Laurence Sterne's Sexual Ethic in "Tristram Shandy."

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Laurence Sterne's Sexual Ethic in *Tristram Shandy*

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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ABSTRACT

Since Laurence Sterne's attention to sexuality is pervasive in *Tristram Shandy*, various interpretations of his sex symbolism have been proposed. Sterne is praised for his Rabelaisian spirit and for his satiric vision, which keeps man's aspiring mind tied to his body. Some critics focus upon Sterne's ability to manipulate rhetorical and semantic ambiguities. And these perspectives provide insight into *Tristram*.

However, Thackeray's evaluation, which charges Sterne with obscenity, has prevailed for too long. It has caused critics to avoid the sexual material, and, consequently, criticism lacks an interpretation of *Tristram* which adequately accounts for its sexual symbolism. This interpretation seems to provide an understanding of the complex attitude constituting Sterne's sexual ethic.

The foundations for this ethic are discovered through viewing *Tristram* in the tradition of sexual humorists: Aristophanes, Lucian, Rabelais, Butler, and Swift. These writers seem to recognize the profound significance of sexuality, and their reactions to it reveal their basic conceptions regarding human nature. In their works, they illustrate the humorist's defiance of restrictions placed upon personal expression by social morality.

This morality, urging man to deny his physical nature,
is the object of Sterne's satire. As he depicts his three main characters, Walter, Toby, and Tristram, Sterne reveals the extent to which each has been victimized by society. Walter Shandy attempts to remove sexuality from the realm of human emotion, to subjugate it to order, and condemns himself to failure. The constant frustration of his rational theories regarding noses, presented in phallic terminology; education, his auxilliary verb sollipsism; and names, the sexual associations of the two to which he most violently objects, symbolizes his inability to understand his own sexual identity.

As the man of war who becomes excessively modest, Toby Shandy represents society's greatest conquest. His sexuality is sublimated, and he rarely struggles. He channels his energies into his hobby-horse, the war games which contain highly sexual implications, and A. R. Towers, Jr. notes that Toby's fortifications are regularly feminized. Indeed, in his attention to this mistress, Toby fulfills many of the requirements for Andreas Capellanus' courtly lover.

In his one encounter with a woman, Toby proves naive and incompetent. His psychological impotence is evident when, upon discovering the nature of the Widow's "Humanity," he hastily retreats to his hobby-horsical world.

Tristram is also a victim of social morality, is aware of this fact, and defies prudery. However, he is physically impotent. To satisfy Toby's hobby-horse, the weights
are removed from the nursery windows; as a result of Walter's work on the "Tristrapaedia," Tristram, abandoned to the care of women, is mutilated while utilizing the window for a chamber-pot. Thus, Tristram's impotence is ultimately the result of moral hypocrisy, and his sexual encounters bring only frustration.

In attempting to come to terms with his sexual identity, Tristram analyzes himself. During his journey, which seems to derive its significance from intensely emotional encounters with women, Tristram describes the simultaneous presence of himself as mutilated child, as impotent man, and as writer. Here, Tristram reveals his understanding of the significance of sexuality. It is presented as a divine provision for man's pleasure and as the basis for the sympathetic communication between men which is necessary if terrestrial life is to be meaningful.

This is the essence of the sexual ethic in Tristram Shandy. As Yorick further explains, the ethic does not constitute an invitation for man to indulge his lustfulness. It is an appeal for man to discover the pleasures inherent in his limited, human condition in order to fulfill the purposes for which he was created. This, in short, is the central theme of this study.
CHAPTER I

SEXUAL HUMOR IN THE COMIC TRADITION

"It is not necessary to my purpose, nor doubtless congenial to the taste of the reader, that I should enter upon any critical analysis of this quality in the author's work."¹ With these words and with eyes averted, H. D. Traill hurries past the sexual matters in the writings of Laurence Sterne. Once beyond them, however, Traill takes his position among the "orthodox" by asserting that "Sterne is of all writers the most permeated and penetrated with impurity of thought and suggestion."² And this impure presence Traill ascribes to "mere animal spirits," although proof for this judgement would require a study "unpleasantly minute."³ Although formulated in 1889, Traill's position here, with slight modifications, has prevailed for too long a time. And it is due largely to such an attitude that critics have failed to account for the pervasiveness of sex in Tristram Shandy or to formulate an interpretation of the novel which would adequately explain it. Thus, there is the need for a critical examination of the sexual symbolism of Tristram in order to

² Traill, p. 148.
³ Traill, p. 147.
provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the novel and to arrive at a determination of the complex of attitudes which may be tentatively described as Sterne's sexual ethic. It is to be hoped that this study will be neither unpleasant nor too minute.

The proper introduction to such a study will be found in an examination of the uses of sex by writers such as Aristophanes, Lucian, Rabelais, Butler, and Swift. Although the works of these authors illustrate varying attitudes toward sex, from the exuberant optimism of Aristophanes and Rabelais to the realistic evaluations, both comic and tragic, of Lucian and Butler to Swiftian pessimism, Sterne exhibits certain affinities with all of them; and there are sufficient similarities to constitute a tradition of comic humorists to which Sterne clearly belongs. For all of these writers seem to recognize the preeminence of the sexual instinct in man's life. Their reactions to this fact, whether laughter or tears or both, reveal a great deal about their conceptions regarding human nature. And in their depictions of sexuality, they illustrate the tendency of comic and satiric writers to flaunt the restrictions placed upon personal expression by social morality.

It is the "old comedy" of Aristophanes's drama which most explicitly illustrates the primal connection between comedy and fertility ritual. As Gilbert Highet remarks, Aristophanic comedy "always reminds us that it originated in
a drunken revel; indeed, some of the extant comedies end
where comedy began, in a wild party, with wine, women, crazy
dancing, and gay semi-coherent singing.  And when Highte
further comments upon the "wildly unpredictable and asymmet-
rical and apparently improvisatorial" quality of Aristoph-
anic comedy, the comparison with Sterne is inevitable: Tris-
tram's innumerable digressions, his false starts, his stars,
dashes, black pages and marble pages provide the form for his
experiences with Nannette at the country dance, with Jenny,
and for the tales of Slawkenbergius and the Abbess of
Andoüillets.

It is the Lysistrata that most clearly reveals Aris-
tophanes's attitude toward sex. In this play, Lysistrata
(the name literally means "Dismisser-of-armies") leads the
women in a scheme to force the men to abandon war, which has
supplanted love. The plan requires that the women refuse to
have sexual intercourse with their husbands. The phallus
becomes the controlling image in the play; and the phallus
erectus is a "kind of symbol, standing for all the thwarted
desires and expectations that would arise in men alienated
from their womankind." The phallic imagery and double en-
tendre permeate the play. In the opening scene, Lysistrata

4 Gilbert Highte, The Anatomy of Satire (Princeton:

5 Gilbert Murray, Aristophanes: A Study (Oxford:

6 Murray, p. 167.
laments the weakness of her sex:

Lysistrata. But I tell you, here's a far more
weighty object.
Calonice. What is it all about, dear Lysistrata,
that you've called the women hither in a
troop? What kind of an object is it?
Lysistrata. A very large one!
Calonice. Is it long too?
Lysistrata. Both large and long to handle--
Calonice. And yet they're not all here!
Lysistrata. O I didn't mean that. If that was the
prize, they'd soon come fluttering
along. No, no, it concerns an object
I've felt over and turned this way and that for sleepless nights.
Calonice. It must be fine to stand such long atten-
tion.

And the final scenes, in which the men capitulate, are loaded
with similar sexual allusions:

Athenian. There's no distinction in our politics.
We've risen as one man to this conclusion;
Every ally is jumping-mad to drive it home.
Spartan. And ours the same, for sure.
Athenian. The Carystians first! I'll bet on that.
Lysistrata. I agree with all of you. Now off and
cleanse yourself for the Acropolis, for
we invite you all into a supper from
our commissariat-baskets. There at table
you will pledge your good behavior to
our loins; then each man's wife is his
to hustle home.
Athenian. Come, as quickly as possible.
Spartan. As quick as ye like. Lead on.
Athenian. O Zeus, quick, quick, lead quickly on.

The frequency and obviousness of such exchanges
strengthen Cedric H. Whitman's contention that the old comic
poet was supposed to smash taboos. "The absence of the ele-
ment of daring, therefore, threw the poet totally onto his

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8 Aristophanes, p. 325.
own competitive genius, whether for subtle innuendo or gargantuan breadth, and Aristophanes is a master of both. Nor was there any limit as to how far one could go; the *Lysistrata* is one of the best examples of the comic power of putting shame to shame by the sheer limitlessness of its freedom."⁹ *Tristram Shandy* is another example of this power, and Sterne reveals a similar control of both innuendo and breadth. And neither in Sterne nor Aristophanes is sex "viewed through any distorting lenses of unreal glamour or inhibited wish, but directly and realistically. . . . Nor is domestic life romanticized, as in the Menandrian world of stereotyped lovers ending up in a stereotype of happy union. Aristophanes' [and Sterne's] family picture includes a full measure of humdrum homeliness, bickerings, and ear-boxing. But the key-note is love."¹⁰ And aside from Lysistrata's brief and infrequent diatribes against the weakness of women, upon which Gilbert Murray bases his argument that Aristophanes is "heavy-hearted . . . and almost bitter,"¹¹ the prevailing tone is comic. Through the confrontation in *Lysistrata*, Aristophanes illustrates the "theory that the bosom is mightier than the sword";¹² and the conclusion of the play is a Bacchanalian revelry of reunion, peace, and love.

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¹⁰ *Whitman*, pp. 208-09.

¹¹ *Murray*, p. 165.

Although this element of Bacchanalian ritual is noticeably absent from the attitude of Lucian of Samosato, his work must be considered in any survey of the tradition of sexual humor. Indeed, as Gilbert Highet points out, Lucian's work "forms a bridge between the dialogues of creative philosophers like Plato, the fantasy of Aristophanes, and the negative criticism of the satirists."\(^{13}\) Highet's comment also suggests the hybrid quality of Lucian's work, for the satiric tone is a pervasive element in his comedy. Brian P. Reardon defines Lucian's works as "satires" in the sense expressed by the Latin satura lanx, the "'mixed dish'... essentially a miscellany on a great variety of subjects, generally but not necessarily with a distinct tendency to moralize."\(^{14}\) On a theoretical level, an explanation for Lucian's mixture of satire and comedy is offered by Ronald Paulson's discussion of the fertility ritual: "The vatic figure who encouraged fertility was accompanied by a satirist who exorcized the elements that could prevent fertility. The curse naturally contrasted forces of sterility with creative and fertile images such as sun, rain, and male and female generative organs."\(^{15}\) This conjunction of the vatic figure and the exorcist, as Paulson points out, is "probably the source


of the idea that satire is a tone independent of a form,\textsuperscript{16} and it also suggests the primitive shape of the combination of comedy and satire.

In a study frequently marred by admittedly personal prejudice, \textit{Lucian, Plato and Greek Morals}, John Jay Chapman makes a particularly incisive comment upon Lucian's satire of Plato in \textit{The Sale of Philosophers}. Lucian's attack, writes Chapman, falls upon the "precise spot where the intellect and senses meet—the nexus and nerve-center of sex."\textsuperscript{17} Lucian does indeed sense the predominant influence of sex in human life, as does Sterne; and the charge of pederasty which is levelled at Plato is particularly effective in revealing the hypocrisy which Lucian discerns in Platonic idealism. When Socrates is being sold, Lucian begins an immediate attack:

\begin{quote}
Buyer. Tell me, what do you specialize in?
Socrates. I'm a lover of youth. I know all about love.
Buyer. Expect me to buy you? It's a tutor for my boy I want—and he's a handsome lad!
Socrates. What better companion than me could you find for a handsome lad? I'm not a lover of the body; it's the soul I find beautiful. Nothing to worry about; even if they lie under the same cloak with me, you won't hear them complain about the way I treat them.
Buyer. I don't believe you. A lover of youth, and you don't mess around with anything but the soul? Despite the opportunities when you're
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{16} Paulson, p. 6.

\textsuperscript{17} Lucian, Plato and Greek Morals (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1931), p. 120.
under the same cloak?\textsuperscript{18}

This charge of sexual irregularity provides the central thrust of Lucian's attack on Platonic idealism, one facet of Lucian's distrust of systems of philosophy. As Paulson writes, "Man, things as they are, and things as they are not make up the elements of Lucian's world; and in this triangle the emphasis clearly falls on the overstructured life and mind materialized in the elaborate structure of things as they are not."\textsuperscript{19} Here, Lucian's treatment of the Academics, Peripatetics, Stoics, and Epicureans is an instructive analogue to Sterne's development of Walter Shandy's elaborate theories of geniture, names, noses, and education.

Lucian continues his satire of the sexual practices of Plato and the Greeks in \textit{A True Story}. In book two of this \textit{voyage imaginaire}, the narrator journeys to the "Island of the Blest." There, he writes, the Greeks "make love openly, in the sight of all, with both women and men. . . . Only Socrates had sworn formally that his associations with the young were pure; but everyone thought he was guilty of perjury. . . . Women are common property, and no one is jealous of his neighbor; they are very Platonic in this respect. Boys submit to anyone who wants them, without any resistance."\textsuperscript{20} This satire continues only slightly veiled in the

\textsuperscript{18} Lucian, p. 102.
\textsuperscript{19} Paulson, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{20} Lucian, p. 246.
fable of the "Moonites": "their marriages are of male with male. . . . Up to the age of twenty-five they all act as female partners, and thereafter as husbands. Pregnancy occurs not in the womb but in the calf of the leg . . . [for] in their intercourse with the young they use orifices behind the knee. . . . To be beautiful on the moon is to be bald and hairless. . . . They grow beards, though, just above the knee." Here then, perhaps, is material for Sterne's unwritten "Chapter on Whiskers." In both contexts, the writers make fun of the false delicacy surrounding sexual matters. Lucian points out that although the Moonites are wantonly perverse and find hairlessness to be aesthetically pleasing, they still grow "beards." And Sterne laughs at the fact that his readers can recognize the influence of sex in daily life and, at the same time, abominate references to "whiskers."

Throughout A True Voyage Lucian provides evidence of the predominance of sex in the life of man. There are those, he asserts, whose entire raison d'être is sex: "There is on the Moon a kind of men called Treemen, and the manner of their generation is as follows. They cut off a man's right testicle and plant it in the ground; from it there grows an enormous tree of flesh, like a phallus. It has branches and foliage, and its fruit is acorns as long as the forearm. When they are ripe, they harvest them and carve men from

21 Lucian, pp. 228-29.
them, adding genitals of ivory, or of wood for the poorer ones; these are what they use to consummate their male marriages."\(^{22}\) Although the narrator maintains a careful detachment from the sexual attitudes and experiences described, his comrades, the other men on the voyage, are not so fortunate. Two of them who respond to the passion of vines, whose "upper parts were female figures, complete in every detail," are "caught by the genitals and unable to free themselves."\(^{23}\) Similarly, the abductors of Helen, Cinyras and his associates, are "suspended by the testicles" for their crime. However, Lucian's ultimate comment upon the influence of sex in man's life is implicit in his description of the boat-men who "floated on their backs in the water, erected their penises, which were very big, stretched sails from them, and then took the sheets in their hands and sailed along when the wind struck."\(^{24}\)

In a similar vein, Sterne epitomizes man, the rational animal who is ultimately governed by his instincts, as the inferior being who syllogizes by his nose. Thus, it is the nature of man who hoists marvelous systems and theories and is yet carried along by a very different sail that engages Lucian's, and Sterne's, profound laughter.

It is a laughter, however, which delights without condemning and which they share with Francois Rabelais. Indeed,

\(^{22}\) Lucian, pp. 228-29.  \(^{23}\) Lucian, p. 222.  
\(^{24}\) Lucian, p. 256.
Francis G. Allinson asserts that the "spirit of Lucianic mischief is reincarnated in Rabelais's more lusty Pantagruel and Gargantua." And by his contemporaries, Sterne was frequently called the "English Rabelais." However, when critics compare these two writers, it is usually Sterne who suffers, often unfairly. Paul Stapfer writes that in "Rabelais il y à de l'infini; nous apercevons partout là limite dans Sterne." Although he admits that the therapeutic value of Shandeism is "at one with the medicine of Rabelais," Huntington Brown refers to the former as a "decadent offspring of 'Pantagruelianism.'" Even Henri Fluchère is somewhat less than fair to Sterne when he writes that although Sterne has not been accused of writing pornography, "the range of his offenses is alleged to run from unashamed coarseness to the suggestive nudges of lewdness." This description stands in sharp contrast to Fluchère's comment upon Rabelais's "healthy scatology, a gay obscenity, an innocent indecency."

30 Fluchère, p. 218.
A more equitable approach to the comparison of Rabelais and Sterne—and, hopefully, a better understanding of the distinctions between the two—must begin with an examination of their different perspectives.

Rabelais's point of view is best described as Olympian, a view from above. According to Thomas M. Greene, the viewpoint reveals a "magisterial distance even from the things he cares for most." It is this "comic withdrawal from a lovably intractable world which betokens Rabelais's uniqueness and genius." By contrast, Sterne's narrative perspective is closely linked with the events of his novel. Tristram, Sterne's engaged narrator, is the central figure of his story. It is his life and his opinions which are being described, directly or indirectly, throughout. There is another important point—here, an element of similarity. The narrators of both Sterne and Rabelais are self-conscious and reader-conscious; and, as a result, the reader becomes involved with the narrative. However, while Tristram elicits his reader's sympathy, the involvement of the reader of Rabelais is objective. The latter views and laughs at the events of the narrative with the Rabelaisian awareness of "the secret folly at the heart of the universe, the wild uncertainty, the abyss of lunacy that underlies our rational constructions." It is this awareness which forms the ba-

32 Green, p. 114. 33 Green, p. 10.
sis for much of the humor of Rebelaisian hyperbole. Rabe-
laïs's innumerable catalogues of Latinate phrases and jargon, coined words, and sexually loaded words frequently pro-
vide comic illustrations of man's inclination to upset the
equilibrium between his theories and nis experiences.

In sexual matters, Rabelais is direct and open. He
describes the conception of Gargantua: "And these two
[Grandgousier and Gargamelle] often played the beast-with-
two-backs, rubbing their bacons together hilariously, and
doing it so often that she became pregnant with a fine
son."34 Here, Rabelais's description stands in marked con-
trast to Sterne's discussion of Mr. and Mrs. Shandy's beget-
ting of Tristram: "'Pray, my dear,' quoth my mother, 'have
you not forgot to wind up the clock'? --'Good G--!' cried
my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate
his voice at the same time,--'Did ever woman, since the cre-
ation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly ques-
tion'?'35 And it is more than two chapters later before the
reader understands the nature of Mrs. Shandy's interruption,
which is the primum mobile of the entire novel.36

Perhaps one of the finest examples of Rabelaisian ex-
cess is the description of Gargantua's clothing, especially
the codpiece which required "sixteen and a quarter ells" of
cloth:

34 Francois Rabelais, The Portable Rabelais, tr. Sam-
35 Sterne, p. 5. 36 Fluchère, p. 73.
The bulge of the codpiece was nearly six feet long, scalloped like the breeches, with the blue damask floating down in front. Viewing the fine gold-thread embroidery and the curious gold knots adorned with fine diamonds, fine rubies, fine turquoises, fine emeralds, and Persian pearls, you would have compared the effect to that of a handsome cornucopia. . . . It was always gallant, succulent, dripping, always verdant, always flourishing, always fructifying, full of temperament, full of flowers, fruits, and all delights. I call upon God to be my witness, if it wasn't a sight worth seeing. But I will tell you more about it in the book which I have written On the Dignity of Codpieces. I will tell you one thing, right here, however, and that is that it was very long and very ample, and that it was well furnished and well victualled inside, being in no way like those hypocritical codpieces that a lot of lily-boys wear, which are filled with wind, to the great detriment of the feminine sex.

Here, then, one can glimpse the breadth of Rabelaisian humor: the comic hyperbole, the catalogues of nouns and adjectives, the satiric thrust at hypocrisy, and the Olympian irony which encompasses all.

As Wilbur Cross writes, "Without Rabelais, his jests, whims, anecdotes, and splendid extravagances, there would never have been a Sterne as we now know him." Where Rabelais will coin names such as Suckpoop and Kissarse, Sterne follows with a Kysarcius, a Phutatorius, or a Dr. Kunastrokious. Rabelais has his "fair of noses," and Sterne his "promontory of noses." Sterne's Tickletoby is an English translation of Rabelais's Tappecue, a cant term for penis. Although one need not read far in Tristram to find such echoes of

37 Rabelais, p. 74.

Rabelais, he must look in several places in the novel to find a breadth of material to parallel the above passage. Appropriately, it is in "Slawkenbergius's Tale" that one comes closest to the spirit of Rabelais.

Here, Sterne briefly describes the Stranger's "crimson-satin breeches, with a silver-fringed--(appendage to them, which I dare not translate)." Just as Gargantua's "well victualed" codpiece inspires Rabelais's narration, so the marvelous "nose" of the Stranger functions in Tristram. The residents of Strasburg are moved by the nose to theorize that "there was no cause in nature, why a nose might not grow to the size of the man himself" (p. 258). This theory leads them to speculate that if the nose did indeed grow to such proportions then "a mortification must necessarily ensue; and forasmuch as there could not be a support for both, that the nose must either fall off from the man, or the man inevitably fall off from his nose" (p. 258).

However, Sterne's most explicit treatment of the phal- lus appears in his description of Tristram's accidental circumcision:

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 ***** *** ** *** *****?

I was five years old.--Susannah did not consider that nothing was well hung in our family,--so slap came the sash down like lightening upon us;--Nothing is left,--cried Susannah--nothing is left--for me, but to run my country. (P. 376)

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Rabelais, p. 249.
Where Rabelais is concerned with an open, direct transmission of humor and satire, Sterne works through indirection, innuendo, and aposiopesis. Rabelais's narrator detaches himself from the events of his narration, unites himself with the reader, and laughs at the monstrous spectacle of man's life. Tristram, on the other hand, remains closely tied to the events he narrates, engages the sympathy of his reader, and laughs at man, at his reader, at himself. In spite of these differences, however, the two writers believe in the same thing—"in man, in spite of his woes, his weaknesses, his faults and his follies, in spite of the absurdity that dwells in him."  

In sexual matters, both writers display a naturalistic attitude. Dr. Douglas W. Montgomery describes Rabelais's "grossness" as the result of his hospital experiences. And William Carlos Williams calls Rabelais a priest "sensitized" to all grossness. His attention to sexual detail reveals a "superabundant physical vitality," an aspect of that "consuming thirst for the abundant life that was characteristic of the men of the Renaissance."  

In Sterne, the sexual imagery and symbolism reveal an attempt to restore a balance that had been upset, on the one hand, by prudery and, on the other, by licentiousness, and to assess the role of sex in human life.

40 Fluchère, p. 176.  
41 Rabelais, p. 36.  
42 Rabelais, pp. 36-37.
It is primarily the former motive, the impetus of satire, which inspires Samuel Butler, the next link in the comic tradition. Although Butler's skepticism excludes Rabelaisian or Shandean laughter from his work, he is described as "cousin-german to Rabelais"; and he seems to derive pleasure from the comic spirit of many of the satiric thrusts in *Hudibras*. Perhaps one of the best examples of this comedy is present in Butler's frequent references to noses, a focal point which he shares with the other humorists.

Just as Walter Shandy comments that "Learned men, brother Toby, don't write dialogues upon long noses for nothing" (p. 229), so it is not for nothing that Butler refers in a mock-heroic simile to the *De curtorem chirugia per institutionem* of the "learned Taliacotius." Although the simile is brief, it is strategically placed in the poem; and Butler makes two other references to noses in part one, canto one of *Hudibras*. Both of these refer to misuses of the nose which the developed simile explains. The first reference occurs in line 228 in which Butler satirizes the Presbyterians who, with their disharmonious, nasal voices, blaspheme "minc'd Pie . . . Plum porridge . . . Pig . . . Goose . . . And . . . Custard." The second occurs in *Hudibras's* learned

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disquisition upon bear-baiting. Here Butler attacks the ridiculous erudition and the gratuitous meddling into affairs of pleasure of the Presbyterians. "Though ev'ry Nare olfact it not" (I,1,1.736), Hudibras scents a Jesuitical, Machiavellian agitation behind the enmity between the dog and the bear.

