--and this is Paris!--humph!--Paris! cried I, repeating the name the third time--

The first, the finest, the most brilliant--

---The streets however are nasty;

But it looks, I suppose, better than it smells--
crack, crack--crack, crack--What a fuss thou makest!

⁶ Cf. above, chapter 2, pp.53-5.

--as if it concern'd the good people to be inform'd,
That a man with pale face, and clad in black, had
the honour to be driven into Paris at nine o'clock
at night, by a postilion in a tawny yellow jerkin
turned up with red calamanco--crack, crack--crack,
crack--crack, crack--I wish thy whip--
--But 'tis the spirit of thy nation; so crack--crack
on.

Ha!--and no one gives the wall!--but in the SCHOOL
of URBANITY herself, if the walls are besh-t--how can
you do otherwise?

And prithee when do they light the lamps? What?
--never in the summer months!--Ho! 'tis the time of
sallads,--O rare! sallad and soup--soup and sallad
--sallad and soup, encore--

--'Tis too much for sinners. (VII.xvii.498-9)

Sterne comes as close here as he ever does to the techniques of modern 'stream of consciousness' novelists. This is surely an interior monologue, with its structure of subjects ordered by sense impressions. But comparison with any section of Ulysses will show that Sterne has not created for his character the rich inner life of memory and the creative interpretation of external details that we associate with the modern novel. Tristram's eye is fixed firmly on the outside world, and his reflections on what he sees and hears remain focussed on their subjects. Sterne is working with a descriptive technique, not a method of revealing character. Thus it is that we get the rather awkward attempt at conveying an external view of Tristram's entry as well as his impressions of the environment, working through a negative statement: 'as if it concern'd the good people to be inform'd...' The proliferation of details giving not only Tristram's appearance but that of his postilion as well goes beyond what we could reasonably expect to pass through Tristram's mind at this point: the language

is governed by what the writer wants his readers to know, not by plausibility of thought-patterns. Similarly, information is gathered into the monologue through the 'telephone' style of asking a question and repeating the answer: a later writer, more sure of his technique, would move easily in and out of dialogue proper.

I am not trying to criticize Sterne's performance here, but rather to draw attention to exactly what he is doing. The narrative is operating from within Tristram's mind, but always to convey external information. What the technique provides is a way of fusing narrative (the entry into Paris and the description of it) with commentary (the judgments and satirical remarks passed on what is seen) through the agency of character (both taking place in Tristram's consciousness). By contrast, the earlier venture in dramatic technique, the Channel crossing, is largely a virtuoso piece of impressionistic writing, striving to convey the movement of the boat and the disturbance to brain and stomach:

I am sick as a horse, quoth I, already--what a brain!
 --upside down!--hey dey! the cells are broke loose
 one into another, and the blood, and the lymph, and
 the nervous juices, with the fix'd and volatile salts,
 are all jumbled into one mass--good g-! every thing
 turns round in it like a thousand whirlpools--I'd
 give a shilling to know if I shan't write the clearer
 for it--

Sick! sick! sick! sick!--
 --When shall we get to land? captain--they have
 hearts like stones--O I am deadly sick!--reach me
 that thing, boy--'tis the most discomfiting sickness
 --I wish I was at the bottom-- (VII.ii.481)

The choppy rhythm imitates the movement of the boat, and the

speaker's loss of control is evident. The various thoughts that arise are punctuated with a return to the key word, 'sick'. It is interesting to notice that as in the previously quoted case Tristram begins by putting his speech or thoughts (the distinction is not important here) into the past with a 'quoth I' and then just leaves out the attribution so that we gradually move into the dramatic present. The fact that he doesn't use speech marks but only the ambiguous dash helps in this process, so that he is able to introduce a second voice into the paragraph without destroying the effect but rather adding to the general mêlée:

Madam! how is it with you? Undone! undone! un--O!
undone! sir--What the first time?--No, 'tis the
second, third, sixth, tenth time, sir;--hey-day--
what a trampling over head!--hollo! cabin boy!
what's the matter--(ibid)

It seems to me that the innuendo here is less interesting than the creation of a vivid scene through dramatic speech.

Dramatic narrative, then, is one way in which Tristram presents his material. He doesn't use it frequently: it would almost certainly pall quite rapidly. But the first-person present-tense situation has other effects. The most interesting ones concern the status of Tristram's commentary. I mentioned in the first part of this chapter that in other parts of the book the general comment is often placed first and sometimes appears to control the structure of a chapter which is (or 'ought' to be) primarily concerned with telling a story. When the commentator is the subject of his own

story, and when the places he is travelling through and travelling itself are the subjects of his commentary, the lines become even more blurred. The best example of Tristram's technique here is in chapter eight, which begins with the following paragraph:

When the precipitancy of a man's wishes hurries on his ideas ninety times faster than the vehicle he rides in--woe be to truth! and woe be to the vehicle and its tackling (let 'em be made of what stuff you will) upon which he breathes forth the disappointment of his soul! (VII.viii.488)

The thought is not only couched in general terms ('a man') but it has a faint aura of metaphoricalness about it--it almost seems that Tristram might not be referring to an actual travelling situation at all, but to mental processes. This aura is created by the pressure of other passages in the novel, the beginnings of other chapters, other metaphorical uses of some of the terms. But the metaphorical reference, if intended at all, is not clear, and the next paragraph takes a firmly literal view, although it opens in a similar tone of moral generalisation:

As I never give general characters either of men or things in choler, "the most haste the worst speed;" was all the reflection I made upon the affair, the first time it happen'd;--

We are suddenly confronted with the term, 'the affair', and left to puzzle out which affair it refers to. The general exclamation of the first paragraph can hardly be turned into an 'affair', and so we are pushed on through the text, searching for an answer, carrying with us a general sense of a subject related to the terms, 'precipitancy', 'hurries', 'haste', 'speed', for these are the words that unite what we have been

given so far. We are also directed forwards by the phrase, 'the first time it happened': it implies further occurrences, as well as planting us definitely back in the narrative mode.

--the second, third, fourth, and fifth time, I confined it respectively to those times, and accordingly blamed only the second, third, fourth, and fifth post-boy for it, without carrying my reflections further;

We still don't know what 'it' is precisely, but we have been given the post-boy as a further clarification of the narrative situation. The sentence now pushes on towards a final statement of its subject:

but the event continuing to befall me from the fifth, to the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth time, and without one exception, I then could not avoid making a national reflection of it, which I do in these words;

That something is always wrong in a French post-chaise upon first setting out.

We realize now that the paragraph is in fact about the process of making a generalization, and Tristram has kept back from us the formulation of the subject until he himself made it, for he was resisting making it until it became unavoidable. And even now its truth-status is in question: the formulation is not final:

Or the proposition may stand thus.

A French postilion has always to alight before he has got three hundred yards out of town.

In this recasting the attention shifts from the chaise to the postilion, and from the objective fact (something wrong) to personal action: there may be nothing wrong but the postilion behaves as though there is.

So far, then, we have been given further information about Tristram's journey, some of his reactions to events on his journey, and also his thoughts about how one should react. The opening generalization slips into place as part of this last aspect of the subject. But the chapter goes on. The next paragraph is a short dramatic narrative:

What's wrong now?--Diable!--a rope's broke!--a knot has slipt!--a staple's drawn!--a bolt's to whittle!--a tag, a rag, a jag, a strap, a buckle, or a buckle's tongue, want altering.---

A technique that we would normally associate with a specific occasion has been pressed into the service of the many occasions Tristram has already told us about, and what looked at first sight like a dialogue turns out to be a list of the various things that have gone wrong. The specific presentation of multiple examples is one of Sterne's special techniques, as when he presents a speech of his father's in direct reporting but gives it representative status: 'my father would say'. In the present case the phrases and words are clearly arranged for their rhythmic potential as much as anything, working up to a fine climax with 'a buckle, or a buckle's tongue'. Then Tristram withdraws again to his reflections:

Now true as all this is, I never think myself impower'd to excommunicate thereupon either the post-chaise, or its driver--nor do I take it into my head to swear by the living G-, I would rather go a foot ten thousand times--or that I will be damn'd if ever I get into another--but I take the matter coolly before me, and consider, that some tag, or rag, or jag, or bolt, or buckle, or buckle's tongue, will ever be a wanting, or want altering, travel where I will--so I never chaff, but take the good and the bad as they fall in my road, and get on:

The moral point which Tristram wants to make is now becoming clear (the episode is part of his attack on the Smollett-type traveller which he develops more fully in A Sentimental Journey),⁷ and again we feel the relevance of the opening generalization which presides over the chapter--and also a return to the possibilities of metaphorical application of the situation, this time much more strongly and clearly, in 'the good and the bad as they fall in my road'. Tristram has taken the climactic list of irritations which was presented dramatically and rewrites it (with sufficient alteration to avoid over-formality of patterning), incorporating it into his sentence away from the dashes and the exclamation marks and thus transforming the rhythm into something much gentler and demonstrating the philosophical acceptance he is preaching. It is necessary to the demonstration that he should go fully through the list again, avoiding any signs of impatience. Thus where before the sentence ended with 'want altering' the verbal group has now been extended to 'will ever be a wanting, or want altering', in which the way the rhythm balances around the comma enacts the balancing of one factor against another that informs Tristram's patience. We are still being told about Tristram's journey, but at a level of abstraction and generalization which unites narration and comment--or perhaps interpretation would be a better term than comment here.

⁷ See Ian Jack, 'Introduction' to A Sentimental Journey, London, 1968, p.xiii.

The final moves in the chapter are to shift first to a specific instance and then to relate it to an actual stage on the journey. The first shift is achieved through verbal substitution, a sleight of hand which takes a phrase from a general remark and transfers it to a specific situation:

so I never chaff, but take the good and the bad as they fall in my road, and get on:--Do so, my lad! said I; he had lost five minutes already, in alighting in order to get at a luncheon of black bread which he had cramm'd into the chaise-pocket, and was remounted and going leisurely on, to relish it the better--Get on, my lad, said I, briskly... and so, as he finish'd the last mouthful of it, we enter'd the town of Montreuil (p.489)

So ends the chapter, back on course, finding its place in the journey, and, we now see, having used a specific stage of the route which illustrated the general point about French postilions as a base for general comment and multiple description. The transition from the general to the specific is shrouded in an ambiguity typical of Sterne. 'Do so' is a substitution for 'get on', but when Tristram returns to it and says 'Get on, my lad', we cannot be sure whether Tristram the character has spoken twice or Tristram the narrator has repeated himself (as he often does after an interruption). If the latter is the case, then the substitution which works the transition is a purely authorial technique, imposed afterwards. But if the character spoke twice, then we are being presented with one of those confusing Shandean moments when two different levels of discourse coalesce. It is something which happens on several occasions in this volume.

Chapter thirteen is rather like the one I have just examined in that it consists largely of Tristram's thoughts cast in general terms and interrupted with a dramatic interlude. But the transition at the end is effected not merely by the relatively simple case of a shift from Tristram the commentator to Tristram the character, with its surrounding aura of ambiguity, but by shifting the passage the reader has been taking as written commentary into the realm of dialogue, where the response of another character gives objective verification of the change of mode:

I love the Pythagoreans ... for their ... "getting out of the body, in order to think well." No man thinks right whilst he is in it; blinded as he must be, with his congenial humours, and drawn differently aside, as the bishop and myself have been, with too lax or too tense a fibre--REASON is, half of it, SENSE; and the measure of heaven itself is but the measure of our present appetites and concoctions--

--But which of the two, in the present case, do you think to be mostly in the wrong?

You, certainly: quoth she, to disturb a whole family so early. (VII.xiii.493-4)

There is comedy in the misunderstanding of Tristram's question (as in the similar passage in chapter seven with his apostrophe to Nature), but this is minor next to the shock of discovering that the discourse is now, or always has been, spoken aloud by Tristram at the inn. We had taken the 'you' in his question to be directed at the reader, but the landlady has taken it as directed at her: we are never told which is the correct interpretation, but the fact that she hears and responds to the question means Tristram must be talking out loud. Perhaps he has been talking out loud for the whole chapter, or perhaps there is a final shift at the line break

marked by the dash. Either way I think the explanation of the confusion must lie in the fact that these are the thoughts that Tristram had at the time, and which he is now writing up for us as a commentary which plays around the central narrative.

Thus in chapter twelve Tristram, having arrived at Abbeville, gives us his opinion that he would rather die in an inn than at home surrounded by his friends, ending up:

but mark. This inn, should not be the inn at Abbeville--if there was not another inn in the universe, I would strike that inn out of the capitulation: so
 Let the horses be in the chaise exactly by four in the morning--Yes, by four, Sir,--or by Genevieve!
 I'll raise a clatter in the house, shall wake the dead. (VII.xii.492)

The comment about death is not incidental, for the whole journey is a flight from Death, who might catch up at any time. There is, therefore, a real likelihood that Tristram might die in the inn at Abbeville, and in retrospect we see that what looked like a sentimental expression of one of Tristram's whimsical opinions has in fact been a slightly elaborate but serious expression of his fear of dying in an inn which he dislikes: with the added hint that perhaps the main thing he has against Abbeville is that it happens to be the place he is at, for his fear of death has made him restless and unable to settle (thus the introduction in the next chapter of the wheel imagery). The comment clearly belongs to the narrative moment, it is the cause of his haste and his instructions, and the relationship between the main

paragraph and the final words is graphically emphasized by the line break after the relation-word, 'so'. We could almost take the whole chapter as being spoken by Tristram in or in front of the inn itself, except that his reference to it as 'that inn' implies that it is not immediately visible to him; nor is he speaking to a landlord or one of the staff, to whom he would most probably say, 'your inn'. So there is a transition from one mode to another at the end, working through a natural logic.

The ending of chapter six, where Tristram has threatened an extensive quote from Rapin on Calais, is grammatically similar to the example I have just examined:

ere I would force a helpless creature upon this hard service ... I would browse upon the mountains, and smile that the north wind brought me neither my tent or my supper.

--So put on, my brave boy! and make the best of thy way to Boulogne. (VII.vi.486-7)

There is the same causal relationship, the rejection of one thing leading to a determination to move on, hinging on the word 'so'. But the gap between the two parts of this relationship is much greater than in the previous case. For the rejection is not of a place or an event on the journey but of a chapter in the book. As before, it is possible to argue that Tristram would have written the chapter, or at least have decided on it, while actually in Calais: this is the implication. But the effect in this case is not so much to make the reader fit the commentary into its place on the journey as to make him read the instructions for travelling

as a metaphor for the process of reading: 'make the best of thy way'. As readers we accompany Tristram on his way, moving when he moves and marking our progress through the book as much by the place-names as by the chapters.⁸

Tristram develops this idea of the correlation between reading and travelling later in the volume after the story of the Abbess of Andoüillet. The reader has been through a digression but Tristram, it seems, has no time for such diversions:

What a tract of country have I run!--how many degrees nearer to the warm sun am I advanced, and how many fair and goodly cities have I seen, during the time you have been reading, and reflecting, Madam, upon this story! There's FONTAINBLEAU, and SENS, and JOIGNY, and AUXERRE, and DIJON the capital of Burgundy, and CHALLON, and Mâcon the capital of the Mâconese, and a score more upon the road to LYONS... (VII.xxvi.510)

The comparison between reading time and narrative time is not new in Tristram Shandy, of course, but it gains a new twist when the narrative is a journey and when Tristram is claiming to write as he travels. The reader has missed out on the experience of these places, and with the effects of the abbess's story fresh in his (or her) mind Tristram feels there is not much point in trying to help the reader to catch up. (Incidentally, the introduction at this point of the lady reader familiar from other parts of the novel adds a final note of confusion to the status of the discourse:

⁸ In A Sentimental Journey, of course, the episodes are given place names instead of chapter numbers, and the fusion of book and journey is almost total.

Tristram is either writing to the moment, as he travels, or he is writing, as he later tells us, in the south of France, and either way he is not in the place where the earlier story-telling took place and where he entered into conversation with 'Madam'.) But in the next chapter Tristram does start to take the reader through the missing towns, not by describing his movements or the appearances of the places or any events that took place there--but by providing the reader with brief comments on them:

--All you need say of Fontainbleau (in case you are ask'd) is, that it stands about forty miles (south something) from Paris, in the middle of a large forest --That there is something great in it...

As for SENS-- you may dispatch it in a word---"'Tis an archiepiscopal see."

--For JOIGNY--the less, I think, one says of it, the better.

But for AUXERRE--I could go on for ever: for in my grand tour through Europe... (VII.xxvii.511-12)

Here the commentary has totally subsumed the narration: the passing of a comment becomes the equivalent of taking the reader through a town. Tristram is, in fact, providing the reader with a substitute for going to these places (with an implied satire on travellers' remarks) and it is not surprising that he finishes up some twenty years in the past describing a different journey altogether. This is what happens when the telling and the travelling part company.

Auxerre is one of Sterne's triumphs in his play with the paradoxes of literary time, and it represents the most extreme point in Tristram's fusion of his various rôles, being more complicated than the rest of the volume by its

reference back to the main characters and an earlier Tristram. It is introduced by a weaving image (Tristram never spins his tales, but weaves them together):

--But this rich bale is not to be open'd now; except a small thread or two of it, merely to unravel the mystery of my father's stay at AUXERRE.

--As I have mentioned it--'tis too slight to be kept suspended; and when 'tis wove in, there's an end of it. (VII.xxvii.513)

Tristram returns to the imagery after he has told his story, when he pauses to comment on the time-schemes:

--Now this is the most puzzled skein of all--for in this last chapter, as far at least as it has help'd me through Auxerre, I have been getting forwards in two different journies together, and with the same dash of the pen--for I have got entirely out of Auxerre in this journey which I am writing now, and I am got half way out of Auxerre in that which I shall write hereafter--There is but a certain degree of perfection in every thing; and by pushing at something beyond that, I have brought myself into such a situation, as no traveller ever stood before me; for I am this moment walking across the market-place of Auxerre with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner--and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broke into a thousand pieces--and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavilion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the Garonne, which Mons. Sligniac has lent me, and where I now sit rhapsodizing all these affairs.

--Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey.

(VII.xxviii.515-6)

The total confusion which Tristram manages to convey in this passage depends largely on his metaphorical way of writing: there is a continual conflation of writing and travelling. When he wants to refer specifically to that part of the chapter dealing with Auxerre he calls it the part that has 'help'd me through Auxerre'--at best an ambiguous statement which carries the implications I have traced throughout the volume that the progress of the writing (and of the reading)

is identical with the progress of Tristram's journey, whereas in 'fact' he has passed through Auxerre before writing about it. 'Getting forwards' is similarly ambiguous, as it could refer to either the book or an actual journey, and 'dash' of the pen is particularly nice. But the chief confusion comes from the double applicability of the pronoun 'I', and he makes the most of it by paralleling the relevant clauses:

I have got entirely out of Auxerre in this journey
which I am writing now

I am got half way out of Auxerre in that
which I shall write hereafter

The similarities in structure emphasize the double experience, while the play with tenses suggests total confusion: the perfect tense in the first clause leads to a present tense ('am writing'), and then a present tense ('am got') is used with a future. Grammatically this is quite correct, but that doesn't alter its confusing appearance when counterpointed against the parallel structures.

Tristram then develops the joke by going through the paradox again in more specific terms, and adding on his third rôle as writer to the two he already has as character. But first he again introduces the subject by a subtle use of figurative language:

I have brought myself into such a situation, as no
traveller ever stood before me.

The word 'traveller' revivifies the terms 'situation' and 'stood' so that the whole contributes to a strong picture of Tristram actually in three places at once (although in none

of them is he 'standing'--further confusion!). The word 'traveller' is also at the root of much of the confusion for it is of course not as a traveller that Tristram is in these three places, but only as a character in his own book. As a traveller he has been in all three places, but only in retrospect can he gather the three together into a fictional present tense. Tristram is exploiting the fact that the same form of words, 'I am this moment walking/entering/in', can be used to cover three quite different occasions. It is partly a matter of different uses of the pronoun 'I', partly of different uses of 'moment'. He is pushing at the very nature of fictional truth by presenting a paradox which is 'true' in the fictional world but never could be in the 'real' world. But he is also raising the whole problem of personal identity and its relationship to place and time:

--And who are you? said he.---Don't puzzle me; said I.
(VII.xxxiii.525)

Finally he brings the whole episode to a brilliant conclusion, first by applying the dead metaphor, 'let me collect myself', to a situation in which he has scattered himself in three different places, and then by undercutting all his previous analysis with a return to the term 'journey' in the singular as though nothing had happened.

This chapter has been a study of the ways that Tristram creates a seamless fabric of story and commentary, 'life and opinions'. In Volume VII, where he becomes his own commenting character, the fusion easily becomes confusion: we can no

longer tell where one mode ends and another starts, and the writer's commentary frequently finds its place in the narrative. New kinds of narrative language are forged to carry Tristram's jests with fictional form and his presentation of immediate, first-hand experience. Some of these techniques Sterne was to take up again in A Sentimental Journey in which he rewrites much of the same journey. But the new narrator shows a new set of interests: the flight from Death has been replaced by the quest for emotional stimulation and many of Tristram's literary/intellectual concerns become inappropriate. In Tristram Shandy most of the experiments remain highly extrovert and self-conscious: the language draws attention to itself in a way that is far removed from the quieter, gentler second novel. Tristram not only creates but parades before us his 'puzzled skein' of fictional experience.

VI: THE LANGUAGE OF SEX

Here are two senses, cried Eugenius, as we walk'd along, pointing with his fore finger of his right hand to the word Crevice, in the fifty-second page of the second volume of this book of books,---here are two senses,--quoth he.--And here are two roads, replied I, turning short upon him,--a dirty and a clean one,--which shall we take?--The clean,---by all means, replied Eugenius. (III.xxxi.218)

And for what reason is it, that all the parts thereof--the congre-dients--the preparations--the instruments, and whatever serves thereto, are so held as to be conveyed to a cleanly mind by no language, translation, or periphrasis whatever? (IX.xxxiii.645)

Tristram Shandy opens and closes on the topic of sex: it opens with the moment of conception and closes with the failure of birth, and it is altogether fitting that in the last chapter Walter Shandy should raise the problem of the language in which to speak of this subject. For Walter it is part of an argument on the destructive power of lust, but this is not necessarily Tristram's (or Sterne's) belief. The problem, however, is certainly Tristram's, and in this chapter I propose to look at some of the uses he puts the problem to and the kind of imagery that is so pervasive throughout the novel. For convenience the question can be divided into two parts: the more or less incidental bawdry, the sex joke; and the question of sexual relationships, especially as shown in the story of uncle Toby's amours.

A. Tristram's bawdry

The only extensive treatment of the language of sex in Tristram Shandy is that made by William Bowman Piper,¹ which, though often brilliant in analysis of the way the language works, I have to take issue with in certain important respects. Piper's thesis is interesting and in some ways attractive, but I don't think it is tenable. He argues that Tristram is a narrator struggling to communicate the incommunicable:

Laurence Sterne has placed the narrator-hero ... in a dilemma: he has, on the one hand, continuously held Tristram in social conversation and, on the other, made him describe a life whose vital facts are unfit for social utterance...