The simile which focuses upon the nose and which explains the malfunctions occurs immediately after Butler's description of Hudibras's beard, which is designed "A sacrifice to fall of State" (I,1,1.272):

So learned Taliacotius from
The brawny part of Porter's Bum,
Cut supplementall Noses, which
Would last as long as Parent breech:
But when the Date of Nock was out,
Oft dropt the Sympathetick Snout. (I,1,11.279-284)

Through the simile, Butler suggests that the shaving of the beard is like the surgery and that the fall of the monarchy is comparable to venereal disease, the predominant cause of the decay of noses. However, Butler continues, the learned doctor's experiments show that the cosmetic nose will serve as a mask for the diseased body and corrupt soul only so long as the donor of the nose lives to "breech." And when he ceases to do so, when the "Date of Nock," the period of Cromwell's rule is past, the nose, with a greater affinity to the "bum" than to the face, will drop off to reveal the vulgar, ignorant and immoral character of the Puritan Commonwealth. Here, then, Butler uses the sexual overtones of the simile to reinforce comically his treatment of the Puritan-
Royalist conflict.

In part two of Hudibras, this political aspect of his satire is abandoned for a time as Butler focuses upon love, the affair between Hudibras and the Widow. In making love to the Widow, Hudibras testifies to the great power of the God of Love:

'Twas he made Emperours Gallants
To their own Sisters, and their Aunts,
Set Popes, and Cardinals agog
To Play with Pages, at Leap-frog;
'Twas he . . .
Made those that represent the Nation
Submit, and suffer amputation:
And all the Grandees of the Cabal
Adjourn to Tuws, at spring and fall.
He mounted Synod-men and rod 'em
To Durty-lane, and little-Sodom;
Made 'em Corvet, like Spanish Jenets
And take the Ring at Madam -------. (II,1,11.357-70)

Hudibras's testament of love is a catalogue of immorality and sexual perversity. And the selfish motive for his pursuit of the Widow becomes explicit in his admission that

Though Love be all the worlds pretense,
Mony's the Mythologique sense,
The real substance of the shadow
Which all Address and Courtship's made to. (II,1,11.443-46)

According to Butler, then, man's attention is more frequently motivated by his greed than by a romantic conception of love. And it is a somewhat less than ideal love that is revealed in the relationship of the married couple in the Skimmington episode:

the Amazon triumphant
Bestríd her Beast, and on the Rump on't
Sate Face to Tayl, and Bum to Bum,
The Warríer whilome overcome;
Arm'd with a Spíndle and a Dístaff,
Which as he rod, she made him twist off;
And when he loytered, o're her shoulder,
Chastiz'd the Reformado Souldier. (II,2,11.641-48)

And if "a writer's attitude toward love can be used as an
indication of his assumptions about man," as W. O. S.
Sutherland maintains, then there is a fundamental pessimism
in Butler, which places him closer to Jonathan Swift than to
Aristophanes, Lucian, or Rabelais.

Although Swift's pessimism was real and ample, it has
been frequently over-emphasized in interpretations of his
work. Louis A. Landa writes that it "is not easy to release
Swift from the legend of the gloomy dean which has been so
firmly established. His life, it has been said, 'was a long
disease, with its disappointments, its self-torture, its mor-
bid recriminations.' This is as false as it is theatri-
cal." And although he was certainly inclined to an "as-
tringent and realistic view of life," he habitually expressed
it in comic terms. Similarly, the predominant mode of
Sterne's realistic perspective is the comic--although, like
Swift's, it is frequently interwoven with satire. In the
Intelligencer, Swift comments upon the combination of satire
and humor by referring to the latter as the "best ingredient

45 "Hudibras and the Nature of Man," in The Art of the

46 Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels and Other Writ-
ings, ed. with intro. by Louis A. Landa (Cambridge: River-

47 Swift, p. ix.
towards that Kind of Satyr, which is most useful . . . which instead of lashing, laughs Men out of their Follies and Vices." Swift's position here reflects the generalized aesthetic of the comic tradition, and there is ample evidence of Sterne's consciousness of it. In response to Warburton's admonishments to abide by the accepted standards of decency and good manners, Sterne replied that he would do his best, "though laugh, my lord, I will, and as loud as I can too." His awareness of his predecessors in this tradition, especially Swift, is indicated in his denial that he has gone "as far as Swift--He [Swift] keeps a due distance from Rabelais--& I keep a due distance from him--Swift has said a hundred things I durst not say--unless I was Dean of St. Patricks--." And, indeed, Sterne's familiarity with Swiftian humor exercised a considerable influence upon Tristram. Perhaps nowhere is this source of humor more evident than in the satirization of the Puritans and enthusiasm in A Tale of a Tub and the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit. Although these works reveal Swift's abhorrence of Dissenters and irrational zeal, encouraged, perhaps, by his avid reading of Butler's Hudibras, the use of traditional sexual overtones envelops the whole in a comic spirit.


50 Curtis, p. 76.
In her study of Swift, Miriam Starkman discerns this comic element when she remarks that what links *A Tale* to the tradition of satire represented by Lucian and Erasmus is "essentially the spirit of Aristophanes." Just as the latter attacked the hypocrisy of Platonic idealism, so Swift charges that it is carnal rather than spiritual ecstasy which inspires the Dissenters, whom he labels Aeolists. The source of their inspiration is a "secret Funnel" inserted in their posteriors "which admits new Supplies of Inspiration." In a brief passage aimed at the Quakers, who allowed their women to preach and pray, Swift's persona points out that these infusions of inspiration were "frequently managed and directed by Female officers, whose Organs were understood to be better disposed for the Admission of those Oracular Gusts, as entering and passing up through a Receptacle of greater Capacity, and causing also a Pruriency by the Way, such as with due Management hath been refined from a Carnal into a Spiritual ecstasie" (p. 156). In the following section of the *Tale*, the digression on madness, the process of this "due management" is explained. The movement of the spirit in man, the persona argues, is completely natural: just as smoke rises from fire, mists from earth, and steam from dung, and since "the..."


Face of Nature never produces Rain but when it is overcast and disturbed, so Human Understanding, seated in the Brain, must be troubled and overspread by Vapours, ascending from the lower Faculties to water the Invention and render it fruitful" (p. 163). And it is in this way that the Dissenters, having effectively frustrated the senses, the access routes to the intellect and reason, are properly inspired.

As proof of his theory, the persona provides the example of the prince who—to the great consternation of his neighbors—began to build his army and fleet and to fill his coffer. In the midst of many extravagant theories of what the prince planned to do, "a certain State-surgeon, gathering the Nature of the Disease by these symptoms, attempted the Cure, at one Blow performed the Operation, broke the Bag, and out flew the Vapour" (p. 164). This example, then, proves the persona's theory of the conversion of forces from one function to another. Just as the great piety of the Aeolists converts the carnal into the spiritual, so the frustration of the prince converts his sexual impulses into militaristic ones; for "It was afterwards discovered that the Movement of this whole Machine had been directed by an absent Female, whose Eyes had raised a Protuberancy, and, before Emission, she was removed into an Enemy's Country. . . . Having to no purpose used all peaceable Endeavours, the collected part of the Semen, raised and inflamed, became adust, converted to Choler, turned head upon the spinal Duct, and ascended to the Brain" (pp. 164-65). This example of the frustration of the
sexual impulse and its subsequent conversion-sublimation epitomizes Swift's satirical use of sex in *A Tale*. A similar sublimation process is evident in the discussion of the ears of the Puritans; for the "Proportion of Largeness [of their ears] was not only looked upon as an Ornament of the Outward Man, but as a Type of Grace in the Inward. Besides, it is held by Naturalists, that if there be a Protuberancy of Parts in the Superior Region of the Body, as in the Ears and Nose, there must be a Parity also in the Inferior" (p. 201). Here again, as Norman O. Brown points out, there is the movement upward of lower faculties: "Displacement from below upward, conferring on the upper region of the body a symbolic identity with the lower region of the body, is Swift's explanation for the Puritan cult of large ears: the ear is a symbolic penis."53

It is to this "ear" that Swift turns in the Mechanical Operation of the Spirit for a comparison with the noses of Dissenters. Here, as in *Hudibras*, the persona focuses upon the nasal quality of their voices, for "among all Improvements of the Spirit, wherein the voice hath born a Part, there is none to be compared with that of conveying the Sound thro' the Nose, which under the Denomination of Snuffling, hath passed with so great Applause in the World" (p. 280). This practice of Snuffling, according to W. Wotton, springs

from men "who have lost their Noses by lewd Courses" (p. 280).

However, according to Swift's persona, this phenomenon is the result of a "modern Saint's" battle with the flesh:

the Saint felt his Vessel full extended in every Part (a very natural Effect of strong Inspiration;) and the Place and Time falling out so unluckily, that he could not have the Convenience of Evacuating upwards, by Repetition, Prayer, or Lecture; he was forced to open an inferior Vent. In short, he wrestled with the Flesh so long, that he at length subdued it, coming off with honourable Wounds, all before. The Surgeon had now cured the Parts, primarily affected; but the Disease driven from its Post, flew up into his Head. (P. 281)

Thus the nose, like the ears, becomes another example of Swift's psychology of sexual sublimation.

From his discussion of this phenomenon, Swift pursues a similar theory in a brief history of the modern movement of the spirit. And, inevitably, he finds the first traces of the spirit in the Egyptian cults of Dionysus and Bacchus. "Superficial readers," he writes, have imagined that this spiritual movement "was nothing more than a Set of roaring, scouring Companions, over-charg'd with Wine; but this is a scandalous Mistake" (p. 283). These rites, he asserts, rest on a much "deeper foundation," the first movements of the spirit. And indeed, "the Seed or Principle, which has ever put Men upon Visions in Things Invisible, is of a Corporeal Nature" (p. 283). Thus, a theory of repression and sublimation seems to provide the primary rationale behind Swift's use of sex in his satire. A similar theory (which will be discussed at greater length later) has been suggested as the motivating force of Uncle Toby's military hobby-horse. The
comic potential of this theory is ample, especially as it overflows into such protuberances as ears and noses. However, there are profoundly serious implications in the naturalistic, materialistic aspect of the theory, as William Empson points out in his discussion of the doctrine of sublimation in *A Tale* and the **Mechanical Operation**:

It is the same machinery, in the fearful case of Swift, that betrays not consciousness of the audience but a doubt of which he may himself have been unconscious. "Everything spiritual and valuable has a gross and revolting parody, very similar to it, with the same name. Only unremitting judgement can distinguish between them"; he set out to simplify the work of judgement by giving a complete set of obscene puns for it. The conscious aim was the defense of the Established Church against the reformers' Inner Light; only the psychoanalyst can wholly applaud the result. Mixed with his statement, part of what he satirized by pretending (too convincingly) to believe, the source of his horror, was "everything spiritual is really material; Hobbes and the scientists have proved this; all religion is really a perversion of sexuality."  

Despite the gravity of these implications, the comic overtones animate the satire in these two works. Such is not the case, however, in Swift's analyses of human nature as it is illuminated by human sexuality. In these works, most notably the scatological poems ("A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed," "The Lady's Dressing room," "Strephon and Chloe," and "Cassinus and Peter") and portions of *Gulliver's Travels* (especially the descriptions of the Yahoos in Book Four), the astringent realism of Swift's perspective excludes comedy; and an attitude of pessimism prevails.

54 Brown, p. 45.
In these "anti-sentimental, anti-Petrarchan" poems, Swift rips away the lovely facade erected around love. In "The Lady's Dressing Room," Strephon explores Celia's room. His disillusioning inventory of its contents includes "a dirty Smock.../Beneath the Arm-pits well besmear'd," combs filled with "A Paste of Composition rare,/Sweat, Dandruff, Powder, Lead and Hair," (ll. 23-24) pots filled with "Pomatum, Paints and Slops,/And Ointments good for scabby Chops," (ll. 35-36) a basin containing a "nasty Compound of all hues,/For here she spits, and here she spews," (ll. 41-42) towels "Begumm'd, besmatter'd, and beslim'd/With Dirt, and Sweat, and Ear-Wax grim'd," (ll. 45-46) and a chest in which the chamber pot is kept which sends "up an excremental Smell/To taint the Parts from whence they fell" (ll. 111-12). Having completed his survey, the "Disgusted Strephon" steals away, "Repeating in his amorous Fits,/ Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits" (ll. 117-18). After this lament, the persona questions "Should I the Queen of Love refuse,/ Because she rose from stinking Ooze?" (ll. 131-32) and admonishes Strephon to be glad to see "Such Order from Confusion sprung,/ Such gaudy Tulips rais'd from Dung" (ll. 143-44). However, this tone of calm resignation is absent from "A Beautiful Young Nymph" and "Cassinus and Peter." In the former, after a cat-

55 Swift, p. xxiv.

ologue of actions and effects in Corinna's bedroom, the persona closes with revulsion:

The bashful Muse will never bear
In such a scene to interfere.
Corinna in the Morning dizen'd,
Who sees, will spew; who smells, be poison'd. (ll. 71-74)

And in the latter, after long questioning, Peter is finally informed of the reason for Cassinus's complete dejection:

"Nor wonder how I lost my Wits;/ Oh! Caelia, Caelia, Caelia sh---" (ll. 117-18).

In "Strephon and Chloe," Swift carefully details the wedding night consummation of the love of the beautiful nymph Chloe and brave Strephon. The poet reveals Strephon's agonized concern with how to approach his new wife, the paragon of beauty and virtue:

Strephon had long perplex'd his Brains,
How with so high a Nymph he might
Demean himself the Wedding-Night:
For, as he viewed his Person round,
Meer mortal Flesh was all he found: (ll. 72-75)

... While she a Goddess dy'd in Grain
Was unsusceptible of Stain: (ll. 85-86)

... Can such a Deity endure
A mortal human Touch impure? (ll. 89-90)

While pondering his dilemma, Strephon hears Chloe with the urinal and cries out "Ye Gods, what Sound is this?/ Can Chloe, heav'ly Chloe -----?" (ll. 177-78). After he thus discovers Chloe "while the Scent increas'd/ As mortal as himself at least," (ll. 185-86) Strephon responds in kind; "And as he fill'd the reeking Vase,/ Let fly a Rouzer in her Face" (ll. 191-92). The central theme of this poem, as
Norman O. Brown defines it, is "the conflict between our animal body, appropriately epitomized in the anal function, and our pretentious sublimations, more specifically the pretensions of sublimated or romantic-Platonic love." And Swift suggests that when the false illusions are dispelled, as inevitably they must be, all sense of modesty and decency is lost, and love departs. Considering the transitory nature of beauty and youth, Swift admonishes the reader in the poem's conclusion:

On Sense and Wit your Passion found,
By Decency cemented round;
Let Prudence with Good Nature strive,
To keep Esteem and Love alive.
Then come old Age when'er it will,
Your Friendship shall continue still:
And thus a mutual gentle Fire,
Shall never but with Life expire. (ll. 307-314)

Here, the poet's urging that love be based upon a realistic view of human nature supports Brown's contention that Swift's "ultimate horror . . . is at the thought that sublimation—that is to say all civilized behavior—is a lie and cannot survive confrontation with the truth."^58

Despite the sanity of Swift's final admonition here, the vivid imagery of these poems has earned the poet a great deal of unfavorable criticism. The poems have been labeled nasty, noxious, painful, and disgusting. Aldous Huxley comments upon the "absurdity, the childish silliness, of this refusal to accept the universe as it is given."^59

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^59 Brown, p. 33.
dleton Murray writes that Swift's attitude is "so perverse, so unnatural, so mentally diseased, so humanly wrong." And Ricardo Quintana only briefly mentions the "noxious compositions" and comments that Gulliver's Travels would have been "a finer work of art" if the "sensationalism into which Swift falls while developing the theme of bestiality [had been] toned down." However, as Louis Landa cogently argues, Swift is writing in a firmly established tradition in these poems:

Their staple is woman as the embodiment of vice, her hypocrisy, her deceptiveness, her filthiness beneath a fair exterior. The tradition is both classical and Christian. The Latin satirist Juvenal (of the Sixth satire) and a medieval church father descanting on womankind as the devil incarnate tend to sound alike on the subject; and Swift sounds like both of them. . . . Swift reflects a basic religious idea, the dichotomy of body and soul, and the implications which flow from this idea. The romantic glorification of what, after all, is only flesh and blood, the exaltation of values concerned with the body, exterior beauty--His corrosive attack on this way of thinking has a strong ethical intention, such as we find enduringly in homiletic literature.

All of the writers in the comic tradition thus sketched have endured critical response not unlike Huxley's and Murray's. The survey of studies of Tristram in the next chapter reveals that Sterne's work has not escaped such moral prejudice which masks itself as literary criticism. Most of Sterne's predecessors, however, have found expositors who, like Messrs. Brown and Landa for Swift, have been able to

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60 Brown, p. 33.  
61 Brown, p. 32.  
62 Swift, p. xxiv.
lead readers to a more enlightened understanding of the function of sexual symbolism in their writings and tradition. However, such a critic has not yet arisen in Sterne scholarship.
CHAPTER II

CRITICAL RESPONSE TO SEX IN TRISTRAM

Until the present century, critical reaction to the sexual expression in Tristram is, with few exceptions, unanimous in its disapprobation. In Yorick and the Critics: Sterne's Reputation in England, 1760 - 1868, Alan B. Howes extensively demonstrates this fact. In February of 1760, after the first installment of Tristram appeared, a reviewer for the Royal Female Magazine "gave an excerpt describing the character of Yorick to illustrate the 'consequences of indiscretion and the licentious indulgence of satirical wit . . . [and lamented that the] wantonness of the author's wit had not been 'tempered with a little more regard to delicacy.'" ¹ This moralistic attitude becomes even more pronounced with the discovery by the reading public that Sterne was a clergyman. For, as Howes points out, "after Sterne became known personally through his triumphant London visit, no reviewer--and probably few readers, for that matter--was able ever again to keep the personality and character of the man quite distinct from the character of his work." ² A fairly typical reaction is evident in a letter to Lloyd's


² Howes, p. 5.
Evening Post which laments "that nothing 'disgraces the present age more' than for Sterne, a clergyman, to write 'the most feeling compositions, to rouse our sensitive appetites; to inflame with lust, and to debauch and corrupt our youth of both sexes.'"\(^3\)

And although the critics, in reviewing the successive volumes of Tristram, found an occasional stroke of sentiment or a felicitous bit of characterization to praise, the note of moral outrage remains dominant. Of volumes three and four, Owen Ruffhead writes that "the section on noses shows a prostitution of wit which might be compared 'to the spices which embalm a putrid carcase.'"\(^4\) And the Critical Review states that Sterne, like Rabelais, writes merely "pour la refection corporelle."\(^5\) Volumes five and six elicit more moderate statements. A writer in the Library is typical in finding "fewer offenses against decorum and delicacy in the new volumes."\(^6\) John Langhorne, in the Monthly Review, writes that "although the fifth and sixth volumes 'are not without their stars and dashes, their hints and whiskers,' they nevertheless 'are not so much interlarded with obscenity as the former.'"\(^7\) But with the next installment of Tristram, the tone of outrage returns. The Candid Review censures Sterne for obscenity and irreverence and concludes that "however witty and ingenious," the book will not give general satisfaction

because "the digressions are too abrupt, not always intelligible, and often very lewd." And Ralph Griffiths writes that although there is humor in the incident of the Abbess of Andouillets, it is "such humor as ought to please none but coachmen and grooms." However, by the time of volume nine, most of the urgency of moral concern has vanished from the wish expressed in the *Critical Review* that the volume "had been a little better accommodated to the ear of innocence, virginibus puerisque."

The criticism of *Tristram* by Sterne's better known contemporaries illustrates a similar distaste for the indecorum of the novel. Samuel Richardson writes to the Bishop of Sodor and Mann that Sterne's "character as a clergyman seems much impeached by printing such gross and vulgar tales, as no decent mind can endure without extreme disgust." Although, to do "justice" to Sterne, Richardson admits that "there is subject for mirth and some affecting strokes," especially in the characterizations of Yorick, Toby, and Trim, and in the Sermon on Conscience.

In letter fifty-three of *The Citizen of the World*, Goldsmith ridicules Sterne as one of those "very dull fel-

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8 Howes, p. 18. 9 Howes, pp. 18-19.
10 Howes, p. 20.
12 Richardson, 148.
lows," who learn, by "a few mechanical helps, ... to become extremely brilliant and pleasing; with a little dexterity in the management of the eye-brows, fingers, and nose." This writer, both bawdy and pert, says Goldsmith, is "always sure of exciting laughter, for the jest does not lie in the writer, but in the subject." And Horace Walpole labels Tristram "a very insipid and tedious performance. ... It makes one smile two or three times at the beginning, but in recompense makes one yawn for two hours. The characters are tolerably kept up; but the humour is forever attempted and missed." And volumes three and four, which, he professes, he could never read beyond, are dismissed as "the dregs of nonsense."

Although Thomas Gray writes that "there is much good fun" in Tristram and that he will see the "future volumes with pleasure," he is the exception, and the dominant critical attitude is evident in the succeeding generation of critics, who were given added impetus by Dr. John Ferriar's Illustrations of Sterne, 1798 (first delivered as "Comments

14 Goldsmith, 265.
16 Walpole, XVI, 44.
on Sterne" in 1791 and published in 1793). Ferriar's discovery of sources for Sterne's writing convinced the moralists of Sterne's dishonesty and gave them an "opportunity to vigorously renew their attacks on the 'indecencies' in his work and the exaggerated details of his life."\(^{18}\)

Here, again, there is a notable exception in William Godwin, who writes in *The Enquirer* (1793) that there is "no reason . . . why knowledge should not as unreservedly be communicated on the topic here alluded to [sex], as on any other affair of human life."\(^{19}\) But the opposite opinion prevails. In 1797, William Wilberforce writes that the "whole tendency of his [Sterne's] writing is to produce 'a morbid sensitivity in the perception of indecency.'"\(^{20}\) Jeremiah Newman's *Lounger's Common-Place Book* (1805) censures "the 'dangerously inflammatory, if not grossly lewd' passages which came 'steaming from the hotbed of a lascivious imagination.'"\(^{21}\) And in *A View of the Pleasures Arising from a Love of Books* (1814), Edward Mangin "regrets the 'impurities of all kinds' which render Sterne's works 'repulsive to every admirer of moral propriety.'"\(^{22}\) And, as Howes points out, these critics are "unanimous in preferring the *Sentimental Journey* to *Tristram Shandy*, largely because it exhibits Sterne's special skill in the pathetic and has less indecency and more regularity

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20 Howes, p. 92. 21 Howes, p. 105.
22 Howes, p. 105.
of plan."\textsuperscript{23} However, as the opinions of Scott, Hazlitt, and Coleridge came to have more influence, this preference was gradually reversed. Scott's opinion of Sterne's use of sexual matters reflects the development in the nineteenth century of the belief that in this respect the writers of the previous century represented a "ruder and less moral age."\textsuperscript{24} Sterne's indecency becomes a "sin against taste. . . . A handful of mud is neither a firebrand nor a stone; but to fling it about in sport, argues coarseness of taste, and want of common manners."\textsuperscript{25} Thus, the more refined age makes a slight allowance for the matter, but the new opinion frequently reveals this element of magnanimous condescension in the praise.

Hazlitt goes several steps further. He is one of the forerunners of the new critical sympathy for and understanding of Sterne. It is Hazlitt who presents the first in-depth evaluation of the characters of Tristram, who makes distinctions between the various aspects of Sterne's humor, and who maintains that the coarseness of the characters was not "mere vulgarity."\textsuperscript{26} Similarly, Coleridge focuses upon Sterne's characters, for he writes that the unity of the novel is the result of the continuity of characterization.\textsuperscript{27}

\textsuperscript{23} Howes, p. 106. \textsuperscript{24} Howes, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{25} Howes, p. 121. \textsuperscript{26} Howes, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{27} Samuel Taylor Coleridge, \textit{Miscellanies, Aesthetic and Literary}, ed. T. Ashe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1885), p. 133.
In his examination of *Tristram*, Lecture Nine, Coleridge, like Hazlitt, makes certain distinctions between the "morality of the characters of Mr. Shandy, my Uncle Toby, and Trim" and the "spurious sort of wit" of the rest of the work. These distinctions give rise to Coleridge's discussion of the constituents of humor: wit "consists in presenting thoughts or images in an unusual connection with each other, for the purpose of exciting pleasure by the surprise"; drollery arises where the "laughable is its own end, and neither inference nor moral is intended"; oddity or grotesquery occurs when "words or images are placed in unusual justa-position rather than connection, and are so placed merely because the juxta-position is unusual"; and true humor "consists in a certain reference to the general and the universal, by which the finite great is brought into identity with the little, or the little with the finite great, so as to make both nothing in comparison with the infinite. The little is made great, and the great little, in order to destroy both; because all is equal in contrast with the infinite." In the light of these distinctions, Coleridge finds that much of the "humor" in Sterne is of a mixed variety: "I think there is more humour in the single remark . . . 'learned men, brother Toby, don't write dialogues upon long noses for nothing!'—than in the whole Slawkenburghian tale that fol-

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28 Coleridge, p. 129.

29 Coleridge, pp. 121, 122, 123, 125.
lows, which is mere oddity interspersed with drollery." Coleridge, once again like Hazlitt, is as earnest in his condemnation of Sterne's obscenity as the earlier critics: "Sterne cannot be too severely censured for thus using the best dispositions of our nature [sympathetic understanding and response] as the panders and condiments for the basest."  

It is this charge in Coleridge's criticism which provides the central element in Victorian assessments of Sterne. In his *English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century*, Thackeray writes that there "is not a page in Sterne's writing but has something that were better away, a latent corruption—a hint as of an impure presence." And reviewing both Sterne and Goldsmith in his essay, Thackeray maintains that only slight allowance can be made for a consideration of Sterne's milieu: "Some of that dreary double entendre may be attributed to freer times and manners than ours, but not all. The foul Satyr's eyes leer out of the leaves constantly." As Howes points out, Thackeray, like Hazlitt and Coleridge earlier, set in motion the critical commentary of the period. The statement in *Sharpe's London Magazine* reveals the full force of Thackeray's influence: "Sterne was 'not only a profligate, but gloried in his profligacy, and was never more in his ele-

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30 Coleridge, p. 133.  31 Coleridge, p. 129.


33 Thackeray, p. 309.  34 Howes, p. 143.
ment than when setting snares to corrupt others.'\(^{35}\) Although he feels that Thackeray was somewhat unfair, Whitwell Elwin writes that much of Sterne's wit is "the phosphoric light emitted by corruption" and that his licentious imagination [shows the] incurable depravity of his taste.\(^{36}\) Elwin, like earlier critics, praises Sterne's sentiment and his power of characterization. But in these elements, Elwin finds grounds for his attack on Sterne's obscenity which is "more to be blamed . . . because it is interwoven with beauties which will not suffer it to die."\(^{37}\)

It was in an effort to restore some balance to this criticism that Percy Fitzgerald published the first full length biography of Sterne in 1864. Although largely refraining from comment upon his writing, Fitzgerald returns to the defense of Sterne based upon his time: "Gross as Sterne was, he should not be judged too harshly. It was difficult for a careless, unsteady mind, such as his was—unaffected too by the least tinge of Puritanism—not to catch the free, débonnaire tone which he saw everywhere."\(^{38}\) Most of the reviewers of Fitzgerald's Life praised it and accepted this defense. One of them wrote "that if Sterne is tried 'by the high standard of morality and decency to which we happily have become accustomed in the reign of Victoria, we shall be

\(^{35}\) Howes, p. 150. \(^{36}\) Howes, p. 152.

\(^{37}\) Howes, p. 152.

unable to acquit him,' but that 'when we remember that he had the misfortune to live amidst the unhealthy atmosphere, the riot, vice and irreligion' of his time, 'we shall feel justified in dismissing him with a lenient sentence.' \(^{39}\) Despite these extenuating circumstances, however, Fitzgerald ascribes the coarseness of Uncle Toby's amour to the "perverse infatuation of the author" and finds that Sterne was seduced into excesses such as the Abbess of Andouillet's story by the "old compliment of the English Rabelais." \(^{40}\) And Walter Bagehot describes Sterne's "indecency for indecency's sake" as consisting of "allusions to certain inseparable accompaniments of actual life which are not beautiful, which can never be made interesting, [and] which would, if they were decent, be dull and uninteresting." \(^{41}\)

Thus, the influence of Thackeray's criticism is significant. And although the importance assigned to it in the twentieth century has diminished, it constitutes a perspective which succeeding critics have been forced to consider.

Despite the pervasiveness of Thackeray's influence in late nineteenth and early twentieth century criticism, Walter Sichel, in Sterne: A Study (1910), focuses attention upon Sterne's style: "As an impressionist above all, he must be considered." \(^{42}\) Sichel discerns three faces in Sterne: one, 

\(^{39}\) Howes, p. 160. \(^{40}\) Fitzgerald, II, 108.

\(^{41}\) Howes, p. 163.

"turned towards his 'hobby-horse'; one, "turned, alas! towards the crazy brotherhood"; and one, "towards human nature." The latter, according to Sichel, is the greatest. And he finds a defense of the second face in Sterne's impressionism, his suggestiveness: "There is no need to insist that there is a clean and an unclean Sterne. What must be insisted, however, is that his libertinage is that of the freest fancy, not that of a fleshly rake; and in this domain, as in the rest, Sterne lacks actuality. His is a blithe, goblin grossness; and though his coarsest food is no meat for babes, it is not poison."

The answer to Sichel's defense is not long in coming, however. George Saintsbury comments on the seriousness of the indecency charge and writes that its validity is "not so much because of the licence in subject as because of the unwholesome and sniggering tone." And this becomes the basis for V. F. Calverton's pronouncement upon Sterne in Sex Expression in Literature: "The truth is he enjoyed the teasing innuendo and allusion to the pornographic and excrementious." And in a similar vein, Lodwick Hartley comments that the "increasingly scatological" nature of Tristram springs from "nothing less than sheer perversity."

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43 Sichel, p. 199. 44 Sichel, p. 36.
47 Lodwick Hartley, This is Lorence (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1943), p. 118.
writes that Sterne "made the ninth book in many respects the bawdiest of the lot, so full of innuendoes and phallic symbolism as to render Thackeray's charge of prurience nearly justifiable."48

Although she finds Sterne too often guilty of "succumbing to the temptation of dissipating his wit in ambiguous jests and innuendoes,"49 Margaret R. B. Shaw discerns in Tristram a "defiance of what seemed to [Sterne] an unnatural and mechanical system of manners" and an attempt "to laugh the world out of the notion that physical functions are of their nature shameful, and therefore unseemly topics in a book that aims at ridiculing prudes as well as pedants."50 Thus in his satire on prudery, Sterne reveals himself to be an unskillful strategist. He completely fails to convince his readers of the serious purpose of his sexual humor and, at times, comes near to "overstepping the bounds of decency and good manners": the episodes of Slawkenbergius and Phutatorius's chestnut could have been left out.51 Similarly, John Laird finds Sterne's fault to be one of excess and points out that the "most savourless" of his salacities are in the digressions.52 Laird writes: "In general, wit that is salted in

48 Hartley, p. 215.


50 Shaw, p. 171. 51 Shaw, p. 239.

that particular [Slawkenbergian] way keeps very well. There is no age which does not droll it on that subject. No doubt there can be too much of it. The approach delicate to an aposiopesis can be overused, and Sterne did overuse it."\(^{53}\) And in a brief biographical essay, Peter Quennell, considering this excessive concern with sexuality, finds that the basis for Sterne's "imaginative concupiscence" is an underlying conflict, "supplied by his attitude towards his mother."\(^{54}\)

And, indeed, the pervasiveness of Sterne's attention to sexual matters makes him and his work a principal target for Freudian investigation. Arie De Froe begins the modern psychoanalytic tradition in 1925 with *Laurence Sterne and his Novels Studied in the Light of Modern Psychology*. According to De Froe, Sterne's mind was "unclean, tainted, and perverse," and the "accusation of obscenity aroused his anger, because of the thwarting of his self-assertive instinct..." Crèbillon, Hall-Stevenson, and others, enjoyed these very obscenities; they thought them clever, amusing, and praiseworthy. Their praises elated him; they gratified his self-assertive instinct, and so to these men he boasted of his double entendres and piquant suggestions."\(^{55}\) De Froe at-

\(^{53}\) Laird, p. 75.


tempts to prove that in his letters to females, Sterne tries "to manage matters in such a way that in his imagination, he comes to stand naked before them." De Froe finds ample evidence in Sterne's "coprophilia" that he could "gratify his instinctive impulses on the imaginative level." Thus, De Froe focuses more attention upon the author than upon his writing. And it seems probable that De Froe's study is one of those described by Thomas Yoseloff when he writes that it "would be so easy to apply a Freudian smear and turn up a culture abounding in sex-sublimations, phallic symbols and all the other easily-handled bric-a-brac in the shops of the psychoanalysts. Surely such an approach would be not without justification. But at best it would represent a half-truth."58

It is because such an approach is indeed justifiable that one must exercise extreme caution in his response to modern criticism of Sterne. Working from certain abstract--and fairly indefinite--psychological assumptions, critics have frequently over-simplified Tristram and attempted to psychoanalyze Sterne rather than to describe a sexual attitude based upon evidence from the novel (Quennell's reduction of the matter to Sterne's conflict with his mother, for example).

Perhaps a more balanced, a more comprehensive Freudian

56 De Froe, p. 174. 57 De Froe, p. 198.

analysis could be achieved through a readjustment of focus—from Sterne and to his novel. Then, to paraphrase Norman O. Brown, one no longer attempts to explain Sterne's literary achievements as mere epiphenomena on his individual neurosis. Rather, one seeks to "appreciate his insight into the universal neurosis of mankind."\(^{59}\) Once this fundamental adjustment is made, one can proceed to comment upon the broad implications of the application of psychoanalytic dicta to Sterne's novel.

According to Freudian critics, the initial impetus for creativity is psychic energy and the consequent ego-id tensions. The creative process begins with a "relaxation of ego control."\(^{60}\) However, the form in which the creative impulse reveals itself is determined by the ego. And, according to this theory, the "major instruments which the ego possesses for the purpose of containing energy are time, space, convention, and logic."\(^{61}\) In Tristram, Sterne carefully manipulates each of these instruments: Tristram's contempt for chronological time is revealed not only in his treatment of clocks but also in the unchronological movement of his narrative; his unconventional treatment of spatial concerns is, perhaps, most obvious in the description of his travels in

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59 Brown, p. 37.


61 Hoffman, p. 323.
volume seven; his flagrant refusal to follow convention is evident throughout the novel in the "misplacement" of the dedication, his extensive use of digression, and his contempt for the "adventure" novel of strict chronological sequence; and his attitude toward logic is implicit in the satiric thrusts at scholasticism and in the development in his novel of a "logic" which considers man's emotions as well as his reason.

In each of these areas, Sterne has long been recognized as an innovator in the aesthetics of the novel. The Freudian hypothesis concerning experimentation in literary form seems to offer the best explanation for the seemingly improvisatorial structure of Tristram. Frederick J. Hoffman writes that the "attempt to introduce a 'qualitative' form, or to insist upon symbolic as distinguished from rational progression comes at least in part from a dissatisfaction with form as not allowing sufficient texture or as overly inhibiting the opportunity of texture." And Sterne's animadversions upon the novel of adventure along with his contention that digressions are the life of a composition would certainly lend credence to Hoffman's thesis. And as an additional aspect of this psychological context, one in which meaning turns upon structure, Sterne's use of ambiguity and word-play, especially as they involve sexual matters, become parts of the "process constantly occurring in the psyche

62 Hoffman, p. 322.
which seeks to achieve an articulate balance of tensions between desire and preservation."\(^{63}\) In this matter, Sterne seems to be seeking a balance in which his work is preserved from oblivion by making his evaluation of man's sexual nature acceptable to the reading public.

When one proceeds from these general assessments of the psychological aspects of *Tristram* to a more detailed examination of the sexual symbolism, he immediately comes to the realization that Sterne's vehicle for exploring the nature of man is wit, not psychoanalysis. The sexual wit, then, becomes Sterne's means for expressing the basic tensions, balances, repressions, and compensations which informed his vision of man. And various critics have turned their attention to the problem of interpreting the sexual symbolism in *Tristram* and relating it to the central themes of the novel.

Perhaps the most successful of the Freudian investigations of *Tristram* is that by A. R. Towers. As his basic assumption, Towers seems to accept the evaluation of James A. Work: "As Sterne was above all else a humorist--'the most complete example in modern literature,' Cross has called him 'of a man whose other faculties are overpowered by a sense of humor'--so *Tristram Shandy* is above all else a humorous book."\(^{64}\) From this, Towers proceeds to his brief but incisive analysis of the sexual comedy of the novel: the "comedy

\(^{63}\) Hoffman, p. 325. \(^{64}\) Sterne, p. li.
of inadequacy" (Tristram), the "comedy of displacement" (Toby), and the "comedy of frustration" (Walter). The inadequacy of Tristram is evidenced in his successive maimings, his impotence with Jenny, and in his method of narration, an "art of self-interruption." The displacement in Toby is revealed in his militaristic hobby-horse, in the "remarkable degree to which fortifications are regularly feminized and even sexualized." And the frustration of Walter stems from his "failure to communicate, to make the essential connections between himself and the world around him." Thus, according to Towers, Walter's "inability to impress his wife sexually is a perfect counterpart to his inability to impress her intellectually." And in the novel, "sex is at once the major exemplar and the faithful mirror of incommunication, cross-purpose, interruption, and indirection."

With this general evaluation, William Bowman Piper seems to agree; for, he writes, Sterne's initial concern, "a supremely natural one in eighteenth century England, is the confrontation of polite society by the individual social consciousness. Sterne has evolved Tristram Shandy from one aspect of this concern: from the limitations polite society imposes on personal expression." As these limits are ex-

69 Towers, 28. 70 Towers, 14.
plored, it is the social unsuitability of sexual expression which determines the shape of the narrative, which forces Tristram "to suspend and tangle his discourse, . . . [to] digress, double-back, and leave gaps." And it is through another structural use of sex that Sterne achieves one of the comic elements in Tristram, which Piper considers a tragi-comedy. Piper asserts that Tristram eases the expression of the tragedy of his life "by playing on its oddity and obscenity." Thus, "Tristram so presents these indications of encroaching mortality [Walter's chills and sciatica] as to direct society's mind entirely toward Walter's sexual activity and potency and never toward his death. . . . Toby's weakness and aging--his increased weight, . . . his balding head, . . . and the lingering signs of his wound . . . --seem, likewise, to be chiefly relevant to the story of his amours." And, after Tristram's unfortunate adventure with Jenny, society's attention is quickly directed to a possible cure, the "drinking of goat's whey, which will, incidentally, lengthen his life by seven years." Piper's assessment of the effect of this structural and thematic device is incisive:

One hardly recognizes that personal desolation and family extinction can be derived from such trivial things as an odd marriage article, a loose rivet, a curate's being named Tristram, or a misplaced chamber pot. The fact that Tristram's trivial accidents may also be socially unmentionable further lessens their tragic impact. The nose-penis equivocation, for instance, although Tristram often asserts its tragic

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72 Piper, p. 25. 73 Piper, p. 126.
74 Piper, p. 57. 75 Piper, p. 57.
side, always leaves the polite members of Tristram's audience too concerned with their own titillations or with the confusions of their prudish neighbors (or with both of these) to attend to Tristram's tragic destiny.  

It is unfortunate that Piper neglects the psychological implications of Sterne's frequent juxtapositioning of sex and death, for the device suggests that Sterne considered these two elements to be the indelible marks of human existence. And since death is unknowable, Sterne devotes his energies to exploring the sexual nature of man. Doubtless, Piper's interest in the satiric value of the presentation of sexual matters, the fact that it allows the reader to see sex in its "true human proportion" or as merely an "unmentionable diversion," is one aspect of Sterne's concern; but it is only one element, one which is subsumed in Sterne's critical examination of Locke's pronouncements upon language and the nature of man.

It is this element of satire in Tristram that forms the basis of the interpretations of Melvyn New and Barbara Packer. New sees Tristram as a "monument to chaos," as a satire in the Scriblerian tradition; and, according to this interpretation, the attention to sexual matters indicates "the desire of the satirist to keep a man's character closely tied to his body." New maintains that the sexual material functions as a metaphor of creativity: the concern of the

76 Piper, p. 60.  
77 Piper, p. 82.  
family, aside from Toby's affair with the Widow, is the birth of Tristram; and Tristram's concern is the creation of the family history. And, this "concern over creativity, apparent from the first scene to the last, becomes the most pervasive metaphor of the work, and provides Tristram Shandy with the unity we seek in vain if we treat it as a novel." Thus, according to New's theory, Tristram's impotence with Jenny serves, metaphorically, as "a reaffirmation of the intellectual and emotional impotence" which is one of Sterne's principal satiric targets. His theories of geniture, names, and noses frustrated, "Walter's desire to create reaches the ignominious epitome of uncreating chaos in the shaping of one million ideas about a white bear." And Toby's bowling-green and "red plush breeches" are merely examples of ludicrous pretension. "In love and in war, Toby plays a game in miniature; his games are . . . Sterne's final satiric evaluation of the sentimental vision." And with this assessment of a strongly antisentimental bias in Sterne, Barbara Packer is in complete agreement. Miss Packer writes that "the world of sentiment in Tristram Shandy is continually undercut by the intrusion of gross physicality."

Although the interpretations of New and Packer are provocative, they are ultimately unconvincing; for to inter-

79 New, p. 82. 80 New, p. 178. 81 New, p. 204.
82 New, p. 200.
pret the sexual symbolism as an instrument of satire only is to seriously limit Sterne's psychological insight. Here, one must carefully weigh the evidence. When Packer asserts that "Sexual and literary decorum lose their hold upon our affections by virtue of their constant alliance with pompous 'connoisseurships' and secretly leering 'ladyships,'" she is dangerously overstating her thesis. While the practice she points out here is frequent enough to warrant a comment, the alliance of the sexual material with a hypothetically prurient reader is by no means sufficiently constant to support her assertion. New more accurately describes this phenomenon when he comments that the satire of the reader turns upon the "willingness with which our minds move to the licentious." No critic would deny this satirical thrust—along with other elements of satire—in *Tristram*. However, in asserting that the concern over creativity provides the work with the unity of satire, New seems to be completely ignoring the frequently remarked concern over human communication and understanding which is the principal theme of the novel and within which the sexual nature of man plays the primary role. Also, New's thesis of *Tristram* as a satire forces him to certain critical evaluations which simply do not accurately describe Sterne's work. For example, New, attempting to evaluate satiric intention, interprets the principal characters in terms of abstractions: Walter represents "Reason"; Toby, "Sentiment";

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84 Packer, p. 2. 85 New, p. 87.
and Tristram, "Both in Extreme." Against these negative qualities, New posits Yorick as the normative standard. Thus, New fails to appreciate the human dimensions with which Sterne endows his characters and which even his earliest critics recognized. And the attempt by New and Packer to reveal Sterne as anti-sentimental is, as John Traugott points out, primarily the result of our "cultural intolerance of sentimentality" and a consequent attempt to present "an 'image' of the man more palatable to our age." And while this may save the man, it "kills the artist"; for Sterne's aesthetic is founded in sentimentality.

Traugott accepts Sterne's sentimentality and sees it as the basis for Sterne's exploration of the possibilities of human communication. And Traugott's discussion of Sterne's sentimentalism as it was philosophically developed by Hume is essential to an understanding of Tristram:

Hume was not an egoist, as was Hobbes, but he believed that all social morals were discoverable and explicable not through reason alone, as Locke maintains, but through a sentimental intuition of customary motives and attitudes. But an imaginative insight through the association of ideas, says Hume, is necessary to achieve this knowledge. As we perceive actions in others similar to our own, we form an idea of the emotion of others, and the idea is transformed into an impression, and becomes through association with ourselves a real passion of our own. But still the emotion or passion is not directed

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86 New, p. 205.
toward ourselves, but rather, we feel for and with the object of our intuition. For Hume, man is always a social being, neither egoistic nor selfless but always in some sympathetic relation (in normal behavior). Reason being not an active faculty, becomes the slave of the passions, in the respect that reason can do nothing without passional intuition.

This philosophical sentimentalism, then, provides the foundation for understanding Sterne's study of human relations; according to Traugott, "it is the real order of Tristram Shandy."  

The main thrust of Traugott's study, however, is his exploration of the conflict with Lockean philosophy, implicit in the above statement of Sterne's sentimentality. Traugott maintains that Sterne set out to "discover motives for reactions, by stimulating reactions," to explore those possibilities of the communication of ideas which Locke had ignored. Sterne, thus, offers to tell us "through contrasts and equivocations, something of our mental life, our irrational associations and conceptions," and he "protests the moral value of wit," its efficacy in "exploring human motives." However, these elements lead Traugott to the conclusion that Tristram is basically a rhetorical exercise, of which sex is only one aspect. And the character becomes "a sort of prosopopoeia (personification of a dialectical

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90 Traugott, p. 74. 91 Traugott, p. 84.
92 Traugott, p. 72. 93 Traugott, p. xv.
94 Traugott, p. 84.
This interpretation, like New's, oversimplifies the humanity of Sterne's characters and seriously limits the range of his artistic vision. Indeed, the whole affair between Toby and the Widow becomes merely a "satire on modesty, since modesty-and-lust is a natural and basic contrast for any rhetoric of love." According to Traugott, it is Sterne's "artistic conception that sees association as a dialectical drama which defines motives." But he ignores the implication, from the pervasiveness of sexual associations, that the universal motive of man is the sexual instinct.

Howard O. Brogan approaches this realization when he writes that sex is the "key point" in Sterne's critique of the "Lockean educational theory." And Sigurd Burckhardt, working along lines obviously related to Traugott's rhetorical thesis, comes even closer to the issue when he describes Sterne's sexual innuendo as "an almost continuous demonstration that words in flight will curve downwards and hit the hearer's concupiscence instead of his reason." But the reason for this direction is left unexplored, for Burckhardt pursues a semantic theory in which the indirection of Sterne's expression of sex "serves as the metaphor of the unmentionable

95 Traugott, p. 132. 96 Traugott, p. 146.
97 Traugott, p. 49.
mystery of the word." 100

Also commenting upon Sterne's use of words, W. B. C. Watkins points to the prevalence of equivocation in *Tristram* as evidence of the delight which Sterne takes in "packing as much implication as possible into a word, a phrase, a situation." 101 And in a fairly general comment upon Sterne's art, Watkins makes an incisive evaluation of both style and theme: "No other English novelist has ever portrayed with such delicate skill the very nerve centers of the brain and spinal cord, the raising or lowering of blood pressure, the instinctive muscular reaction to mental and emotional agitation—in short, the intimate relation and interaction between body and mind." 102 John M. Stedmond concurs in this evaluation and asserts that the struggle between spirit and body "might be said to constitute the main 'plot' of *Tristram Shandy*." 103

Stedmond believes that Sterne's presentation of this struggle constitutes the central element in his purpose: to develop in the reader an awareness of the implications of the human condition. According to Stedmond, this awareness is the essence of Sterne's "message": "Man can experience the delights of the human state only by subjecting himself to its

100 Burckhardt, 77.


102 Watkins, p. 142.

limitations. If he rebels disproportionately, he may well lapse into frustrated melancholy; if he submits too readily, he may lose himself in tawdry trivialities. But if he can retain his sense of humor and his urge to make the best possible use of his admittedly limited powers, then he can attain a measure of human happiness. But Stedmond fails to assess the central position of sexuality in such an awareness of life. Instead, he assumes that a satirical intention governs the sexual expression. Sexual passion thus becomes merely one of the "passionate forces in humans which, by getting astride of vaunted reason, render men ludicrous." And from this position, Stedmond implicitly advocates an imbalance in the psyche (of reason over the passions) which is clearly alien to Sterne's sentimentality.

Henri Fluchère agrees with Watkins and Stedmond that one of Sterne's principal concerns is the portrayal of the duality of man, the "close interdependence of the physical and the spiritual." And Fluchère provides the most incisive description of the pervasiveness of sexual themes in Tristram:

The whole book proceeds from the initial theme of procreation. Everything is involved in some way with the event that took place on the night of the first Sunday in March 1718: homunculus, pregnancy, confinement, midwife, baptism, and so on through the whole unfolding of the story, while allied themes swarm and flourish in ambiguous embroideries, equiv-


ocal incidents, and anecdotes and stories in which obscenity now plays at hide-and-seek with the reader, now exposes itself in all its comic absurdity. . . . [And] Obadiah's marriage and the "pop-visit" of his cow to the parish bull on the same day bring back the genetic themes at the end of the book, so that they come full circle on the final ambiguity, which is a sort of esoteric symbol of the whole. 107

However, when he approaches the problem of evaluating the significance of this pervasiveness, Fluchère is somewhat confusing and seems self-contradictory. While he writes that Sterne, in his attention to human sexuality, "belongs to the tradition of the humanists, who felt no bitterness against the body," he also asserts that Sterne attempts to overthrow the tyranny of man's physical nature by assigning it a comic function. 108 The humanistic attitude of regarding the body as a friendly and integral part of life and the satirist's concept of the body as a tyrant to be overthrown seem to be mutually exclusive. While he describes Tristram as "a constant fragmentation of reality," 109 Fluchère fails to see that the sexual matters provide a constant point of reference within and among the fragments. And while he comments upon the difficulty of bending "language to the service of that rational order to which the mind aspires," 110 he does not refer to the order which is provided by the language of sexual expression, which, however imprecise and ambiguous, elicits a universal response and, in so doing, anatomizes human nature.