Despite the continuous social restraints with which Sterne has confronted him, Tristram Shandy must tell the story of his sexual misfortunes; he must do so because these misfortunes have determined his life, and his life is his primary topic.²

He sees Tristram as engaged in a genuine struggle in which the attempt to convey essential sexual matters is made by using two primary techniques: sterilization (the use of scholarship and learning), and equivocal extension (suggesting the true facts he cannot discuss openly). The general thesis, and as applied to sexual matters particularly, seems to me to suffer from trying to put Sterne's book into an interpretative straitjacket which doesn't fit. There are many occasions on which Tristram faces just the dilemma

¹ Laurence Sterne, New York, 1965.

² Piper, pp.21 & 66.

Piper outlines, but there are others on which he does not. Sterne has not created a narrator-hero with that kind of consistency: the book is not pure novel, so to speak. So it is impossible to treat all the sexual innuendo as an attempt at necessary communication, or all the learned terms as 'sterilization'. Tristram says, in discussing the art of logic:

As for the Argumentum Tripodium, which is never used but by the woman against the man;--and the Argumentum ad Rem, which, contrarywise, is made use of by the man only against the woman:--As these two are enough in conscience for one lecture;---and, moreover, as the one is the best answer to the other,--let them likewise be kept apart, and be treated of in a place by themselves. (I.xxi.71)

This is used by Piper as an example of what he calls 'sterilization', but I cannot see that the use of Latin or the spurious impression of logic in any way 'clothe' the obscenity. The obvious spuriousness, rather, draws attention to it. Nor is it easy to see these particular items as among the 'many admittedly obscene elements in his life story'.³ It is just one of Tristram's (rather boring) little jokes in passing, perhaps suggesting something of his opinion of such learned terminology, but certainly not covering up his obscenity.

Out of his analysis of Tristram's sexual language, particularly his use of innuendo, Piper draws his conclusions as to Tristram's purpose in using these methods:

³ Piper, p.67.

This, then, is the satiric value of Tristram's pointed but equivocal presentation of sex: it allows the members of society to take the high sexual road or the low--to see sex in its true human proportion or to see it merely as an unmentionable diversion. Almost every time one of them--one of us--finds mere bawdry in Tristram's life story, he is implicating himself in society's sexual hypocrisy. He has let society's prudery warp his mind so that he ignores the true relevance of sex in Tristram's life--in all human life--and exalts the mere activity of lust.⁴

This is a nice idea, and it might be pleasant to believe that Sterne is so righteous, but I don't think it fits the facts. I wish to argue that there is a certain attack on prudery in Tristram's insistence on sexual matters, but it cannot be assumed throughout: there are too many cases where Tristram just obviously enjoys a 'dirty joke'. Furthermore, Piper bases his claim for the 'true human proportion' in sexual matters on an assertion that Tristram shows sex as a 'familial' matter; of the sexual references he says: 'they almost all carry its procreative and familial vision of sex'.⁵ He does admit that the connection is not always clear, but he claims that many of the less obviously familial sexual matters are woven into the family story (e.g., Phutatorius's affair with the chestnut takes place at a meeting which finally gets down to discussing the mother's kinship with her child), and that in other cases Walter and Toby remain prominent enough in the story to act as constant reminders of 'sex's vast personal consequences and its family ties'.⁶

⁴ Piper, p.82.

⁵ Piper, p.80.

⁶ Piper, p.82.

This is not really very good evidence. A much better argument in the case of Phutatorius would be that some, at least, interpret the affair as a judgment on his lewdness and his concern with extra-marital sex. But no such justification can be made for Trim's affair with the Beguine, nor for the many incidental jokes which appear in the text as we go along. This leaves us with the problem of just what Tristram's attitude is towards sex and towards the sexual innuendoes which appear in the book. There is not very much evidence in the way of direct statement. We have the conversation recorded with Eugenius, quoted at the beginning of this chapter; we also have Tristram's statement about himself in the final volume when he is discussing his mother's innocence:

How I happen to be so lewd myself, particularly a little before the vernal and autumnal equinoxes-- Heaven above knows. (IX.i.600)

There are occasions when he treats of sexual matters without worrying:

"May he be cursed in his reins, and in his groin," (God in heaven forbid, quoth my uncle Toby)---"in his thighs, in his genitals," (my father shook his head) "and in his hips"... (III.xi.177)

Obadiah could not make a trot of it, but with such a terrible jingle, what with the tire-tête, forceps and squirt, as would have been enough, had Hymen been taking a jaunt that way, to have frightened him out of the country...

As Obadiah had a wife and three children--the turpitude of fornication, and the many other political ill consequences of this jingling, never once entered his brain. (III.vii.165)

At other times, however, he makes a great show of worrying about the polite way of expressing sexual matters:

Amongst many other book-debts, all of which I shall discharge in due time,--I own myself a debtor to the world for two items,--a chapter upon chamber-maids and button-holes, which, in the former part of my work, I promised and fully intended to pay off this year: but some of your worships and reverences telling me, that the two subjects, especially so connected together, might endanger the morals of the world,-- I pray the chapter upon chamber-maids and button-holes may be forgiven me,--and that they will accept of the last chapter in lieu of it; which is nothing, an't please your reverences, but a chapter of chamber-maids, green-gowns, and old hats.

Trim took his off the ground,--put it on his head, --and then went on with his oration upon death, in manner and form following. (V.viii.363)

The moment the stranger alighted, he ordered his mule to be led into the stable, and his cloak-bag to be brought in; then opening, and taking out of it, his crimson-satin breeches, with a silver-fringed-- (appendage to them, which I dare not translate)--he put his breeches, with his fringed cod-piece on, and forthwith with his short scymetar in his hand, walked out to the grand parade. (IV. Slawkenbergius's Tale, 249)

'Tis evident thereupon to me, that a French post-horse would not know what in the world to do, was it not for the two words ***** and ***** in which there is as much sustenance, .as if you gave him a peck of corn: 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: for which cause, I have been volving and revolving in my fancy some time, but to no purpose, by what clean device or facete contrivance I might so modulate them, that whilst I satisfy that ear which the reader chuses to lend me--I might not dissatisfy the other which he keeps to himself.

--My ink burns my fingers to try--and when I have-- 'twill have a worse consequence--it will burn (I fear) my paper.

--No;--I dare not--

But if you wish to know how the abbess of Andoÿllets, and a novice of her convent got over the difficulty (only first wishing myself all imaginable success)--I'll tell you without the least scruple. (VII.xx.503-4)

In all these case the caution and insistence on polite terminology only increases the reader's attention on the words

in question. In the first case Piper points out that the second paragraph entails an immediate repudiation by Tristram of the cant meanings of the words at the end of the first,⁷ but this doesn't really alter the situation; Tristram has still drawn attention to the possible double entendre, and under the pretence of abandoning a dangerous subject. The Slawkenbergius passage is clearly just a case of mild wit: in the Latin equivalent the word, there represented in Greek, appears only once, so that the second occasion on which Tristram does translate it is unnecessary. It is a word which sometimes he uses quite openly:

my father clapp'd both his hands upon his cod-piece,
which was a way he had when any thing hugely tickled
him... (VII.xxvii.514)

but at other times avoids:

it fell perpendicularly into that particular aperture
of Phutatorius's breeches, for which, to the shame
and indelicacy of our language be it spoke, there is
no chaste word throughout all Johnson's dictionary (IV.
xxvii.320)

that his chucking the chestnut hot into Phutatorius's
-**, was a sarcaistical fling at his book (ibid, p.323)

he has left a large uneven thread, as you sometimes
see in an unsaleable piece of cambric, running along
the whole length of the web, and so untowardly, you
cannot so much as cut out a * * (VI.xxxiii.463)

These various cases suggest that Tristram is not really concerned with avoiding impolite language, but rather with using society's prudery to emphasize his sexual innuendo. He plays an elaborate game with the techniques of censorship. In the

⁷ Piper, p.77. For the cant meanings see Work, Tristram Shandy, p.363 note 1 and p.549 note 1.

passage from which the last quotation comes Tristram refers to asterisks and their unhelpfulness:

so little service do the stars afford, which, nevertheless, I hang up in some of the darkest passages, knowing that the world is apt to lose its way, with all the lights the sun itself at noon day can give it... (VI.xxxiii.462)

The irony here, of course, is that the 'stars' are a darkening, a replacement of words (which would presumably be clear) by unclear signs. However, the use of asterisks could be genuinely compared with starlight if the alternative is just blanks or dashes, for Tristram often uses his asterisks in a very precise way:

The chamber-maid had left no ***** *** under the bed: --Cannot you contrive, master, quoth Susannah, lifting up the sash with one hand, as she spoke, and helping me up into the window seat with the other,--cannot you manage, my dear, for a single time to **** ** ** ** *****? (V.xvii.376)

It seems likely in this case that when Tristram uses asterisks for the words 'chamber pot' he is not only making a passing joke at prudish censorship but also using an obvious example of word-equivalence to prepare the reader for the asterisks that are to follow: when we have seen how 'chamber pot' is signified we will understand how to read the rest. But the asterisks are only rarely as precise in their equivalence as in this example, and even then it may not be as easy to fill in the missing words (see VII.xxix.518). Rather, Tristram often uses asterisks for their suggestive power, of which he is well aware:

Make this dash,--'tis an Aposiopesis.--Take the dash away, and write Backside,---'tis Bawdy. Scratch Backside out, and put Cover'd-way in, 'tis a Metaphor;

---and, I dare say, as fortification ran so much in my uncle Toby's head, that if he had been left to have added one word to the sentence,---that word was it. (II.vi.100-101)

The asterisks are a device for throwing the responsibility onto the reader for any words or meanings which are considered unclean. But the very presence of censorship indicates the presence of something to be censored. In the particular case just quoted Tristram would appear to be indulging in an elaborate attempt to suggest to the reader any word but the four-letter one the four asterisks would seem to demand, but in the process he also manages a further dig at prudery: society's false standards make the candid 'backside' a 'bawdy' word (claims Tristram), whereas the much more suggestive asterisks or 'cover'd way' can be dignified with the terms 'aposiopesis' and 'metaphor', and are presumably allowed.

Tristram suggests elsewhere that prudery is not perhaps all that it makes itself out to be:

And when the extreams of DELICACY, and the beginnings of CONCUPISCENCE, hold their next provincial chapter together, they may decree that bawdy also. (V.i.348)

This is a psychological perception which Tristram makes use of in his play with innuendo. He makes a somewhat similar disparaging comment about chastity as a moral value:

Rosinante's continency (as may be demonstrated from the adventure of the Yanguesian carriers) proceeded from no bodily defect or cause whatsoever, but from the temperance and orderly current of his blood.-- And let me tell you, Madam, there is a great deal of very good chastity in the world, in behalf of which you could not say more for your life. (I.x.18)

Society's sexual values are further undercut by the behaviour of Tristram's female reader, although it will depend upon our interpretation of the exact status of the 'readers' in the novel whether we credit any of their language and behaviour to Tristram or to Sterne. 'Madam' represents the gentle sex, and she tends to be easily offended by the possibility of sexual innuendo:

Nor is there any thing unnatural or extravagant in the supposition, that my dear Jenny may be my friend. --Friend!--My friend.--Surely, Madam, a friendship between the two sexes may subsist, and be supported without---Fy! Mr. Shandy:---Without any thing, Madam, but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference of sex. (I.xviii.49)

But this readiness to disapprove of innuendo goes with an ability to spot it very quickly, and this is reinforced by the special interest Madam takes in sexual affairs, and her curiosity:

With all this learning upon NOSES running perpetually in my father's fancy--with so many family prejudices --and ten decads of such tales running on for ever along with them--how was it possible with such exquisite--was it a true nose?--That a man with such exquisite feelings as my father had... --Throw yourself down upon the bed, a dozen times-- taking care only to place a looking-glass first in a chair on one side of it, before you do it--But was the stranger's nose a true nose---or was it a false one?

To tell that before-hand, madam, would be to do injury to one of the best tales in the christian world... (IV.i.272)

As for the thin scarlet breeches, they had been unripp'd by the taylor between the legs, and left at sixes and sevens--

--Yes, Madam,--but let us govern our fancies. It is enough they were held impracticable the night before, and as there was no alternative in my uncle Toby's wardrobe, he sallied forth in the red plush. (IX.ii.602)

In the latter case it is not, perhaps, altogether clear that Madam has actually said anything, rather than Tristram imputing the thought to her, but if that is the case it only strengthens the suggestion that Tristram has no high opinion of the thoughts that lie behind prudery. There are several other occasions on which Tristram takes Madam as the most appropriate person to receive his innuendo:⁸

All which plainly shews, may it please your worships, that the decay of eloquence, and the little good service it does at present, both within, and without doors, is owing to nothing else in the world, but short coats, and the disuse of trunk-hose.--We can conceal nothing under ours, Madam, worth shewing. (III.xiv. 185-6)

which at once puts an end to the conference--I mean to the sentimental part of it.--What is left, madam, is not worth stooping for. (IV.i.273)

this comes, as all the world knows, from having half a dozen words for one thing; 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 the part I am now pointing to with my forefinger--how can we help ourselves? (VIII.iv.542)

It is, of course, impossible in the last case to know who was pointing where, though from usual form we would expect Tristram to be curbing Madam's sexual thoughts again.

There is, then, some basis for suggesting that Tristram is playing with prudery on many occasions when sexual subjects or possibilities arise, but it would be unwise to press too heavy a moral burden onto Tristram's bawdry. No doubt prudery

⁸ The direct address to 'madam' even becomes a clue to the reader to watch for the innuendo.

is a form of 'gravity', and no doubt Tristram finds it not only funny but also potentially dangerous.⁹ He is also aware of the problems of communication, of sexual language, as comically illustrated in his avoidance of the word 'cod-piece', in the story of the Abbess of Andoüilletts, and in his discussion of noses, whiskers, and related words. But this is also a problem for the other characters in the novel. It is possible to distinguish between genuine innocence on the one hand and prudery on the other if we consider uncle Toby:

My A-e, quoth my uncle Toby, is much better--brother Shandy (VIII.xxxii.583)

--and this 'hotwithstanding my mother, Doctor Slop, and Mr. Yorick, were sitting in the parlour'. Similarly Tristram's mother, unlike Madam, doesn't understand sexual implication most of the time:

My mother, who was sitting by, look'd up,--but she knew no more than her backside what my father meant, --but my uncle, Mr. Toby Shandy, who had been often informed of the affair,--understood him very well.(I.iii.7)

L--d! said my mother, what is all this story about?
(IX.xxxiii.647)

There is one occasion at least, though, where Mrs Shandy shows rather more awareness, and perhaps more feelings on the subject, than we would normally expect:

I would oblige thee, nolens, volens, to beget for me one subject every month--

⁹ For the rôle of prudery in uncle Toby's amours see below, pp. 287-8. The Widow Wadman makes use of Sternean ambiguity to aid her prudishness about sexual conversation.

As my father pronounced the last word of the sentence--my mother took a pinch of snuff. (VIII.xxxiii.586)

The structure of Tristram's sentence here does not actually insist that Mrs Shandy saw the connection--it could be an authorial coincidence--but that seems unlikely. On another occasion Mrs Shandy again seems to suggest that she doesn't fully approve of Walter's unnatural regularity in sexual matters:

Unless she should happen to have a child--said my mother--
 --But she must persuade my brother Toby first to get her one--
 --To be sure, Mr. Shandy, quoth my mother.
 --Though if it comes to persuasion--said my father-- Lord have mercy upon them.
 Amen; said my mother, piano.
 Amen: cried my father, fortissimè.
 Amen: said my mother again--but with such a sighing cadence of personal pity at the end of it, as discomfited every fibre about my father--he instantly took out his almanack... (IX.xi.613-4)

Walter is obviously thinking of Toby's sexual modesty, but Mrs Shandy is thinking about her own situation.

Walter's feelings about sex are interesting. Clearly he has no time for prudery. We know that according to his theories the moment of conception is of great importance in the development of the child; we know that he enjoys sexual imagery, as in his teasing of Toby and Trim about the bridge, and that he is not averse to bawdy jokes in general:

[Toby] would often tell my father in the simplicity of his heart, that it was almost (if not about) as bad as talking bawdy.--
 --And suppose it is? my father would say. (IX.iii.603)

Moreover, Walter is given the magnificent speech on lust at

the end of the novel, in which it seems reasonable to suppose that he is perfectly aware of the way in which his description of military weapons is transferable back to his original subject:

The act of killing and destroying a man, continued my father raising his voice--and turning to my uncle Toby--you see, is glorious--and the weapons by which we do it are honourable--We march with them upon our shoulders--We strut with them by our sides--We gild them--We carve them--We in-lay them--We enrich them--May, if it be but a scoundril cannon, we cast an ornament upon the breech of it. (IX.xxxiii.645)

Tristram has already warned us that his father 'was not very nice in his choice of words when he was wroth'. Altogether, Walter shows a mixture of the scholar's disdain for sex (as bodily pleasure) and the system-builder's reverence for it (as a fit subject for theories, and an appetite to be organized--thus the monthly sessions)--together with something of the wit's delight in sexual jokes.

Yorick is similarly not above a quick quibble:

I wish, said Trim, as they entered the door,--instead of sash-weights, I had cut off the church-spout, as I once thought to have done.--You have cut off spouts enow, replied Yorick. (V.xxiii.381-2)

and even Trim on one occasion is quicker onto the sexual implications than Walter:

My father, who saw all things in lights different from the rest of the world, would say to the corporal, that he ought to look upon these two presents more as tokens of his brother's nicety, than his affection.--Tom did not care, Trim, he would say, to put on the cap, or to smook in the tobacco-pipe of a Jew.--God bless your honour, the corporal would say, (giving a strong reason to the contrary)--how can that be? (VI.xxiv.449-50)

But most of the innuendo in the story of Tom and the Jew's widow should probably be attributed to the author rather than

to Trim who is, after all, talking about his own brother now in the jails of the Inquisition. There can be no doubt of Sterne's intention to make use of innuendo wherever possible, as in this case:

She made a feint however of defending herself, by snatching up a sausage:--Tom instantly laid hold of another---

But seeing Tom's had more gristle in it---

She signed the capitulation--and Tom sealed it; and there was an end of the matter. (IX.vii.609)

The interesting point about this story is that the innuendo is less a question of precise symbolism than of general suggestiveness:

As Tom perceived, an' please your honour, that he gained ground, and that all he had said upon the subject of sausages was kindly taken, he went on to help her a little in making them.--First, by taking hold of the ring of the sausage whilst she stroked the forced meat down with her hand--then by cutting the strings into proper lengths, and holding them in his hand, whilst she took them out one by one--then, by putting them across her mouth, that she might take them out as she wanted them--and so on from little to more, till at last he adventured to tie the sausage himself, whilst she held the snout. (*ibid*)

Despite the obvious symbolic potential of sausages there is no possibility here of establishing a coherent symbolic pattern. Rather, all is suggestive and vague, and partly because of it this is probably one of the most erotic passages in the novel. Eroticism is rare in Tristram Shandy (Trim's love story is one of the few other examples),¹⁰ while bawdry and sexual wit are common.

¹⁰ But see also below, pp. 283-5.

I have said that we have little in the way of direct statement from Tristram as to his attitude to sex, but if we examine his practice in the novel we can draw certain conclusions. There are a great many places where innuendo or double entendre appear, hardly related to the subject in hand, and apparently for their own sake as jokes. There are some cases, such as the Argumentum Tripodium passage quoted above, where it is impossible to see any way out, any possibility of a 'straight' meaning which would allow us, if we wanted to, to say that the bawdry was not intended by Tristram. More commonly, however, the reader infers the secondary meaning rather than having it thrust upon him, and so it remains possible to argue that the bawdry lies with the reader rather than with the author, as Tristram seems to claim to Eugenius in the dialogue quoted at the head of this chapter. However, the reader is given plenty of help in many cases. The whole aura of sexual suggestion encourages the reader to notice various innuendoes. Often we are led to search for a further meaning by the inconsequentiality or oddness of a passage:

...together with all its rights, members, and appurtenances whatsoever.

These last words, you must know, were not according to the old form in which such licences, faculties, and powers usually ran, which in like cases had heretofore been granted to the sisterhood. But it was according to a neat Formula of Didius his own devising, who having a particular turn for taking to pieces, and new framing over again, all kinds of instruments in that way, not only hit upon this dainty amendment, but coax'd many of the old licensed matrons in the neighbourhood, to open their faculties afresh, in order to have this whim-wham of his inserted. (I.vii.12-13)

I won't go about to argue the point with you,--
'tis so,--and I am persuaded of it, madam, as
much as can be, "That both man and woman bear
pain and sorrow, (and, for aught I know, pleasure
too) best in a horizontal position." (III.xxix.215)

By all that is priestly! I value this precious
relick, with it's stigmata and pricks, more than
all the relicks of the Romish church--always ex-
cepting, when I am writing upon these matters,
the pricks which enter'd the flesh of St. Rada-
gunda in the desert, which in your road from FESSE
to CLUNY, the nuns of that name will show you for
love. (VIII.xvii.557)

In this last example we can also see another way in which
Tristram helps us to a second meaning--his choice of words.
Some words are automatically ambiguous by virtue of the
objects they refer to.¹¹ There are obvious cases:

It is a great pity--but 'tis certain from every day's
observation of man, that he may be set on fire like
a candle, at either end--provided there is a sufficient
wick standing out; if there's not--there's an end of
the affair. (VIII.xv.553)

There are other words which gain in the course of the novel
from their usage, such as the term 'part'. It is used quite
clearly in the case of Phutatorius:

...did no more than gently solicit Phutatorius's
attention towards the part...(IV.xxvii.321)

If it is a tender part, and a part which can con-
veniently be wrapt up... (IV.xxviii.325)

On another occasion Tristram uses his trick of drawing at-
tention to the equivocation:

...or rather the last word of that opinion,--(for
it was all my mother heard of it) caught hold of
her by the weak part of the whole sex:--You shall
not mistake me,--I mean her curiosity. (V.xii.368)

¹¹ In much of what follows I am indebted to Piper's thorough
treatment of Sterne's ambiguity.

It is usages such as these that may enable us to see a much more subtle use of the word, when Tristram says:

It had ever been the custom of the family, and by length of time was almost become a matter of common right, that the eldest son of it should have free ingress, egress, and regress into foreign parts before marriage,--not only for the sake of bettering his own private parts, by the benefit of exercise and change of so much air--but simply for the mere delectation of his fancy, by the feather put into his cap, of having been abroad.
(IV.xxxi.333)

A mixture of oddness and usage leads to the subtle logic behind Tristram's later statement:

This chapter, therefore, I name the chapter of THINGS ---and my next chapter to it, that is, the first chapter of my next volume, if I live, shall be my chapter upon WHISKERS, in order to keep up some sort of connection in my works. (IV.xxxii.336-7)

Tristram talks just enough nonsense about balance and harmony in his work for us to take this at face value if we are not awake to the way 'things' has been used elsewhere in the book (as in the Argumentum ad Rem) and indeed the way it has been used in the immediately preceding lines:

I have a thing to name--a thing to lament--a thing to hope--a thing to promise, and a thing to threaten --I have a thing to suppose--a thing to declare--a thing to conceal--a thing to chuse, and a thing to pray for. (ibid)

'Whiskers', of course, gains its meaning primarily from the earlier equivocation with 'nose', as Tristram makes clear when he comes to deal with them:

as surely as noses are noses, and whiskers are whiskers still (V.i.343-4)

In all these cases the innuendo has little to do with the story, or with what Tristram is talking about at the time.