107 Fluchère, pp. 231-32. 108 Fluchère, p. 207. 109 Fluchère, p. 22. 110 Fluchère, p. 33.
Thus, although critics have frequently provided interesting and valuable insights into *Tristram*, in their various critical responses to Sterne's sexual expression, they have apparently misinterpreted both Sterne and his novel. In general, eighteenth and nineteenth century writers were prevented from reaching just evaluations by their prudery. More recent critics are either misled by satirical, rhetorical, or semantic "hobby-horses," or simply fail to follow the implications of their studies to an obvious conclusion. For example, modern critics almost unanimously comment upon Locke's influence upon Sterne, especially the former's concepts of the *tabula rasa* and the association of ideas, and his critique of language. And certainly these aspects of Locke's philosophy have a definite relationship to *Tristram*. But Locke's brief and infrequent comments upon man's physical nature, upon his corporeal existence and impulses, which have been completely ignored by criticism, also exert a profound influence upon Sterne's conception of man. Indeed, it is in man's physical nature that Sterne sees the force for establishing an equilibrium with man's propensity to theorize, sees the potential value to human communication and understanding in the recognition and acceptance of the common physical humanity. Therefore, he urges man to discover the pleasures which inhere in his limited, human condition. It is their inability to make this discovery that Sterne explores in his principal characters: Walter, who attempts to repress sexuality; Toby, who sublimates it; and Tristram, who real-
izes the extent to which he and his family have been victim-
ized by society's artificial morality and suggests the natur-
alness of man's sexual instincts.

This, then, is the foundation of Sterne's comic vi-
sion of the nature of man, of his sexual ethic, and of his
comment--in the sermon on "Penances"--that "one principal
reason, why God may be supposed to allow pleasure in the
world, seems to be for the refreshment of our souls and
bodies, which, like clocks, must be wound up at certain in-
tervals."\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{111} Laurence Sterne, "Penances," in The Sermons of Mr.
1904), II, 264.
CHAPTER III

WALTER SHANDY AND RATIONAL SEX

The simile comparing man with a clock by which Sterne, in his sermon, suggests the nature of the relationship between sensory pleasures and man's soul provides the standard for measuring Walter Shandy's comic aberrations, which have a dominant influence upon his son. The theme of procreation opens Tristram's narration; and, as he writes of his own conception, Tristram reveals his father's sexual practices.

Walter Shandy, "being somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age" (p. 8), had so ordered his domestic duties that "on the first Sunday night of every month throughout the whole year," he both wound the "large house-clock . . . standing upon the back-stairs head, with his own hands" and performed the conjugal responsibilities of a husband. On the night of Tristram's conception, Mrs. Shandy's untimely question, "Pray, my dear, . . . have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" (p. 5), reveals the absurdity of the reduction of sex to a mechanical habit. Here, as J. M. Stedmond comments, the comedy springs from the "reduction of man to machine. Copulation and clock-winding are on a par in the Shandy household."1 In this action, as Fluchère points out, sex is "divested of all sensual or emotional content."2 The

1 Stedmond, p. 8.  
2 Fluchère, p. 226.
absurdity of the situation is implicit in the fact that Walter submits to sex but refuses "to allow his senses the least pleasure," a refusal which places him "outside the natural order." Walter's contempt for sex seems to stem from the fact that sex is of that "realm of human experience that is unamenable to rational control." And in the context of this dichotomy of reason and passion, one can see an important aspect of Sterne's comic use of sexual matters, for Walter's "inability to impress his wife sexually is a perfect counterpart to his inability to impress her intellectually," and it is this failure of communication that is one of Walter's constant sources of frustration.

The critical evaluations of Walter's sexual attitude by J. M. Stedmond and A. R. Towers in terms of satiric and comic purposes (interpretations which represent the critical consensus) are doubtlessly accurate. However, there are profoundly serious implications in Sterne's comedy. Towers' thesis with regard to the failure of communication indicates, in a general way, Sterne's ultimate concern. And it remains for a detailed analysis of the opening scene of the novel to reveal the exact ways in which Sterne begins the development of his thesis. In a novel which many readers feel is digressive, erratic, and completely without order, and which Fluchère describes as being "only a constant fragmentation of reality," there is an organization, an order predicated

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3 Fluchère, p. 233. 4 Towers, p. 27.
5 Towers, p. 28. 6 Fluchère, p. 22.
upon human instincts which is provided by the pervasiveness of sex, the one constant within the fragments. And in the details of the opening scene, one can see an emerging pattern for the entire novel.

The background material which is necessary for a thorough understanding of the opening of *Tristram Shandy* is to be found in the work which, according to Tristram, many read but few understand, John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Sterne seems to have believed that Locke's epistemology represented man's best attempt to construct a comprehensive theory of the attainment, expression, and transmission of knowledge, and yet he saw that in many ways Locke's theories were completely inadequate as explanations of human phenomena. The opening of Sterne's novel, for example, involves Tristram, the narrator, as child-embryo, Mrs. Shandy, as wife-mother, and Walter Shandy, as husband-father. In his essay, Locke writes that the concepts of "relations" (the underlined words) represent simple ideas or collections of simple ideas. He writes that "when the word father is mentioned: first, there is meant that particular species, or collective idea, signified by the word man; secondly, those sensible simple ideas, signified by the word generation; and, thirdly, the effects of it, and all the simple ideas signified by the word child." 7 Sterne's presentation of

Tristram's conception, then, can be seen as a subtle quali­fication of Locke's theory. The human attitudes and emo­tions which are present in this scene reveal the insuffi­ciency of rational theories in describing human relation­ships. Walter's attitude reveals the unnaturalness of view­ing sex merely as "generation," as conjugal duty; his denial of its pleasure refutes the idea of generation as "sensible simple ideas." And the entire novel is required to show the "effects" of generation—the life of the child.

Another, and perhaps more important, aspect of Sterne's critical evaluation of Lockean theory in the opening scene concerns the relationship between body and soul, es­pecially as it involves pleasure. As maintained earlier, Sterne's comparison of man and clock implies an essential and healthful relationship between body and soul. And in his sermon on "The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zarephath Considered," Sterne writes of the naturalness with which the soul and the body befriend one another: "I cannot conceive but that the very mechanical motions which maintain life, must be performed with more equal vigour and freedom in that man whom a great and good soul perpetually inclines to show mercy to the miserable, than they can be in a poor, sordid, selfish wretch." 8 Here, Sterne suggests a direct relationship between soul and body, relating the proportion of vigour in the "mechanical motions" of the body to the greatness and

8 The Sermons of Mr. Yorick, I, 84.
goodness of the soul. Sterne's idea seems to be analogous to Locke's theory of sensation: "Every act of sensation, when duly considered, gives us an equal view of both parts of nature, the corporeal and the spiritual. For whilst I know, by seeing or hearing, etc., that there is some corporeal being without me, the object of that sensation, I do more certainly know, that there is some spiritual being within me that sees and hears."9 Thus, in both Locke and Sterne there is the realization of the fact that in every act of external perception—sensation there is an element of internal perception, of self-consciousness.

The relationship, then, of Walter's attitude toward and performance of sexual activities to this theory is twofold. First, Sterne's development of Walter's attitude reveals a refinement upon the Lockean concept of sensation as "sensuous perception." In the separation of contempt, Walter's attitude, from performance, Sterne distinguishes sensuous feeling from organic motion, two important aspects of sensation. And, secondly, in revealing the possibility of this separation, Sterne demonstrates man's ability to perceive, here to engage in a sexual relationship, without a corresponding development of self-awareness. This constitutes, in effect, the denial of one aspect of humanity, bodily pleasures, and results in frustration and the complete failure to elicit any response (failure of communica-

9 Locke, I, 406-07.
tion). Ultimately, Mr. Shandy's contemptuous attitude toward sex is based upon his vision of man as "really, despite appearances to the contrary, an exalted and godlike being." And all of his theories—of geniture, names, noses, and education—seem to be predicated upon this same hypothesis.

It is obvious that Walter Shandy's propensity to theorize renders him a principal target of Sterne's satire. When charged with a lack of feeling and compassion, Walter responds with a defense of his rationalism above all things: "What is the character of a family to an hypothesis? . . . Nay, if it comes to that—what is the life of a family?" (p. 69). Uncle Toby's response, the *argumentum fistulatorium*, underlines the ridiculousness of Walter's position. Sterne's comment upon this position seems to be implicit in the description of the Shandy coat-of-arms depicted on Walter's carriage which contained "instead of the bend dexter . . . a bend sinister" (p. 314). The mark of illegitimacy, then, suggests the unnaturalness of Walter's attitude. And in the successive frustrations of Walter's theories, Sterne seems to be demonstrating the impossibility of "determining meaning apart from a context of human situations." Furthermore, the sexual ramifications of each of Walter's theories serve to undermine Walter's attempts to deny the influence of the body in human existence through subjugating it to rational

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10 Stedmond, p. 129.
control.

The first instance of Walter's attempting this control is revealed in the opening scene of the novel. The narration of Tristram's humorously pathetic conception presents the initial thwarting of one of Walter's theories: his concept of the importance of a vigorous conception. The act of propagation, according to Mr. Shandy, "required all the thought in the world, as it laid the foundation of this incomprehensible contexture in which wit, memory, fancy, eloquence, and what is usually meant by the name of good natural parts, do consist" (p. 149). Its consequences being of great magnitude, then, Walter believed that the act required all the powers of concentrated thought of the participants. Thus the effect of Mrs. Shandy's completely irrational question, although the result of her husband's mechanical orderliness, was that it completely "scattered and dispersed the animal spirits, whose business it was to have escorted and gone hand-in-hand with the HOMUNCULUS, and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception" (p. 5). This interruption becomes the basis for Walter's rationalizations of the oddity of Tristram, the product of the union: "My Tristram's misfortunes began nine months before ever he came into the world" (pp. 6-7). The fundamentally solipsistic nature of Walter's ratiocinative processes, which condemns him to disappointment and frustration, is obvious here. First, there is the establishment of a rigid pattern in the performance of what he ridiculously terms
"conjugal duty." Walter's actions reduce sexual union to a habit and its participants to automatons. Then there is the attempted enforcement of the abstract principle of the concentration required, which posits the significance of the act outside the context of human emotion. In a similar fashion, Walter's denial of any of the pleasure normally associated with sex further places him outside the natural order. [Ironically, it is the "naïve" Uncle Toby who presents the most accurate assessment of Walter's sexual activities when he remarks to Dr. Slop: "My brother does it . . . out of principle" (p. 116).] And finally, when the child does not function properly, i.e., by Walter's standards of rationality, Mr. Shandy seeks to explain the disorder by returning to the abstract principle which, he believed, determined these results. In each step of this process, then, Walter Shandy ignores the irrational aspects of the situation. The instinctive and emotional elements of human sexuality, its human dimensions, are to be carefully and disdainfully controlled. The act of sexual union, considered as both an elemental and ultimate form of human communication, is rendered sterile.

The second principle by which Mr. Shandy attempts to manipulate natural process involves his theory of child birth, the "Causa sine quâ non" of all his theories concerning reproduction. For after his minute inquiries into the question of the anatomical location of the soul, rejecting the pineal gland location theorized by Descartes and the
theory of "Coglionissimo Borri," Mr. Shandy determined that the soul was to be found "in, or near, the cerebellum,—or rather some-where about the medulla oblongata" (p. 149). This belief led to his theory of the great importance of the "preservation of this delicate and fine-spun web, from the havock which was generally made in it by the violent compression and crush which the head was made to undergo, by the nonsensical method of bringing us into the world by that part foremost" (p. 149). For this reason, then, Mr. Shandy determined that the Caesarian section was the best method for delivery. However, when Mrs. Shandy turned "pale as ashes" at the very mention of the operation, Walter said no more of it.

In further contradiction of her husband's wishes, Mrs. Shandy demands that the midwife be called to attend her. Dr. Slop, whom Walter favored for attendant, was to be called but was to assist only in case of an emergency. When the Doctor succeeds in delivering Tristram, his forceps crush the infant's nose "as flat as a pancake" (p. 214).

The foundation for the sexual double entendres which surround the word "nose" throughout Tristram's narrative is to be found in the parlour discussion among Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy, and Uncle Toby. In demonstrating the function of his recently invented forceps, Slop tears "every bit of the skin quite off the back of both my [Toby's] hands . . . and . . . [crushes] all my knuckles . . . to a jelly" (p. 187). Dr. Slop then points out the importance of a head-first
foetal position in a forceps delivery, for "if the hip is mistaken for the head,—there is a possibility (if it is a boy) that the forceps *******" (p. 188). Mr. Shandy's response to this incident seems inconsistent. First, his comment on the actions of the forceps upon Toby's hands is perfectly natural, indicating a father's concern: "Tis well . . . that the experiment was not first made upon my child's head piece" (p. 187). However, it is his reaction to Slop's discussion of the possibility of hip presentation in a forceps delivery that is surprising. Walter says that "when your possibility has taken place at the hip,—you may as well take off the head too" (p. 188). There is a rich ambiguity in this deceptively simple statement. One possible interpretation is that Mr. Shandy is simply adopting a position that is as ridiculously extreme and in as complete a violation of moderation as his extreme rationalism. Another possible reading of the lines is that Mr. Shandy is engaging in a form of masculine, locker-room camaraderie. That the Doctor interprets his comment in this light is suggested by Slop's tripping "nimbly, for a man of his size, across the room to the door" (p. 188). And despite the fact that Walter earlier in the evening disdained Slop's puns upon "curtains" and "horn works," he later teases Toby about "sally ports" and "thrusting bridges." Ultimately, however, the principle meaning of the statement seems to rest in its inconsistency with Walter's character. The comment expresses a position completely antithetical to an attitude which de-
nies sexual impulses and is disdainful of sexual pleasures and to a philosophy which proclaims the absolute necessity of the head's sovereignty over the body.

However, this is an inconsistency which is implicit in various incidents throughout the novel. It is present in Tristram's description of Walter in moments of pleasure: "my father clapp'd both his hands upon his cod-piece, which was a way he had when any thing hugely tickled him" (p. 514). The unconscious gesture, here, suggests a focal point in Mr. Shandy's emotional life—in spite of his theories. The same inconsistency, again revealed by a gesture which contradicts theory, is present in his discussion of the population of city and country. Mr. Shandy maintained that the "current of men and money towards the metropolis, upon one frivolous errand or another,—set in so strong,—as to become dangerous to our civil rights" (p. 46). Walter developed his theory "into a perfect allegory, by maintaining it was identically the same in the body national as in the body natural, where blood and spirits were driven up into the head faster than they could find their ways down;—a stoppage of circulation must ensue, which was death in both cases" (p. 46). Walter's proposed solution to stop this flow is to appoint judges for each avenue of the metropolis to stop strangers, ascertain the purpose for their journeys, and to send them back home if the reason were "not of weight sufficient." Thus, he would see "that the head be no longer too big for the body;—that the extrems, now wasted and pin'd in, be restored to
their due share of nourishment, and regain with it, their natural strength and beauty" (p. 46). The disparity between the theory of balance and proportion here expostulated and Walter's life of theorums and hypotheses is obvious. And the allegory becomes devastatingly ironic when Tristram describes the actions of his father which accompany this particular disquisition: Walter pulls "up his breeches with both his hands" (p. 46).

What Sterne seems to be suggesting through this inconsistency, then, is the absence of self-awareness in Walter Shandy. As commented earlier with regard to his attitude toward participation in sex, Mr. Shandy has divorced the act from the feeling. He thus fails to achieve the awareness of self which should accompany the act. In Mr. Shandy, Sterne reveals the futility of attempting to find meaning in life outside the context of human emotions. Through the confrontation of Walter with the fundamental human relationship of sex, Sterne suggests the impotence of reason. Walter's failures and frustrations seem to be the result of his insistence upon the hyperbolic illusion, authorized by society, of the efficacy of reason in all matters, and his rejection of sexuality. Thus, his problem is not only of communication but also of identity. And in this context, it should be noted that Walter Shandy's theories also include two elements which are principal marks of personal identity: noses and names.

Walter's theory of names was that names exerted a
"magical bias" upon the character and conduct, the identity, of their bearers. "How many Caesars and Pompeys, he would say, by mere inspiration of their names, have been rendered worthy of them? And how many, he would add, are there who might have done exceeding well in the world, had not their characters and spirits been totally depressed and Nicodemus'd into nothing" (p. 50). Here, Walter's theory reveals one aspect of the verbal confusion, which Locke had described, which results from the incautious association of irrelevant ideas with words so frequently that they become inseparable. The principal concern of Locke's presentation of this matter was the possible confusion resulting from the actual identification of verbal signs with their referents. And Walter's theory carries this confusion to the ultimate degree of error and absurdity. For his theory reduces man's identity to a mechanical function of the name assigned to him. Walter argues that if a man had named his son "Judas," "the sordid and treacherous idea, so inseparable from the name, would have accompanied him thro' life like his shadow, and, in the end, made a miser and a rascal of him" (p. 51).

According to this theory, there were good names, indifferent names, and bad names. In the first class, Walter placed the names Trismegistus, Archimedes, Caesar, Pompey, Alexander, and William. Of the second category were Jack, Dick, Tom, and Bob, Tristram's brother's name. And in the third class were Nyky, Simkin, Andrew, Numps, Dinah, and Tristram. It was to the last two names that Walter had the
greatest aversion, and it is around them that the sexual im­
plications of the theory center.

Dinah, Tristram explains, "was my great aunt . . . who, about sixty years ago, was married and got with child
by the coachman, for which my father . . . would often say,
she might thank her godfathers and godmothers" (p. 65). The
disgrace to the Shandy family caused by Dinah's passion was
a matter of great concern to both Toby and Walter. But
while the affair was a cause of acute pain to the former,
Walter "scarce ever let a day pass to an end without some
hint at it" (p. 68). For, just as "the backslidings of Venus
in her orbit fortified the Copernican system . . . [so] the
backslidings of Dinah in her orbit, did the same service in es­
tablishing" Walter's theory of names. Thus the association
of unregulated passion with the name "Dinah" is revealed to be
one of the principal bases for the theory, and the comic
analogy between the Copernican System and the Shandean Sys­
tem becomes less ludicrous when viewed in the context of the
omnipresent influence of sex.

A similar background seems to be present for Walter's
attitude toward the name "Tristram," which he abhorred above
"all the names in the universe" (p. 55). Although Walter
maintained that no man called Tristram had ever performed a
great or worthy deed and was engaged in writing a disserta­
tion upon the name just two years prior to the narrator's
birth, he never stated his specific objections to the name,
a blatantly obvious omission. The traditional associations
of the name "Tristram," one who devoted his life to a doomed love, seem to provide the natural explanation. The slightest possibility that a child should be cursed with such an irrational propensity would certainly constitute sufficient cause for Walter's abhorrence of the name.

Although the absence from the novel of this explanation suggests that Walter is, at times, unconsciously motivated by word-and-idea confusion, there are numerous examples of his conscious manipulation of such associations. Perhaps the singularly most revealing example of this practice is Walter's use of "ass" to signify the "passions." Tristram refers to the hermit Hilarion as the source of this "metaphor" and explains that his father liked it because "it was not only a laconick way of expressing--but of libelling, at the same time, the desires and appetites of the lower part of us" (p. 584). The frustration of communication which this subjective, arbitrary, and unnatural signification occasions is comically illustrated when Walter asks Toby of the progress of his "Asse." Toby, "thinking more of the part where he had had the blister, than of Hilarion's metaphor," (p. 584) imagined that Walter, "who was not very ceremonious in his choice of words, had inquired after the part by its proper name" and replied "My A—e . . . is much better--brother Shandy" (p. 585). This scene, then, provides an ostensibly comic exemplum of Sterne's primary concern in his novel: the problems of communication and understanding between men, which spring, to a great extent, from the ambiguity of
language. And, once again, the ambiguity turns upon sexual matters.

The Lockean dimensions of this problem are nowhere more in evidence than in Walter's theory of noses. As suggested previously, the nose is one of the principal marks of individual identity, as is the name; and the penis-nose equivocation strongly suggests that man's sexual nature plays a principal role in his life. Furthermore, this equivocation ironically undermines Walter's denial of the importance of the sexual instinct.

When Tristram is preparing to enter into a discussion of his father's concern with noses, he is confronted by Eugenio with the ambiguity of his words and with the need for defining his terms. And although Tristram maintains that "to define--is to distrust," (p. 218) he disclaims obstinacy and proceeds to his definition:

I define 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. (P. 218)

The ludicrous verbosity and subtle erudition of this definition render it the typical expression of the son of Walter.

The first element in Tristram's definition, the address to the readers, demonstrates his awareness of the sub-
jective and arbitrary signification of words. This is the primary consideration of Locke's thesis in "Of Words" when he writes that "unless a man's words excite the same ideas in the hearer which he makes them stand for in speaking, he does not speak intelligibly." And Locke's conceptual-nominalist position is obvious in Tristram's cautions against "other ideas" and his emphasis upon the "word" nose.

Although the definition appears to be a mere tautology, it involves a skillfully ironic manipulation of Locke's three basic classifications of words, the names of simple ideas, of mixed modes, and of substances. The word "nose" is the name of a substance, a sign "of such complex ideas wherein several particular substances do or might agree, by virtue of which they are capable of being comprehended in one common conception and signified by one name." And though nature provides the likenesses (long, short, flat, sharp, "club-shaped," etc.) for such classifications, they are made by man.

However, Tristram treats the word as if it were the name of a simple idea, defying any other definition than a tautology by its very singleness and simplicity of meaning. The disparity between the "nose" as substance, as a complex of ideas and qualities; the "nose" as simple idea, the tautology; and the ambiguity of the "nose" in Walter's theory suggests that one should consider "nose" as the name of a mixed mode. The latter is Locke's class of names in which a

complex idea is associated with a judgement, an evaluation. Locke's examples of words in this class are "justice" and "charity," and the "nose" achieves a similar complexity in its phallic symbolism. For all of Walter's minute inquiries into the history of noses lead him to the conclusion that the "greatest family in England" could not maintain itself "against an uninterrupted succession of six or seven short noses" (p. 220).

In preparing the reader for Slawkenbergius, whose work is described as a "Digest and regular institute of noses," (p. 232) Tristram comments briefly on other theorists of the nose in whom Walter was deeply read. The purpose of this commentary seems to be to reveal the various aspects of the theory which are present in Slawkenbergius only by implication. Prignitz, for example, writes that based upon his research in "upwards of twenty charnal [carnal?] houses in Silesia" it appears that the "mensuration and configuration of the osseous or boney parts of human noses, in any given tract of country . . . are much nearer alike, than the world imagines" (p. 232). The foundations upon which noses are built, then, are fundamentally the same, the sex instinct is universal; however, Prignitz continues, "the size and jollity of every individual nose, and by which one nose ranks above another, and bears a higher price, is owing to the cartilaginous and muscular parts of it, into whose ducts and sinuses the blood and animal spirits being impelled, and driven by the warmth and force of the imagination . . . [and] that the
The excellency of the nose is in a direct arithmetical proportion to the excellency of the wearer's fancy" (pp. 232, 233). The analogy, here, between Prignitz's theory of the nose's relationship to the fancy and Sterne's comment upon the relationship between the "mechanical motions" of the body and man's spirit seems obvious. Sterne seems to be taking an orthodox and traditional position: the importance of the spirit to the life of the senses and the importance of the "fancy," love, to the full consummation of the "nose," sex. However, the next theorist, Scroderus, maintains "That so far was Prignitz from the truth, in affirming that the fancy begat the nose, that on the contrary,—the nose begat the fancy" (p. 233). And although Tristram points out that the "learned suspected Scroderus, of an indecent sophism," (p. 233) that is, of shifting the meaning of "fancy" from "imagination" to "love," he does not resolve the question. And the theorist who supposedly overturns both Prignitz and Scroderus, Ambrose Paraeus, completely avoids the issue by reasoning that "the length and goodness of the nose was owing simply to the softness and flaccidity in the nurse's breast" (p. 234).

In Walter's library of learned men, who "don't write dialogues upon long noses for nothing," (p. 229) probably the most learned is Hafen Slawkenbergius, whose work is Walter's "recreation and delight . . . at matin, noon, and vespers" (p. 241). And although Tristram suggests that the work was misnamed Slawkenbergii Fabella ("Philosophy is not built upon
tales"; yet the pun seems to provide an exception to the generalization), he writes that the tales were a "rich treasury of inexhaustible knowledge to my father" (p. 241). The basis of Walter's esteem for Slawkenbergius seems to be three-fold: first, of course, is the author's subject, for his work is a compendium of "nosology"; second is his satiric attitude toward the clergy—especially Catholics, the laity, politicians, doctors, and schoolmen; and third is his recounting of the innumerable disputations which Diego's nose occasioned.

The commoners argue over the truth or falsity of the nose. The doctors argue whether man's body could support such a nose. The clergy argue whether God could/would create such a nose, and the universities split into Nosarians and Antinosarians:

'Tis above reason, cried the doctors on one side.
'Tis below reason, cried the others.
'Tis faith, cried one.
'Tis a fiddle-stick, said the other.
'Tis possible, cried the one.
'Tis impossible, said the other. (P. 263)

It is significant, however, that Slawkenbergius singles out the "logicians" for sticking "closer to the point" than the others. They "began and ended with the word nose," and, writes Slawkenbergius, would have settled the controversy had they not encountered a petitio principii: "'Now death', continued the logician, 'being nothing but the stagnation of the blood'--'I deny the definition--Death is the separation of the soul from the body', said his antagonist" (p. 259).
The first logician asserts the physical, naturalistic definition of death; and his antagonist, the metaphysical, theological definition. It is a question that is analogous to the debate over whether love begets sex or vice versa. And it, like the earlier question, remains unanswered. This confrontation, then, which ended the dispute, is emblematic of Sterne's thesis: there is, once again, the inability to agree upon the signification of terms, which prevents communication; and there is the questioning of the life force, blood or spirit, that ultimately leads to a consideration of the role of sex in man's life.

J. M. Stedmond is doubtlessly correct when he points out that this "nosology" is Tristram's development of the "tradition of phallic by-play associated with the antics of the clown from the earliest times." The extensive use of this material is illustrated in chapter one, and Stedmond perceptively describes the quest for the "truth of the nose" as "a clowning version of the quest for truth rather like that of Panurge in Book Three of Gargantua and Pantagruel." However, this clowning is frequently used to further thematic as well as satiric development. In Aristophanes' drama, Lysistrata manipulates sex until the frustrated men are forced to conclude the war. And in Tristram Shandy, Sterne suggests a similarly important role for sex in the conclusion to Slawkenbergius' tale. Diego, preparing to hasten to Julia, composes an ode which expresses his love. According to Slaw-

14 Stedmond, p. 102. 15 Stedmond, p. 103.
kenbergius, Diego "eased his mind against the wall" as follows:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Ode} \\
\text{Harsh and untuneful are the notes of love,} \\
\text{Unless my Julia strikes the key,} \\
\text{Her hand alone can touch the part,} \\
\text{Whose dulcet movement charms the heart,} \\
\text{And governs all the man with sympathetic sway.} \\
\text{O Julia!} \quad (P. 269)
\end{align*}
\]

The "part," which all the Strasburgers would have died to touch, is, of course, Diego's magnificent nose. And the ambiguity surrounding the "part" implies a connection between sex, love, and sympathy. And although, as previously noted, the relationship between sex and love is never explicitly defined, here the relationship seems to involve a movement from sex (the "part") to love (the heart) and to the sympathy which "governs all the man." This movement relates significantly to what seems to be Sterne's opinion of the possibilities of communication between men. It is, Sterne implies, a communication based upon sympathetic intuition rather than upon reason, the fallibility of which he repeatedly demonstrates. And given this condition, it is man's sexuality which exerts the most profound influence upon him. Man's relationships, both man to woman and man to man, depend heavily upon the individual's ability to establish his identity, a task which remains impossible until he has come to terms with his sexual nature. The interweaving of this serious thematic concern with the comic, the alternation of tragedy and comedy noted by W. B. Piper,\(^\text{16}\) is em-

\(^{16}\)Piper, p. 126.
blematic of man's condition. The tragic rests in man's repeated failure to understand himself or others. The comic results from man's attempts to extricate himself from the hypocrisies enforced by society (Tristram), in man's passive naïvete (Toby), and in man's attempts to proclaim his identity, to define himself within the strictures of society (Walter), and it is ironic that despite the fact that his theories concern questions of fundamentals, Walter remains pathetically misinformed and misguided.

Walter's theory of education, as developed in his Tristrapaedia, is yet another example of his inability to communicate with others. His theory, which centers upon the use of auxiliary verbs, is essentially solipsistic. In its denial of the necessity of sense perception in education, it constitutes a comically absurd refutation of Locke's tabula rasa, but it does not present a theory of innate ideas either. Its methodology is simply to stimulate a series of questions ("Have I ever seen one [a white bear]? Might I ever have seen one?" etc. (p. 406)) and possible answers based upon various verb forms, tenses, negatives, and affirmatives. The probable results of such a system lead one critic to describe it as the "epitome of uncreating chaos."17 And another comments ingenuously that this system (a faith based entirely upon words) reaches a climax in the confrontation between Toby and Widow Wadman (a faith based upon things) as the Widow goes through a Tristrapaedic conjugation of her quandary: "Can I look at it [a "white

17 New, p. 204
However, as Howard O. Brogan notes, sex is the "key point in the critiques of Lockean educational theory" by Sterne. It is consistent with his character, then, that the system proposed by the eternally frustrated Walter be solipsistic. He, like Toby and Tristram, has sublimated his sexual drives. His propensity to theorize, like Toby's war games and Tristram's writing, represents the rechanneling of this energy. And the regularity with which the hobby-horses of all three are metaphorically sexualized reinforces this idea. Thus, the activities and the learning processes of all three are sexually motivated.

Of all the characters in the novel, it is Walter who speculates most freely and articulately on the nature of love and sex. One of the theories he proposes is the traditional concept of two kinds of love: rational love affecting

18 Burckhardt, p. 84.

19 Brogan, p. 145. This point can be made clearer, perhaps, by comparing Sterne with Fielding. While the latter, as Fluchère points out, "idealizes passion to the point of making it the essential motive-force of practical morality," (p. 219) Sterne seems to view passion-sex as a basic instinct. Walter fights the instinct; Toby idealizes it; Tristram accepts it.

20 Towers, p. 21. Towers makes this comment with regard to Uncle Toby and his fortifications, describing his attitude toward them as being that of an "ardent lover." And the same point can be made concerning the relationship between the theories and Walter, who "solaced himself with Bruscambille after the manner, in which . . . your worship solaced yourself with your first mistress," (p. 225) and between writing and Tristram, who is a "caressing prefacer stifling his reader, as a lover sometimes does a coy mistress" (p. 198).
the Brain and natural love affecting the Liver. And, of
course, he cites Plato as his authority for this dichotomy
(p. 587). Toby, quite naturally, is unimpressed: "What
signifies it, brother Shandy, . . . which of the two it is,
provided it will but make a man marry, and love his wife,
and get a few children" (pp. 586-87). Intuitively, however,
he seems to have arrived at the same conclusion as Parson
Yorick, who comments that he knew "there were two Religions
. . . among the ancients--one--for the vulgar, and another
for the learned; but I think one Love might have served both
of them very well" (p. 587). The significance of Yorick's
ironic attitude toward Plato's dichotomy of love is that it
maintains the ambiguity of love's nature, the complex blend
of passion and ideality that is not easily analyzed. And it
is an attitude which, perhaps, is based upon Sterne's famil-
liarity with Lucian, who maintained that in matters of love
Plato's behavior was highly questionable and his opinions,
therefore, of dubious value.

Rational love, Walter maintains, is the "golden chain
let down from heaven, [which] excites to love heroic, which
comprehends in it, and excites to the desire of philosophy
and truth" (p. 587). Natural love "excites to desire,
simply" (p. 587). Walter presents his own refinement upon
this theory, "which Plato . . . never thought of": "Love,
you see, is not so much a Sentiment as a Situation, into
which a man enters" (p. 589). His letter to Toby is there-
fore filled with practical advice on how to achieve mastery
of the situation, how to control the passions. The vision of "so exalted and godlike a Being as man" (p. 644) as an animal stirs Walter to magnificently eloquent anger: "I still think and do maintain it to be a pity that it [procreation] 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" (pp. 644-45). His contrasting of the darkness in which the sex act cloaks itself with the glory surrounding the actions of war seems, according to Fluchère, "incongruous and almost indecent."  

Although Tristram reports that Yorick was "rising to batter the whole hypothesis to pieces" when Obadiah enters, (p. 645) the truth of Walter's Diatribe, the contrasting attitudes of society toward sex and war, is irrefutable. And the implication of the scene seems to be that this situation is the result when the hypocrisies of society and religion force man to deny his physical being, his sexual nature.

21 Fluchère, p. 235.
CHAPTER IV

TOBY SHANDY AND SUBLIMATED SEX

The most typical victim of the hypocrisies which Wal­ter attacks is Toby Shandy; for although Tristram is equally victimized, his awareness of the hypocrisies renders him atypical. And Uncle Toby's attempted denial of sexuality, evidenced by his excessive modesty, is manifested in his hobby-horse, his military games. Here, indeed, Sterne's irony becomes an instrument of psychological realism for probing the complexity of human response.¹ For Toby's modesty, which makes him "both more and less than human,"² also renders him both the most sympathetic figure to society and its easiest victim. It is Toby's sublimation which has substituted the death force (war) for the life force (sex). Thus, the hypocrisy of society's attitudes toward these two forces, the glorification of war and the derision of sex, is Toby Shandy. As John M. Stedmond writes, Toby, "as symbolic representation of the aberrations inherent in society, is judged and condemned."³ And the significance of this objectification leads one critic to see the interchangeability of war


² Stuart M. Tave, The Amiable Humorist, p. 149.

³ The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne, p. 6.
and sex as the chief metaphor of Sterne's work.  

The limits of this metaphor are explored primarily through Sterne's use of double entendre. Although Henri Fluchere maintains that Sterne attempts to capture the ultimately "organic unity" of life "in spite of the ... imprecision of words," it seems that Sterne is able to depict the complexity of this unity more accurately through the ambiguity of words. And furthermore, the comment that the humor of Sterne's syntax depends upon the "dual exploitation of man's sympathetic and risible faculties" is equally applicable to his depiction of man's psychological life. Here, again, the justness of Piper's classification of the novel as tragicomedy can be appreciated in Sterne's presentation of the modest and naive Toby's using sexually loaded terminology, a presentation which, for comic purposes, leaves the serious implications of the situation unexplored.

This method of revealing Toby's sublimation is evident from the beginning of the novel in the use of the word "hobby-horse" to denote Tooby's games, for it was not until the nineteenth century that the word came to mean a favorite}

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5 Laurence Sterne, p. 33.


7 William Bowman Piper, Laurence Sterne, p. 126.
pastime. To the eighteenth century reader, a hobby-horse was "an imitation horse, such as was used in the mummers' dance or as a child's toy," and for the preceding age it had the secondary meaning of a harlot.\(^8\) Thus, Uncle Toby's hobby-horse undoubtedly provided an index to his childlike qualities; and perhaps, as Ian Watt writes, it "seemed a frivolous derogation of man's stature as a rational animal."\(^9\) However, the sexual implication of the term serves to strengthen A. R. Towers' thesis concerning the feminization of the science of fortifications which results from Toby's sublimation\(^10\) and indicates the significance of sexual impulses in man's life which Sterne discerns. Indeed, one critic asserts that "Sterne uses the horse symbol in the same way that Euripides and Fielding before him, and Lawrence and Faulkner after him, used it."\(^11\) For it seems that Sterne had come to realize that "human behavior is not based on reason; [and] in the end Locke had taught him not so much that the mind is a blank tablet, as that philosophical attempts to transcend ordinary human experience end up in a blind alley."\(^12\) It is this "blind alley" that Sterne charts to perfection in the character of Walter Shandy, and it is a manifestation of this same result--this time at the purely practical end of the scale--that he reveals in Toby Shandy.

\(^8\) Watt, 326.  \(^9\) Watt, 326.

\(^{10}\) "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story," 21.


\(^{12}\) Watt, 328.
That the lives of Walter and Toby are opposite ends of the same scale, one abstract and theoretical and the other concrete and practical, is the implication of Ernest Tuveson's statement that the principal distinction between the two men is that Walter spins his information and facts from his head while Toby gets his from authorities. Tuveson also seems quite accurate when he comments that hobby-horses may "provide the victim himself with a kind of pleasing and consoling illusion." Here, the words "victim" and "illusion" deserve special emphasis, for they serve well to describe and characterize both Walter and Toby. However, when Tuveson questions whether Toby's hobby-horse may not be considered a "kindly provision in the scheme of things, filling up the void in his life," he seems to forget that these games are the result and manifestation of Toby's inability to participate in ordinary human experiences. Indeed, rather than being part of a divine scheme, the hobby-horse is the central action in a series of events extending from Toby's wound at Namur to the window sash episode, a series of events which seems more accurately described as an example of the "ubiquity of the absurd." This absurdity is obvious, of course, in the defiance of rational analysis and is a part of Sterne's

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14 Tuveson, p. 276.

15 Tuveson, p. 276.

16 Fluchère, p. 137.
comic vision: "The normal world becomes absurd, and the absurd equalizations in Tristram's world become meaningful because only in a world configured by impotence can all directions be valid, and only in such a world would the thrust of a commitment or the violence of an obsession, be transformed into the mad gallop of a hobbyhorse." 

Uncle Toby's modesty was acquired and the gestation period of his hobby-horse was begun, as Tristram writes, by "a blow from a stone broke off by a ball from the parapet of a hornwork at the siege of Namur which struck full upon my Uncle Toby's groin" (p. 67). The full significance of these details does not become clear until Tristram approaches the amours of Toby and Widow Wadman, the "choicest morsel" of his story. For the narration of these episodes reveals a psychological complexity which seems to equal that of the battle between the sexes depicted by Richardson. While the latter chronicles the struggles between Pamela and Squire B. or between Clarissa and Lovelace with a relentless realism, Sterne, through Tristram, unveils the moral conventions of society which cripple its victims. There is in the affair between Mrs. Wadman and Toby a comic attack on the perversions of sexuality caused by society: lust and impotence. For Toby's impotence, implied throughout the novel, is not physiological, as Trim assures Bridget (p. 639) and as Tristram strongly implies in his discussions of Toby's leg (p. 545) and wound

(p. 626); but it is a physical manifestation of his "most extream and unparallel'd modesty" (p. 66).

In characterizing Toby, Tristram is very careful to point out that his modesty is of the "truest sense . . . that is, Madam, not in regard to words, for he was so unhappy as to have very little choice in them,—but to things" (p. 66). Here, Tristram's comment with regard to Toby's diction seems particularly important, for the suggestion of inevitability concerning Toby's selection of words reveals the severely limited nature of Toby's experiences. The fact that his world has turned about military affairs suggests that most of his natural instincts have been channeled into military forms and expressed in military terminology. The fact that the central episode involving Toby after the war involves a proposal of marriage seems to constitute an invitation to examine his vocabulary for sublimated sexuality. And within this context, it is quite predictable that through Tristram's "words" Toby's "things" are revealed to be ambiguous and equivocal.

The description of how Toby was wounded, for example, is loaded with sexual implications and serves as an initial illustration of this ambiguity. The stone which struck Toby came from the "parapet of a hornwork," (p. 67) a form which Mr. Work glosses as a "military work with but one front, consisting of two demi-bastions, thrown out beyond the glacis for the protection of any weak point" (p. 67). Considering the context for this remark, the ambiguity of Work's last
three words seems to suggest the need for a sexual interpretation of the passage. A hornwork, then, consists of two demi-bastions, each of which consists of one face and one flank. Thus there are two faces and flanks to a hornwork, and it is in this situation, which suggests the primordial male-female confrontation, that Toby is wounded. And Dr. Slop's pun which associates hornworks with the horns of a cuckold (p. 111) serves to underline the sexual dimensions of the term. A parapet, from which the stone was struck, is a breast-high defense over which one can shoot but which supposedly prevents penetration by an enemy's ammunition. And it is from this fortification, designed to protect the lower half of the body, that a stone strikes Toby's groin, the area most frequently attacked by society's prudery.

The stone, then, is a symbol of this prudery; and "whatever the nature of the physical wound, its symbolic import is as clear as that of Tristram's crushed nose. It is Uncle Toby's badge, the outward sign of the remarkable psychological processes with which Sterne endows him."18 And since the injury rendered him "unfit for the service," (p. 78) Toby was returned to England to recuperate. It is with obvious irony that Tristram recounts the joy of Toby's surgeon that the wound "was more owing to the gravity of the stone itself, than to the projectile force of it" (p. 79). For whatever the cause, the result is the same: one of society's

18 Towers, 20.
ultimate victories is accomplished in the conversion of the man of war into the man of excessive modesty, who is driven by the persistent questioning of his visitors to his games in the country.

For so complex and confusing were Toby's attempts to answer the questions about the siege at Namur that his listeners became confused, he became perturbed, and his wound became irritated. And Tristram explains the last phenomenon by a reference to the *History of Health and the Art of Preserving It* by Dr. James Mackenzie, who urges "those who would preserve their health to keep their passions in absolute subjection to their reason" (p. 83). Toby's attempt to escape these irritations, then, to control his passions leads first to his obtaining a map of Namur, which, for a time, greatly helped him in his explanations. The map, however, did not explain the fortifications or the actions, and Toby began to study the science of fortifications with a passionate intensity. His acquisition of his knowledge, according to Tristram, is the result of the "long friction and incumbition" between Toby and his subject matter (p. 88). And the word "incumbition," meaning the act of lying or pressing upon, accurately suggests the sexual nature of Toby's studies, which so engrossed him that he began to discontinue the routines that indicated a gentleman's interest in the opposite sex: he "began to break in upon the daily regularity of a clean shirt,—to dismiss his barber unshaven,—and to allow his surgeon scarce time sufficient to dress his wound, con-
cerning himself so little about it, as not to ask him once in seven times dressing how it went on" (p. 91). However, when the idea of using the bowling green for the enactment of military campaigns came to him, Toby became impatient for his cure and, one day, "pack'd up his maps, his books of fortification, his instruments, etc.—and, by the help of a crutch on one side, and Trim on the other, . . . embark'd for Shandy-Hall" (p. 93). Here, Toby is successful in displacing the pain in his groin: "All this succeeded to his wishes, and not only freed him from a world of sad explanations, but, in the end, it proved the happy means . . . of procuring . . . his Hobby-Horse" (p. 84). And Toby's attitude toward his hobby-horse is that of "an ardent lover": 19 "Never did lover post down to a belov'd mistress with more heat and expectation, than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy" his bowling green (p. 98).

The origin and development of this attitude can be traced in Toby as he and Corporal Trim discuss the plans for their "secret" campaigns in the Shandy estate garden, which was "sheltered from a house . . . by a tall yew hedge, and was covered on the other three sides, from mortal sight, by rough holly and thickset flowering shrubs" (p. 98). And the idea of privacy which Toby associated with his country games "did not a little contribute to the idea of pleasure preconceived" in his mind (pp. 98-99). His imagination is quickly

19 Towers, 21.
fired by the details of the plan, for he shares Trim's contempt for the "ravelins, bastions, curtins, and hornworks," (p. 96) which are but a "fiddle faddle piece of work of it here upon paper" (p. 96). All of these fortifications and others Toby desires to have in miniature for his bowling green.

There is, however, a significance to the group of fortifications which are the object of Toby's attention in the preceding passage. The ravelin, which, as Toby points out, is frequently confused with the half-moon because they are both shaped like the hornwork, (p. 111) is an outwork of two faces built in front of a curtin. The bastion is any projecting part of a fortification; and the curtin, with a punning allusion to bed curtains, is a plain wall which connects two bastions. These figures all suggest the male generative function, an aggressive, thrusting posture. But the situation casts a doubt on the potency of the aggressor by the details which suggest cuckoldry.

Trim vows to construct these figures to perfection or "be shot by your Honour upon the glacis of it" (p. 96). The latter is the parapet constructed to provide a defense for the covered way, a fortification which, like the fossé or ditch-moat, draws its name from the shape of the female generative anatomy. Beginning with the construction of the fossé, which Toby can describe "to a hair's breadth," (p. 96) Trim plans to "Throw out the earth upon this hand towards the town for the scarp,—and upon that hand towards the campaign
for the counterscarp" (p. 96). These figures continue the development of the female principle. The scarp is the inner side of the ditch, and the counterscarp is the outer wall of the ditch which is used to protect the covered way. Furthermore, these two terms have secondary meanings which constitute subtle puns. The word "scarp" is also used to signify a diminutive of the bend sinister. Thus the presence of this figure reinforces the shadow of illegitimacy over Toby's games which the bend sinister mistakenly painted in the coat-of-arms on Walter Shandy's coach suggested. And "counterscarp" was used, during the Renaissance, to designate a protecting wall in an anatomical sense, a hymen.

Toby's immediate reaction to the planning is that of the lover eager with anticipation: "My uncle Toby blushed as red as scarlet . . . it was not a blush of guilt,—of modesty,—or of anger; it was a blush of joy;—he was fired with Corporal Trim's project and description" (p. 97). Toby, "leaping up upon one leg, quite overcome with rapture," (p. 98) sends for his supper, but is unable to eat—or to sleep: he "could not shut his eyes.—The more he considered it, the more bewitching the scene appeared to him" (p. 98). It is interesting to note, here, the many ways in which Toby's reactions coincide with Andreas Capellanus' rules concerning the behavior of the courtly lover.

With regard to the qualifications for the lover, Capellanus writes that "Good character alone makes any man worthy
of love" and that "Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice." The goodness of Toby's character is often Tristram's subject; and generosity, especially in the episodes involving LeFever and the fly, is the quality most frequently singled out for special attention. Then, Capellanus continues, "No one can be bound by a double love," for "A new love puts to flight an old one"; and "No one should be deprived of love without the very best of reasons." Toby's love for his maps and books is ended by the idea of the bowling green which he knows will greatly facilitate his discourses on the war and which, Trim assures him, will speed his recovery. And, of course, his affair with Widow Wadman does not begin until the signing of the Peace of Utrecht ends that with his garden campaigns. Toby's immediate reaction to the plans for the garden are those of the courtly lover: his rapture is the palpitation of the heart which Capellanus describes; his desire for privacy concurs with the idea that "When made public love rarely endures," and his state of agitation coincides perfectly with that described by Capellanus: "He whom the thought of love vexes, eats and sleeps very little." In fulfilling his role, Toby is willing to

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21 Capellanus, p. 42.
22 Capellanus, p. 42.
23 Capellanus, p. 43.
24 Capellanus, p. 42.
25 Capellanus, p. 42.
26 Capellanus, p. 42.
27 Capellanus, p. 43.
give anything to his love, the major portion of his estate (p. 449), the jack boots (p. 448), the pipes (p. 454), and the leaden weights from the windows (p. 378); for "Love can deny nothing to love." All Toby's actions and thoughts are engaged by his love, his hobby-horse: "Every act of a lover ends in the thought of his beloved . . . A lover can never have enough of the solaces of his beloved . . . A true lover is constantly and without intermission possessed by the thought of his beloved." 

And it is, of course, this preoccupation of Toby's which results in many of the comic misunderstandings throughout the novel. Thus, there is the strong possibility that Sterne, in suggesting the extent of the sublimation-conversion, cast the chivalrous Toby in the role of the courtly lover. The parallels between Toby and this conventional lover are increased and the irony compounded when one considers that Capellanus developed his definition, details, dialogues, and rules of *amour courtois* in response to questions from his friend Walter, whom he advises, in a conventionally medieval retraction, to avoid the "mandates of love, and labor in constant watchfulness so that when the Bridegroom cometh He may find you wakeful." And it is another Walter who is Toby's frequent advisor and who, paying more attention to the retraction than to the rules, writes a leter-

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28 Capellanus, p. 43.  
29 Capellanus, p. 43.  
30 Capellanus, pp. 53-54.
ter warning his brother to beware of the passions of love.

In prosecuting his campaigns, Toby acquired many "field pieces," cannons, culverins, bastard culverins, and demi-culverins, particularly two of the last named, which were considered very good field pieces, "to mount in the gorge [the neck of an outwork] of that new redoubt [a portion of a bastion within shot of the covered way]" (p. 377). To comply with Toby's desire for these two pieces, Trim removed the window weights from Tristram's nursery, which resulted in the latter's accidental circumcision. Here, the coincidence of the gratification of Toby's sublimated sexual instincts with the near disaster for the infant Tristram provides yet another example of the potential dangers in society's hypocritical morality. While the manifestation of these dangers is once again comic, this morality has forced Toby to channel his sexual, life-giving energies into a hobby-horse which, in its disregard for others, frequently leads to tragic consequences.

The final two additions of importance to Toby's bowling green are a town and a sentry box, which he treated himself to at Christmas "instead of a new suit of cloaths" (p. 446). The town, which was to be "built exactly in the stile of those, of which it was most likely to be the representative," (p. 447) was to be placed within the polygon of the fortification and was to serve for all. Tristram describes the successful results of Toby's labors: "It answered prodigiously the next summer--the town was a perfect Proteus--
It was Landen, and Trerebach, and Santvliet, and Drusen, and Hagenau,—and then it was Ostend and Menin, and Aeth and Dendermond.—Surely never did any town act so many parts, since Sodom and Gomorrah" (p. 448). The sexual implications of Tristram's Biblical allusion accurately indicate the nature of the perversity to which Toby has innocently been driven.