It appears as a source of humour, and Sterne doesn't like to miss the opportunity for a good joke.

The most extended and elaborate of these incidental jokes is the material on noses. It arises from a genuine incident in the story, and most of the humour is worked well into the novel, concerned either with what happened to Tristram or with his father's beliefs, although the translation of *Slawkenbergius* which Tristram includes is frankly put in for its own sake:

the most amusing part of Hafen Slawkenbergius, is his tales,---and, considering he was a German, many of them told not without fancy... there are a few of them in his eighth, ninth, and tenth decads, which I own seem rather playful and sportive, than speculative,--but in general they are to be looked upon by the learned as a detail of so many independent facts, all of them turning round somehow or other upon the main hinges of his subject, and collected by him with great fidelity, and added to his work as so many illustrations upon the doctrines of noses.

As we have leisure enough upon our hands,--if you give me leave, madam, I'll tell you the ninth tale of his tenth decad. (III.xlii.241-2)

It is worth looking at the way the joke develops as it goes along, and the way Sterne plays it for all he is worth for many pages on end.

The matter begins with Trim announcing that Dr. Slop is making a bridge and Toby misunderstanding the kind of bridge that is involved. This leads Tristram on to the story of Trim and Bridget and the breaking of the bridge, with all that Walter made out of it:

Prithee, how was it then, corporal? my father would cry, turning to Trim.--It was a mere misfortune, an' please your honour,--I was shewing Mrs. Bridget our fortifications, and in going too near the edge of the fossé, I unfortunately slipp'd in.--Very well Trim! my father would cry,--(smiling mysteriously, and giving a nod,--but without interrupting him)--and being link'd fast, an' please your honour, arm in arm with Mrs. Bridget, I dragg'd her after me, by means of which she fell backwards soss against the bridge,--and Trim's foot, (my uncle Toby would cry, taking the story out of his mouth) getting into the cuvette, he tumbled full against the bridge too.--It was a thousand to one, my uncle Toby would add, that the poor fellow did not break his leg.---Ay truly! my father would say,--a limb is soon broke, brother Toby, in such encounters.--And so, an' please your honour, the bridge, which your honour knows was a very slight one, was broke down betwixt us, and splintered all to pieces. (III.xxiv.210-11)

It is possible to see a fairly precise symbolism here,¹²

but it soon changes when the new bridges are discussed:

for by this means, he would say, I leave one half of my bridge in my enemy's possession,--and pray of what use is the other?...
so that the whole might be lifted up together, and stand bolt upright,---but that was rejected for the reason given above.¹³

For a whole week after he was determined in his mind to have one of that particular construction which is made to draw back horizontally, to hinder a passage ... but my father advising my uncle Toby, with great earnestness, to have nothing more to do with thrusting bridges,--and my uncle foreseeing moreover that it would but perpetuate the memory of the corporal's misfortune,--he changed his mind... (III.xxv.213)

When the bridge imagery has been brought to this point we are told that this is not the kind of bridge Dr Slop is making anyway. In a fine comic situation the ambiguity of

¹² Notice the useful syntactical ambiguity of 'broke down betwixt us'--the bridge betwixt us was broken down, or, betwixt us we broke down the bridge.

¹³ The reason given was that Toby's wound made the bridge difficult to manage.

'bridge' is used to carry a complete reversal from Toby's hobby-horse to Walter's, so that just as the latter is rising up to triumph he is struck down by misfortune. But underneath this reversal of the literal application of the word the figurative meaning is continued, for a bridge and a nose can work as metaphorical vehicles for the same unmentionable tenor. Among other effects, this ambiguity contributes to Walter's reversal of fortune for he has been struck in the very way he was going to triumph ('a limb is soon broke, brother Toby, in such encounters').

However, the figurative function of the nose may not be immediately apparent to the reader and it seems that Tristram may be aware of this, for he says:

No doubt, the breaking down of the bridge of a child's nose, by the edge of a pair of forceps,--however scientifically applied,--would vex any man in the world, who was at so much pains in begetting a child, as my father was,--yet it will not account for the extravagance of his affliction, or [sic] will it justify the unchristian manner he abandoned and surrender'd himself up to it.

To explain this, I must leave him upon the bed for half an hour,--and my good uncle Toby in his old fringed chair sitting beside him. (III.xxx.217)

Most obviously, what Tristram goes on to explain is the family history of noses and Walter's learning upon the subject; he says as he returns to his father on the bed:

With all this learning upon NOSES running perpetually in my father's fancy--with so many family prejudices --and ten decads of such takes running on for ever along with them--how was it possible... (IV.i.272)

But even this, of course, is ambiguous when 'such tales' refers to the tale from Slawkenbergius the reader has just

read. For more than anything else Tristram fills the pages between these two statements with innuendo and double entendre, and one way of explaining why it mattered so much to Walter would be to explain--as far as is decently possible--that nose here means 'nose'. In fact there is a mystery here which it is difficult to unravel, for what we can not be sure about is whether nose means 'nose' just for Tristram or for his father as well; whether the books which could easily be on noses or on 'noses' are themselves self-consciously symbolic, or whether it is Tristram who makes us see them in that light. (I am assuming here that Prignitz and Scroderus at least, if not Slawkenbergius, are for Tristram genuine books, and fictitious only for Sterne, but it is one of those places in the novel where it is impossible to maintain a clear novelistic distinction between author and narrator.) Perhaps it doesn't ultimately matter very much; it remains one of those tantalizing ambiguities which Sterne is so good at, refusing his readers the comfort of a world where everything may be known and certain. It is also, of course, a function of the way he treats the ambiguity surrounding noses, for Tristram is always ready to insist that he means 'the external organ of smelling' and to lay the responsibility for any further interpretation completely on the reader.

So, having said that he must explain why Walter was so upset about his child's nose, Tristram cuts back to the scene between his great-grandfather and great-grandmother

and immediately interrupts himself to make sure that his reader is not misunderstanding what he means by the term:

Now, before I venture to make use of the word Nose a second time,--to avoid all confusion in what will be said upon it, in this interesting part of my story, it may not be amiss to explain my own meaning, and define, with all possible exactness and precision, what I would willingly be understood to mean by the term...

I define a nose, as follows,--intreating only beforehand, and beseeching my readers, both male and female, of what age, complexion, and condition soever, for the love of God and their own souls, to guard against the temptations and suggestions of the devil, and suffer him by no art or wile to put any other ideas into their minds, than what I put into my definition.--For by the word Nose, throughout all this long chapter of noses, and in every other part of my work, where the word Nose occurs,--I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less. (III.xxxi.217-8)

And if the readers had not been aware of the possibilities of Nose before, they are now. Moreover, Tristram has carefully produced a definition which does absolutely nothing to control the meaning of the word. It is his awareness of the possibilities more than anything else that keeps the reader's mind awake to the richness of the language in this part of the book; nor is it surprising if, after such a definition, he feels it necessary to return to the problem twice more, defining again, and referring to the devil again.

He continues to reinforce the imagery, by a reference to Rabelais, who clearly presides over the novel at this point. When he comes to Walter's belief that long noses are essential to the preservation of a family through several generations he finds it necessary to return to definition:

---Fair and softly, gentle reader!---where is thy fancy carrying thee?--If there is truth in man, by

my great grandfather's nose, I mean the external organ of smelling, or that part of man which stands prominent in his face,--and which painters say, in good jolly noses and well-proportioned faces, should comprehend a full third,--that is, measuring downwards from the setting on of the hair.--

--What a life of it has an author, at this pass!
(III.xxxiii.221)

Here he improves on his previous vague definition, making the words more patently ambiguous, giving us two definitions, the latter part of the second completely undermining the first.

From this point on Tristram plays the ambiguity for all it is worth. Thus we are told, most appropriately, that when Walter first purchased Bruscombille's prologue upon long noses he 'solaced himself with Bruscombille after the manner, in which, 'tis ten to one, your worship solaced yourself with your first mistress' (III.xxxv.225). He also insists that if we don't know what sex Bruscombille was it doesn't matter for 'a prologue upon long noses might easily be done by either' (ibid). The episode with Erasmus suggests more strongly than any other that Walter thought of noses as 'noses', but even this is not quite clear, as his solution is left to the imagination of the reader.¹⁴ Slawkenbergius, we are told, found that 'the point of long noses had been too loosely handled by all who had gone before' (III.xxxviii.231). This is the kind of wit at which Sterne excels; he has always a strong sense of the physical potential buried under dead metaphors, and as the humour of the

¹⁴ See Work, Tristram Shandy, p.229 note 3 & p.230 note 4.

simple equivocation wears thin we look more for what he will do with the ambiguity once established. There is more of the kind of audacity shown in this last image in the Tale. But at this point we may even begin to suspect when Tristram says of Slawkenbergius that 'he has entered the list with a stronger lance, and taken a much larger career in it, than any one man who had ever entered it before him' (III.xxxviii.231-2); such is the effect of the whole episode that all the words are potentially 'unsteady', and it needs very little effort of rearrangement from Tristram to start the imagination working. There is a parallel here with the way that uncle Toby's hobby-horse works, and it is typical of Sterne to use his readers to illustrate one of his points: that if the mind is primarily working along certain lines it will twist any matter that it can to fit those lines, rather than leave them to follow the new material.

It would therefore be tedious to go through every slightly ambiguous phrase or sentence in the rest of the third volume. As Tristram says, ''tis all comprehended in Slawkenbergius' (III.xxxviii.233), and only one or two instances deserve special attention. I have remarked above that the nose joke is well worked into the rest of the novel. It is primarily another example of Walter's odd theories; the learned authorities fit into the satire on pedantry ('how many millions of books in all languages, and in all possible types and bindings, have been fabricated upon points not half

so much tending to the unity and peace-making of the world', III.xxxiv.223), and the whole affair is put firmly into the domestic setting, with dialogues in the parlour between Walter and Toby. The wit also works on many of the same techniques as are used elsewhere. Thus Tristram makes brilliant use of his tendency to interrupt himself and worry about the space he is taking up and about the order in which to present his material, so avoiding what might have been a highly embarrassing description of his mother:¹⁵

Now Ambrose Paraeus convinced my father, that the true and efficient cause of what had engaged so much the attention of the world ... was neither this nor that, --but that the length and goodness of the nose was owing simply to the softness and flaccidity in the nurse's breast...

his hypothesis ... overthrew at the same time the system of peace and harmony of our family...

My mother, you must know,---but I have fifty things more necessary to let you know first... (III.xxxviii.234-5)

So we never do know, although we can infer from what has gone before, what Tristram was going to tell us about his mother. But it must remain an inference: the number of ways that sentence might have been continued are almost infinite.

Perhaps the most brilliant episode to come out of the whole nose sequence is that where Walter tries to interest Toby in the solution of noses, and it is significant that much of the delight of this stems from the abiding charact-

¹⁵ The following passage is examined from the point of view of Tristram's self-interruption in chapter 2, above, pp.69-70.

eristics of the two brothers and the kind of comedy that Sterne creates between them rather than from anything specifically to do with noses or 'noses'. Tristram introduces the episode with a generalization about ratiocination and the making of syllogisms, explaining with a physical metaphor (as Locke had done before him) the idea of the medius terminus. He then translates this to Toby's behaviour, incidentally giving us another example of the way that gestures can be misinterpreted:

Had the same great reasoner looked on, as my father illustrated his systems of noses, and observed my uncle Toby's deportment,--what great attention he gave to every word,--and as oft as he took his pipe from his mouth, with what wonderful seriousness he contemplated the length of it,--surveying it transversely as he held it betwixt his finger and his thumb,---then foreright,---then this way, and then that, in all its possible directions and foreshortenings,---he would have concluded my uncle Toby had got hold of the medius terminus; and was syllogizing and measuring with it the truth of each hypothesis of long noses, in order as my father laid them before him. (III.xl.238)

Now, uncle Toby was doing nothing of the kind, and at first sight the use of the pipe seems to be a mere exercise of the fancy to add to the joke, but on reflection we notice what a suitable medius terminus it is. If a man measures two nine-pin alleys by a 'yard', then it is quite reasonable for Toby to measure long noses by his pipe. And on the principle of associational assimilation I mentioned earlier,¹⁶ the pipe itself loses its single meaning and is drawn into the aura of innuendo. There are one or two other occasions

¹⁶ See above, p.266.

in the novel when the pipe is similarly ambiguous, but it is by no means a permanent symbol, being often used quite literally and simply: it is too important an item in the magazine of gesture to be spoiled by perpetual associations, but they are potentially there and they recur at the end of the novel:

My uncle Toby laid down his pipe as gently upon the fender, as if it had been spun from the unravellings of a spider's web--- (IX.xxxi.643)

At that point in the novel the symbolic laying down of the pipe is completely appropriate. Another use of the pipe image will be considered later in this chapter.

In Slawkenbergius's Tale Sterne (and Tristram?) completely lets himself go. The interpolated tale is a standard ingredient of the eighteenth-century novel, although it is usually worked in from a character rather than from a book; but it is quite reasonable for Tristram to want to show us something of this book which meant so much to his father, and which is not generally known. It would be idle, however, to try to make out a stronger place in the novel for this tale than as an expression of Sterne's love of verbal play and high spirits even if, in the process, he manages to aim another satiric dart at the learned professions, to provide a fantastic illustration of the way in which an obsession can take control of the mind (this time of a whole city), and to strike out at the prudery of society.

As in several of the other cases we have examined the imagery is interesting in its instability. The primary sexual image is the Stranger's nose, but the general air of suggestiveness infects other things as well:

It grieves me, said the centinel, speaking to a little dwarfish bandy-leg'd drummer, that so courteous a soul should have lost his scabbard---he cannot travel without one to his scymetar, and will not be able to get a scabbard to fit it in all Strasburg. --I never had one, replied the stranger, looking back to the centinel, and putting his hand up to his cap as he spoke--I carry it, continued he, thus--holding up his naked scymetar, his mule moving on slowly all the time, on purpose to defend my nose.(IV.245-7)

With only one stranger, it is difficult for both the nose and the scymetar to function symbolically at the same time, but this is what seems to happen. The comment on the stranger's lack of a scabbard¹⁷ (and the difficulty of finding one to fit) is apt when we remember that the Stranger, Diego, is without his Julia; but this interpretation is squashed by his reply, whereby the scymetar becomes the defence of the nose. The way the imagery extends outwards from the nose is also noticeable where Tristram has changed Rabelais's idea of a nose-fair to a promontory of noses.¹⁸

Tristram makes use of the persona of Slawkenbergius by referring to him at certain dubious points in the narrative,

¹⁷ The Latin which Tristram has provided draws an etymological connection here between the literal and figurative meanings: 'virum adeo urbanum vaginum perdidisse' (IV.244).

¹⁸ In his discussion of noses Tristram makes oblique reference to Rabelais (III.xxxvi.226, III.xxxviii.235, III.xli.240) from whom the 'nose' idea presumably derives. The concept of a 'nose-fair' is Ponocrates' solution. See Rabelais, Gargantua and Pantagruel, trans. J.M.Cohen, Harmondsworth, 1955, I.xl.127.

thus dissociating himself from the language and at the same time drawing special attention to it:

If the stranger's nose took this liberty of thrusting itself thus into the dishes* of religious orders...

*Mr. Shandy's compliments to orators--is very sensible that Slawkenbergius has here changed his metaphor--- which he is very guilty of;--that as a translator, Mr. Shandy has all along done what he could to make him stick to it--but that here 'twas impossible. (p.255)

But when a demonstrator in philosophy (cries Slawkenbergius) has a trumpet for an apparatus, pray what rival in science can pretend to be heard besides him?(p.257)

The lines were very natural--for they were nothing at all to the purpose, says Slawkenbergius, and 'tis a pity there were no more of them. (p.270)

The lines (Diego's Ode to Julia) were, of course, very much to the purpose, and it is probably a good thing there were no more of them:

Harsh and untuneful are the notes of love,
 Unless my Julia strikes the key,
 Her hand alone can touch the part,
 Whose dulcet move-
 -ment charms the heart,
 And governs all the man with sympathetic sway. (p.269)

There is an echo of the stranger's earlier speech:

my nose shall never be touched till-- (p.251)

and by emphasizing Slawkenbergius's comment Tristram makes sure that we notice the relevance of the ode. The Tale ends with another comment from Slawkenbergius:

Alas! alas! cries Slawkenbergius, making an exclamation--it is not the first--and I fear will not be the last fortress that has been either won--or lost by NOSES. (p.271)

The image here looks forward to the second part of my chapter, but it is first necessary to see the nose sequence to its conclusion.

Tristram now returns to his father lying across the bed and after a short military and sentimental interruption from Toby and Trim we are given Walter's reactions to the misfortune his child has suffered. His answer, of course, leads on to the next catastrophe, Tristram's baptism, but the conclusion of the nose saga comes when Walter is bewailing the enmity of Fortune:

Take pen and ink in hand, and calculate it fairly, brother Toby, said my father, and it will turn out a million to one, that of all the parts of the body, the edge of the forceps should have the ill luck just to fall upon and break down that one part, which should break down the fortunes of our house with it. (IV.ix.280)

At this point the ambiguity is still rife, particularly with the use of the word 'part', but note Toby's response:

It might have been worse, replied my uncle Toby-- I don't comprehend, said my father---Suppose the hip had presented, replied my uncle Toby, as Dr. Slop foreboded.

My father reflected half a minute--looked down --touched the middle of his forehead slightly with his finger---

--True, said he. (IV.x.280-81)

Walter is caught in a difficult choice between priorities as Toby refers back to the very first mention of possible confusion between these two important areas of the body, when Dr Slop explains to Walter:

if the hip is mistaken for the head,--there is a possibility (if it is a boy) that the forceps * * *
* * * * * (III.xvii.188)

We are told quite plainly, then, that it was not the hip but the head and so all the ambiguity is resolved at the last. Tristram and his father have always been talking about the nose, whatever might have appeared to the contrary, and the

whole episode may be seen as an enormously extended example of what Piper calls the 'false lead',¹⁹ whereby Tristram allows (even encourages) his readers to take the wrong direction, only to prove them wrong at the end. But it also further weakens Piper's hypothesis, for he writes:

Despite his great skill in sterilizing his life story and in extending it with equivocation, Tristram has obviously been unable to declare its facts exactly. We do not know the nature of his misfortune at birth nor the extent of his window-sash mutilation: we do not know whether his vigor has been impaired or merely his figure in the world.²⁰

But we do know: we know that his nose and nothing else was crushed at birth, and it is perfectly clear from Walter's reactions to the window-sash accident that Tristram has merely been circumcised, physically remarkable as this may seem. Had it been any worse, as Dr Slop tried to claim, Walter would not have taken it all so calmly, but would have been overcome with grief, whether this took the form of collapsing on the bed or walking out to the fish-pond. He certainly would not have consulted Spencer de Legibus Hebraeorum Ritualibus. The fact is that Tristram is perfectly capable of finding ways of telling us everything he wants us to know, and if certain matters are left mysterious this is because he chooses it shall be so. Tristram's techniques for discussing sexual matters are partly a humorous acknowledgment of society's prudery and partly a way of drawing our attention to them and getting every ounce of humour out of them that is possible. Far from struggling to find a way of communicating the sexual elements of his life he makes every effort to indulge in sexual jokes and bawdy humour.

¹⁹ Laurence Sterne, p.75ff.

²⁰ Laurence Sterne, p.79.

B. Sexual relationships

Incidental sexual jokes do not tell us very much about the author's attitude to the rôle of sex in human relations, except that he finds it a fit subject for humour; and, particularly in the context of the general attack on gravity, we may suspect an attack on prudery. To go further than this we must examine sexual relationships as they appear in the novel, the narrator's comments on them, and his treatment of the characters involved; we may also examine the function of the most commonly recurring set of imagery, that taken from military matters.

The novel has a strong family setting; it is not, like many novels, concerned with adolescent infatuation or the growth to maturity through love, nor with strong passions. The characters are middle-aged; at the time when most of the novel takes place Walter Shandy had

brought some other little family concernments to the same period, in order, as he would often say to my uncle Toby, to get them all out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pester'd with them the rest of the month. (I.iv.8)

He was then 'somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age' (ibid), and his sexual life was also interrupted by 'the Sciatica'. He tends, anyway, to see the demands of the body as an 'ass' that kicks, and needs to be kept in its place; he claims that 'every evil and disorder in the world, of what kind or nature soever, from the first fall of Adam,

down to my uncle Toby's (inclusive) was owing one way or other to the same unruly appetite', lust (IX.xxxii.644). This is one point of view in the novel, and there are times when Tristram almost seems to support it:²¹

--But for my father's ass---oh! mount him-- mount him--mount him--(that's three times, is it not?)
 --mount him not:--'tis a beast concupiscent--and foul befall the man, who does not hinder him from kicking. (VIII.xxxi.584)

But when he describes himself in love it seems that his attitude is rather more complex:

whenever it so falls out, which it sometimes does about the equinoxes, that an earthly goddess is so much this, and that, and t'other, that I cannot eat my breakfast for her--and that she careth not three halfpence whether I eat my breakfast or no--

--Curse on her! and so I send her to Tartary, and from Tartary to Terra del Fuogo [sic], and so on to the devil: in short there is not an infernal nitch where I do not take her divinityship and stick it.

But as the heart is tender, and the passions in these tides ebb and flow ten times in a minute, I instantly bring her back again; and as I do all things in extremes, I place her in the very centre of the milky-way--

Brightest of stars! thou wilt shed thy influence upon some one--

--The duce take her and her influence too--for at that word I lose all patience... (VIII.xi.549-50)

And so it goes on, and we see Tristram entirely under the influence, swinging from one extreme to another. Shortly afterwards he gives us a list of the qualities of love: he runs through his own 'alphabetical' list, presented in a column down the page, and concludes:

But in short 'tis of such a nature, as my father once told my uncle Toby upon the close of a long dissertation upon the subject--"You can scarce," said he, "combine two ideas together upon it, brother Toby, without an hypallage". (VIII.xiii.551-2)

²¹ The mock-rhetoric in this quotation suggests that Tristram is at least slightly ironic.

This insistence on the paradoxes of love informs all Tristram's writings on the subject. He is making a similar point when he says:

"It is with Love as with Cuckoldom"--the suffering party is at least the third, but generally the last in the house who knows any thing about the matter: this comes, as all the world knows, from having half a dozen words for one thing; 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? (VIII.iv.542)

And in writing about love he generally manages to take back with one hand what he gives with the other:

At present, I hope I shall be sufficiently understood, in telling the reader, my uncle Toby fell in love:

--Not that the phrase is at all to my liking: for to say a man is fallen in love,--or that he is deeply in love,--or up to the ears in love,--and sometimes even over head and ears in it,--carries an idiomatical kind of implication, that love is a thing below a man: --this is recurring again to Plato's opinion, which, with all his divinity ship,--I hold to be damnable and heretical;--and so much for that.

Let love therefore be what it will,--my uncle Toby fell into it. (VI.xxxvii.469)

Having appeared to come out strongly against Plato and his father Tristram immediately returns not only to his idiomatic form with its implications but to an even stronger form of it, as 'in' shifts to 'into'.

At one point Tristram insists that 'all misogynists' are not 'legitimate sons of Adam', but 'bastards' (VI.xxx.456), and he tells of how after uncle Toby had had to give up his campaigns:

Softer visions,--gentler vibrations stole sweetly in upon his slumbers;--the trumpet of war fell out

out of his hands,--he took up the lute, sweet instrument! of all others the most delicate! the most difficult! (VI.xxxv.466)

But most of the time he tends to be rather more hard on love and sexual relationships, tending more towards his father's views. This attitude is most clearly revealed in the extent to which he utilizes military imagery in his descriptions: love and sex are seen as matters of war, shooting, plans, attacks, sieges, etc. It is of course true that this partly arises naturally from the influence of Toby's hobby-horse, and also that military imagery is used in the novel for other purposes, but this doesn't alter its overwhelming predominance in sexual matters, nor its significance in that context.

The analogy works both ways: sex is seen in military terms and Toby's campaigns are sometimes seen in sexual terms. When Tristram has explained to us the origin of Toby's hobby-horse, he says:

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;--

and he goes on:

I say in private;--for it was sheltered from a house, as I told you, by a tall yew hedge, and was covered on the other three sides, from mortal sight, by rough holly and thickset flowering shrubs;--so that the idea of not being seen, did not a little contribute to the idea of pleasure pre-conceived in my uncle Toby's mind. --Vain thought! However thick it was planted about,--- or private soever it might seem,--to think, dear uncle Toby, of enjoying a thing which took up a whole rood and a half of ground,--and not have it known! (II.v.98-9)

Toby's hobby-horse serves for him instead of a mistress (as we saw above, p.265, Walter's books on noses doing for him),

and the idea of a mistress-substitute is carried further in the ensuing innuendo: 'self-same thing', 'thick ...planted about', 'a thing which took up a whole rood and a half of ground'. Dr Slop shows his awareness of the punning possibilities of military terminology and is generally disappointed of for it, but Walter has great fun with it:

At other times, but especially when my uncle Toby was so unfortunate as to say a syllable about canons, bombs or petards,--my father would exhaust all the stores of his eloquence (which indeed were very great) in a panegyric upon the BATTERING-RAMS of the ancients,--the VINEA which Alexander made use of at the siege of Tyre.--He would tell my uncle Toby of the CATAPULTAE of the Syrians which threw such monstrous stones so many hundred feet, and shook the strongest bulwarks from their very foundation; he would go on and describe the wonderful mechanism of the BALLISTA, which Marcellinus makes so much rout about,--the terrible effects of the PYRABOLI,---which cast fire,--the danger of the TEREBRA and SCORPIO, which cast javelins... (III.xxiv.211)

Walter is also aware of the symbolic value of other terms, and makes use of them to triumph over his wife:

I wish, said my father, raising his voice, the whole science of fortification at the devil, with all its trumpery of saps, mines, blinds, gabions, fausse-brays and cuvetts---

--They are foolish things--said my mother...

--Particularly the cuvetts; replied my father.

'Twas enough--he tasted the sweet of triumph.(IX.xi.612-3)

Professor Work describes 'cuvetts' as 'trenches dug in the middle of a large ditch' (Tristram Shandy, p.612, note 1). But Toby and Trim are not generally aware of the potential of the terms they use:

I wish I may but manage it right; said my uncle Toby --but I declare, corporal I had rather march up to the very edge of a trench--

--A woman is quite a different thing--said the corporal.

--I suppose so, quoth my uncle Toby. (VIII.xxx.583)

Consequently Sterne is able to so arrange their speech that it provides for unconscious humour:

Your reverence does not consider, said the corporal, shouldering his stick like a musket, and marching into the middle of the room, to illustrate his position,--that 'tis exactly the same thing, as doing one's exercise in the field.--

"Join your right hand to your firelock", cried the corporal, giving the word of command, and performing the motion.--

"Poise your firelock", cried the corporal, doing the duty still of both adjutant and private man.

"Rest your firelock;"--one motion, an' please your reverence, you see leads into another. (V.xxxii.392)

The other major occasion on which the military hobby-horse is a subject for innuendo connects up also with the imagery of the pipe noticed above (see pp.268-9). It is worth quoting at length to see the way the imagery develops, gradually becoming clearer, most readers probably having to work backwards to see the full implications:

SOMETHING therefore was wanting, as a succedaneum, especially in one or two of the more violent paroxysms of the siege, to keep up something like a continual firing in the imagination,--and this something, the corporal, whose principal strength lay in invention, supplied by an entire new system of battering of his own,--without which, this had been objected to by military critics, to the end of the world, as one of the great desiderata of my uncle Toby's apparatus...

...The Turkish tobacco pipes had nothing particular in them, they were fitted up and ornamented as usual, with flexible tubes of Morocco leather and gold wire, and mounted at their ends, the one of them with ivory, --the other with black ebony, wipp'd with silver ...²²

²² In the omitted part we see Trim telling Walter about Tom's attitude to things used by the Jew (see p.255 above), and we are told that the Montero-cap was used as a gift on this occasion--thus drawing our attention away from the pipes.

My uncle Toby had scarce turned the corner of his yew hedge, which separated his kitchen garden from his bowling green, when he perceived the corporal had began the attack without him.--

Let me stop and give you a picture of the corporal's apparatus; and of the corporal himself in the height of this attack just as it struck my uncle Toby, as he turned towards the sentry box, where the corporal was at work,--for in nature there is not such another,--nor can any combination of all that is grotesque and whimsical in her works produce its equal.

The corporal---

--Tread lightly on his ashes, ye men of genius...²³

The corporal, who the night before had resolved in his mind, to supply the grand desideratum, of keeping up something like an incessant firing upon the enemy during the heat of the attack,--had no further idea in his fancy at that time, than a contrivance of smoaking tobacco against the town, out of one of my uncle Toby's six field pieces, which were planted on each side of his sentry-box; the means of effecting which occurring to his fancy at the same time, though he had pledged his cap, he thought it in no danger from the miscarriage of his projects...²⁴

...His first intention, as I said, was no more than giving the enemy a single puff or two;--but the pleasure of the puffs, as well as the puffing, had insensibly got hold of the corporal, and drawn him on from puff to puff, into the very height of the attack, by the time my uncle Toby joined him...

My uncle Toby took the ivory pipe out of the corporal's hand,--looked at it for half a minute, and returned it.

In less than two minutes my uncle Toby took the pipe from the corporal again, and raised it half way to his mouth--then hastily gave it back a second time.

The corporal redoubled the attack,--my uncle Toby smiled,--then looked grave,-- then smiled for a moment, --then looked serious for a long time;--Give me hold of the ivory pipe, Trim, said my uncle Toby--my uncle Toby put it to his lips,--drew it back directly,--gave a peep over the horn-beam hedge;--never did my uncle Toby's mouth water so much for a pipe in his life.-- My uncle Toby retired into the sentry-box with the pipe in his hand.---

²³ The 'sentimental' apostrophe to Trim and the description of Toby's funeral that have been omitted at this point must be affected by the innuendo surrounding them.

²⁴ In the omitted part Tristram talks about light being struck out from 'collision ... of bodies', mentioning Walter's beds of justice.

--Dear uncle Toby! don't go into the sentry-box with the pipe,--there's no trusting a man's self with such a thing in such a corner. (VI.xxiii-xxviii.449-55)

It is quite possible to read this episode as a straightforward description of one of the most charming moments in the history of uncle Toby's campaigns, and so it is at one level--although I think that at the very end the innuendo must be obvious to almost every reader.²⁵ But in fact the innuendo can be discovered below the surface nearly all the way through: we are kept in suspense by the suggestive word 'something' only to find that when Tristram becomes more specific and refers to the pipes these in turn become the subject of equivocation.²⁶ And as in the description of the rood and a half of ground, the innuendo comments on the pleasure Toby and Trim get from their hobby-horse. In our post-Freudian age the comment does not seem surprising: in a pre-Freudian age it may not have appeared as this kind of comment at all, but conscious or otherwise it seems to me difficult to resist seeing the imagery as a suggestion of sublimation and sexual enjoyment in the games on the bowling green.

Such a suggestion also helps to make the connection the other way--between Toby's amours and his campaigns. Such is

²⁵ The capitalized 'SOMETHING' and the unusual word 'sucedaneum' in the opening paragraph should also be noticed by reasonably alert readers: at least they would arouse suspicions. 'Apparatus' is another unsteady word.

²⁶ Cf. the similar process with the bridge and the nose, pp.260-262 above.

his hobby-horse that it is impossible to imagine him viewing anything he does in other terms than as a campaign. Military images are no more than in character for both Toby and Trim, but they extend beyond them to other characters and to the narrator, and they can also be vehicles for sexual innuendo. The connection between war and sex has been established in the novel by images such as those already examined.²⁷ Tristram uses the image apart from uncle Toby when he is describing the Phutatorius affair, and trying to find a periphrasis for the term 'cod-piece':

let it suffice to say--it was that particular aperture, which in all good societies, the laws of decorum do strictly require, like the temple of Janus (in peace at least) to be universally shut up. (IV.xxvii.320)

Walter finds it useful when he is told that Toby is to be married:

He may as well batter away his means upon that, as any thing else. (VI.xxxix.473)

and Trim produces a precise comparison:

All womankind, continued Trim, (commenting upon his story) from the highest to the lowest, an' please your honour, love jokes; the difficulty is to know how they chuse to have them cut; and there is no knowing that, but by trying as we do with our artillery in the field, by raising or letting down their breeches, till we hit the mark.--

--I like the comparison, said my uncle Toby, better than the thing itself--

--Because your honour, quoth the Corporal, loves glory, more than pleasure. (IX.viii.609)

It is difficult to be sure here just how far the characters

²⁷ It is, of course, a traditional analogy, though Sterne develops it in his own way by making use of the sexual possibilities of military jargon and equipment.

are aware of the innuendo but it seems likely that neither of them is. The precise force of Toby's remark depends upon what we (and he) take the tenor of the metaphor to be.

As well as providing sexual double entendres the military imagery is used to characterize the Widow Wadman's attempts to seduce uncle Toby. When Tristram has to take a part of these campaigns out of their place to explain how the bridge of his nose was mistaken by uncle Toby, he tells us:

After a series of attacks and repulses in a course of nine months on my uncle Toby's quarter ... my uncle Toby, honest man! found it necessary to draw off his forces, and raise the siege somewhat indignantly. (III.xxiv.209)

When he comes back to describing what happened he returns to the same metaphor:

This made an armistice (that is speaking with regard to my uncle Toby--but with respect to Mrs. Wadman, a vacancy)--of almost eleven years. But in all cases of this nature, as it is the second blow, happen at what distance of time it will, which makes the fray--I chuse for that reason to call these the amours of my uncle Toby with Mrs. Wadman, rather than the amours of Mrs. Wadman with my uncle Toby. (VIII.x.549)

He then continues to treat the affair as a conflict and discourses on the widow's plan; and at this point the sexual implications of the imagery merge with the others (as in 'quarter', quoted above):

Now, through all the lumber rooms of military furniture, including both of horse and foot, from the great arsenal of Venice to the Tower of London (exclusive) if Mrs. Wadman had been rummaging for seven years together, and with Bridget to help her, she could not have found any one blind or mantelet so fit for her purpose, as that which the expediency of my uncle Toby's affairs had fix'd up ready to her hands.

...so that when an attack was resolved upon, Mrs. Wadman had nothing more to do, when she had got advanced to the door of the sentry-box, but to extend her right hand; and edging in her left foot at the same movement, to take hold of the map or plan, or upright, or whatever it was, and with outstretched neck meeting it half way,--to advance it towards her; on which my uncle Toby's passions were sure to catch fire--for he would instantly take hold of the other corner of the map in his left hand, and with the end of his pipe, in the other, begin an explanation...

...Whereas, in following my uncle Toby's forefinger with hers, close thro' all the little turns and indentings of his works--pressing sometimes against the side of it--then treading upon it's nail--then tripping it up--then touching it here--then there, and so on--it set something at least in motion.

This, tho' slight skirmishing, and at a distance from the main body, yet drew on the rest; for here, the map usually falling with the back of it, close to the side of the sentry-box, my uncle Toby, in the simplicity of his soul, would lay his hand flat upon it, in order to go on with his explanation; and Mrs. Wadman, by a manœvre as quick as thought, would as certainly place her's close besides it; this at once opened a communication, large enough for any sentiment to pass or repass, which a person skill'd in the elementary and practical part of love-making, has occasion for--

By bringing up her forefinger parallel (as before) to my uncle Toby's--it unavoidably brought the thumb into action--and the forefinger and thumb being once engaged, as naturally brought in the whole hand. Thine, dear uncle Toby! was never now in it's right place--Mrs. Wadman had it ever to take up, or, with the gentlest pushings, protrusions, and equivocal compressions, that a hand to be removed is capable of receiving--to get it press'd a hair breadth of one side out of her way.

Whilst this was doing, how could she forget to make him sensible, that it was her leg (and no one's else) at the bottom of the sentry-box, which slightly press'd against the calf of his--So that my uncle Toby being thus attacked and sore push'd on both his wings--was it a wonder, if now and then, it put his centre into disorder?--

--The duce take it! said my uncle Toby. (VIII.xvi.554-6)

This remarkable passage of love-making hovers interestingly between the sentimental and the sexual. What might be no more than a delicate sensuality, working on Tristram's usual

level of minuteness, is given sexual overtones by the use of typical forms of ambiguity: 'my uncle Toby's passions were sure to catch fire', 'it set something at least in motion', 'it put his centre into disorder', 'the duce take it'. This is not a matter of Tristram's usual bawdry, since the situation is different: rather than seeing a verbal potential for sexual jest he is hinting at the sexual aspects of what is really a seduction scene.

But only at the end ('centre') is the military terminology used to convey sexual meanings. Most of the way through it describes the widow's movements and intentions, giving to them an aspect of warfare. This is Tristram's habitual way of seeing her behaviour:

As soon as the corporal had finished the story of his amour--or rather my uncle Toby for him--Mrs. Wadman silently sallied forth from her arbour, replaced the pin in her mob, pass'd the wicker gate, and advanced slowly towards my uncle Toby's sentry-box: the disposition which Trim had made in my uncle Toby's mind, was too favourable a crisis to be let slipp'd--

--The attack was determin'd upon ... The corporal had march'd--the field was clear.

Now consider, sir, what nonsense it is, either in fighting, or writing, or any thing else (whether in rhyme to it, or not) which a man has occasion to do --to act by plan...

--She formed a new attack in a moment. (VIII.xxiii.575-6)

Then when he returns to the imagery Tristram makes an interesting comment:

An eye is for all the world exactly like a cannon, in this respect; That it is not so much the eye or the cannon, in themselves, as it is the carriage of the eye--and the carriage of the cannon, by which both the one and the other are enabled to do so much

execution. I don't think the comparison a bad one: However, as 'tis made and placed at the head of the chapter, as much for use as for ornament, all I desire in return, is, that whenever I speak of Mrs. Wadman's eyes (except once in the next period) that you keep it in your fancy. (VIII.xxv.577)

The comparison is made as much for use as for ornament, and we are required to keep it in our fancy: we are not to forget that Mrs Wadman is attacking uncle Toby, and that she is dangerous. This is the 'Love-militancy' which Tristram has referred to earlier (VIII.xiv.552), and it is significant that the 'next period', where the comparison does not apply, reads:

I protest, Madam, said my uncle Toby, I can see nothing whatever in your eye.

The comparison would here be inappropriate because Toby does not realize that the widow's eye is like a cannon, and so the cannon is not implied in his use of the word. So at the end of the account of the affair Tristram tells us:

My uncle Toby and the Corporal had gone on separately with their operations the greatest part of the campaign, and as effectually cut off from all communication of what either the one or the other had been doing, as if they had been separated from each other by the Maes or the Sambre.

My uncle Toby, on his side, had presented himself every afternoon in his red and silver, and blue and gold alternately, and sustained an infinity of attacks in them, without knowing them to be attacks--and so had nothing to communicate. (IX.xxx.641)²⁸

Toby's innocence is continually insisted on throughout the

²⁸ The mention of the Maes and the Sambre in this passage carries an interesting implication, relating the love campaign, not just to Toby's campaigns in general, but to the specific one where he got his wound in the groin, with the possible suggestion of identification between the two campaigns: here he receives another (metaphorical) wound in his groin; and gets his modesty from a 'blow'.

amours, and the military imagery thus receives an added twist of irony in that Toby, the soldier, is unaware that he is engaged in warfare. Thus he mistakes the widow's curiosity for compassion at a point where various elements of the imagery come together:

when Mrs. Wadman went round about by Namur to get at my uncle Toby's groin; and engaged him to attack the point of the advanced counterscarp, and pêle mêle with the Dutch to take the counterguard of St. Roch sword in hand--and then with tender notes playing upon his ear, led him all bleeding by the hand out of the trench, wiping her eye, as he was carried to his tent--Heaven! Earth! Sea!--all was lifted up--the springs of nature rose above their levels--an angel of mercy sat besides him on the sofa--his heart glow'd with fire--and had he been worth a thousand, he had lost every heart of them to Mrs. Wadman.

--And whereabouts, dear Sir, quoth Mrs. Wadman, a little categorically, did you receive this sad blow? --In asking this question, Mrs. Wadman gave a slight glance towards the waistband of my uncle Toby's red plush breeches, expecting naturally, as the shortest reply to it, that my uncle Toby would lay his forefinger upon the place--It fell out otherwise--for my uncle Toby having got his wound before the gate of St. Nicolas, in one of the traverses of the trench, opposite to the salient angle of the demi-bastion of St. Roch; he could at any time stick a pin upon the identical spot of ground where he was standing when the stone struck him... (IX.xxvi.637-8)

The wheel has come full circle. Toby remembers 'his large map of the town and citadel of Namur and its environs, which he had purchased and pasted down upon a board by the Corporal's aid, during his long illness'. The source of all the imagery has been Toby's hobby-horse, and his hobby-horse grew from his desire to be able to explain precisely to compassionate friends the place where he got his wound; it would not be unreasonable to assume that his overwhelming response to the widow's solicitude about his wound is connected with the long

history of enquirers he had when laid up at his brother's house. Mrs Wadman's strategy rebounds on her, and all the ambiguity that has surrounded words like 'place' now works against her, as she is defeated in her attempt to find out Toby's potency. She makes use of what may be called the original campaign in her own 'campaign' and is, unconsciously, out-maneuvred. Tristram had very good reasons for holding up the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters until this point, for the incident makes a fine climax to the amours, and indeed to the novel, taking us back almost to the beginning;²⁹ the corporal's revelation ('the groin, your honour knows, is upon the very curtin of the place', IX.xxxi.643) is a coda to this, harking back to Dr Slop's pun.³⁰

Uncle Toby's amours, then, are seen as campaigns, particularly in respect of the widow Wadman, but also from both sides. But Toby doesn't realize the military implications of the situation, even though he may use the terminology ('She has left a ball here--added my uncle Toby--pointing to his breast', VIII.xxviii.581). We are given a view of this particular relationship between the sexes in which it appears as a kind of warfare; the widow is attacking Toby, her eye is a cannon which carries out destructive work, and she wounds him--first, conventionally, by making him fall

²⁹ Psychologically this incident takes us right back to the first chapter of the novel, for Toby's response is the same as Mrs Shandy's--an automatic release of previously associated ideas.

³⁰ Cf. above, chapter 3, pp.144-5.

in love; secondly, by what may be called the moral wound she inflicts when he mistakes her curiosity for compassion. The military imagery is in this connection backed up by other images which suggest criticism of the widow Wadman. When Tristram first introduces Toby to us in 'a new character', as a lover, he says:

There was, Madam, in my uncle Toby, a singleness of heart which misled him so far out of the little serpentine tracks in which things of this nature usually go on; you can--you can have no conception of it: with this, there was a plainness and simplicity of thinking, with such an unmistrusting ignorance of the plies and foldings of the heart of woman... (VI.xxix.455)

'Serpentine tracks' is picked up again in 'plies and foldings'.

In the next chapter he refers to the 'sons of Adam', and of Mrs Wadman he says:

A daughter of Eve, for such was widow Wadman, and 'tis all the character I intend to give of her--
--"That she was a perfect woman"... (VIII.viii.546)

He says that the Fates had, 'from the first creation of matter and motion', set going a chain of causes which made it impossible for Toby to 'have occupied any other garden in Christendom' (VIII.xiv.552), and he tells us that:

Mrs. Wadman had told it [the fact of Toby's being in love] with all its circumstances, to Mrs. Bridget twenty-four hours before; and was at that very moment sitting in council with her, touching some slight misgivings with regard to the issue of the affair, which the Devil, who never lies dead in a ditch, had put into her head--before he would allow half time, to get quietly through her te Deum (VIII.xxviii.581)

Walter, in his letter to Toby, warns him:

never to go forth upon the enterprize, whether it be in the morning or the afternoon, without first recommending thyself to the protection of Almighty God, that he may defend thee from the evil one...(VIII.xxxiv.591)

in which that 'one' may be either the devil or the widow, or both. When Tristram has told us, by asterisks, that Nature had given Toby everything he needed to make of him a perfect husband he continues:

Now this last article was somewhat apocryphal; and the Devil, who is the great disturber of our faiths in this world, had raised scruples in Mrs. Wadman's brain about it; and like a true devil as he was, had done his own work at the same time, by turning my uncle Toby's Virtue thereupon into nothing but empty bottles, tripes, trunk-hose, and pantofles.(IX.xxii.626)

When Toby goes courting the widow has the nerve to lay a Bible on the table before he enters, but she seems unimpressed when he says that the reasons for marriage are written in the Common Prayer Book; and when he refers, in trying to find compensations for the suffering a woman goes through in child-birth, to 'the pleasure which it has pleased God--' she interrupts him with 'A fiddlestick!' (IX, Chapter the Eighteenth, 635). So Tristram explains:

There is an accent of humanity in an enquiry of this kind which lulls SUSPICION to rest--and I am half persuaded the serpent got pretty near it, in his discourse with Eve; for the propensity in the sex to be deceived could not be so great, that she should have boldness to hold chat with the devil, without it...
(IX.xxvi.637)

and Walter sets out to show that 'every evil and disorder in the world, of what kind or nature soever, from the first fall of Adam, down to my uncle Toby's (inclusive) was owing one way or other' to lust(IX.xxxii.644).