The Peace of Utrecht, as noted earlier, ended Toby's campaigns in the garden abruptly. According to Tristram, Toby did not dismount his hobby-horse but was flung from it, (p. 463) and his great disappointment was obvious. Indeed, Toby could not read anything from the Utrecht Gazette "without fetching a sigh, as if his heart would break in twain" (p. 458). Walter Shandy's denunciations of Toby's grief over the conclusion of the war were not taken kindly, for "a man's Hobby-Horse is as tender a part as he has about him" (p. 115). And Toby ultimately delivers an "apologetical oration," in defense of war and his love for his mount. In an appeal for sympathetic understanding, Toby designs his defense "for the ear of a brother, who knows his character to the bottom, and what his true notions, dispositions, and principles of honour are" (p. 459). It is ironic that the brother-recipient of this appeal is Walter Shandy whose "rational," hobby-horsical theories exclude any possibility of understanding the nature of Toby's obsession. Toby questions whether his desire for the continuance of the war results from his weaknesses of age, temper, passions, or understanding.

In his oration, Toby rebuts the possible answers in
each category. It was Nature, he says, that planted the propensity to war in him as a boy: "If, when I was a schoolboy, I could not hear a drum beat, but my heart beat with it—was it my fault?" (p. 460). Thus the natural origin of the instinct for aggression and, on a symbolic level, for sex is affirmed. Toby's generosity with others is defended: when books dealing with military adventures "were handed around the school,—were they not all purchased with my own pocket money? Was that selfish, brother Shandy?" (p. 461) His kindness is reiterated: "was I not as much concerned for the destruction of the Greeks and Trojans as any boy of the whole school? . . . you know, brother, I could not eat my dinner" (p. 461). It was, he asserts, a kindness for which he was even punished: "Had I not three strokes of a ferula given me, two on my right hand and one on my left, for calling Helena a bitch for it?" (p. 461). Here, although Toby was reprimanded for his coarse speech, he learned well the exemplum of the story: the evils of sexual passion.

In concluding his oration, Toby delivers an eloquent reply to Yorick's argument against war:

Need I be told, dear Yorick, as I was by you, in Le Fever's funeral sermon, That so soft and gentle a creature, born to love, to mercy, and kindness, as man is, was not shaped for this?—But why did you not add, Yorick,—if not by NATURE—then he is so by NECESSITY?—for What is war? What is it, Yorick, when fought as ours has been, upon principles of liberty, and upon principles of honour—what is it, but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds? (P. 462)

It is in his definition of war that Toby's true naïveté is
most obvious, not, as has been often argued, in the sexual episodes. For despite the argument for the necessity of war to which he seems to give lip service, Toby ultimately reaffirms the natural origin of the instinct: "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).

The chapter immediately following Toby's oration, Chapter XXXIII, is an intrusion by Tristram with comments upon his writing. This intrusion provides strong evidence that Toby's apologia is to be read on a sexual level. Chapter XXXII, Toby's oration, is, for Sterne, a remarkably straightforward narration; yet Chapter XXXIII discusses the "backwards and forwards" movement problems which Tristram usually encounters. Of the necessity for careful planning, Tristram writes that "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" (p. 462). The "darkest passages," of course, are those narrative details which deal fairly explicitly with sexual matters, and the stars serve in the aposiopeses. And one needs only to remember Walter's
comment upon the darkness in which the sex act is committed and the glorious sunlight in which war is celebrated to realize that Tristram's "digression" on writing serves to guide the reader's interpretation of the preceding chapter: Toby's defense of his propensity for war is an allegory of the origin, sublimation, and perpetuation of the sexual instinct.

This allegory, the symbolic equivalents between war and sex, becomes even more obvious when, the war over, the affair between Toby and Widow Wadman begins. This affair, Tristram's "choicest morsel," is considered by one critic to be "the crux of the book." However, the critic does not adequately explain the bases for this assessment. The love affair is the crux of Sterne's novel because it provides the terms for understanding Toby's character, for evaluating his hobby-horse, and thus contains the key for interpreting the myriad forms of sex symbolism.

The interchangeability of Toby's military jargon and the terms of his love affair is foreshadowed by Tristram in Volume III when he writes of the forces which, following the demolition of Dunkirk, "insensibly drew him [Toby] in, to lay siege to that fair and strong citadel," (p. 208) Widow Wadman. Attempting to explain to Toby his feelings for Mrs. Wadman, Trim states that "love . . . is exactly like war, in this; that a soldier, though he has escaped three weeks compleat o' Saturday-night,—may nevertheless be shot through

31 Stedmond, p. 81.
the heart on **Sunday** morning" (p. 572). When Toby reveals his belief that "a man never fell in love so very suddenly," (p. 573) Trim tells of his falling in love with the Beguine. And the catalyst for this sudden love is purely sexual: the Beguine was rubbing Trim's wounded leg and "the more she rubb'd, and the longer strokes she took--the more the fire kindled in my veins--till at length, by two or three strokes longer than the rest--my passion rose to the highest pitch" (pp. 574-575). Although Toby's response to Trim's story, "And then, thou . . . madest a speech," (p. 575) seems to indicate an obliviousness to its sexual implications, he and the Corporal proceed to draw up the plan of action for the present campaign:

> as soon as . . . everything is ready for the attack --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.

> 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. (P. 583)

In commenting upon the story of his brother's love, a "digression" which reflects upon Toby's attack on Mrs. Wadman, and in further advising his master in matters of courtship, Trim continues the military metaphor: "All womankind, . . . 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" (p. 609). Once again, Toby protests his preference for the military over the amatory: "I like the comparison . . . better than the thing itself" (p. 609). And Trim's response perfectly expresses the opinion of society: "Because your honour . . . loves glory, more than pleasure" (p. 609). However, the principal motives for man's actions are the poles of pleasure and pain, not the idea of a pleasure-glory contrast which society inculcates; and Trim, who follows his natural instincts, is incapable of understanding the extent to which Toby has been victimized by society's artificial morality or the strength of Toby's unnatural sublimation.

It is instructive to note here that both Volumes VIII and IX, which deal primarily with Toby's love affair, contain, in their opening chapters, details which imply an unnaturalness about Toby. In Chapter V of Volume VIII, Tristram expresses the wish that his uncle had been a water-drinker, which would have indicated a natural state. Furthermore, writes Tristram, reason would lead one to the conclusion that water dampens the fires of passion. This, however, only "shews the weakness and imbecility of human reason," (p. 543) for all men are equally susceptible to the passions. The sexual instinct is universal and primal, whether manifested naturally through procreation or unnaturally; and Toby, although he never drank water except when "better liquor was not to be had," (p. 544) is in "the same predicament" (p. 543) with all men.
A similar implication is made in Chapter I of Volume IX in which Tristram discusses his mother's curiosity-voyeurism. Mrs. Shandy's desire to peep through the key-hole at Toby's progress with Widow Wadman leads Tristram to a dissertation upon the proper uses of key-holes:

certainly key-holes were made for other purposes; and considering the act, as an act which interfered with a true proposition, and denied a key-hole to be what it was—it became a violation of nature; and was so far, you see, criminal.

It is for this reason, an' please your Reverences, That key-holes are the occasions of more sin and wickedness, than all other holes in the world put together.

—which leads me to my uncle Toby's amours. (P. 600)

Here, as in his discussion of water-drinkers, Tristram's concern with sexuality is coupled with the idea of unnaturalness. And as prefatory material to the narration of Uncle Toby's affair, the implication of the two passages seems inescapable.

The first campaign in the affair is conducted solely by Mrs. Wadman, for Toby's head was so filled with the plans for the bowling green that he was completely unaware of her attack. It is ironic that the vulnerability of Toby's flank to her advances is the result of his obsession with his games. Toby had "forgot one of the most necessary articles of the whole affair . . . a bed to lie on," and he was forced "to accept of a bed at Mrs. Wadman's," who was a perfect "daughter of Eve" (p. 546). In commenting upon this situation, Tristram humorously points to a primitive characteristic of man: his reaction when his domain is invaded by
a stranger. For in her own house, a woman can see a man "in no light without mixing something of her own goods and chattels along with him—till by reiterated acts of such combinations, he gets foisted into her inventory" (p. 546). This is the danger to which Toby is oblivious; and, furthermore, "the first moment Widow Wadman saw him, she felt something stirring within her in his favour" (p. 544). That "something—no matter what—no matter where" (p. 544), Tristram implies, is lust. Her passion remains frustrated for eleven years, however; for it is not until the war is over and the garden campaigns are almost completed that Mrs. Wadman can renew her attacks. This first confrontation is only, according to Tristram, "matter copulative and introductory to what follows" (p. 547).

The effects of this confrontation are gradually manifested during the eleven-year hiatus. The most immediate effect is seen in Mrs. Wadman's bedroom etiquette. For during a seven-year widowhood of "many bleak and decembeely nights" (p. 547), Mrs. Wadman had established the habit of having Bridget pin together the plaits of her night gown at the bottom. The implications of this action in so far as sexuality is concerned are reinforced by Tristram's suggestion that this practice is not unlike his father's bedroom habits. It is a habit, he writes, which "might have vied with the most mechanical one of the most inflexible bedchamber in Christendom" (p. 548). However, the force of Mrs. Wadman's passion is obvious in the speed with which she abandons the habit;
for on the third and last night of Toby's stay in her house "when Bridget had pull'd down the nightshift, and was assay-
ing to stick in the corking pin . . . she kick'd the pin out of her fingers—the etiquette which hung upon it, down--down it fell to the ground, and was shivered into a thousand pieces" (p. 548). Thus Widow Wadman begins to cast off her restraints and her modesty. And the effect of her desire is similarly manifested when she is eavesdropping on Toby and Trim in the bowling green. The two me* are having a slight disagreement about their wounds:

There is no part of the body, an' please your honour, where a wound occasions more intolerable anguish than upon the knee--

Except the groin; said my uncle Toby. An' please your honour, replied the corporal, the knee, in my opinion must certainly be the most acute, their being so many tendons and what-d'ye-call-'ems all about it.

It is for that reason, quoth my uncle Toby, that the groin is infinitely more sensible--there being not only as many tendons and what-d'ye-call-'ems . . . about it--but moreover * * * --

Mrs. Wadman, who had been all the time in her arbour--instantly stopped her breath--unpinn'd her mob at the chin--and stood up upon one leg. (P. 569)

Unpinned at both top and bottom, then, the Widow is ready to pursue her goal in earnest. But she delays long enough to study anatomy, for her "first husband was all his time afflicted with a Sciatica" (p. 636). Obviously determined not to have another husband whose love making would be subject to physiological problems, Mrs. Wadman read "Drake's anatomy from one end to the other. She had peeped into Wharton upon the brain, and borrowed Graaf upon the bones and muscles; but could make nothing of it" (p. 636).
And in a footnote, Sterne, feigning dissatisfaction with Tristram's knowledge of Graaf, writes that "This must be a mistake in Mr. Shandy; for Graaf wrote upon the pancreatick juice, and the parts of generation" (p. 636). When her studies are unsatisfactory, Mrs. Wadman questions Dr. Slop, whose answers, since he was "the worst man alive at definitions," (p. 637) prove to be equally inconclusive. She then resolves to find out the exact nature of Toby's wound by renewing her attack on him.

Meanwhile, Toby, having perceived the relationship between the science of fortifications and his love for the Widow,\(^{32}\) knows that he is in love. Although he first believed that a blister obtained in riding a horse was part of the pain of love, Toby knew "that his wound was not a skin-deep wound--but that it had gone to his heart" when the blister broke and the pain remained (p. 580). It seems possible that Sterne is suggesting here the idea that Toby's hobby-horse, though acceptable to society, is not completely satisfying to him. For the friction between Toby and his horse results in a blister, which he confuses for a time with love; and the minute he is forced to dismount his hobby-horse, he is drawn into the affair with the Widow. Furthermore, "when he felt he was in love with widow Wadman, he had no conception that the thing was any more to be made a mystery of,\)

than if Mrs. Wadman had given him a cut with a gap'd knife across his finger" (p. 580). Toby is prepared to stage a direct, frontal attack. He announces to Trim that he is in love and confesses that Mrs. Wadman "has left a ball here . . . pointing to his breast" (p. 581).

In the second attack on Toby, Mrs. Wadman begins her strategy to conquer him through his hobby-horse. Accordingly, she carefully observes Toby's direction of the campaigns from his sentry box. And Tristram comments upon the vulnerability of Toby's position to Mrs. Wadman's assault in a passage that is loaded with sexual innuendo: "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" (p. 455). Toby, however, is unaware of his danger, and Tristram describes the tactics of the Widow's entrapment of Toby in detail:

Toby always took care on the inside of his sentry-box, which was towards his left hand, to have a plan of the place, fasten'd up with two or three pins at the top, but loose at the bottom, for the conveniency of holding it up to the eye, etc. . . . as occasions required; 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 moment, to take hold of the map or plan, or upright, or whatever it was, and with out-stretched 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.

When the attack was advanced to this point . . . Mrs. Wadman's next stroke of generalship . . . was, to take my uncle Toby's tobacco-pipe out of his hand as soon as she possibly could; . . . [which] obliged my uncle Toby to make use of his forefinger. . . .
For as there was no arterial or vital heat in the end
of the tobacco-pipe, it could excite no sentiment—
it could neither give fire by pulsation—or receive
it by sympathy—'twas nothing but smoak.
Whereas, in following my uncle Toby's forefinger
with hers, . . . 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]
Toby, in the simplicity of his soul, would lay his
hand flat upon it, in order to go on with his expla-
nation; and Mrs. Wadman, by a manoeuvre as quick as
thought, would as certainly place her's close be-
sides it; this at once opened a communication, large
enough for any sentiment to pass or repass,

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 slight-
ly 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. (Pp. 554,
555, 556)

In this fashion, Mrs. Wadman converts the military offensive
into a sexual one. His sublimation weakened by the confron-
tation with its object, Toby is thoroughly confused by the
"disorder" of his reactions, and the Widow triumphs. During
one such offensive, Mrs. Wadman, in order to complete her
victory, devises a new tactic. In approaching the sentry
box, she complained of having a foreign particle in her eye.
"Squeezing herself down upon the corner of his bench," she
asks Toby to look into her eye and to remove the particle,
which, she assures him, "is not in the white" (p. 576).
Toby, although he believed that looking into an eye was "al-
most (if not alout) as bad as talking bawdy," (p. 603) com-
plies with her request and is vanquished. For eyes, writes
Tristram, are "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"; (p. 577) and there was never an eye "so fitted to rob my uncle Toby of his repose" (p. 578) as was Mrs. Wadman's. It was an eye "full of gentle salutations—and soft responses—speaking—not like the trumpet stop of some ill-made organ, ... 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?'... It did my uncle Toby's business" (p. 578). Thus, while Toby is marching to her house, Mrs. Wadman waits inside "with an eye ready to be deflowered" (p. 619).

However, Toby's movement toward the house is repeatedly stalled. The principal interruption consists of Toby's stopping to hear Trim's story of his brother's love affair and marriage. When Trim describes the Spanish Inquisition as a place where "when once a poor creature is in, he is in ... for ever," Toby, looking at the Widow's house, says "'Tis very true" (p. 603). And his strongest reaction is to the flourish of a stick with which Trim illustrates his idea of freedom. Tristram's comment that a "thousand of my father's most subtle syllogisms could not have said more for celibacy" (p. 604) indicates the nature of Toby's fears. It is the sexual challenge which Mrs. Wadman represents that Toby wishes to avoid. At the door of the house, he decides that
he needs another conference, but "Trim let fall the rapper," and inside "Mrs. Bridget's finger and thumb were upon the latch" (p. 619).

Inside, Mrs. Wadman proceeded "round about by Namur to get at my uncle Toby's groin" (p. 637). Toby's heart "glow'd with fire" (p. 637) at her repeated expressions of concern for his wound: "And whereabouts, dear Sir, ... 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" (p. 638). However, so accustomed is Toby to such inquiries and so strong his sublimation that his response is almost automatic: he dispatches Trim to get his map of the fortifications of Namur. And although Mrs. Wadman's inquiries were repeatedly frustrated, Toby "presented himself every afternoon in his red and silver [breeches], and blue and gold alternately, and sustained an infinity of attacks in them, without knowing them to be attacks" (p. 641).

It is not until Toby attempts to draw up a list of Mrs. Wadman's many virtues that he discovers that her concern for his wound, her "HUMANITY," is the result of the fact that the groin is upon "the very curtin of the place" (p. 643). And his realization of her lustfulness causes him to make a very hasty retreat: "My uncle Toby gave a long whistle ... Let us go to my brother Shandy's" (p. 643). Henri Fluchère
captures the essence of this last action in the love affair when he writes that through his retreat, Toby "emerges from Circe's cave where metamorphosis awaited him, and re-enters the real world, the Shandean world of hobby-horses." When, as in the sentry box attack, Toby is unknowingly confronted by Mrs. Wadman's concupiscence, he is merely confused by his own emotional reactions. But when he is forced by Trim's revelation to acknowledge the nature of Mrs. Wadman's passion, he perceives the sexual consequences of marriage and takes refuge at Walter Shandy's home.

Critical evaluation of Toby's awareness of sexuality is almost unanimous, and it has become a critical cliché to remark, as does John M. Stedmond, that in "matters of sex, Toby is always solemnly unsophisticated." And although the recognition of Widow Wadman's lust seems forced upon Toby, there are sufficient examples of his perceptiveness to indicate that the childlike Toby possesses that paradoxical combination of innocence and wisdom which seems typical of children. First, it should be noted that Toby is Tristram's source for much of the information concerning the affairs of the Shandy family before its historian was born. In fact, Toby is "responsible for the information concerning the begetting scene." Remembering this fact, one is pre-

33 Fluchère, p. 332. 34 The Comic Art, p. 81.
pared for Toby's understanding of Walter Shandy's sexual life. For Toby is perfectly accurate when he informs Dr. Slop that his brother begets children "out of principle" (p. 116).

Furthermore, during Tristram's delivery, when Walter expostulates upon his wife's stubborn insistence on having the midwife rather than Dr. Slop, Toby's modesty provides him with an understanding of Mrs. Shandy. Perhaps, he says, she does not want a man near "her ****" (p. 100). When Walter responds by attacking Toby's ignorance of women, "you might, at least, know so much as the right end of a woman from the wrong," (p. 101) he ironically reveals his own inability to understand his wife. And Toby pleads his ignorance: "I know nothing at all about them, . . . and I think . . . that the shock I received the year after the demolition of Dunkirk, in my affair with widow Wadman--;--which shock you know I should not have received, but from my total ignorance of the sex,--has given me just cause to say, That I neither know, nor do pretend to know anything about 'em, or their concerns either" (p. 101). This confession, along with similar passages, is doubtlessly the basis for the label of innocent which critics have placed on Toby; however, that he is protesting too much is revealed by Tristram's description of this scene. Toby is musing upon women:

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. (P. 102)

Here, of course, Toby's actions belie his words, and his understanding of the physiological aspects of sex is again illustrated when, in response to Walter's lamentation over Tristram's crushed nose, he notes that "It might have been worse, . . . Suppose the hip had presented" (p. 280).

Finally, the equivocal epitome of Toby's knowledge of sexual matters is contained in the Shandean hypothesis regarding the secret of health: the contentions between and balance of radical heat and radical moisture within man. Symbolically these two elements represent the male and female generative forces. And this sexual dimension of the hypothesis is confirmed by Walter Shandy's deduction of Aristotle's observation from it: "Quod omne animal post coitum est triste" (p. 397). Toby's version of the hypothesis, expressed by Trim, is, of course, carefully sublimated: "I infer . . . that the radical moisture is nothing in the world but ditch-water--and that the radical heat . . . is burnt brandy . . . and give us but enough of it, with a pipe of tobacco, to give us spirits, and drive away the vapours--we know not what it is to fear death" (p. 402). And although Toby, concurring with the others, believes it likely that Trim has heard some "superficial empiric" discourse upon the topic, (p. 402) he accepts the theory. And thus converted, the hypothesis affirms the primacy of the sexual instinct
even in Toby's hobby-horsical world.

There is, then, a considerable complexity in the character of Toby Shandy, a complexity which results principally from his involvement in sexual affairs. Toby's "emasculated heroics" are not merely his "rhetorical notice to the world of his ego," nor is Sterne's work primarily a treatise on rhetoric. Toby's games are not "Sterne's final satiric evaluation of the sentimental vision," nor is his work successful only when read as Scriblerian satire. Rather, Tristram Shandy is a novel in which Sterne reveals the problems which humans have when they attempt to communicate with one another and in which "sex is at once the major exemplar and the faithful mirror of incommunication, cross-purpose, interruption and indirection." Furthermore, it is sex which establishes "in reality his quaint but profoundly human characters which any too systematic stylization would turn into imperfect and ephemeral conventions." And it is Edwin Muir who most nearly describes the essence of Sterne's powers of characterization:

Tristram Shandy is perhaps the only novel in the English language which is humorous in its construction, humorous, that is to say, through and through. And this means that what Sterne created was not merely a few comic figures inhabiting the world of ordinary fact, as Fielding and Scott and Dickens did, but a world of comic entities in which not merely his human figures, but everything from man down to the homun-

37 Melvyn New, Laurence Sterne as Satirist, p. 200.
cules, are forms of humour. That world is as much a creation of poetic genius as the forest of Arden or the wood near Athens. And this is why Uncle Toby and Mr. Shandy have been so often called Shake spearean; they live like Falstaff and Bottom in a world of free comic entities. . . . They are not figures of comedy in a picture of society, but naturals of humour in a world of universal forces.

The most pervasive of these forces is the sexual instinct; and it is important to understand the interaction between Toby and this force, his complete submission to social morality, because it is through Toby's behavior that one is enabled to see the exact nature of the hobby-horsical "world into which Tristram will be born and in which he will grow up."


41 Fluchère, p. 45.
CHAPTER V

TRISTRAM SHANDY: SEX AND SENSIBILITY

That the dimensions of Tristram's world are determined by the two principal influences in his life, his father Walter and his uncle Toby, is suggested throughout the novel. First, this determination seems to be implied in the amount of his "life and opinions" which Tristram devotes to the two men, and chapters three and four of this study attest to their prominence. Then, there are Tristram's comments on his family and their influences. Initially, of course, the ones responsible for his life are Tristram's parents; and he opens his narration by chiding them for negligence:

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours and dispositions which were then uppermost:—Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,—I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me. (P. 4)

Thus, Tristram calls attention to the important consequences of the procreative act for the offspring: his rationality, the temperature of his body, and his genius. And in each of these three areas, the dominant influences of Walter and Toby

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are obvious.

Indeed, Tristram's genius for writing and narrating seem to be the result of his irrationality and his perception of the significance of his impotence. Walter's "rational" theories are undoubtedly the cause of the fact that Tristram will never "think nor act like any other man's child" (p. 6). And Tristram attributes his difficulties in writing clearly and rationally to Walter:

But 'tis my father's fault; and whenever my brains come to be dissected, you will perceive, without spectacles, that 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 * *, (here I hang up a couple of lights again)--or a fillet, or a thumb-stall, but it is seen or felt.--

Quanto id diligentius in liberis procreandis cavendum, sayeth Cardan . . . ["How much more careful should we be in begetting our children"]. (P. 463)

Tristram also makes a distinction between his hobby-horse, writing, and his father's "ass," the term by which Walter libelled the "appetites of the lower part of us" (p. 584). His hobby-horse, according to Tristram, "is no way a vicious beast; he has scarce one hair or lineament of the ass about him," while Walter's ass is "a beast concupiscent--and foul befall the man, who does not hinder him from kicking" (p. 584). Ironically, Tristram joins his father here in decrying the sexual passions; and the irony is compounded by the fact that just as Walter's theories are based upon sexual repressions (as illustrated in chapter three) so Tristram's art is a sublimation of sexual instincts not unlike Toby's games, a
fact that is demonstrated by the prevailingly sexual metaphors used to describe writing and the writer.

Then, in attempting to explain his "lewdness," Tristram excludes the influences of both his mother and father. Elizabeth Shandy, he writes, was never lewd: "A temperate current of blood ran orderly through her veins in all months of the year, and in all critical moments both of the day and night alike; nor did she superinduce the least heat into her humours from the manual effervescencies of devotional tracts, which having little or no meaning in them, nature is oft times obliged to find one" (p. 600). Throughout the novel, Mrs. Shandy is completely impervious to both reason and passion. Thus, since Tristram was "totally neglected and abandoned to my mother" (p. 375) while his father compiled the "Tristrapedia," he was for a time molded by an unpassionate and irrational force. Her influence is thus significant for its negative effect; for, according to Tristram, the female members of the Shandy family "had no character at all,--except, indeed, my great aunt Dinah," (p. 65) whose character seems to be defined by a sexual episode: she was "about sixty years age . . . married and got with child by the coachman" (p. 65). And Tristram's assertion that Walter could not have caused his lewdness because "'twas the whole business of his [father's] life to keep all fancies of that kind" (p. 600) out of the Shandy house is belied by the sexuality of Walter's theories.