This is a remarkable collection of references, more or less direct, to the first fall of man and to the widow as Eve misled by the Devil. It is backed up by the comment

Tristram makes when Mrs Wadman asks Toby to look into her eye:

Honest soul! thou didst look into it with as much innocency of heart, as ever child look'd into a raree-shew-box; and 'twere as much a sin to have hurt thee. (VIII.xxiv.576)

The condemnation of the widow's behaviour is fairly complete --though I say behaviour, because she herself is seen as misled by the devil rather than as evil; she is called 'Unhappy Mrs. Wadman!' (IX.xxvi.638); and the devil in this case is, as Walter points out, lust. The widow's great sin is to distrust Toby, and not to recognise that he would not enter into such a situation if he was not 'equal to the department' (IX.xxxiii.646); his idea is to 'marry, and love his wife, and get a few children' (VIII.xxxiii.586). The heaviest irony then comes when Toby refers to her greatest virtue as 'HUMANITY'--for the widow is above all guilty of a sin against humanity, against the honesty and innocence of uncle Toby, whom Hazlitt called, 'one of the finest compliments to humanity'.³¹

Tristram says he is confident that the story of Toby's amours will 'turn out one of the most compleat systems, both of the elementary and practical part of love-making, that ever was addressed to the world' (VI.xxxvi.466), and so we are perhaps justified in generalizing from these amours to the whole question of relationships between the sexes,

³¹ 'On the English novelists', Complete Works, ed P.P.Howe, London & Toronto, 1931, vol VI, p.121.

but I have already pointed out that Tristram insists on the paradox of sex, as 'bewitching' and 'confounded', and as the most 'lyrical of all human passions: at the same time the most Misgiving', etc., and if on the one hand he presents love as warfare and the widow's curiosity as evil, he refuses to become too serious about the matter, or to let us simply accept Walter's view of lust. For the whole affair is, more than anything, very funny, and Toby's innocence is absurd. The widow is rather pathetic in her attempts to find out about Toby's wound, especially when compared with the direct manner in which Bridget goes about it, and the continuing sexual jokes and innuendoes, which have run all the way through the novel, distance us from the story and make it, at one level, just another ribald 'cock and bull' story.

Nor is the sexual concern which underlies Mrs Wadman's attempts at love-making the only kind of relationship possible between the sexes. As Tristram tells his female reader:

a friendship between the two sexes may subsist, and be supported without ... any thing, Madam, but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference of sex. Let me intreat you to study the pure and sentimental parts of the best French Romances;--it will really, Madam, astonish you to see with what a variety of chaste expression this delicious sentiment, which I have the honour to speak of, is dress'd out. (I.xviii.49)

The relations between sex and sentiment are interesting. Sentiment is seen as 'pure', and Tristram seems to favour it. The trouble is, that sex may get in the way of any

attempt to establish a purely sentimental relationship. This, it seems to me, is what happens when Tristram joins in the country dance in the plains of Languedoc. He says, not without (presumably unconscious?) innuendo:

O! there is that sprightly frankness which at once unpins every plait of a Languedocian's dress--that whatever is beneath it, it looks so like the simplicity which poets sing of in better days--I will delude my fancy, and believe it is so...

The momentary uncertainty as to which noun 'it' replaces quite undermines the 'pure sentiment', and when Tristram joins the dance he finds himself disturbed:

Hadst thou, Nannette, been array'd like a dutchesse!
 --But that cursed slit in thy petticoat!
Nannette cared not for it...
 I would have given a crown to have sew'd it up--
 Nannette would not have given a sous (VII.xliii.536-8)

I would suggest that the pervasive presence of sexual innuendo in the novel acts on the sentimentalism as an astringent, keeping it from becoming too sentimental.³² Tristram is too aware of the importance of sexual passion to believe whole-heartedly in sentimental relationships, and sentiment, however, 'delicious' it may be, doesn't have the strength to stand up against either the 'beast concupiscent' or that love which 'will but make a man marry, and love his wife, and get a few children'.

³² Cf. my remarks on A Sentimental Journey in Appendix A, below pp. 345-7.

VII: TRUE SHANDEISM AND THE LANGUAGE OF SENTIMENT

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. (IV.xxxii.337-8)

This concluding chapter is concerned with three aspects of Sterne's language which cut across the novelistic distinctions of chapters two to five: satire, rhetoric and sentiment. These three also carry more directly much of Sterne's moral vision, and I have taken the opportunity thus afforded of concluding my study by digressing into the territory of thematic criticism and considering some of the more general aspects of Tristram Shandy. My work on Sterne's use of language has inevitably and properly led me back to such wider concerns.

A. Great Wigs and Long Beards

A writer 'On the present state of literature in England' in the Imperial Magazine wrote: 'Mr. Sterne doubtless possesses in the highest degree the art of ridiculing the ruling passions, or hobby horses, as well as the vices and

follies of mankind'.¹ It seems to me that there is need for a distinction between the satire, or strong ridicule, that Sterne reserves for what he considers vices, and the amusement with which he treats his characters' hobby-horses. But there is a good deal of satire central to the concerns of Tristram Shandy, and it helps negatively to define 'true Shandeism'.

The most consistent object of Tristram's satire is pedantry. It is, of course, a traditional butt of satirists.² As a form of false order and rigid dehumanization pedantry is an obvious target for Sterne, while its manic qualities can also provide a source of delight. Uncle Toby is something of a pedant in his military studies, and Walter is almost wholly so. But in both cases we see too much of the characters in fully realized situations for them to be simply satiric objects. Tristram says of Walter, moreover:

there was a seasoning of wisdom unaccountably mixed up with his strangest whims, and he had sometimes such illuminations in the darkest of his eclipses, as almost attoned for them:--be wary, Sir, when you imitate him. (V.xlii.404)

But it is less his wisdom than his sheer imaginative intensity that raises Walter above the stock figure of the pedant and system-builder; and the same is true of Toby. Yet both can

¹ Quoted by Alan B. Howes, Yorick and the Critics, New Haven, 1958, p.23.

² See D.W.Jefferson, 'Tristram Shandy and the tradition of learned wit', Essays in Criticism I (1951), pp.225-48.

provide occasions for Sterne to revel in the absurdities of learned jargon.³ Left just to Walter and Toby such jargon might appear no more than a feature of the hobby-horse, but it is also generalized throughout the book, and the system-builders and their lumber of false learning are consistently satirized.

Perhaps the most obvious form of satire is the inserted document. The note giving the arguments of the Sorbonne doctors concerning pre-natal baptism is one case where Sterne, rather than making it up, uses a genuine example: it is absurd enough in itself.⁴ The Marriage Settlement is clearly fictitious, and Sterne exaggerates the legal tendency to exhaustive definition so that it becomes quite tautologous:

That in case it should hereafter so fall out, chance, happen, or otherwise come to pass...

upon TRUST and confidence, and for and unto the use and uses, intent, end, and purpose following...

He also inserts modifiers which can have no meaning within the sentence:

for the well and truly hiring of one coach...

and finally produces a list gargantuan in its detail:

and all and every the messuages, houses, buildings, barns, stables, orchards, gardens, backsides, tofts,

³ See above, chapter 3, pp. 113-4 and p. 128.

⁴ See Work, Tristram Shandy, p. 58 note 3. The Excommunication and the Sermon are the other two major examples of Sterne's use of pre-existing documents.

crofts, garths, cottages, lands, meadows, feedings, pastures, marshes, commons, woods, underwoods, drains, fisheries, waters, and water-courses;-- together with all rents, reversions, services, annuities, fee-farms, knights fees, views of frank-pledge, escheats, reliefs, mines, quarries, goods and chattels of felons and fugitives, felons of themselves, and put in exigent, deodands, free warrens, and all other royalties and seignories, rights and jurisdictions, privileges and hereditaments whatsoever... (I.xv.38-40)

Tristram punctures the bombast 'in three words'. The inflated language is an indication of affectation and self-importance, and marks a removal from reality.

Not only the diction of pedantry is satirized. Slawkenbergius's Tale provides a comprehensive list of pedants --medics ('the faculty'), scientists ('the more curious and intimate inquirers after nature and her doings'), logicians, civil and ecclesiastical lawyers, and theologians both Protestant and Catholic--and the logicians provide a nice example of syllogistic syntax:

A nose, argued the logician, cannot bleed without blood--and not only blood--but blood circulating in it to supply the phaenomenon with a succession of drops--(a stream being but a quicker succession of drops, that is included, said he)-- (IV.259)

The whole pedantic system is shored up by references back to earlier pedants, so that it becomes self-perpetuating, as in the voluminous footnote provided for the church lawyers (IV.260) or the jingle set up at the Visitation Dinner in the discussion of baptism:

It is cited in Brook, said Triptolemus---And taken notice of by Lord Coke, added Didius---And you may find it in Swinburn on Testaments, said Kysarcus.
(IV.xxix.328)

These particular learned doctors are further satirized by their names,⁵ which serve as well to distance them from the reader and set them up as archetypal figures. But the pedants are also attacked through a more fully developed figure, Dr Slop.

Slop is perhaps more important as a representative of Roman Catholicism than as a doctor, but the combination of the two is enough to damn him totally in the Shandean world. He indulges in learned jargon occasionally:

The radical heat and moisture, quoth Doctor Slop, turning to my father, you must know, is the basis and foundation of our being;--as the root of a tree is the source and principle of its vegetation.-- It is inherent in the seeds of all animals, and may be preserved sundry ways, but principally in my opinion by consubstantials, impriments, and occludents. (V.xl.402)

'Twill end in a phimosis (V.xxxix.401)

and insists on the proper terminology to boost his self-importance:

...yet nothing will serve you but to carry off the man-midwife.---Accoucheur,--if you please, quoth Dr. Slop. (II.xii.112-13)

But it is his unpleasantness which really brands him, and the satire is more external than internal--that is, Slop appears rather more sinned against than sinning. His language is fairly free from oddities but he is subjected to a variety of farcical situations, such as his fall and the

⁵ See Work, Tristram Shandy, p.193 note 1 and p.194 note 5 for translations of the names.

cutting of his thumb, and the way he is caught in ridiculous positions.⁶ His rôle as villain is more a result of what he does and says than the way he says it.

All this satire of system-builders and pedants is relevant to the central concerns of Tristram Shandy, and not mere whimsy. The great enemy is 'gravity', or solemnity. It is attacked consistently by Tristram and by Yorick, who is reported as saying:

That gravity was an errant scoundrel; and he would add, --of the most dangerous kind too,--because a sly one; and that, he verily believed, more honest, well-meaning people were bubbled out of their goods and money by it in one twelve-month, than by pocket-picking and shop-lifting in seven. In the naked temper which a merry heart discovered, he would say, There was no danger,--but to itself:--whereas the very essence of gravity was design, and consequently deceit;--'twas a taught trick to gain credit of the world for more sense and knowledge than a man was worth. (I.xi.26)

The same attack is picked up by Tristram in his Preface, where he also returns to the attack on the learned professions, and this time less for their false learning than for downright malice and corruption:

In the foreground of this picture, a statesman turning the political wheel, like a brute, the wrong way round --against the stream of corruption,--by heaven!--instead of with it... In that spacious HALL, a coalition of the gown, from all the barrs of it, driving a damn'd, dirty, vexatious cause before them, with all their might

⁶ Cf. above, chapter 4, pp.193-6. For the historical background to Sterne's satire of Dr Slop, and an explanation (with plates) of his terms and instruments, see Arthur H. Cash, 'The birth of Tristram Shandy: Sterne and Dr Burton', in Studies in the Eighteenth Century, ed. Brissenden, pp.133-54.

and main, the wrong way;--kicking it out of the great doors, instead of, in,--and with such fury in their looks, and such a degree of inveteracy in their manner of kicking it, as if the laws had been originally made for the peace and preservation of mankind... (III.xx.198-9)

Despite its oddness of place, and apparently digressive form, the Preface is used by Tristram in quite a conventional way to establish the fundamental principle on which his book rests: the compatibility of 'wit' and 'judgment'.

These vexatious terms, 'wit' and 'judgment', do not lose any of their ambiguity in Tristram's use of them. First we should consider the definition given by Locke:

...wit, lying most in the assemblage of ideas, and putting those together with quickness and variety wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment ... on the other side, in separating carefully one from another ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude and by affinity to take one thing for another. This is a way of proceeding quite contrary to metaphor and illusion; wherein for the most part lies that entertainment and pleasantry of wit which strikes so lively on the fancy, and therefore is so acceptable to all people; because its beauty appears at first sight, and there is required no labour of thought to examine what truth or reason there is in it.⁷

Locke is here identifying wit with imagination, and Sterne is partly concerned to defend imaginative apprehension of the world;⁸ but more directly Locke is attacking simile and

⁷ An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, (6th edition), Book II, chapter xi, para 2; quoted in Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World, p.68.

⁸ See above, chapter 2, pp.49-50, and cf. Tristram's attack on rule-bound criticism, III.xii.180-82.

metaphor. Tristram brings this attack into his Preface:

And Triptolemus and Phutatorius agreeing thereto, ask, How is it possible there should? for that wit and judgment in this world never go together; inasmuch as they are two operations differing from each other as wide as east is from west.---So, says Locke,--so are farting and hickuping, say I. But in answer to this, Didius the great church lawyer, in his code de fartandi et illustrandi fallaciis, doth maintain and make fully appear, That an illustration is no argument,--nor do I maintain the wiping of a looking-glass clean, to be a syllogism;--but you all, may it please your worships, see the better for it,---so that the main good these things do, is only to clarify the understanding, previous to the application of the argument itself, in order to free it from any little notes, or specks of opacular matter, which if left swimming therein, might hinder a conception and spoil all. (III.xx.193)

Tristram, in answer to the claim that judgment (understanding) and wit (comparison) are incompatible, answers with a simile, and counters the charge that 'an illustration is no argument' (virtually a restatement of the claim that wit and judgment are incompatible) with a further 'illustration'. Earlier Tristram has said:

But as the Philosopher would use no other argument to the sceptic, who disputed with him against the reality of motion, save that of rising up upon his legs, and walking a-cross the room;--so would my uncle Toby use no other argument to prove his HOBBY-HORSE was a HOBBY-HORSE indeed, but by getting upon his back and riding him about. (I.xxiv.78)

In the same way Tristram's method of arguing for the value of illustration, metaphor and simile in serious discussion is to make use of it and prove that it works. This is the case not only in the example just quoted but in his central demonstration of the unity of wit and judgment. He starts with just one of those exercises in 'the assemblage of ideas' which Locke complains of, this time adapted from Rabelais:⁹

9 See Work, Tristram Shandy, p.200 note 23.

in all likelihood, if you had looked about, you might have seen something standing, or hanging up, which would have cleared the point at once,--"for what hinderance, hurt or harm, doth the laudable desire of knowledge bring to any man, if even from a sot, a pot, a fool, a stool, a winter-mittain, a truckle for a pully, the lid of a goldsmith's crucible, an oyl bottle, an old slipper, or a cane chair?"--I am this moment sitting upon one. (III.xx.200)

and he goes on, 'Will you give me leave to illustrate this affair of wit and judgment, by the two knobs on the top of the back of it'. So his central argument rests on illustration, on wit. And it develops from a simile:

Here stands wit,--and there stands judgment, close beside it, just like the two knobbs I'm speaking of,

to a complete identification through metaphor:

Now these two knobs--or top ornaments of the mind of man, which crown the whole entablature,--being, as I said, wit and judgment...

thus 'being misled by similitude and by affinity to take one thing for another', as Locke had warned. And the argument is conducted through one of Sterne's witty assumptions that he is actually talking to us, rather than writing a book:

do,--pray, get off your seats, only to take a view of it. The demonstration is rhetorically convincing, and Tristram makes his point both about and through the witty manipulation of language.

Towards the end of the Preface, however, it becomes clear that Tristram means more by wit and judgment than the distinction between modes of thought set out by Locke. He lays the blame for the separation of the two on 'your graver

gentry' who have 'little or no chance in aiming at the one', i.e., wit. Here he is using 'wit' in a sense closer to the modern one. From Locke's 'putting [ideas] together with quickness' comes the idea of wit as liveliness, and of a 'wit' as a jester.¹⁰ Thus Tristram associates 'great wits' with satire and repartee (III.xx.195) and Yorick is quoted as saying that:

brisk trotting and slow argumentation, like wit and judgment, were two incompatible movements (I.x.20)

incorporating wit into the riding imagery discussed above.¹¹

The attack on wit is led by 'great wigs, grave faces', and so wit is seen as the opposite of gravity, and the separation of wit from judgment--or, as we may now say, comic playfulness from high seriousness--is 'one of the many and vile impositions which gravity and grave folks have to answer for hereafter' (III.xx.202). Tristram is insisting, as he does elsewhere, on the serious value of his comic work:

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. ('Dedication' to Vol.I, p.3)

B. Religion and rhetoric

Tristram and Yorick come together in their moral position

¹⁰ The history of this sense of the word is discussed by C.S.Lewis, Studies in Words, Cambridge, 1960, pp.86-110.

¹¹ Chapter 2, pp.47-50.

and condemnation of gravity. They also join forces in satire. Yorick amuses himself at the expense of Walter's adulation of great scholars of the past with a parody of learned language:

I presume, said Yorick, smiling,--it must be owing to this,--(for let logicians say what they will, it is not to be accounted for sufficiently from the bare use of the ten predicaments)--That the famous Vincent Quirino, amongst the many other astonishing feats of his childhood, of which the Cardinal Bembo has given the world so exact a story,--should be able to paste up in the publick schools at Rome, so early as in the eighth year of his age, no less than four thousand, five hundred, and sixty different theses, upon the most abstruse points of the most abstruse theology; --and to defend and maintain them in such sort, as to cramp and dumbfound his opponents. (VI.ii.409-10)

Walter misses the irony, for he goes on to cap this story with many others even more unlikely, but it is in fact a fine piece of burlesque, nicely capturing the overburdened syntax of excessive and involuted qualification proper to 'abstruse theology'. The flow of the sentence is continually interrupted to add a further modification so that the fundamental meaning almost gets lost. The basic outline is simple enough:

it must be owing to this / that the famous Vincent Quirino // should be able to paste up // no less than four thousand five hundred and sixty different theses...

But at each point marked with an oblique stroke Yorick adds a qualification, and of course the sentence runs on again after the point at which I have stopped. Add to this cumbrous phrases like 'not to be accounted for sufficiently from', and the heavy exactitude of 'no less than four thousand, five hundred, and sixty', and the rhetorical

expansion of 'cramp and dumbfound' and 'defend and maintain', and the sentence totters towards breaking point. (It is worth remarking that this is quite different from the fluid, shifting syntax that marks so much of Tristram's discourse: there he tacks new ideas on, or swerves off in a new direction; here the outline remains strictly logical but is filled out with petty details and cavils.)

It is no coincidence that the particular branch of learning Yorick satirizes here should be 'abstruse theology'. It is his consistent point of attack, for all the affectation, irritation and deception of the system-builders is aggravated in this case by the fact that it is the all-important subject of religion which they are tampering with:

I wish there was not a polemic divine, said Yorick, in the kingdom;--one ounce of practical divinity--is worth a painted ship load of all their reverences have imported these fifty years. (V.xxviii.387)

He exercises his wit upon them when inviting Walter to the Visitation Dinner to discuss Tristram's baptism:

the beards of so many commissaries, officials, advocates, proctors, registers, and of the most able of our school-divines, and others, are all to meet in the middle of one table. (IV.xxiii.302)

It is part of Yorick's belief as well as of his character that he should produce such a nice example of Shandean imagery, with the idea of the beards forming a sort of second-level table-cloth. But when he gets to the Dinner he treats them to a more serious exposition of his ideas on religion, although it is still not without wit:

I have undergone such unspeakable torments, in bringing forth this sermon, quoth Yorick, upon this occasion,---that I declare, Didius, I would suffer martyrdom--and if it was possible my horse with me, a thousand times over, before I would sit down and make such another: I was delivered of it at the wrong end of me--it came from my head instead of my heart---and it is for the pain it gave me, both in the writing and preaching of it, that I revenge myself of it, in this manner.--To preach, to show the extent of our reading, or the subtleties of our wit--to parade it in the eyes of the vulgar with the beggarly accounts of a little learning, tinselled over with a few words which glitter, but convey little light and less warmth --is a dishonest use of the poor single half hour in a week which is put into our hands--'Tis not preaching the gospel--but ourselves--For my own part, continued Yorick, I had rather direct five words point blank to the heart-- (IV.xxvi.317)

This is a fine speech, using many of the devices of rhetoric to make its point. It is based around important antitheses --head and heart, gospel and ourselves--and the 'tinsel' image is developed to make the same point: the contrast between 'glitter' and 'warmth'. The birth image suggests unnaturalness, and the other figures range from the half-serious hyperbole of 'martyrdom' to the pathos of 'poor single half hour'. The syntax is carefully arranged so that the passive construction, 'is put into our hands', suggests something held in trust, and the sentences are patterned for emphasis: the two short ones, 'I was delivered ...' and 'it came from...', say the same thing in different terms, the meaning stands still, and then it moves on in a longer sentence to a conclusion. The syntactical repetition: 'To preach ... to parade...' marks another repetition of meaning, where the second version provides a figurative restatement of the first. And in the middle of this moving

statement Yorick is not so solemn that he refrains from mentioning his horse, reminding his readers, and probably his audience, of the ludicrous figure he makes on it.

This is, then, a good example of the uses of rhetoric, and at the same time a justification for it. Rhetoric as the means of persuasion, of directing 'five words point blank to the heart', is more important to the preacher than learning, for religion is more concerned with persuading people to right action than with explaining to them the subtleties of theology. And we are given an example of Yorick's rhetoric in the sermon on conscience which Trim reads out.

John Traugott has pointed out how self-conscious Sterne was about rhetoric.¹² Tristram often alludes to rhetorical terms and practices, usually playing with them ironically, and in Walter Shandy he has created a character who is first and foremost an orator, though a frustrated one more often than not. The Sermon shows Sterne's abilities as a rhetorician, while the effects are playfully pointed up by the reactions of the audience--Dr Slop falls into the opening trap, Trim accepts as completely real the climactic scene, and only Walter the orator follows the drift of the rhetoric.

¹² Tristram Shandy's World, p.xv and passim.

The syntax is heavily patterned, and repetitions occur at various levels of structure:

he cannot well be a stranger to the true state of			
			this account;---
he must	be privy	to his own thoughts	
			and desires;--
he must	remember	his past pursuits,	
	and know certainly	the true springs	
		and motives...	
			(II.xvii.125-6)

or again:

and as current as the inference is,
 and as infallible as the rule appears at first sight,
 yet, when you look nearer to it,
 and try the truth of this rule upon plain facts,--
 you see it liable to so much error from a false application;--
 the principle upon which it goes so often perverted;--
 the whole force of it lost,
 and sometimes so vilely cast away,
 that it is painful to produce the common examples from
 human life which confirm the account... (II.xvii.128)

In this way a long sentence is built up into an almost chant-like rhythm while the syntactical release is held up till near the end so that each repetition becomes another stage in the process of suspense, and thus more forceful.

The fullest example comes quite early on:

I make no doubt but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impressed upon the mind of man,--that did no such thing ever happen, as that the conscience of a man, by long habits of sin, might (as the scripture assures it may) insensibly become hard;--and, like some tender parts of his body, by much stress and continual hard usage, lose, by degrees, that nice sense and perception with which God and nature endow'd it:--Did this never happen;---or was it certain that self-love could never hang the least bias upon the judgment;--or that the little interests below, could rise up and perplex the faculties of our upper regions, and encompass them about with clouds and thick darkness:--Could no such thing as favour and affection enter this sacred COURT:--Did WIT disdain to take a bribe in it;--or was asham'd to shew its face as an advocate for an unwarrantable enjoyment:---OR, lastly, were we assured, that INTEREST stood always unconcern'd

whilst the cause was hearing,--and that passion never got into the judgment-seat, and pronounc'd sentence in the stead of reason, which is supposed always to preside and determine upon the case:--Was this truly so, as the objection must suppose;--no doubt then, the religious and moral state of a man would be exactly what he himself esteem'd it... (II.xvii.127)

This is all one sentence--and it goes on with further co-ordination after the point at which I have left it. The conditional inversion of verb and subject is repeated throughout, each time picking up the argument again and hammering it home:

did no such thing ever happen...
 Did this never happen...
 was it certain that...
 Could no such thing...
 Did WIT disdain...
 were we assured...
 Was this truly so...

Further co-ordination takes place within each clause, and most of these phrases introduce more than one statement. The whole amounts to an elaborate irony: the first sentence states his opponent's point of view:

I make no doubt but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impressed upon the mind of man,--that...

and the end of the sentence takes up the same idea:

no doubt then, the religious and moral state of a man would be exactly what he himself esteem'd it...

but the tense has now changed from the positive affirmation at the beginning to the more 'conditional' 'would be', and in between Yorick has produced this massive catalogue of reasons for believing otherwise, so that we get the full irony of the concluding statement:

the guilt or innocence of every man's life could be known, in general, by no better measure, than the degrees of his own approbation and censure.

This is the completion of the reversal of the way the Sermon started out, in which the preacher seemed to take the point of view now demolished, speaking in the voice of another. The syntactical patterning of this long sentence, the way it is all bound together into one unit by grammatical suspense, adds weight and force to the ironic technique: each time we think we are getting to the end of the sentence we find there is yet another argument to be brought in.

A similar technique of pounding away at the listener is used at the end of the Sermon where Yorick gives his picture of the Inquisition:

Behold ... Hark ... See ... Behold ... Observe ...
See ... Consider ... see ... Behold ... See... (II.xvii.138-9)

Sterne may not have quite trusted this theatricality to work on the page as he could make it do in the pulpit, for the rhetorical pattern is disturbed by Trim's constant interruptions. Instead of the rhetoric direct, we are given rhetoric plus effect, and Trim's fictionally 'true' suffering is added to the stylised suffering rhetorically depicted in the sermon. Trim's suffering is, of course, not only genuine but also absurd,¹³ and so the strong climax is diluted to fit better into the tone of the novel, which is not concerned with this kind of major tragedy. Nevertheless, Trim's reaction does indicate the kind of effect Yorick is after: he seeks to move his audience, to persuade them more through

¹³ Cf. chapter 4, pp.207-8.

their emotions than by learned argument. Like Tristram in his Preface, he depends on illustration to make his point, and so the arsenal of rhetoric is brought in to make the illustrations as effective and vivid as possible.

The Sermon was, as Walter surmizes (II.xvii.133) originally written for a legal audience,¹⁴ and if Yorick doesn't believe in parading his learning, he could perhaps be accused of parading his wit. Legal imagery is cleverly woven in throughout--the subject of the sermon was doubtless chosen for the way it could thus be made appropriate to its audience. Conscience naturally fits into the scheme:

Thus conscience, this once able monitor,---placed on high as a judge within us, and intended by our maker as a just and equitable one too... (II.xvii.132)

There are continual references to 'judgment', 'guilt', 'evidence', and we have already seen the most extended courtroom imagery in the passage quoted above (pp.308-9). In dealing with the Inquisition he plays with the idea further:

Behold Religion, with Mercy and Justice chained down under her feet,---there sitting ghastly upon a black tribunal, propp'd up with racks and instruments of torment (II.xvii.138)

and here of course the image is particularly appropriate because the Inquisition is itself a court ('the anguish of a mock trial'), and indeed the legal imagery could be seen partially as a preparation for this climax in the dealings of a corrupt court. In contrast the Sermon finishes on a

¹⁴ Work, Tristram Shandy, p.142 note 2.

very patriotic note:

No, God and reason made the law, and have placed conscience within you to determine;--not like an Asiatic Cadi, according to the ebbs and flows of his own passions,--but like a British judge in this land of liberty and good sense, who makes no new law, but faithfully declares that law which he knows already written. (II.xvii.140)

It is all very cleverly worked in and suggests again the way wit can be used in a serious context as a means of argument and persuasion.

Yorick's sermon gives us an interesting view of Sterne's relationship to eighteenth-century ethical thinking, and particularly to sentimentalism. (Indeed, we may presume he chose this particular example for its relevance to the moral interests of his book.) In its emphasis on the need of moral feelings to rely on religious law the sermon might seem to run counter to the sentimental ethic usually associated with Shaftesbury, of whom Basil Willey has written:

he believes our natural sense of right and wrong to be antecedent to, and independent of, any religious beliefs.¹⁵

But early on in the Sermon we find this:

I make no doubt but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impressed upon the mind of man, --that did no such thing ever happen ...

... no doubt then, the religious and moral state of a man would be exactly what he himself esteem'd it. (II.xvii.127)

In the gap left in this quotation we get the emphatic cata-

¹⁵ The Eighteenth-Century Background, London, 1940, p.71.

logue of failings which interfere with man's initial state of innocence and right judgment (see above, pp.308-9) and thus make necessary his dependence on the established moral laws of religion. It is true that the rest of the sermon gives all its attention to the corruption of conscience and concludes that 'we can have no dependence upon morality without religion' (II.xvii.136), but the initial premise puts Sterne firmly in a Shaftesburian world.

R.S.Crane has claimed that sentimentalism reaches back beyond Shaftesbury to the 'latitudinarian' divines of the seventeenth century, and we know that Sterne was influenced by the writings of Tillotson and his contemporaries.¹⁶ But Ernest Tuveson insists that there is an important difference between Shaftesbury and those who 'anticipated' him.¹⁷ Of the seventeenth-century preachers Tuveson says there was a 'largely unconscious drift' towards 'a kind of Pelagianism' which he describes thus:

the proposition that the potentialities of human nature remain, and that corruption has entered from a long accumulation of pejorative changes in customs, education, etc.

But he goes on:

Yet theological Pelagianism, although a heresy, remains within religion, and implies need for grace and redemption.¹⁸

¹⁶ See R.S.Crane, 'Suggestions towards a genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"', ELH I (1934), pp.205-30. Cf. L.v.d.H. Hammond, Laurence Sterne's 'Sermons of Mr. Yorick', New Haven, 1948

¹⁷ Ernest Tuveson, 'The importance of Shaftesbury', ELH XX (1953), pp.267-99.

¹⁸ 'The importance of Shaftesbury', p.274.

It is precisely any suggestion of 'grace and redemption' that is missing from Sterne's sermon. The appeal to religion is only an appeal to established laws and fixed principles. Shaftesbury, Tuveson points out, 'was intensely aware of the fact that, to the human view at least, society in his time was far from being the ideal harmonious system it should be'.¹⁹ Man failed to live naturally. Sterne starts from this position, elaborates it, and goes on to recommend religion as a solution.

Such a conception of the relationship between religion and morality is fully consonant with Yorick's attack on abstruse theology and his insistence on practical religion. It also provides the justification for his reliance on rhetoric and the dramatic technique of his sermon. There is thus a close connection between the satire and rhetoric of Tristram Shandy and at least one facet of what we mean by Sterne's 'sentimentalism'.

C. Sentimentalism and sentimentality

Before going on to discuss the language of sentiment it is necessary to clarify some of the terms and concepts involved in eighteenth-century sentimentalism. 'Sensibility', 'sentimental' and 'sentimentalism' have been used fairly

¹⁹ 'The importance of Shaftesbury', p.275.

indiscriminately by different critics discussing eighteenth-century literature. The most thorough analysis of these terms is provided by Erik Erämetsä who distinguishes two main areas of application.²⁰ There is the moral doctrine of the earlier part of the century, and the later movement of 'weepy' literature:

The underlying difference between the two literary trends was this. In the earlier sentimentalism, the primary element lay in the presentation of a moral aim, moral instruction, while a certain kind of feeling, or signs of this feeling, constituted the secondary element, the inevitable accessory to the moral purpose involved...

In the sentimentalism of the late eighteenth century, on the other hand, feeling was exhibited 'for its own sake', which then formed the primary element in it.²¹

So when Ernest Bernbaum says that sentimental comedy rested on a belief in the goodness of average human nature, he is talking about the earlier movement.²² In a more or less diluted form this was very widespread throughout the century, and could be seen to include not only Fielding but also Richardson. Erämetsä's 'presentation of a moral aim, moral instruction' derives from the earliest uses of the word 'sentimental' to mean something like 'sententious', but the morality tends to be Shaftesburian in direction. As the appeal of morality shifts from the intellect to the feelings,

²⁰ Erik Erämetsä, 'A study of the word "sentimental" and of other linguistic characteristics of eighteenth-century sentimentalism in England', Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Series B, vol 74, i, Helsinki, 1951.

²¹ 'A study of the word "sentimental"', p.70.

²² Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, Gloucester, Mass., 1958, p.2.

so 'sentiment' and 'sentimental' become associated with feeling rather than thought.²³ This movement is given a major push by Sterne, whose title, A Sentimental Journey, seems to have had a considerable effect on the use of the word. Erämetsä argues that Sterne's use of the word to denote feeling was influenced by the French term 'sentiment'.

In Sterne, although Erämetsä doesn't seem particularly aware of this, the two kinds of sentimentalism come together. Despite the religious reservations put forward in the sermon on conscience Tristram Shandy is clearly in the tradition of sentimental morality in which benevolence is the great virtue and the good-natured man most to be admired. Uncle Toby is in this sense a sentimental hero, although Sterne's realism means that, unlike (say) Sir Charles Grandison, he is also recognised as an absurdly innocent old fool. At the same time Sterne's dabbling with the 'pathetic' and his emphasis on the feelings (more dominant in A Sentimental Journey but clearly there in Tristram Shandy) connect directly with the 'sentimental novels' of the later eighteenth century. It thus becomes difficult but important to establish what we mean by Sterne's 'sentimentalism'.

The issue is further complicated by the modern term,

²³ For further suggestions on the development of 'sentiment' towards meaning 'feeling' see R.F.Brissenden, '"Sentiment": some uses of the word in the writings of David Hume', in Studies in the Eighteenth Century, ed Brissenden, pp.89-107.

'sentimentality', and its effect on the word 'sentimental'.

I. A. Richards writes:

A response is sentimental if it is too great for the occasion

and that when we apply 'sentimental' to persons:

It means that they are too susceptible, the flood-gates of their emotions too easily raised.²⁴

It is clear from J.M.S. Tompkins' description of minor eighteenth-century sentimental fiction how this meaning has come about:

The votary of sensibility valued emotion for itself, without stopping to consider whether it sprang from an adequate cause; indeed, it was a mark of the most refined sensibility that the cause should appear at first blush inadequate. Hence springs in the first place a lack of proportion, and in the next place all the insincerity of stoked-up feelings and self-complacency.²⁵

As Tristram says on another occasion:

The best word, in the best language of the best world, must have suffered under such combinations. (V.i.347)

But an indication of how far the term has moved from its original area of meaning is given by Richards' second definition:

Another sense ... is that in which 'sentimental' is equivalent to 'crude'. A crude emotion, as opposed to a refined emotion, can be set off by all manner of situations, whereas a refined emotion is one that can only be aroused by a narrow range of situations. Refined emotions are like sensitive instruments; they reflect slight changes in the situations which call them forth.²⁶

Here that refinement of emotion which characterized at least

²⁴ Practical Criticism, London, 1964 (pb. edition), p.258.

²⁵ The Popular Novel in England, 1770-1800, London, 1932, p.100.

²⁶ Practical Criticism, pp.258-9.

the earlier sentimental novels (it is made much of in A Sentimental Journey) has become the opposite of 'sentimental'.

The situation is highly confused, and the subtlety and ambiguity of Sterne's novels only add to the complication. Erämetsä follows an earlier student of the term 'sentimental', Edith Birkhead, in seeing Sterne as a straightforward sentimentalist of the second kind. He says of Sterne's sentimentalism:

It consisted of skilful and delicate manipulation of one's feelings, so as with the help of wit and tickling impulsiveness to give the person concerned the highest possible degree of sensational pleasure.²⁷

And Edith Birkhead remarks:

The incidental touches of pathos in Sterne are more moving than his studied scenes like the story of Le Fever or the Recording Angel's tear. The artistry of that pretty trifle, the story of Maria, is too apparent, though it was founded on a real incident.²⁸

The attempt to see Sterne as a simple sentimentalist who produces 'touches of pathos' leads to misreading and a lack of appreciation of his particular genius. Another incidental commentator, an historian of 'sensibility', writes:

At another time, in A Sentimental Journey, he rejoiced in the carefree merrymaking of a group of servants dancing in a kitchen and finding in their simple amusement what to Sterne seemed complete happiness.²⁹

And this of a description rife with innuendo:

²⁷ 'A study of the word "sentimental"', p.46.

²⁸ 'Sentiment and sensibility in the eighteenth-century novel', Essays and Studies XI (1925), pp.92-116 (p.106).

²⁹ Walter Francis Wright, 'Sensibility in English prose fiction, 1760-1814', Illinois Studies in Language and Literature XXII, nos. 3-4, Urbana, 1935.

as a Frenchman, whatever be his talents, has no sort of prudery in shewing them, La Fleur, in less than five minutes, had pull'd out his life...³⁰

Sterne cannot be fitted into simple categories, nor will he ever let his reader rest for long with a single response. I now therefore propose to look at two of the episodes in Tristram Shandy which have been called 'sentimental' (in most senses, at different times). I have consigned to an appendix a brief consideration of some of the linguistic complexities of A Sentimental Journey, where sentimentalism is far more central than it is in Tristram Shandy.³¹

D. The language of sentiment

I shall concentrate here on what are probably the most notorious 'sentimental' passages in Tristram Shandy: the story of Le Fever and the story of Maria. They raise the most interesting problems, and provide examples of two important facets of sentimentalism in the novel: uncle Toby's sentimentalism and Tristram's. It is significant that they are both interpolations into what might be called the story of Tristram Shandy, but Le Fever's story involves both Toby and Trim, and is altogether better worked in, arising from Walter's discussion of tutors, and having been anticipated earlier in the book (V.x.366). We never know whether young

³⁰ A Sentimental Journey, p.45.

³¹ See below, Appendix A, pp.341-55.

Le Fever did become Tristram's governor, but it seems most probable that like other schemes in the novel it never reached fulfilment.

The major part of the story concentrates on uncle Toby, not on Le Fever. The focus is less on illness and death than on Toby's good-nature. Any judgment of the story is thus affected by our total response to Toby as a character, to other examples of his good-nature and quixotism, to the mixture of love and gentle irony with which Tristram usually treats him. So the running Toby jokes are not forgotten:

My uncle Toby filled his second pipe; and had it not been, that he now and then wandered from the point, with considering whether it was not full as well to have the curtain of the tennaile a straight line, as a crooked one,--he might be said to have thought of nothing else but poor Le Fever and his boy the whole time he smoaked it. (VI.vi.418)

The hobby-horse is used in a slightly different and more complex way in judging Toby's reactions:

It was to my uncle Toby's eternal honour,--though I tell it only for the sake of those, who, when coop'd in betwixt a natural and a positive law, know not for their souls, which way in the world to turn themselves--That notwithstanding my uncle Toby was warmly engaged at that time in carrying on the siege of Dendermond, parallel with the allies, who pressed theirs on so vigorously, that they scarce allowed him time to get his dinner--that nevertheless he gave up Dendermond, though he had already made a lodgment upon the counter-scarp;--and bent his whole thoughts towards the private distresses at the inn; and, except that he ordered the garden gate to be bolted up, by which he might be said to have turned the siege of Dendermond into a blockade,--he left Dendermond to itself,--to be relieved or not by the French king, as the French king thought good; and only considered how he himself should relieve the poor lieutenant and his son.

--That kind BEING, who is a friend to the friendless, shall recompence thee for this. (VI.viii.423-4)

We have learned in Tristram Shandy to beware when Tristram announces that he is drawing a moral out of a situation. Such pretensions to seriousness are usually to be treated with caution. So the elaborate detail with which Tristram here describes Toby's dilemma only further heightens the absurdity of suggesting that there could really be any moral choice between the games on the bowling green and the needs of 'the poor lieutenant' (Le Fever is always 'poor'). Tristram's fulsome tribute at the end is also, on one level at least, absurd. At another level, however, we understand what it meant to the obsessive uncle Toby to give up such an exciting siege half way through and to overcome his ruling passion in the interests of charity, and the tribute can be taken seriously.

The inherent ambiguity in Toby's character is present throughout the story. Thus Sterne uses his technique of physical absurdity:

He will march; said my uncle Toby, rising up from the side of the bed, with one shoe off:--An' please your honour, said the corporal, he will never march, but to his grave:--He shall march, cried my uncle Toby, marching the foot which had a shoe on, though without advancing an inch,--he shall march to his regiment. --He cannot stand it, said the corporal;--He shall be supported, said my uncle Toby;--He'll drop at last, said the corporal, and what will become of his boy?
(VI.viii.424-5)

Toby is in effect back on his hobby-horse here, carried away to the realm of imagination, marching up and down on the spot, oblivious to the fact that he has only one shoe on. The joke is further reinforced by the suggestion of a pun

in 'He cannot stand it ... He shall be supported'. But at the same time, the actual subject of the conversation is pathetic, and Trim strikes the note of true pathos with, 'What will become of his boy?'. Stringent anti-sentimentalists might also claim that the tolerant humour with which Toby's emotional reactions are treated is sentimental indulgence. But sentimental humour is a somewhat different thing from all-out sentiment. It is a general feature of the presentation of Toby's character, and usually handled with great delicacy:

I never in the longest march, said the corporal, had so great a mind to my dinner, as I had to cry with him for company:--What could be the matter with me, an' please your honour? Nothing in the world, Trim, said my uncle Toby, blowing his nose. (VI.vii.420)

I wish, said my uncle Toby, with a deep sigh,--I wish, Trim, I was asleep. (VI.vii.423)

The amused irony with which Tristram treats Toby's marching also prepares for the conceit which follows it:

He shall not die, by G--, cried my uncle Toby.
 --The ACCUSING SPIRIT which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blush'd as he gave it in; --and the RECORDING ANGEL as he wrote it down, dropp'd a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever. (VI.viii.425)

To those who wish to treat the whole scene as undiluted sentiment this may come as a shock. Thus Edith Birkhead doesn't find this 'studied scene' as 'moving' as the incidental touches of pathos.³² Of course not. The very artificiality she complains of is part of Tristram's technique of withdrawal and commentary on Toby's sentimentality. The conceit is funny, because Toby is funny, and Tristram

³² See above, p.318.

is clearly indicating his amusement at his uncle's exaggerated and unrealistic attitudes.

The humour doesn't rule out the sentiment, but qualifies and complicates it. The final scene begins in straight pathetic vein:

The sun looked bright the morning after, to every eye in the village but Le Fever's and his afflicted son's; the hand of death press'd heavy upon his eye-lids,-- and hardly could the wheel at the cistern turn round its circle. (VI.x.425)

As far as I can discover it has not been remarked before that there is here a probable reference to the famous passage at the end of Ecclesiastes:

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth,
while the evil days come not, nor the years draw
nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in
them;
While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the
stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after
the rain...
Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden
bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the
fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.
Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.³³

This allusion imparts further gloom and thoughts of death to Tristram's description. Into this scene marches uncle Toby:

when my uncle Toby, who had rose up an hour before his wonted time, entered the lieutenant's room, and without preface or apology, sat himself down upon the chair by the bed-side, and independently of all modes and customs, opened the curtain in the manner an old friend and brother officer would have done it, and asked him how he did,--how he had rested in the

³³ Ecclesiastes XII. i-vii.

night,--what was his complaint,--where was his pain, --and what he could do to help him:--and without giving him time to answer any one of the enquiries, went on and told him of the little plan which he had been concerting with the corporal the night before for him. (VI.x.425-6)

There is something faintly comic and very Shandean in Toby bombarding the poor lieutenant with his questions and not waiting for an answer. Even without Tristram's narrative comment it is clear from the way the questions run on from one another that none of them gets answered. Nevertheless, the hint of humour is very slight and doesn't really alter the basic seriousness of the scene. Toby's directness and briskness when there is anything to be done are part of his moral character, and we are treated to the emotive terms, 'old friend and brother officer' in the description of his manner.

Tristram then goes on to an even more direct comment on his uncle, and certain key words begin to appear:

There was a frankness in my uncle Toby,--not the effect of familiarity,--but the cause of it,--which let you at once into his soul, and shewed you the goodness of his nature; to this, there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him; so that before my uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father, had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him.
(VI.x.426)

Apart from terms like 'frankness' and 'goodness', the religious terminology increases: 'soul', 'eternally', and a faintly biblical suggestiveness in 'beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him'. 'Eternally' is

particularly interesting as an hyperbole used, it seems, less for its denotation than for its religious overtones. The inversion, 'had the son', suggests Tristram perhaps trying a bit too hard, for with the repetition of 'had' in 'had taken hold' the syntax actually becomes slightly confusing and off-putting, I find.

Children are a stock element of any really good sentimental scene--or should we say that our responses towards children are so ambivalent that we easily make the accusation of sentimentality when they are around? The child in this scene has something of the status and rôle of a dumb animal, responding 'insensibly' to uncle Toby's aura of benevolence. Physical contact is used often in Tristram Shandy to mark an unspoken, even unformulable, sympathetic communication between characters.³⁴ It operates between Walter and Toby when the clash of their hobby-horses has brought them to the point of open conflict, and we may compare an isolated moment of sentimental humour in the middle of the highly dubious story of Trim's brother and the Jew's widow:

The Corporal blush'd down to his fingers' ends--a tear of sentimental bashfulness--another of gratitude to my uncle Toby--and a tear of sorrow for his brother's misfortunes, started into his eye and ran sweetly down his cheek together; my uncle Toby's kindled as one lamp does at another; and taking hold of the breast of Trim's coat (which had been that of Le Fevre's) as if to ease his lame leg, but in reality to gratify a finer feeling--he stood silent for a minute and a half; at the end of which he took his hand away, and the

³⁴ Cf. above, chapter 4, p.168.