The void thus left in Tristram's development is filled
through the influence of Toby Shandy. And the characteristic of the latter which had the strongest effect on Tristram is sentimentality. Here, of course, the most noteworthy example is the episode involving Toby and the fly, which he let go rather than kill: "Go, . . . go poor devil, get gone, why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me" (p. 113). And Tristram, not depreciating "the study of Literae humaniores, at the university" or discrediting "the other helps of an expensive education bestowed upon me, both at home and abroad," attributes "one half of my philanthropy" to that one event (p. 114).

The critical debate over the satiric or sentimental nature of Tristram (and of Sterne's novel) does not seem to warrant discussion at this point. Those critics who argue for an exclusively satiric interpretation seem to be sufficiently accounted for by John Traugott's comment that today's "cultural intolerance of sentimentality" has led them "to attempt an 'image' of the man [Sterne] more palatable to our age." ¹ Furthermore, Tristram's sentimentality is not a debilitating one; for it is always carefully counterbalanced by his comic spirit, a fact which largely accounts for the duration of the debate, and, as noted in chapter one, embodies the philosophy of sympathetic intuition later developed by Hume. And it is this type of "philanthropy," sentimentality, which accompanies Tristram throughout his life. In Volume IX,  

when he writes of his attitude during his travels, Tristram refers to Toby's amours which were "running all the way in my head, . . . [and] 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 kindliest harmony vibrating within me, with every oscillation of the chaise" (p. 629).

Furthermore it was Toby's addition to Walter's marriage contract which was responsible for Tristram's being born in the country and, consequently, for the crushing of the infant's nose, symbolically, of course, a sexual mutilation. And it was Toby's hobby-horse, for which Trim removed the weights from the nursery window, which resulted in the actual mutilation (circumcision at the very least) of Tristram. Thus, the influences of Toby and Walter on both Tristram's life and opinions are of paramount importance, and Tristram's "continued concern with his father and his Uncle Toby should serve society as a constant reminder of sex's vast personal consequences and its family ties."² This familial aspect of sex becomes even more significant when one compares the ways in which these three men react to love.

Walter Shandy, according to Tristram, "was very subject to this passion, before he married" (p. 578). Here, the negative effect of Mrs. Shandy is again obvious, for, after marriage, "he would never submit to it like a Christian; but would pish, and huff, and bounce, and kick, and play the

² William Bowman Piper, Laurence Sterne, p. 82.
Tristram's behavior thus vascillates between actions like
Toby's and like Walter's. There is an element of the former's benevolent passivity in Tristram's attention to his cap, a female sexual symbol like "an old hat cock'd" or "a cock'd old hat," (p. 549) which is "an excellent cap . . . and warm--and soft" (p. 550). But Walter's influence dominates. It is his enthusiasm, his "pishing and huffing," which Tristram exhibits in both condemning and deifying the woman and the passion. Thus the sexual roles determined by society for both Walter and Toby shape Tristram's attitude: "Sex was not for Tristram a brief, unmentionable diversion, a mere topic for bawdy fooling . . . it was, rather, a vital, in his case, disastrous human act. Sex, as his story reveals it, is triangular, familial . . . [and] Tristram's comic handling of his story has brought out the comic side of this vision of sex: its humor arises from the helplessness of those involved in the act of sexual begetting and from the act's outlandish consequences."  

The inevitable and "outlandish" consequences of procreation, of sexuality, as they affect human expression and communication are the principal concern of Sterne's novel. Alan Dugald McKillop points out that in spite of "overriding obsessions, human ends are infinitely various, . . . [and] we may say that in Shandy the ends are sexual satisfaction, the riding of hobby-horses, and the full expression of ideas and sentiments."  

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3 Piper, p. 79.

4 "Laurence Sterne," from The Early Masters of English
seems out of balance and unfinished if one looks only to the explicit concern over sexuality in the novel. But when one realizes that sexuality is the common concern which implicitly links both hobby-horses (theories, games, and writing) to their riders and to each other (Walter, Toby, and Tristram), then the three angles are connected to form the complete triangle. The measure of one angle has been taken in the analyses of Walter and Toby. The other angles, dealing with sexual satisfaction and with expression, involve the complex role of Tristram: as child, as man, as writer, and as narrator.  

Walter Shandy's description of his son as a "child of wrath! child of decrepitude! interruption! mistake! and discontent!" (p. 296) is pointedly reformulated by Henri Fluchere when he describes Tristram as "nothing other than the imperfect fruit of an interrupted copulation." For the frustration implicit in these descriptions both for Walter and for Tristram is the keynote to the latter's life. And although Walter frequently lamented that Tristram's misfortunes began nine months before he was born, the troubles ac-

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5 Charles Parish, "The Nature of Mr. Tristram Shandy, Author," BUSE, 5, No. 2 (1961), 89. Mr. Parish, however, distinguishes only three roles: author, narrator, and minor character.

6 From Tristram to Yorick, p. 381.
tually began, as Tristram knows, before his parents were married. Elizabeth had demanded that if married to Walter she be allowed "to lay in (if she chose it) in London" (p. 40). Since this clause in the marriage contract irritated Walter, Toby proposed the qualification that "in case my mother hereafter should, at any time, put my father to the trouble and expense of a London journey upon false cries and tokens;-- that for every such instance she should forfeit all the right and title which the covenant gave her to the next turn" (p. 40).

The year before Tristram was born, Mrs. Shandy demanded her rights to a London trip for what proved to be a false pregnancy. This non-baby seems to symbolize the sexual problems of the elder Shandys, the sterility of their relationship; and it suggests, just as Tristram's opening words imply, that the real pregnancy in the following year was a mistake. For Walter was so angered by the expense of the first trip that he insisted upon exercising his rights: his wife was to deliver the child at the Shandy estate. And as Tristram says, "I was doom'd by marriage articles, to have my nose squeeze'd as flat to my face, as if the destinies had actually spun me without one" (p. 41).

Then, in order to compensate for the nose-crushing and the mis-naming, Walter makes expensive preparations for the education of his son. The plans, however, are frustrated by Walter's meticulousness, his "slow progress" in writing his "Tristrapaedia": "at which ... he was three years and some-
thing more, indefatigably at work, and at last, had scarce completed, by his own reckoning, one half of his undertaking: the misfortune was, that I was all that time totally neglected and abandoned to my mother; and what was almost as bad, by the very delay, the first part of the work, upon which my father had spent the most of his pains, was rendered entirely useless,—every day a page or two became of no consequence" (p. 375). Thus, Tristram's natural growth and development rendered most of Walter's work useless. Furthermore, says Tristram, if it had not been for a single event, "which . . . if it can be told with decency, shall not be concealed a moment," (p. 375) the "Tristrapaedia" would have become completely obsolete. This event is, of course, the window sash accident, and the strong implication of this preface to its narration is that it terminated the child's sexual maturation.

Walter saw only a forced circumcision in the accident: "Who am I, that I should fret or fume one moment about the matter" (p. 385). But Dr. Slop, who was called for assistance, talked; and the effect was ruinous for Tristram's reputation: "in a week's time, or less, it was in every body's mouth, That poor Master Shandy *************** entirely.

--And Fame, who loves to double every thing,—in three days more, had sworn positively she saw it,—and all the world, as usual, gave credit to her evidence—'That the nursery window had not only ***********************;--but that ***** ****************************'s also'" (p. 433). Thus, society attributes impotency to Tristram from his childhood. And the
efforts of Toby and Walter to overcome the "libellous report" are ineffective. Toby advises Walter "to shew him [Tristram] publickly," (p. 433) advice which Walter ignores; and the latter merely determines to put Tristram in "breeches . . . let the world say what it will" (p. 433). However, the impotence, real or only feared, pursues Tristram into manhood; and its effects are real.

The role of Tristram the man is a relatively small one. But it is important, for most of the episodes in which he is involved are encounters with women, before, during, and after the travels (Volume VII), which he describes as a race from Death. Indeed, Tristram's journey, which he introduces with a "tawdry" story about "a nun who fancied herself a shellfish, and of a monk damn'd for eating a muscle," (pp. 479-80) seems to be structured by his meetings with women; and Fluchère notes the "Dionysiac tone" of its narration.  

The most prominent woman in Tristram's life seems to be "dear, dear Jenny" (p. 49). And in the first reference to her, Tristram discusses the bases of a male-female relationship. His friendship with Jenny, he affirms, "may subsist, and be supported without-- . . . Without any thing . . . but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference in sex" (p. 49). And in this teasing allusion to sexuality, Tristram admon-

7 Fluchère, p. 383.
ishes the reader "to study the pure and sentimental parts of the best French Romances . . . to see with what a variety of chasté expressions this delicious sentiment . . . is dressed out" (p. 49). Here, of course, Tristram's ambiguity is deliberate. In this way, he can both suggest his own virility and satirize society's injunction against discussing such matters.

The relationship with Jenny is slightly clarified after the narration of the window sash episode when Tristram refers to differences of perspective between people: "This is the true reason, that my dear Jenny and I, as well as all the world besides us, have such eternal squabbles about nothing. --She looks at her outside,--I, at her in--. How is it possible we should agree about her value" (p. 382). The suggestion here is that a Platonic conception of friendship governs Tristram's actions with regard to Jenny. And this suggestion is again made when he writes: "I love the Pythagoreans (much more than ever I dare tell my dear Jenny) 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" (p. 493).

This denunciation of the effect of the body upon reason is to be expected from the son of Walter Shandy. However, Tristram does not deify reason, as did his father; and he also recognizes that the "humours," the passions, are native and pleasant to mankind. Therefore it is surprising neither that Tristram attempts a sexual relationship with
Jenny nor that he fails:

--Do, my dear Jenny, tell the world for me, how I behaved under one [disaster], the most oppressive of its kind which could befall me as a man . . .
'Tis enough, said'st thou, coming close up to me, as I stood with my garters in my hand, reflecting upon what had not pass'd--'Tis enough, Tristram, and I am satisfied, said'st thou, whispering these words in my ear **** ** **** *** ****;--**** ** ****-- any other man would have sunk down to the center. (Pp. 517-18).

However, as Piper notes, Tristram eases the painfulness of this situation by affirming that "Every thing is good for something," (p. 518) and revealing his plans for a cure: a six-weeks trip to Wales to drink goat's whey, which will also lengthen his life by seven years. 8

This event, remembered and recounted during his travels, is Tristram's second story about his affairs with women. The first, a chance encounter, is with a nameless "chère fille" in Boulogne. Although brief, this scene is important in revealing the pattern by which Tristram juxtaposes a concern over death with sexuality. Hurriedly changing horses for the next portion of his trip, Tristram envisions a group of men who speculate upon the reasons for his anxious flight: "high treason, . . . murder, . . . committing ---- . . . debt" (p. 487). In the middle of their debate, Tristram addresses the girl who "tripp'd by, from her matins--you look as rosy as the morning" (p. 487). And after the girl returns his greeting, Tristram asserts that the only debt he owes is to Nature, whom he beseeches to stop "for a stage or two"

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8 Piper, p. 57.
(p. 488) the "death-looking, long-striding scoundrel of a scare-sinner, who is posting after me" (p. 487). The girl gone from sight, Tristram turns to his host: "So you have nothing else in Boulogne worth seeing?" (p. 488). What this patterning of details accomplishes, as has been noted, is the easing of the tragic events of Tristram's life, the insistence upon a comic vision. In addition, however, it suggests that Tristram sees the encounters with women as moments of ecstatic vitality, which, of course, stand in marked contrast to the forces of time, illness and death, that are stalking him. That he is unable, sexually, to fulfill these relationships, to make them productive, is the result of society's hypocrisies, which shaped his family and, consequently, him.

The juxtapositioning of sex and death, this time with particular references to time, is present again as Tristram travels through Montreuil. The one thing in that city that is "very handsome" is Janatone, "the inn-keeper's daughter" (p. 489). Although he laments that she is a coquette and "That Nature should have told this creature a word about a statue's thumb," (p. 490) Tristram vows that she deserves a portrait, which he proposes to draw. The principal obstructions to this drawing, he says, are the effects of time. It is significant that the changes which Tristram foresees are primarily of a sexual nature. Janatone carries "the principles of change within . . . [her] frame; and considering the chances of a transitory life, I would not answer for thee a
moment; e'er twice twelve months are pass'd and gone, thou mayest grow out like a pumkin, and lose thy shape—or, thou mayest go off like a flower, and lose thy beauty—nay, thou mayest go off like a hussy—and lose thyself.—I would not answer for my aunt Dinah, was she alive—'faith, scarce for her picture" (p. 490). And the allusion to Dinah underlines the sexual implications of Tristram's description, which seems to encompass both praise and lament. His enraptured vision of Janatone is interrupted, however, by his desire for her portrait to be painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds: "—But if I go on with my drawing, after naming that son of Apollo, I'll be shot" (p. 491). The compliment to Reynolds is obvious, but there seems to be a greater significance to the contrast between Tristram and the great painter than this. For in this episode, Tristram's ecstatic dedication to Janatone and his attention to the principles of fertility inherent in her suggest the spirit of Dionysus. Then, in his praise of Reynolds, Tristram invokes the spirit of Apollo, and the result is a confrontation between the two forces. And just as Toby's "center" was disordered by his encounter with Widow Wadman, so Tristram is routed: "—I—help me! I could not count a single point" (p. 491).

This situation is only temporary, though; for the life-force is sufficiently strong in Tristram that he immediately resumes his race, remembering "that Death . . . might be much nearer me than I imagined" (p. 491). And as he continues his travel, the only thing which Tristram finds worthy of
note about Amiens is that "Janatone went there to school" (p. 496).

While traveling, Tristram reflects upon the progressive dimunition of men's souls and the future of Christianity: "I hesitate not one moment to affirm, that in half a century, at this rate, we shall have no souls at all; which being the period beyond which I doubt likewise of the existence of the Christian faith, 'twill be one advantage that both of 'em will be exactly worn out together" (p. 495). Here, with a rather heavy irony, Tristram assumes society's voice of moral indignation. The object of this irony becomes obvious as Tristram taunts society with a vision of the future: "Blessed Jupiter! and blessed every other heathen god and goddess! for now ye will all come into play again, and with Priapus at your tails--what jovial times" (p. 495). The reference to Priapus, son of Dionysus and Aphrodite and god of the male generative principle, clearly indicates that Tristram is responding to society's condemnation of man for his sexuality. Perhaps, even more particularly, he is answering those critics who charged him with obscenity. For Tristram is proposing not that man should worship Priapus but that he should recognize the importance of sexuality in the divine scheme of things and realize that he "can experience the delights of the human state only by subjecting himself to its limitations." It is not heresy or an immoral paganism but rather

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an "awareness of the implications of the human condition" that Tristram wishes to create. ¹⁰

At Lyons, the last but not least thing which Tristram desires to see is the tomb of the lovers, Amanda and Amandus. In leaving the inn, however, his pilgrimage to the tomb is blocked by a "poor ass . . . with a couple of large panniers upon his back" (p. 522). Although with his dog and cat Tristram's discourses never get beyond "the proposition, the reply, and the rejoinder, which terminated my father's and mother's conversations in his [father's] beds of justice," he writes that "with an ass, I can commune for ever" (p. 523). After conversing with the ass, disdaining to strike him, and giving him a macaroon, Tristram is making his farewell

—when a person coming in, let fall a thundering bastinado upon the poor devil's crupper, which put an end to the ceremony.

Out upon it!
cried I— but the interjection was equivocal—and, I think, wrong placed too—for the end of an osier which had started out from the contexture of the ass's pannier, had caught hold of my breeches pocket as he rush'd by me, and rent it in the most disastrous direction you can imagine—so that the

Out upon it: in my opinion, should have come in here— (p. 524).

Here, the sexual exhibition seems gratuitous, but the following episode provides a significant perspective for interpreting the event.

When Tristram, having made the necessary repairs, descends from his room again, he is stopped by the man who struck the ass and who is "a commissary sent to me from the

¹⁰ Stedmond, p. 162.
post-office, with a rescript in his hand for the payment of some six livres odd sous" (p. 525). And since the tax seems unjust, Tristram debates the matter with the commissary. His case is doomed to failure from the beginning, however, for he is completely confused by their first exchange:

---My good friend, quoth I---as sure as I am I---and you are you---
---And who are you? said he.---Don't puzzle me; said I (p. 525).

Thus, the conjunction of Tristram, the ass, and the tax collector, which results in the sexual exposure, leads to a question of identity and, ultimately, to Tristram's capitulation to the official's demands. The implication of these episodes, then, seems to be that a significant portion of a man's identity involves his sexual nature. And Tristram's ambiguous and frequently sublimated sexuality explains, to a great extent, his inability to comprehend his own identity.

Further evidence of the difficulty which Tristram has in attempting to know himself is present in the situation which he describes in Chapter Thirty of his travels. Tristram notes that his predicament is one never experienced by another traveller: "I am this moment walking across the market-place of Auxere with my father and my uncle Toby, in our way back to dinner--and I am this moment also entering Lyons with my post-chaise broke into a thousand pieces--and I am moreover this moment in a handsome pavillion built by Pringello, upon the banks of the Garonne, which Mons. Slingeniac has lent me, and where I now sit rhapsodizing all these
affairs" (p. 516).

Present all at once, then, are Tristram the boy, the man, and the writer; and critics frequently comment upon the manipulation of temporal and spatial dimensions in this scene.\(^1\) What they have failed to note, however, is the importance of the fact that this distillation of three facets of Tristram's identity occurs during a journey, an archetypal symbol of man's quest in life, which he describes as a flight from death and which seems to derive its meaningfulness from intensely emotional encounters with women. Tristram's fragmentation of himself is significant at this point: there are a sexually mutilated child, an impotent man, and a writer whose sexual instincts have been channeled into his writing. And it is Tristram who becomes the central symbol of the confused, immature, and frightened man who is the victim of society's hypocritical morality. Thus, in many respects, the angst of man's condition is very real to Tristram, and it is a testament to his faith and to the strength of his comic vision that he is able to continue: "--Let me collect myself, and pursue my journey" (p. 516).

The final episode of Tristram's journey is an affirmation. On the road "betwixt Nismes and Lunel, where there is

\(^1\) Perhaps the most stimulating of these is A. A. Mendilow's "The Revolt of Sterne" in Time and the Novel (London: Peter Nevill, Ltd., 1952), pp. 159-99. This article (rpt. in Laurence Sterne: A Collection of Critical Essays, pp. 90-107) discusses Sterne's investigations of "the ways by which a sequential medium could be manipulated to express simultaneity and the flow of human consciousness." (pp. 90-91).
the best Muscatto wine in all France," (p. 537) Tristram hears the "fife and tabourin" and sees a group of swains "preparing for a carousel":

They are running at the ring of pleasure, said I, . . . and kicking off one boot into this ditch, and t'other into that--I'll take a dance . . .

A sun-burnt daughter of Labour rose up from the group to meet me as I advanced towards them; her hair, which was a dark chestnut, approaching rather to a black, was tied up in a knot, all but a single tress.

We want a cavalier, said she, holding out both her hands, as if to offer them--And a cavalier ye shall have; said I, taking hold of both of them.

Hadst thou, Nannette, been array'd like a dutchesse!

--But that cursed slit in thy petticoat!

Nannette cared not for it . . .

Tie me up this tress instantly, said Nannette, putting a piece of string into my hand--It taught me to forget I was a stranger--The whole knot fell down--We had been seven years acquainted.

The youth struck the note upon the tabourin--his pipe followed, and off we bounded--"the duce take that slit!" . . .

I would have given a crown to have it sew'd up--Nannette would not have given a sous--Viva la joia! was in her lips--Viva la joia! was in her eyes. A transient spark of amity shot across the space betwixt us--She look'd amiable!--why could I not live and end my days thus? Just disposer of our joys and sorrows, cried I, why could not a man sit down in the lap of content here--and dance, and sing, and say his prayers, and go to heaven with this nut brown maid? Capriciously did she bend her head on one side, and dance up insiduous--Then 'tis time to dance off, quoth I (pp. 537-38).

Here, the "ring of pleasure," an obvious sexual allusion, and the circle of the dance constitute a ritualistic expression of the male-female sexual relationship. Fluchere describes Tristram's entrance into the dance as in the "style of an elegant bacchanal" and the slit in Nannette's petticoat as a "gay and open admission of the natural rights of
The details of the novel concerning Tristram, the man, after his journey deal primarily with his declining state of health; although, as always, the descriptions are carefully presented in a sexually comic context. In discussing the problems of telling the story of Toby's affair, Tristram laments that whatever he does he seems to get into trouble. He is still tormented by a "vile asthma" he caught "in skating against the wind in Flanders," (p. 545) and only two months earlier "in a fit of laughter, in seeing a cardinal make water like a quirister (with both hands) . . . [he broke] a vessel in . . . [his] lungs, whereby, in two hours, . . . [he] lost as many quarts of blood" (p. 545). And this same spirit permeates a second reference to his bleeding. Shortly after his description of Toby's sitting "naked and defenceless" on Mrs. Wadman's sofa, Tristram speaks of the illness which attended his latest efforts: "I lost some fourscore ounces of blood this week in a most uncritical fever which attacked me at the beginning of this chapter . . . I have still some hopes remaining, it may be more in the serous or globular parts of the blood, than in the subtile aura of the brain—be it which it will—an Invocation can do no hurt—and I leave the affair entirely to the invoked, to inspire or to inject me according as he sees good" (pp. 627-28). In the invocation, Tristram beseeches the "Gentle

12 Fluchère, p. 383.
Spirit of sweetest humour" to "Turn in hither . . . behold these breeches! they are all I have in the world— that pite­ous rent was given them at Lyons" (p. 628). And doubtlessly he is seeking similar assistance when he wears his "topaz ring," (p. 616) which, according to Mr. Work's note, was be­lieved by medieval lapidaries to be a "cure for sensuality" (p. 468).

The final encounter for Tristram is with "poor Maria," who had "her Banns forbid, by the intrigues of the curate of the parish who published them" and "ever since . . . has been unsettled in her mind" (p. 630). Immediately, Tristram re­sponds with sympathy for the girl, who now tends goats:

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 fallen an unseasonable pleas­antry in the venerable presence of Misery, to be en­titled to all the wit that ever Rabelais scatter'd (p. 631).

This passage contains one of Tristram's most direct attacks on the vicious scheming of society to prevent man from cele­brating the sensual pleasures of life. Her marriage prohib­ited, Maria, "but three years ago . . . so fair, so quick­witted and amiable," (p. 630) is desolate. From his own ex­periences, Tristram knows the depth of her misery. And yet the tone of the episode, provided by Tristram's carriage of
himself and his protestations, provides the comic relief that is a dominant part of his view of life's frustrations and disappointments.

Thus, the experiences of Tristram's life seem to explain the picture he presents of himself at his desk: "And here am I sitting, this 12th day of August, 1766, in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, without either wig or cap on, a most tragicomical completion of his [Walter's] prediction, 'That I should neither think, nor act like any other man's child, upon that very account!'" (p. 600). And, furthermore, one can see the significance of the sexual sublimation accomplished through his writing in Tristram's statement that, though not confined "to any man's rules," (p. 8) he "will answer for it the book shall make its way in the world, much better than its master has done before it--Oh Tristram! Tristram! can this but be once brought about--the credit, which will attend thee as an author, shall counterbalance the many evils which have befallen thee as a man" (p. 337).

However, the frustration, inadequacy-impotence, in Tristram's manhood pursues him in his writing. And the descriptions of Tristram the writer provide a "comic portrait of the artist." A comic coherence is maintained throughout these details by the sexual metaphors which are

14 Stedmond, p. 110.
associated with writing, and the comedy is qualified by the serious implications of this symbolism.

Although warned against reading concupiscently for "nothing but the gross and more carnal parts of a composition" and chided for his "vile pruriency for fresh adventures," the reader soon becomes aware that Tristram's "subtle hints and sly communications of science" (p. 57) concern primarily the science of human sexuality. His writing, like Toby's games and Walter's theories, is his hobby-horse:

What a rate have I gone on at, curvetting and frisking it away, two up and two down for four volumes together, without looking once behind, or even on one side of me, to see whom I trod upon!—I'll tread upon no one,—quoth I to myself when I mounted—I'll take a good rattling gallop; but I'll not hurt the poorest jack-ass upon the road—So off I set—up one lane—down another, through this turnpike—over that, as if the arch-jockey of jockeys had got behind me. (P. 298)

And that this hobby-horse manifests a sexual sublimation is obvious. Tristram affirms that he has "lusted earnestly, and endeavored carefully" (p. 301) in his writing, from the "Virgin dedication" (p. 15) throughout his volumes. His "fervent wish . . . with which . . . [he] set out, was no more than the first insinuating How d'ye of a caressing prefacer stifling his reader, as a lover sometimes does a coy mistress into silence" (p. 198). The principal obstruction to his work is the appeal of sensual pleasures; and though he admits that "obstructions in the glands are dangerous," (p. 541) Tristram, after the dance with Nannette, writes of the difficulty of working "coolly, critically, and canoni-
cally . . . especially if slits in petticoats are unsew'd up" (p. 539). That Tristram continues to write is evidence of the strength of his sublimation: in the confrontation between sexuality and writing, the latter is victorious. And Tristram asserts that this victory is the result of a "vegetable diet, with a few of the cold seeds," (p. 437) a diet that was believed to "cool the blood and compose the passions" (p. 473).