Corporal making a bow, went on with his story of his brother and the Jew's widow. (IX.v.605)

Here Tristram really lays it on thick--the tears, the gratuitous reference to Le Fever, the 'finer feeling'--and the slightly odd use of the word 'sentimental' reminds us of the unstable meaning it had at this time, appearing as it does today tautologous. But Tristram is not entirely serious: he gives the game away with the almost institutional 'a minute and a half; at the end of which he took his hand away', where the pedantic exactness overburdens the description to the point at which it clearly becomes funny. The sentimentality is Toby's and Trim's--not Tristram's.

The passage with Le Fever's son, by contrast, has an altogether more serious tone. The unhappy child instinctively turns to Toby for protection, and Tristram's comments on his uncle's character endorse the action. So far the scene might well please anyone who likes to have his tender feelings stirred, and disgust anyone who easily finds such stirring 'sentimental'. It isn't possible to make a definitive judgment on whether the emotion is excessive or too facile. My own response is that the description of the child's action, which might easily seem overdone, is acceptable within the larger context of uncle Toby's character as it is established throughout the book. Tristram has shifted delicately from the mixture of sentiment and humour earlier in the episode to the pure pathos of this moment.

The next step is to take the pathos that bit too far, and so withdraw again to ironic distance:

The blood and spirits of Le Fever, which were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart,--rallied back,--the film forsook his eyes for a moment,--he looked up wishfully in my uncle Toby's face,--then cast a look upon his boy,--and that ligament, fine as it was,--was never broken.---

Nature instantly ebb'd again,--the film returned to its place,--the pulse fluttered--stopp'd--went on--throb'd--stopp'd again--moved--stopp'd--shall I go on? --No. (VI.x.426)

The crucial question is how we read the last five words. Do they mark a continuation of a gradual diminuendo, or a sudden breaking of the mood? Does Tristram answer his own question, even, or is it one of his 'readers' again? We could take into account the beginning of the next chapter:

I am so impatient to return to my own story, that what remains of young Le Fever's, that is, from this turn of his fortune, to the time my uncle Toby recommended him for my preceptor, shall be told in a very few words, in the next chapter. (VI.xi.426)

It has been argued that this gives us the clue:

his pulse stopped, started, stopped, started--until the author is frankly tired of it. If we're not sure, he puts us out of doubt: 'I am so impatient to return...' 35

This seems to me a misreading of the way Tristram uses the chapter break for a complete change of mood, a fresh start. It also fails to take account of the way Tristram's question enacts what happens to Le Fever, the sense in which it could almost be the pulse asking, 'Shall I go on?--No'.

³⁵ Alan B. Bateman, Tristram Shandy: Notes, London & Toronto, 1968, p.78. Mr Bateman is a far from reliable guide at several points, but his opinion here is a possible one.

However, I cannot find conclusive evidence in the language at this point which would guide us to a 'correct' reading, nor would it seem particularly helpful to argue that Tristram has left it purposely ambiguous. It is too self-conscious for Sterne to have thought it could work as a gentle, sentimental ending, I think. He seems to be withdrawing back out of the scene, drawing our attention to his own technique (as he often does elsewhere), and so ultimately refusing to commit himself to participation in the pathos of the situation. I'm not sure that it entirely works on this occasion--unlike, say, the rather nice wit of the black page commemorating the death of Yorick. I am not suggesting that the withdrawal mars the value of the scene; merely that the technique doesn't quite come off.

This problematic moment doesn't radically affect the larger impression made by the episode of Le Fever. The balance is kept between pathos and humour, and the mixture in uncle Toby's character of silliness and greatness is as effective as ever. It is worth remembering that in the dedication to volumes five and six Sterne picked out this episode and dedicated it to Viscount Spencer's wife:

for which I have no other motive, which my heart
has informed me of, but that the story is a humane
one (V.341)

and that the episode was universally admired when the volumes were published as an example of the pathetic.³⁶

³⁶ See Howes, Yorick and the Critics, p.14.

Similar problems arise with the story of Maria, probably Sterne's most famous episode (partly because she reappears in A Sentimental Journey, where Sterne's treatment makes an interesting comparison with Tristram Shandy³⁷). It is even more tenuously connected with its surroundings than the story of Le Fever, arising as a digression within a digression. Its relation to its general context is primarily ironic, for that context is the story of uncle Toby's amours with the Widow Wadman--hardly a great romantic tale, although Tristram might seem to present it as such:

For my uncle Toby's amours running all the way in my head, they had the same effect upon me as if they had been my own--I was in the most perfect state of bounty and good will; and felt the kindest harmony vibrating within me, with every oscillation of the chaise alike; so that whether the roads were rough or smooth, it made no difference; every thing I saw, or had to do with, touch'd upon some secret spring either of sentiment or rapture. (IX.xxiv.629)

The ambiguity which we associate with Sterne's treatment of sentiment is there already. What looks like a genuine description of a sentimental state (the association with the nerves is common, especially in A Sentimental Journey) is ascribed to a most dubious cause. Similarly, just before, what could be a sentimental recommendation of generosity:

pay it with both hands open, rather than leave Dis-appointment sitting drooping upon the eye of your fair Hostess and her Damsels in the gate-way, at your departure--

is given a self-interested, sexual twist:

and besides, my dear Sir, you get a sisterly kiss of each of 'em worth a pound--at least I did-- (ibid)

And the whole digression follows on from an invocation

³⁷ See Appendix A below, pp.351-2.

addressed to the muse that presided over the pen of Cervantes.

From this ambiguous beginning we are introduced to the story of Maria. Fundamentally it is a sentimental classic: intrigued against and denied in love, the beautiful, innocent Maria loses her reason and wanders distracted, playing the evening service upon her pipe. The initial response is clearly sentimental--that is, Tristram's feelings are stirred and he seems to enjoy it:

--They were the sweetest notes I ever heard; and I instantly let down the fore-glass to hear them more distinctly...

...The young fellow utter'd this with an accent and a look so perfectly in tune to a feeling heart, that I instantly made a vow, I would give him a four and twenty sous piece, when I got to Moulins (IX.xxiv.629-30)

After Tristram has heard the story his response is further affected by it:

He was going on, when Maria, who had made a short pause, put the pipe to her mouth and began the air again--they were the same notes;---yet were ten times sweeter.

The description of her appearance fits the mood:

she was in a thin white jacket with her hair, all but two tresses, drawn up into a silk net, with a few olive leaves twisted a little fantastically on one side--she was beautiful; and if ever I felt the full force of an honest heart-ache, it was the moment I saw her. (IX.xxiv.630)

The 'white' jacket emphasizes her innocence, its thinness her frailty; the hair, like her mind, is slightly disordered, and the leaves are a standard part of the pattern, corresponding to the Ophelia syndrome. We may compare this with another of Tristram's sentimental moments, his passion for

the Tomb of the Two Lovers at Lyons:

She--(Amanda) all the time wandering barefoot, and
with dishevell'd hair, o'er rocks and mountains
enquiring for Amandus (VII.xxxi.521)

The details are perfunctory, as befits a story which is described as 'pabulum' for the 'cullender' of Tristram's brain, and which is responsible for one of those absurd moments when he rushes to the tomb and finds it gone.

There Tristram's amusement at his own sentimentality is clear. Here the standard details are executed with a good deal more care and delicacy, the specific details giving some sense of originality and actuality. The word 'honest' carries considerable force, implying that Tristram is responding to genuine innocence and beauty and perhaps intended to eliminate any sexual element from the response.

Having set up this tender scene, Tristram now goes on to twist it in typical Shandean fashion:

As the postilion spoke this, MARIA made a cadence so melancholy, so tender and querulous, that I sprung out of the chaise to help her, and found myself sitting betwixt her and her goat before I relapsed from my enthusiasm.

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?

I do intreat the candid reader to believe me, that it was from the humblest conviction of what a Beast man is,--that I ask'd the question; and that I would not have let^t fallen an unseasonable pleasantry in the venerable presence of Misery, to be entitled to all the wit that ever Rabelais scatter'd--and yet I own my heart smote me, and that I so smarted at the very idea of it, that I swore I would set up for Wisdom and utter grave sentences the rest of my days--and never--never attempt again to commit mirth with

man, woman, or child, the longest day I had to live.

As for writing nonsense to them--I believe, there was a reserve--but that I leave to the world.

Adieu, Marie!---adieu, poor hapless damsel!---some time, but not now, I may hear thy sorrows from thy own lips--but I was deceived; for that moment she took her pipe and told me such a tale of woe with it, that I rose up, and with broken and irregular steps walk'd softly to my chaise.

---What an excellent inn at Moulins! (IX.xxiv.631)

Tristram leaves it to the world to decide whether or not he is writing nonsense to them, and we also have to decide whether he is interrupting a beautiful story with his nonsense, or whether the story itself might be considered nonsense. Certainly he protests too much: his remark could have passed quietly if he had not stopped to comment on it. But the comment is part of the scene: it is while he is there that it strikes him as inappropriate, and this is the crux of the matter. Under the first impulse of his feelings he springs out of the chaise and finds himself sitting next to Maria. This kind of impulsive movement is the typical outward sign of sudden emotion in Tristram Shandy.³⁸ 'Enthusiasm' is a dubious word in the eighteenth century, and seems to have been so for Sterne;³⁹ generally it was associated with the Methodists and emotional excess. So Tristram suddenly becomes aware of his own absurdity--as throughout the book he has been aware of the absurdity of Toby or Yorick in such sentimental outbursts--and he sees as from the outside the picture of himself being compared

³⁸ See above, chapter 4, pp.167-8.

³⁹ Cf. Alice G. Fredman, Diderot and Sterne, p.38.

with the goat. We may suspect the depth of conviction in the phrase, 'the venerable presence of Misery', and we certainly cannot accept seriously his promise to 'utter grave sentences' after all that has been said about gravity in the book.

We are given, then, an excessive response to pathos, followed by self-conscious distancing, followed by an excessive reaction the other way. This awkward swinging about from one response to another is what we might expect from the Tristram we have come to know in the course of the novel: a highly self-conscious witty jester who believes in the value of feeling as more dependable than intellectualizing, but is himself something of an intellectual. When he gets into a sentimental situation he cannot cope with it, he cannot respond with the naivety of a Toby without becoming conscious of his own absurdity.

Thus he swings back again to the sentimental response, although it rings rather false:

Adieu, Maria!--adieu, poor hapless damsel!--some time, but not now, I may hear thy sorrows from thy own lips...

We suspect he is posturing a bit--it's all a bit literary, with 'thy' instead of 'your'. And then experience again cuts across his self-consciousness:

she took her pipe and told me such a tale of woe with it, that I rose up, and with broken and irregular steps walk'd softly to my chaise.

He was referring to a spoken story, but sentimental experience

transcends language, and the music speaks directly to his feelings.⁴⁰ The final line may be read either as a further intrusion into the sentimental mood, or as a gulping change of the subject in order to hide his emotion--an indication that nothing more can be said. It also tells us that Tristram later recovered his usual self-possession and got over the emotional experience.

Both in this case and at the end of the Le Fever episode problems of interpretation arise which we don't feel on other occasions when Tristram deals with sentimental situations. The crucial difference is that the main actor is Tristram himself. This is partly a matter of Tristram's character: he is not a clearly defined figure like uncle Toby, he perpetually shifts from the humorous to the serious, and we can never trust him. If we attempt to put that faith in him which we can easily put in Fielding's or Jane Austen's narrators, it doesn't work. If uncle Toby said, 'Shall I go on--No', we would know that it was because he was overcome with emotion and could not proceed, and it would never occur to him that anyone might let fall an unseasonable pleasantry in the venerable presence of Misery. In the story of Le Fever, or of the Fly, we get Tristram's response to uncle Toby's response to a situation. With Maria and Le Fever's death one of these stages is removed, and we come uncomfortably close to the actual suffering. It becomes difficult to distinguish between Tristram laughing at himself and Tristram

⁴⁰ Cf. V.xv.372 quoted above, chapter 2, p.93.

laughing at Le Fever or Maria. (Perhaps even more disturbing is the thought of Tristram laughing at us, and our emotions, having appeared to provide us with a suitable object for them.) This is related to one of the more objectionable aspects of later sentimental fiction, which is the sheer egoism of the concentration on the enjoyment of the spectator of suffering, rather than the feelings of the sufferer.⁴¹ Such enjoyment is not at issue here, but there is a similar diverting of attention from the suffering person towards Tristram himself. This, if anything, is the criticism I would want to make of Sterne's 'sentimental' writing, and it could be called a kind of sentimentality. But his actual handling of the pathos is done with considerable skill, and he shows himself always aware of the absurdities of sentimentalism, and always tempers his approval of spontaneous feeling with laughter.

E. True Shandeism

In this chapter I have discussed Tristram's parody of pedants and his attack on gravity, Yorick's rhetorical religion, and some features of the sentimentalism of Tristram Shandy. Themes have emerged in earlier chapters which seem

⁴¹ See J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel, p.102; also Brian Vickers, 'Introduction' to Henry Mackenzie, The Man of Feeling, London, 1967, p.x. Cf. below, Appendix A, pp.349-51.

to me to point in a similar direction: Tristram's attack on order and rigidity and his concern with non-rational experience; the hobby-horsical aspects of the major characters and the way their mental habits impede rational communication; the attention given to trivial or minute events, disrupting the larger structures of the book but capturing and emphasizing everyday reality; the insistence on the complex unity of experience and the confusing of normally separate epistemological modes; the play with the ambiguities of sexual language and sexual experience, the attack on prudery, and the grand climax of uncle Toby's frustrated love affair. By studying Sterne's language in relation to these themes I hope to have remained close to the central conception of Tristram Shandy.

In his discussion of the growth of realism, and thus of the novel, Ronald Paulson has written:

A second, perhaps purer strain of anti-romance can be traced back to Erasmus and Rabelais and the early satires supporting the humanist revival. Their main purpose was to throw open windows, destroy the illusions, rigidities, and stupidities of the Scholastic categories, and return to an apostolic simplicity.

And further:

In the tradition of Rabelais the real, as the unpredictable, disorderly, and unformulable, is a corrective if not a good used to destroy the unreal romance of man-made conventions and stock-responses.⁴²

⁴² Satire and the Novel in Eighteenth-Century England, New Haven & London, 1967, pp.26 & 27. Paulson's terms are very similar to my own, which were arrived at inductively from a study of Sterne's language.

This is the tradition of Sterne,⁴³ although he perhaps doesn't really share the belief Paulson attributes to the Renaissance humanists in 'apostolic simplicity'. At one point Sterne refers to 'my dear Rabelais, and dearer Cervantes' (III.xix.191), and of the Cervantic tradition Paulson writes:

Again and again in the modern novel we encounter a protagonist who aspires to the idealized life of romance (literary, historical, heroic, aristocratic) and thereupon sees reality distorted through those aspirations; this life, with its code, aspirations, and way of thinking is contrasted to the protagonist's real world and true self. Cervantes shows that the romance world is an evil insofar as it represents a cramping of one's own nature, a madness that sees giants where there are only windmills, or a code of manners that is inappropriate to the particular man who aspires toward it or the particular time in which he lives. It can also be a good, however, insofar as it represents a corrective to the petty forms of the present, man's natural instincts that have been fettered by the customs of society, a higher reality revealed by some divine madness, the world of imagination and poetry, or even (by extension) the true reality beneath the deceiving appearances of the world, and the ideal world we fall short of.⁴⁴

This ambivalent attitude seems to me clearly present in Tristram Shandy,--we have only to think of uncle Toby with his bowling green, or Walter with his magnificently silly theories and his rhetorical power in defending them. The satire is there strongly enough, but at the same time we cannot ignore uncle Toby's eloquence when he says:

And heaven is my witness, brother Shandy, that the pleasure I have taken in these things,--and that

⁴³ Tristram acknowledges his forbears, and he has long been recognised as an inheritor of this humanist tradition. See Jefferson, 'Tristram Shandy and the tradition of learned wit'.

⁴⁴ Satire and the Novel, pp.31-2.

infinite delight, in particular, which has attended my sieges in my bowling green, has arose within me, and I hope in the corporal too, from the consciousness we both had, that in carrying them on, we were answering the great ends of our creation. (VI.xxxii.462)

Toby speaks for all the Shandys, for although much of the time we may see Tristram as the conscious satirist, turning the conventions of fiction upside-down and flouting every rule written or unwritten, yet insofar as we also see him as an author struggling to impose an ideal form on the shapeless and lively mass of detail swimming around in his head and in countless documents, he shows himself to be a quixotic system-builder, his father's true son, failing magnificently. Within his own century Sterne appears associated both with the Whig writers who changed the concept of a 'humour' from a general fault of mankind which is exposed for correction to a loveable eccentricity, a celebration of English liberty,⁴⁵ and with the anti-classical movement that produced rococco art and the natural and easy acting of Garrick.⁴⁶ Thus we find Tristram writing, after rehearsing the history of ideas associated with English eccentricity:

Then, fourthly and lastly, that this strange irregul-

⁴⁵ Satire and the Novel, pp.62-4. Sterne's interventions in York politics were on the Whig side (see Work, 'Introduction' to Tristram Shandy, p.xxv).

⁴⁶ 'The irregular and the vital are even connected with Hogarth's "Line of Beauty", the natural curving line opposed to the geometrical symmetry of Palladian architecture and neoclassicism', Satire and the Novel, p.256. Cf. Brissenden, 'Sterne and painting' in Of Books and Humankind, ed Butt.

arity 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. (I.xxi.64)

He's joking of course, but at the same time it's a nice point (and not totally unrelated to the rise of the novel).

Apostrophes to Garrick and to Hogarth are quite common:

if you have read Hogarth's analysis of beauty, and if you have not I wish you would. (II.ix.104)

Sterne is thus not a solitary sport in the history of literature, but the inheritor of a great tradition and a representative of the movement which broke up Augustan neoclassicism and prepared the way for the romantics.

I have tried to show in the course of this thesis how Sterne found a linguistic form, or forms, which would convey his conception to the reader, supporting and extending the way he uses character, event, commentary and fictional form. I have argued in my first chapter that prose is not a uniform system of language but a highly adaptable instrument that can be used for a multiplicity of purposes and effects. Sterne used it in a highly original and, indeed, eccentric way in creating his original and eccentric characters in their original and eccentric world.

But more even than an assertion of the essentially non-rational nature of man, and a celebration of the freedom of the human imagination, true Shandeism lies in the apotheosis of laughter. Tristram says of his book:

If 'tis wrote against any thing,--'tis wrote, an' please your worships, against the spleen; in order, by a more frequent and a more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succussions of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the gall and other bitter juices from the gall bladder, liver and sweet-bread of his majesty's subjects, with all the inimicitious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenum. (IV.xxii.301-2)

Even here he cannot refrain from expressing his belief through a parody of medical language, inflating the process of laughter into a scientific mystery. For he is laughing all the way through. If I have not insisted as much as I might have done in the course of this study on Sterne's humour it is because to do so all the time would have become tedious. But the language of Tristram Shandy is funny. All the digressions, the losing the way and then brilliantly recapturing it, the minute descriptions, the lists and squiggles, the strange long words and the racy slang, the chatting and orating--all this, as well as the more obvious parody and the ever-inventive wit, is primarily funny in its effect. Sterne is unlike the majority of comic novelists, who portray funny characters and funny situations, in that his language all the way through is witty and delightful: you have to go out of the novel to Swift or Rabelais, or Butler or Byron, or right forwards in time to Joyce, to find a similar phenomenon.⁴⁷ The first and most enduring quality of Tristram Shandy is also the most unique quality of its language: pure comedy.

⁴⁷ Dickens, of course, seems to have learned much from Sterne, and his language does at times take on comic qualities in similar ways, but not with the consistency found in Sterne.

APPENDIX A: SENTIMENTALISM IN 'A SENTIMENTAL JOURNEY'

Sterne's second novel is very unlike his first, despite certain superficial similarities both of style and technique. In Tristram Shandy sentimentalism in the sense of a belief in the value of feeling above ratiocination and in the supremacy of benevolism and good-nature as ethical values is fundamental to the novel, but it is not a 'novel of sensibility', not primarily concerned with the registration of feeling and sympathetic contact with others. Sterne developed his use of the 'pathetic', notably in the stories of Le Fever and Maria, but these are incidental to the main comedy. He elevated his narrator to a point of equal importance with his characters, but he did create very real characters seen from the outside.

In A Sentimental Journey there is only one character and he tells his own story. And that story, moreover, is largely one of inner action, of what goes on in his mind, feelings, soul. In Tristram Shandy each character is seen to be trapped within his own mental world, but they are nevertheless described from an external point of view and pitted against each other. In A Sentimental Journey the world shrinks to Yorick's mind and feelings, and external reality is always filtered through his perception of it. The other characters who appear are shadowy figures, and

their speech is more often reported than given direct. Thus the rhythm of events as conveyed through the chapters is adapted to Yorick's experience rather than to any external measure, and even chapter numbers disappear as each chapter becomes the encapsulation of a single moment of experience. Plot is irrelevant, for it deals with external manifestations. (It is possible to see that if the novel had been completed a plot might have emerged, that is, a kind of sentimental education entailing a gradual purification of sentiment throughout the course of the journey; but the evidence as it stands is insufficient.)

A Sentimental Journey is, then, in this sense, a remarkably pure example of a 'novel of sensibility' or 'sentimental novel', reducing action almost totally to subjective registration of experience, and concerned more with the effect of character and event on the narrator than with them in themselves. But Sterne was never a pure sentimentalist. He believed in the importance of feeling, and in the ideal notion of sentimental purity--a refinement of one's relations with others to benevolent outgoing interest, the sympathetic vibration of two souls in harmony. But he also knew that this was an ideal not really compatible with human nature, which is a much more complex thing than sentimentalists would like to make out.

So Sterne presents us in Yorick with a sentimentalist

who continually finds 'every dirty passion, and bad propensity in my nature' (The Remise Door, 22)¹ getting in the way of his sentimental ideals.² In this appendix I shall briefly examine some of the features of the language in which Sterne portrays this conflict.

The vocabulary of feeling is interesting. It is closely tied up with the language of sensation, although it is not certain how far Yorick (or Sterne) believes in an intimate connection between emotion and sensation and how far he uses it as a convenient objective correlative. The connection is partly inherent in our language: 'feeling' itself can be applied either to a physical or an emotional experience, as (less frequently) can 'sensation'. The standard metaphor which locates the emotions in the 'heart' continues the connection, and Yorick extends this connection with the heart to the 'blood' and the 'pulse'. Certain physical manifestations connected with the blood have a pre-established connection with the emotions, notably blushing:

As I acknowledged this, I felt a suffusion of a finer kind upon my cheek--more warm and friendly to man,

¹ A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy, ed Ian Jack, Oxford English Novels, London, 1968. All page references are to this edition and are given in the form shown.

² I find further corroboration of this view of the novel in Paulson, Satire and the Novel, pp.262-5. Paulson arrives at his interpretation via a discussion of genres, but includes some attention to the language.

than what Burgundy (at least of two livres a bottle, which was such as I had been drinking) could have produced. (Calais, 4)

'Warm' is another ambivalent term which connects with the blood. The pulse-feeling episode derives from the same association, and the connection between physiology and emotion is made quite explicitly, and extended (via the sentimentalist's ethics) to a moral judgment:

And how does it beat, Monsieur? said she.--With all the benignity, said I, looking quietly in her eyes, that I expected-- (The Husband, 54)

The same kind of connection was made in Tristram Shandy, but with that tone of Shandean irony which leaves the reader wondering just how much Tristram really means to be taken seriously:

I enter upon this part of my story in the most pensive and melancholy frame of mind, that ever sympathetic breast was touched with.--My nerves relax as I tell it.--Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse, and of that careless alacrity with it, which every day of my life prompts me to say and write a thousand things I should not. (III.xxviii.215)

Similarly Yorick, writing about Maria, says:

Why does my pulse beat languid as I write this?
(Maria: Moulines, 114)

This close connection between sensation and emotion also relates to the delicate hand-play that goes on in the novel:

The pulsations of the arteries along my fingers pressing across hers, told her what was passing within me: she looked down--a silence of some moments followed.
I fear, in this interval, I must have made some slight efforts towards a closer compression of her hand, from a subtle sensation I felt in the palm of my own--not as if she was going to withdraw hers--but, as if she thought about it--and I had infallibly lost it a second time, had not instinct more than reason directed me to the last resource in these dangers--to hold it loosely, and in a manner as if I was every moment going to release it, of myself. (The Remise Door, 19)

It is clear from my last example how the language of sentimental feeling can easily become confused with the language of sexual flirtation. Thus with the 'Grisset' in the glove shop we get the language of looks:

The beautiful Grisset look'd sometimes at the gloves, then sideways to the window, then at the gloves--and then at me. I was not disposed to break silence--I follow'd her example: so I look'd at the gloves, then to the window, then at the gloves, and then at her --and so on alternately.

I found I lost considerably in every attack--she had a quick black eye, and shot through two such long and silken eye-lashes with such penetration, that she look'd into my very heart and reins--It may seem strange, but I could actually feel she did-- (The Gloves, 55)

The exact repetition of the words describing their similar actions not only adds to the comedy of the situation, but implies some kind of non-verbal communication between them. The physiological term for the seat of the affections, 'reins', becomes highly ambiguous as Yorick says, 'I could actually feel she did'. The nature of his sensation is in doubt, and we are reminded of uncle Toby when the Widow Wadman's attacks 'put his centre into disorder' (VIII.xvi.556). This kind of physical flirtation recurs with the fille de chambre, where Yorick acknowledges that he 'feels the movements which rise out of' his 'situation' (The Conquest, 94)--the equivocation here centering on the word 'movements':

So she put her hand into her right pocket, which was next me, and felt for it for some time--then into the left--'She had lost it'.--I never bore expectation more quietly--it was in her right pocket at last--she pulled it out ... I held it ten minutes with the back of my hand resting upon her lap--looking sometimes at the purse, sometimes on one side of it. (The Temptation, 93)

Again:

as she passed her hand in silence across and across my neck in the manoeuvre, I felt the laurels shake which fancy had wreath'd about my head. (ibid)

In this case Yorick is very aware of the conflict, and the situation is conveyed through straight description rather than equivocation: the language is only revealing by what it does not say. At other times it is his attempts to avoid the pitfalls of equivocation that land him in further trouble:

Hèh bien! Monsieur l'Anglois, said the Count, gaily --You are not come to spy the nakedness of the land --I believe you--ni encore, I dare say, that of our women--But permit me to conjecture--if, par hazard, they fell in your way--that the prospect would not affect you...

...Excuse me, Monsieur Le Count, said I--as for the nakedness of your land, if I saw it, I should cast my eyes over it with tears in them--and for that of your women (blushing at the idea he had excited in me) I am so evangelical in this, and have such a fellow-feeling for what ever is weak about them, that I would cover it with a garment, if I knew how to throw it on--But I could wish, continued I, to spy the nakedness of their hearts, and through the different disguises of customs, climates, and religion, find out what is good in them, to fashion my own by--and therefore am I come...

...I conceive every fair being as a temple, and would rather enter in, and see the original drawings and loose sketches hung up in it, than the transfiguration of Raphael itself...

...'tis a quiet journey of the heart in pursuit of NATURE, and those affections which rise out of her, which make us love each other--and the world, better than we do. (The Passport, 84-5)

I have quoted at length to show how, as Yorick goes on trying to define his sentimentalism against the 'indecent insinuation' of the Count, he continually stumbles into ambiguities and equivocations which implicitly comment on his pure intentions. As he says later:

Nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece (The Conquest, 94)

and this fact is reflected in the language.

The problem is not always a sexual one. One of the features of Yorick's account of inner action is a tendency to personify different feelings or qualities, and internal debates between conflicting impulses are quite frequent. When he decides to invite the lady at Calais to share his chaise the opening of his description of the ensuing debate leads us to think of the sexual implications of the suggestion, but we are wrong:

Every dirty passion, and bad propensity in my nature, took the alarm, as I stated the proposition--It will oblige you to have a third horse, said AVARICE...
--You know not who she is, said CAUTION... (The Remise Door, 22)

and so on through cowardice, discretion, hypocrisy, meanness and pride. The only reference to the sexual implications is indirectly via Yorick's reputation. He thus indicates the place of sexual impulses within his ethical code by concentrating on more objectionable vices. Other failings in Yorick's attempt at sentimentalism include his meanness with the Monk and his use of flattery in Paris.

Yorick has a considerable capacity for self-deception, and he tends to take up sentimental postures which are then deflated by reality. The worse excesses of sentimental language are largely associated with this posturing; one common feature of it is his tendency to talk to himself

out loud, and he is also likely to indulge in some extravagant gestures:

Just God! said I, kicking my portmanteau aside, what is there in this world's goods which should sharpen our spirits... (Calais, 4)

Disguise thyself as thou wilt, still slavery! said I --still thou art a bitter draught; and though thousands in all ages have been made to drink of thee, thou art no less bitter on that account.--'tis thou, thrice sweet and gracious goddess, addressing myself to LIBERTY, whom all in public or in private worship, whose taste is grateful, and ever will be so, till NATURE herself shall change--no tint of words can spot thy snowy mantle, or chymic power turn thy sceptre into iron-- with thee to smile upon him as he eats his crust, the swain is happier than his monarch, from whose court thou art exiled--Gracious heaven! cried I, kneeling down upon the last step but one in my ascent --grant me but health, thou great Bestower of it, and give me but this fair goddess as my companion--and shower down thy mitres, if it seems good unto thy divine providence, upon those heads which are aching for them. (The Passport: The hotel at Paris, 72)

The first example is part of the famous opening of the novel, where Yorick announces his feelings of generosity and then refuses alms to the Monk. When we remember that he is alone in the room, the absurdity of his gesture becomes apparent. Similarly, in the second example--the 'kneeling down upon the last step but one in my ascent'--the precise detailing of which step it was particularly emphasizes the self-consciousness of the gesture. This speech is interesting. Having heard the starling Yorick has changed his mind, and what he says here is a distinct advance in reality over his earlier speech dismissing the Bastille as 'a house you can't get out of' (*ibid*, 70). But he has still not come to terms with the true reality of imprisonment, as he does (though in a highly artificial and self-conscious way) when he sits

down and conjures up in his imagination the sufferings of a prisoner. In the speech I have quoted the heavy rhetoric --personification, exclamation, repetition--the use of archaic forms (thou, thy), the highly generalized and stylized 'swain' who 'eats his crust', and the tired imagery ('bitter draught', 'goddess') all point to lack of involvement.

Yorick isn't really in contact at all with the subject he is declaiming about, but merely going through the motions. He even bungles his metaphors, as he describes liberty as a 'goddess ... whose taste is grateful'. The taste image is of course carried over from the earlier 'bitter draught' idea, and has no place in the goddess sequence. Significantly, when Yorick does get down to really using his imagination he comments:

I was going to begin with the millions of my fellow creatures born to no inheritance but slavery; but finding, however affecting the picture was, that I could not bring it near me... (The Captive, 72)

The broad generalizations and rhetorical flourishes in this earlier passage mark just such a failure to 'bring it near me'.

A slightly more problematic example occurs when he receives the letter from the lady he had met in Calais:

Then I will meet thee, said I, fair spirit! at Brussels--'tis only returning from Italy through Germany to Holland, by the rout of Flanders, home --'twill scarce be ten posts out of my way; but were it ten thousand! with what a moral delight will it crown my journey, in sharing in the sickening incidents of a tale of misery told to me by such a sufferer? to see her weep! and though I cannot dry up the fountain of her tears, what an exquisite sensation is there still left, in wiping them away

from off the cheeks of the first and fairest of women,
as I'm sitting with my handkerchief in my hand in
silence the whole night besides her. (Amiens, 43)

I call this problematic because Yorick goes on to say,
'There was nothing wrong in the sentiment'! In fact, it is
a fantastic example of the most horrible features of senti-
mentalism: the 'moral delight' in 'sickening incidents',
the 'exquisite sensation' based on the lady's misery. One
further feature typical of sentimentalism is the emphasis
on 'the first and fairest of women': the sentimental novel-
ists always liked their distressed ladies to be as beautiful
as possible,³ and this feature, I think, leads to some sort
of explanation of the problem surrounding this passage.
When Yorick says, 'There was nothing wrong in the sentiment'
it is as the first stage in an account of his reaction to
what he had just said:

and yet I instantly reproached my heart with it in
the bitterest and most reprobate of expressions (ibid)

He is reproaching himself for endangering his fidelity to
Eliza, thus recognizing the sexual element in his feelings.
So we may infer that in trying to disguise to himself his
sexual interest in the lady he has laid on as thickly as
possible the sentimental description of his relationship
with her, producing all the clichés of sentimental fiction.
Thus, 'sitting with my handkerchief in my hand in silence
the whole night beside her' carefully accounts for what they

³ See Tompkins, The Popular Novel, p.105.

will be doing during the sexually dangerous night-time. And so the comment 'there was nothing wrong in the sentiment' is undermined and we see not only the sexual basis of the attraction but the explanation of the lurid sentimentalism. I don't think this is too ingenious an explanation.

The most notorious example of 'sentimental language' is the apostrophe Yorick declaims to 'Dear sensibility' after his meeting with Maria. In Tristram Shandy Maria is the subject of a Yorick-like piece of self-consciousness,⁴ but in A Sentimental Journey she is given a more strongly sentimental treatment, although not entirely free from ambiguity at the end:

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

(Maria: Moulines, 116)

The end of this sentence is a direct allusion to the story told by Hathan to David when reproaching him for killing Uriah and taking his wife Bathsheba:⁵

⁴ See above, chapter 7, pp.329-35.

⁵ This is not the reference given by Ian Jack (note, p.237) but is much closer to the text than his suggestion of 2 Samuel IX. vii, and obviously what Yorick had in mind.

But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; and it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter. (2 Samuel XII. iii)

On a literal level this reinforces the apparent innocence and benevolence of Yorick's interest in Maria. But it is Nathan's parable for Uriah and Bathsheba, and so metaphorically it reinforces the suggestions of sexual interest in the rest of the passage.

Nevertheless, the treatment of Maria is largely straight sentiment, and together with The Supper and The Grace it provides a strongly sentimental context for Yorick's apostrophe. There are no signs in it of him talking out loud or making extravagant gestures: the outburst rather seems to belong to the more aware narrator Yorick, not the character. The evidence thus suggests that we should take the apostrophe seriously as part of the growing sentimentalism towards the end of the book:

Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that's precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw --and 'tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN--eternal fountain of our feelings!--'tis here I trace thee --and this is thy divinity which stirs within me ---not, that in some sad and sickening moments, 'my soul shrinks back upon herself, and startles at destruction'--mere pomp of words!--but that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself --all comes from thee, great--great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation.--Touch'd with thee, Eugenius draws my curtain when I languish--hears my tale of symptoms, and blames the weather for the disorder of his nerves. Thou giv'st a portion of it sometimes to the roughest

peasant who traverses the bleakest mountains--he finds the lacerated lamb of another's flock--This moment I beheld him leaning with his head against his crook, with piteous inclination looking down upon it--Oh! had I come one moment sooner!--it bleeds to death--his gentle heart bleeds with it--
Peace to thee, generous swain!--I see thou walkest off with anguish--but thy joys shall balance it--for happy is thy cottage--and happy is the sharer of it--and happy are the lambs which sport about you. (The Bourbonnois, 117)

This bears some traces of what I would call the excesses of sentimental language--the exclamations, the archaic forms--but I think that on the whole it works rather well. The rhetorical strategy of rejecting 'mere pomp of words' is backed up by the relatively simple statement: 'I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself'. The fanciful idea of God as the 'sensorium of the world' (again uniting the moral and sensational aspects of sentimentalism) is really only a slight twist to the well-known biblical passage:

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. (Matthew X. xxix-xxxi)⁶

And if we feel that Yorick is trying a bit too hard with 'the roughest peasant who traverses the bleakest mountains', at least he provides a concrete image, focusing on a particular situation. And against the sentimentalism of the 'noble peasant' idea he balances the sophisticated sentiment of Eugenius, who 'blames the weather for the disorder

⁶ Cf. also: 'As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground', 1 Samuel XIV. xlv.

of his nerves'. The final paragraph, as well as balancing 'generous joys' against the 'generous cares' we have just had, also rather nicely implies life going on again in the image of the lambs. This paragraph also provides a link with the narrative context to follow, as, first, Yorick's concern for the suffering of his horse leads him to interrupt his journey (paralleling the concern for the lamb), and then we do in effect see the happy cottage and the happy wife, and if not lambs then young people sporting around the peasant.

There are certain loose inconsistencies in the passage. Apart from the rather odd idea of being chained to a bed of straw (which is perhaps not quite what he says, but the idea does intrude), it is rather difficult to determine exactly what or whom Yorick is apostrophizing. There is clearly an identification of some kind being made between 'sensibility' and God. 'Sensibility' is 'thou', and it is 'thy divinity', which rather suggests a complete identification. Then God is addressed as 'great SENSORIUM of the world', and Eugenius is 'touch'd with thee': touched with God seems a rather odd idea, unless we assimilate together God and sensibility. But then he says, 'Thou giv'st a portion of it', where 'it' must be sensibility and 'Thou' presumably is God. In this respect the passage doesn't seem to be very clearly thought out--certainly not very clearly expressed. But we can still see that considerable care has been put into it, and it

doesn't suffer from the wilder excesses of Yorick's rhetoric such as we have seen earlier in the book. However incoherently, it makes the important connection between Yorick's sentimentalism and his religion, and so prepares for the climax of these two volumes in the two chapters which follow. If it is somewhat artificial, this serves as a salutary reminder that sentimentalism was not romanticism, however much it may have prepared the ground and sprung from similar impulses. It shows, furthermore, the fine line between serious sentimental rhetoric and posturing pomposity in A Sentimental Journey, and illustrates some of the ways in which that novel has been able to perplex and irritate critics over the years by its subtle (and not always ideally clear) ambiguity and complexity.

APPENDIX B: SOURCES FOR WALTER SHANDY ON DEATH

Most of Walter's speech on Death (V.iii.353-7) is taken from Robert Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, II.iii.5, with some material added from Francis Bacon's Essay II, 'Of Death'. Below I give all the relevant sections from the sources (on the left) in the order they appear there, together with Sterne's adaptations of them (on the right). For Burton I have used the Everyman edition, edited by Holbrook Jackson, London, 1932, pp.176-85 of vol 2, checked against a copy of the sixth edition (the last revised one) published in Oxford in 1651: I have silently restored the spelling and punctuation in the occasional instances where a comparison could be made. For Bacon I have used Spedding's text as printed in The Philosophical Works of Francis Bacon, edited with an introduction by J.M.Robertson, London and New York, 1905, p.737; for clarity I have omitted the Latin quotations. For a discussion of Sterne's use of these passages see above, chapter 3, pp.115-9.

Burton

'When we are, death is not:
but when death is, then we
are not' p.178

Walter

for consider, brother Toby,
--when we are--death is not;
--and when death is--we are
not. p.356

'Tis an inevitable chance,
the first statute in Magna
Charta, an everlasting Act
of Parliament, all must die.
p.181

Tombs and monuments have
the like fate, data sunt
ipsis quoque fata sepul-
chris, kingdoms, provinces,
towns, and cities have
their periods, and are con-
sumed. In those flourish-
ing times of Troy, Mycenae
was the fairest city in
Greece, Graeciae cunctae
imperitabat, but it, alas,
and that Assyrian Nineveh
are quite overthrown; the
like fate hath that Egypt-
ian and Boeotian Thebes,
Delos, commune Graeciae
conciliabulum, the common
council-house of Greece;
and Babylon, the greatest
city that ever the sun
shone on, hath now nothing

'Tis an inevitable chance
--the first statute in Magnâ
Chartâ--it is an everlasting
act of parliament, my dear
brother,--All must die. p.353

To die, is the great debt and
tribute due unto nature: tombs
and monuments, which should
perpetuate our memories, pay
it themselves; and the proudest
pyramid of them all, which
wealth and science have erected,
has lost its apex, and stands
obtruncated in the traveller's
horizon... Kingdoms and pro-
vinces, and towns and cities,
have they not their periods?
and when those principles and
powers, which at first cemented
and put them together, have
performed their several evol-
utions, they fall back ...
Where is Troy and Mycenae, and
Thebes and Delos, and Persepolis
and Agrigentum ... What is become,
brother Toby, of Nineveh and

but walls and rubbish
left. Quid Pandioniae
restat nisi nomen
Athenae? Thus Pausanius
complained in his times.
And where is Troy itself
now, Persepolis, Carthage,
Cyzicum, Sparta, Argos,
and all those Grecian
cities? Syracuse and
Agrigentum, the fairest
towns in Sicily, which
had sometime 700,000
inhabitants, are now de-
cayed: the names of Hiero,
Empedocles, etc., of those
mighty numbers of people,
only left ... cities, men,
monuments decay, nec solid-
is prodest sua machina terris,
the names are only left, those
at length forgotten, and are
involved in perpetual night.
pp.181-2

Babylon, of Cizicum and Mity-
lenae? The fairest towns that
ever the sun rose upon, are
now no more: the names only
are left, and those (for many
of them are wrong spelt) are
falling themselves by piece-
meals to decay, and in length
of time will be forgotten, and
involved with every thing in
a perpetual night: the world
itself, brother Toby, must--
must come to an end. pp.353-4

'Returning out of Asia,
 when I sailed from Aegina
 toward Megara, I began'
 (saith Servius Sulpicius,
 in a consolatory epistle
 of his to Tully) 'to view
 the country round about.
Aegina was behind me,
Megara before, Pyraeus
 on the right hand, Corinth
 on the left, what flour-
 ishing towns heretofore,
 now prostrate and over-
 whelmed before mine eyes?
 I began to think with
 myself, Alas, why are we
 men so much disquieted
 with the departure of a
 friend, whose life is much
 shorter? When so many goodly
 cities lie buried before us.
 Remember O Servius thou art
 a man; and with that I was
 much confirmed, and cor-
 rected myself.' p.182

Returning out of Asia, when I
 sailed from Aegina towards
Megara, ... I began to view
 the country round about.
Aegina was behind me, Megara
 was before, Pyraeus on the
 right hand, Corinth on the left.
 --What flourishing towns now
 prostrate upon the earth!
 Alas! alas! said I to myself,
 that man should disturb his
 soul for the loss of a child,
 when so much as this lies
 awfully buried in his presence
 --Remember, said I to myself
 again--remember thou art a man.
 p.354

Thou mayst be ashamed, I say with Seneca; to confess it, 'in such a tempest as this to have but one anchor,' go seek another; and for his part thou dost him great injury to desire his longer life.
p.182

'Wilt thou have him crazed and sickly still,' like a tired traveller that comes weary to his inn, begin his journey afresh, 'or to be freed from his miseries? Thou hast more need rejoice that he is gone.'
p.182

He is now gone to eternity as another Ganymede, in the flower of his youth, 'as if he had risen', said Plutarch, 'from the midst of a feast', before he was drunk...
p.183

My son is dead!--so much the better;--'tis a shame in such a tempest to have but one anchor. p.355

Is it not better to be freed from cares and agues, from love and melancholy, and the other hot and cold fits of life, than like a galled traveller, who comes weary to his inn, to be bound to begin his journey afresh?
p.356

But he is gone for ever from us!--be it so. He is got from under the hands of his barber before he was bald--he is but risen from a feast before he was surfeited--from a banquet before he had got drunken.
p.355

'Is it not much better
 not to hunger at all than
 to eat: not to thirst
 than to drink to satisfy
 thirst: not to be cold
 than to put on clothes
 to drive away cold? You
 had more need rejoice
 that I am freed from
 diseases, agues, cares,
 anxieties, livor, love,
 covetousness, hatred,
 envy, malice, that I fear
 no more thieves, tyrants,
 enemies, as you do.'

p.184

The Thracians wept still
 when a child was born,
 feasted and made mirth
 when any man was buried:
 and so should we rather
 be glad for such as die
 well, that they are so
 happily freed from the
 miseries of this life.

pp.184-5

Is it not better, my dear
 brother Toby, (for mark--
 our appetites are but dis-
 eases)--is it not better
 not to hunger at all, than
 to eat?--not to thirst,
 than to take physick to cure
 it?

Is it not better to be
 freed from cares and agues,
 from love and melancholy, and
 the other hot and cold fits
 of life... p.356

The Thracians wept when a child
 was born ... and feasted and
 made merry when a man went out
 of the world; and with reason.

p.355

Bacon

Groans and convulsions,
and a discoloured face,
and friends weeping,
and blacks, and obsequies,
and the like, show death
terrible.

It is no less worthy to
observe, how little
alteration in good spirits
the approaches of death
make; for they appear to
be the same men till the
last instant. Augustus
Caesar died in a com-
pliment; ... Tiberius
in dissimulation; as
Tacitus saith of him...
Vespasian in a jest; sit-
ting upon the stool ...
Galba with a sentence;...
holding forth his neck.
Septimius Severus in
despatch ... And the like.

Walter

There is no terror, brother
Toby, in its looks, but what
it borrows from groans and
convulsions--and the blowing
of noses, and the wiping away
of tears with the bottoms of
curtains in a dying man's
room. p.356

For this reason ... 'tis
worthy to recollect, how
little alteration in great
men, the approaches of death
have made.--Vespasian died
in a jest upon his close
stool--Galba with a sentence
--Septimius Severus in a dis-
patch--Tiberius in dissimul-
ation, and Caesar Augustus
in a compliment. pp.356-7

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