Then, Tristram provides a variety of explanations of his method of writing. At one point, he maintains that he begins "with writing the first sentence—and trusting to Almighty God for the second" (p. 540). This, obviously, is Tristram's tongue-in-cheek response to those critics who charged him with obscenity. But the explanation also provides him an opportunity to assert the organic construction of his work, the way in which "one sentence of mine follows another, and how the plan follows the whole" (p. 540). This, furthermore, should silence the questioning reader to whom Tristram's only response is "Ask my pen,—it governs me,—I govern not it" (p. 416).

When confronted with the sexual implications of his work, Tristram attempts to shift the responsibility for these implications to his readers. "Writing, when properly managed," he states, "is but a different name for conversation":

As no one, who knows what he is about in good company, would venture to talk all;—so no author, who understands the just boundaries of decorum and good
breeding, would presume to think all: The truest respect which you can pay to the readers' understanding, is to halve this matter amicably, and leave him something to imagine, in his turn, as well as yourself.

For my own part, I am eternally paying him compliments of this kind, and do all that lies in my power to keep his imagination as busy as my own.

(Pp. 108-09)

This discussion does indicate, of course, one of Tristram's principal methods of composition. His "writing-talking style," according to W. B. Piper and Wayne C. Booth, reflects both Tristram's inner feelings and his concern for the audience. In essence, this style is Tristram's version of the censor-evasion technique of communication, which Leonard Feinberg explains: "Society represses the basic desires, Freud says—and the strongest desires it represses are sex and aggression. Man gets around this censorship by talking instead of doing—and by talking indirectly enough and wittily enough so that he can be safe and entertaining at the same time." Thus, the forces of societal convention are strong inhibitors of sexual expression; and since it is the private, sexual life of the Shandy family that Tristram is attempting to make public, he is forced "to suspend and tangle his discourse, . . . [to] digress, double back, and leave gaps."

Tristram is even more explicit in discussing this

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15 Piper, p. 25.
17 Piper, p. 25.
problem when he writes of the way in which he handles "ticklish discussions,"
of which, heaven knows, there are but too many in my book—where I find I cannot take a step without the danger of having either their worships or their reverences upon my back—I write one half full,—and t'other fasting;—or write it all full,—and correct it fasting;—or write it fasting,—and correct it full, for they all come to the same thing:—So that with a less variation from my father's plan, than my father's from the Gothick—I feel myself upon a par with him in his first bed of justice,—and no way inferior to him in his second.—These different and almost irreconcilable effects, flow uniformly from the wise and wonderful mechanism of nature,—of which,—be her's the honour.—All that we can do is to turn and work the machine to the improvement and better manufactury of the arts and sciences.—

Now when I write full, . . . I write free from the cares, as well as the terrors of the world.—I count not the number of my scars. . . .

But when . . . I indite fasting . . . I pay the world all possible attention and respect,—and have as great a share (whilst it lasts) of that understrapping virtue of discretion, as the best of you. —So that betwixt both, I write a careless kind of a civil, nonsensical, good humoured Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good—

—And all your heads too,—provided you understand it. (P. 436)

Even here, the sexual allusions seem irrepressible: Walter's "beds of justice" are a part of his repression just as writing is Tristram's. Furthermore, Tristram's attention to the "wise and wonderful mechanism of nature" reiterates his belief in the natural origin and power of the sexual impulse:

"All that we can do, is to turn and work the machine" (p. 436). And there is a sense of awe and of comic helplessness in man's confronting nature. Sexual procreation, then, is seen by Tristram as part of a divine scheme, and society's prudish morality thus becomes not only a destroyer of the
sensual pleasures of life, but also marks man as a rebel before God. It is this awareness, which "will do all your hearts good . . . And all your heads too," (p. 436) which Tristram seeks to stimulate. Though of complex ramifications, it is an understanding which man can reach more easily intuitively, instinctively, than intellectually. And in this context, it is possible to see an element of Lawrencian wisdom in Tristram's satire of rationalism: his readers will understand and write as well as he "when they think as little" (p. 615). The "message" of the Erasmian clown, writes J. M. Stedmond, is that man "can experience the delights of the human state only by subjecting himself to its limitations. If he rebels disproportionately, he may well lapse into frustrated melancholy; if he submits too readily, he may lose himself in tawdry trivialities. But if he can retain his sense of humor and his urge to make the best possible use of his admittedly limited powers, then he can attain a measure of human happiness."18

This is the happiness that Tristram wishes his readers to discover and which he seeks to realize through his writing. His work, says Tristram, is "digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time," (p. 73) for digressions "are the sunshine,—they are the life, the soul of reading;—take them out of this book for instance,—you might as well take the book along with them;—one cold eter-

18 The Comic Art, p. 131.
nal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer;—he steps forth like a bridegroom,—bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail" (p. 73).

There are basically two types of digressions, opinionative and explanatory, in Tristram's work, and his art of progressive digression, writes A. D. McKillop, "displays human history as it unfolds in space and time, and as the past fuses with the present and the remote with what is close at hand. . . . [It is] the art of presenting coexisting aspects of the totality of experience." And Benjamin H. Lehman explains the two principal aspects of this totality: Tristram is concerned with both associational life and physical life and "what is digression under the aspect of clock time (the physical life) is progression under the aspect of being time (the associational life). . . . Its effect is to give a truer account of the world perceived than any other, as is the effect in Proust." The efficacy of this art in Tristram's writing of his life and opinions is obvious, and it is significant that most of his digressions concern "chapters" on "delicate subjects," which he has promised the reader.

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And the integration of the physical life of the Shandy family with its associational life is accomplished primarily through the digressions. For the effects of Tristram's conception, delivery and maiming, mis-naming, and mutilation are realized in the writer's chapters: on "knots"; "the right and wrong end of a woman"; "wishes"; "noses"; "modesty"; (p. 280) a "chapter upon chapters," which is a "puff at the fire of Diana's temple"; (p. 282) upon "sleep" and "button holes," "a maiden subject"; (pp. 289-90) a "chapter of Things"; (p. 336) and a chapter "Upon Whiskers," similar to that upon noses which "ran the same fate some centuries ago in most parts of Europe, which Whiskers have now done in the kingdom of Navarre" (p. 347). Thus, the unifying principle throughout these "digressions" is the sexual motif, and Piper describes its structural significance: "At the beginning of his discourse Tristram's power as a writer seemed to impregnate and fortify the man . . . 'he steps forth like a bridegroom.' . . . Towards its close the process is reversed and the writer partakes of man's temporal enthrallment . . . 'The fifteenth chapter is come at last; and brings nothing with it but a sad signature of "How our pleasures slip from under us in this world"; For in talking of my digression--I declare before heaven I have made it'" (p. 618).²²

Furthermore, in his digressions, Tristram's explicit concern for his readers and critics is frequently couched in

²² Piper, pp. 55-56.
sexual terms. At one point, Tristram expresses a desire to have only readers of "memory, fancy, genius, eloquence, quick parts, and what not" (p. 194) and cries:

Bless us!—what noble work we should make!—how should I tickle it off!—and what spirits should I find myself in, to be writing away for such readers!—and you,—just heaven!—with what raptures would you sit and read,—but oh!—'tis too much,—I am sick,—I faint away deliciously at the thoughts of it!—'tis more than nature can bear!—lay hold of me,—I am giddy,—I am stone blind,—I'm dying,—I am gone.—Help! Help! Help!—But hold,—I grow something better again, for I am beginning to foresee, when this is over, that as we shall all of us continue to be great wits,—we should never agree amongst ourselves, one day to an end:—there would be so much satire and sarcasm,—scoffing and flouting, with railing and reparteeing of it,—thrusting and parrying in one corner or another,—there would be nothing but mischief amongst us.—Chaste stars! what biting and scratching, and what a racket and a clatter we should make, what with breaking of heads, and rapping of knuckles, and hitting of sore places,—there would be no such thing as living for us. (Pp. 194-95)

Here, quite obviously, Tristram is "toying with the common metaphysical conceit in which dying is equated with having an orgasm." The battle of wits becomes a sexual confrontation, and it is this same conversion which is evident in Tristram's account of the debate over changing his name. During the council meeting, a hot chestnut falls into a "particular aperture of Phutatorius's breeches," (p. 320) a "part of them, where of all others he stood most interested to watch accidents" (p. 319). The prescribed remedy is to wrap the burned part in "a soft sheet of paper just come off the

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press" (p. 325). Contained in this episode is Tristram's subtle response to those critics who alleged that his work inflamed the passions of his readers. For although Yorick suggests that the cure results from "the oil and lamp-black with which the paper is so strongly impregnated," (p. 325) the point being made is that Tristram's writing "will hardly tend to inflame sexual passions, even those already warmed by hot chestnuts, but will in fact tend to have the opposite effect of producing a comic catharsis."24

It is thus a comic perspective which Tristram wishes his readers to acquire through an understanding of human nature and human sexuality. His work, through the interpenetration of progression and digression, attempts to portray his life and opinions as an exemplum. It is not an easy task:

I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume--and no farther than to my first day's life--'tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it --on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back--was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this--And why not?--and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description--And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I should just live 364 times faster than I should write--It must follow, an' please your worshipships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write--and consequently, the more your worshipships read, the more your worshipships will have to read.

Will this be good for your worshipships eyes? It will do well for mine; and, was it not that my

24 John M. Stedmond, p. 108.
opinions will be the death of me, I perceive I shall lead a fine life of it out of this self-same life of mine; or, in other words, shall lead a couple of fine lives together. (Pp. 285-86)

Thus, although the distinction being made between Tristram as writer and as narrator may seem artificial, it is justified by his precedents. Furthermore, it seems that only through this method of analysis is the reader enabled to understand Tristram's complexity and to appreciate Sterne's achievement in integrating these elements into one character. Obviously there are areas in which Tristram's roles overlap; and through these, one can trace a shadowy coherence of character. The shadows are dispelled, however, through one's realization that this coherence is provided by the sexual motif. As a victim of society's hypocritical morality, Tristram, the child, is sexually mutilated; Tristram, the man, is impotent; Tristram, the writer, sublimates his sexual instincts; and Tristram, the narrator, reveals the way in which all is connected. According to Fluchère, it is Tristram who "gives the book its raison d'être and its unity. If, in the action proper, he is only a minor character incapable of intervention, he makes up for it by his authority, mastery, and critical power as narrator: nothing happens unless he wishes it to happen, or without his passing judgment on it if he feels inclined. He is deeply interested in this action and these characters, but he wants to make us equally interested, which he can only do by making us see the universal relativity in which we all exist—characters,
author and reader alike." Furthermore, he seeks "to correct our smug assumption that all within our heads is neat and orderly, and that the mad and even the eccentric are different in kind from ourselves." And far more often than not, the judgements and evaluations by which Tristram involves the reader in his action concern sexuality, a fact which suggests that it is principally this realm of the universal human experience which interests him. Indeed, his aesthetic seems based upon the sexual element in human nature. And the seemingly endless variations which he plays upon the theme contradict any belief that sexuality, as a common denominator, necessarily limits the artist's vision of humanity to a single perspective.

The variety of perspectives and attitudes in Sterne's novel ranges from the comic to the tragic and from the satiric to the sympathetic, and all are unified by the voice of the narrator. Furthermore, it is Tristram, as narrator, who is responsible for most of Sterne's wit in the novel, a "true wit" which springs from a congruence of ideas (spouts, noses, hats, hornworks, etc.) rather than from mere resemblance of words. It is his wit, of course, which permits Tristram "to evade the Censor's restrictions by referring to


27 Piper, p. 73.
sex indirectly." And it is through studying Tristram's narrative techniques that critics have attempted to evaluate Sterne's style.

One of these techniques, as noted earlier, is Tristram's propensity to discuss the problems involved in telling his story. When Uncle Toby remarks that perhaps Mrs. Shandy, in preferring the midwife for her attendant, "does not care to let a man come so near her ***," (p. 100) Tristram comments:

I will not say whether my uncle Toby had completed the sentence or not;--"tis for his advantage to suppose he had,--as, I think, he could have added no ONE WORD which would have improved it.

If, on the contrary, my uncle Toby had not fully arrived at his period's end,--then the world stands indebted to the sudden snapping of my father's tobacco-pipe, for one of the neatest examples of that ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the Aposiopesis.--Just heaven! how does the Poco piu 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!...

"My sister, mayhap," quoth my uncle Toby, "does not choose to let a man come so near her ***." 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.

(P. 100)

And later, when he is preparing for the story of the Abbess of Andouilletts, Tristram reveals his desire to use two words, "bouger" and "fouter," and his fear of the consequences if he does: "My ink burns my finger to try--and when I have--

'twill have a worse consequence—it will burn (I fear) my paper" (p. 503). Such instances of the intensely self-conscious and audience-conscious narrator lead John Traugott to state that the "raising of questions, sometimes by division of a topic, sometimes by insinuation or equivocation, and a mocking communication or deliberation with his respondents, is probably the characteristic device of Sterne's style." And according to Fluchère, this is Sterne's expressionism, "this constant boldness of style that makes one forget the ordinary conventions governing the relations between reader and writer." One principal effect of Tristram's frequent addresses to "Sir," "Madam," "Your Reverence," etc. is that "sexual and literary decorum lose their hold upon our affections by virtue of their constant alliance with pompous 'connoisseurships' and secretly leering 'ladies.'" And this concept of the audience as fool constitutes, according to Piper, the satiric value of Tristram's concern with sexuality; for "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."  

29 Tristram Shandy's World, p. 93.  
30 Fluchère, p. 434.  
32 Piper, p. 82.
In Chapter XXXVI of Volume VI, Tristram, anticipating the amours of Toby and Widow Wadman, briefly discusses the nature of love. He refers to Plotinus's theory that love is "part God and part Devil"; to Ficinus's attempt to determine "How many parts of it--the one--and how many the other"; and to Plato, who would have "all of it one great Devil, from head to tail" (pp. 466-67). To these philosophers, Tristram's response is that of Nazianzen to Philagrius:

and most nobly do you aim at truth, when you philosophize about it in your moods and passions.

Nor is it to be imagined, for the same reason, I
Nor is it to be imagined, for the same reason, I
should stop to enquire, whether love is a disease,—
or embroil myself with Rhasis and Dioscorides, whether the seat of it is in the brain or liver;—because this would lead me on, to an examination of the two very opposite manners, in which patients have been treated. . . .

These are disquisitions, which my father, who had laid in a great stock of knowledge of this kind, will be very busy with, in the progress of my uncle Toby's affairs: I must anticipate thus much, That from his theories of love, (with which, by the way, he contrived to crucify my uncle Toby's mind, almost as much as his amours themselves)---he took a single step into practice;---and by means of a camphorated cerecloth, which he found means to impose upon the tailor for buckram, whilst he was making my uncle Toby a new pair of breeches, he produced Gordonius's effect upon my uncle Toby without the disgrace. (Pp. 467, 68, 69)

The exact nature of Gordonius's effect, according to Mr. Work's note, is that "Camphora pudendis alligata, et in braca gestata . . . membrum flaccidum reddit" (p. 468). And in this action, there is another example of society's direct interference in the sex life of an individual.

Then, Tristram contends that he is not "obliged to set out with a definition of what love is":

[Further text]
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, . . . carries an idiomatic kind of implication that love is a thing below a man:---this is recurring again to Plato's opinion, which, with all his divinityship,---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. (P. 469)

Thus, for the time, Tristram dismisses the attempt to define love, but the implication is that it is basically a physical, sexual phenomenon, which is not to be deplored for that reason.

When he returns to Toby's affair, in Volume VIII, Tristram begins his discussion of love with the same implication: "It is with Love as with Cuckoldom" (p. 540). And in his explanation of this statement, Tristram provides an anatomy of love: "'It is with Love as with Cuckoldom'---the suffering party is at least the third, but generally the last in the house who knows anything 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?" (p. 542). Although here, as usual, Tristram maintains an ambiguity in his discussion of love, the progression seems to be from groin to abdomen to heart and, finally, to head. And this interpretation seems
to be substantiated by Tristram's comment upon Trim's love for the Beguine, a love obviously resulting from sexual stimulation: "... it contained in it the essence of all the love-romances which ever have been wrote since the beginning of the world" (p. 575). It is in this fashion, then, that Tristram suggests the sexual nature of love and decries the falsifications of it by the writers of romance, who are applauded by society.

When he continues his analysis of love and marriage, Tristram focuses upon "ends." It is certain, he says, that a man "may be set on fire like a candle, at either end—provided there is a sufficient wick standing out" (p. 553). And that Tristram is the impotent victim of society is evidenced by his desire to be lighted constantly at the top. However, Mrs. Wadman, plagued by the persistent rumors concerning his wound, predetermined to light Toby "if possible, at both ends at once" (p. 554). Then, in examining the "different ends ... for which a woman takes a husband," (p. 624) Tristram resorts to Slawkenbergian imagery. Woman searches for her "right end" in the panniers of a string of asses. In the first, there is nothing but "empty bottles"; in the second, "tripes"; the third, "trunk-hose and pantofles ... and so to the fourth and fifth, ... till coming to the asse which carries it, 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" (p. 625). The phallic symbolism of this
passage is underlined by Tristram when, in response to ques­
tions about what "it" is, he affirms that "with regard to my
uncle Toby's fitness for the marriage state, nothing was
ever better" (p. 626). Tristram's physical impotence seems
to prevent him from comprehending Toby's psychological im­
potence, for he remarks that Mrs. Wadman turned "Toby's Vir­
tue . . . into nothing but empty bottles, tripes, trunk-hose
and pantofles" (p. 626).

There is little blindness, however, in Tristram's
treatment of Obadiah. For his attitude toward the latter is
a complex blend of envy, irony, and amused contempt. The
envy is undoubtedly the result of Obadiah's normalcy; he
"had a wife and three children" (p. 165). This feeling is
qualified by Tristram's ironic comment that Obadiah was
oblivious to the "turpitude of fornication and the many other
political ill consequences" of his actions (p. 165). And
though part of the irony here is that Tristram does not be­
lieve sex to be base or ugly, his amused contempt for Oba­
diah springs from the absurdly disproportionate effects
which the latter's actions have had upon his life. For Oba­
diah "breeds Walter's mare to a jack, hinders the birth of
Tristram . . . [and] damns the potency of the Shandy bull,
which apparently symbolized the potency, or the lack of it,
of Walter, Uncle Toby, and Tristram."33 The hindrance to
Tristram's birth is the result of Obadiah's tying knots about

33 Overton Philip James, The Relation of "Tristram
Dr. Slop's medical instruments. In attempting to untie these knots, Slop cuts his thumb. And in delivering Tristram with his injured thumb, Slop crushes the infant's nose.

Consequently, Tristram devotes considerable attention to Obadiah and his knots: "In the case of knots,—by which, in the first place, I would not be understood to mean slip-knots... nor, secondly, in this place, do I mean that particular species of knots, called bow-knots.... 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" (pp. 167-68).

Here, Tristram's dissertation and protestation make it clear that he is punning upon the word "knot," with its secondary meaning of coition. And through Obadiah, Tristram is pointing out the enormous consequences of sexuality in his life and the consequences of society's encouraged and enforced obliviousness to this significance. Furthermore, in keeping with his patterning of sexual comedy with tragedy, Tristram reveals that it was Obadiah who brought the news of Bobby Shandy's death, (p. 349) which left Tristram as the sole heir of the family.

This news, according to Tristram, brought the solution to a very serious quandary for Walter Shandy. On the one hand, Walter wanted to clear the ox-moor for farming, an expensive project but one that would ultimately prove profitable for him. On the other hand, 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” (p. 333). The alternative, then, to the ox-moor project was to provide the means for Bobby's travels. And though the advantage of the first plan seemed obvious, Walter was tormented "to think he was all this while breeding up my brother like a hog to eat" the profits (p. 335). It is significant that Tristram uses sexually loaded terminology to describe both Bobby's travel in "foreign parts," an experience which he now should have, and his father's suffering from the contention between the two projects:

For to say nothing of the havock, which by a certain consequence is unavoidably made by it all over the finer system of the nerves, which you know convey the animal spirits and more subtle juices from the heart to the head, and so on--It is not to be told in what a degree such a wayward kind of friction works upon the more gross and solid parts, wasting the fat and impairing the strength of a man every time as it goes backwards and forwards.

My father had certainly sunk under this evil, as certainly as he had done under that of my CHRISTIAN NAME--had he not been rescued out of it as he was out of that, by a fresh evil--the misfortune of my brother Bobby's death.

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! (p. 336)

The news of Bobby's death leads to a series of events and orations which not only provide further exemplification of the comedy-tragedy juxtapositioning but also suggest the predominance of two forces in man's life, death and sex.
Walter Shandy's learned oration on mortality is repeatedly interrupted. Tristram breaks in to comment upon his father's eloquence, a discussion which leads him to reveal his father's anger upon learning that Obadiah had bred his favorite mare to a jackass. Here, dying and breeding are equalized in that both are seen primarily as catalysts for Walter's theorizing. Then, in his listing of historical precedents for dying, Walter turns to the death of Cornelius Gallus, the example which "crowns all," who died during sexual intercourse (p. 357). At this point, Tristram suspends Walter's discourse and turns to the reactions of the servants to Bobby's death.

Susannah thinks first of the "green satin night-gown" she will receive as a consequence of Mrs. Shandy's going into mourning (p. 360). The "foolish scullion" merely asserts that he is not dead (p. 360). Obadiah thinks of the "terrible piece of work . . . in stubbing the ox-moor" (p. 360). And Trim is moved, like Walter, to an eloquent "harangue" upon mortality, punctuated by gestures with his stick and hat, which Tristram, once again, interrupts. Tristram first breaks in to comment upon the effectiveness of Trim's oration, especially the gestures; and he remarks that men are "not stocks and stones . . . nor are we angels, I wish we were,--but men cloathed with bodies, and governed by our imaginations;--and what a junketting piece of work of it there is, betwixt these and our seven senses, especially some of them, for my own part, I own it, I am ashamed to
confess" (p. 361). And that the senses of which Tristram is ashamed are sexual is made clear when he refers to his narration of the kitchen scene as a "chapter of chamber-maids, green-gowns, and old hats" (p. 363). When Trim completes his discourse, he is requested by his fellow servants to tell the story of his brother Tom, the proclaimed tragedy of Tom and the Inquisition, which contains a sexual motif that will undoubtedly capture the attention of his audience.

Tristram then returns to his father's oration and reiterates the details of the death of Cornelius Gallus with his wife. The last word of Walter's example, "wife," catches Mrs. Shandy, who was passing the door, "by the weak part of the whole sex . . . her curiosity" (p. 368). She hears Walter who is, unknown to her, quoting Socrates' "'I have three desolate children'"; and she reacts immediately: "Then, cried my mother, opening the door,—you have one more, Mr. Shandy, than I know of" (p. 370). To which, Walter responds and concludes his oration by asserting that "By heaven! I have one less" (p. 370). And Tristram concludes the episode with a musical interlude, which Neil D. Isaacs describes as an "autoerotic experience": 34 "Ptr..r..r..ing--twing--twang--prut--trut . . . twiddle, diddle diddle, diddle diddle, dum . . . tweedle diddle,--prut-trut--krish--krash--krush.--I've undone you, Sir" (p. 371). His principal auditor, Tristram implies, is Death, "the grave man in black" (p. 371). It seems

34 Isaacs, 95.
as if Tristram, against his will, is forced to display his vitality and potency before Death: "Sir, I had rather play a Caprichio to Calliope herself, than draw my bow across my fiddle before that very man; and yet, I'll stake my Cremona to a Jew's trump, which is the greatest musical odds that ever were laid, that I will this moment stop three hundred and fifty leagues out of tune upon my fiddle, without punishing one single nerve that belongs to him" (p. 371). And Mr. Isaacs perceptively comments upon the sexual implications of Tristram's performance:

A capriccio is an instrumental, usually whimsical piece of music, but the word also means a stroke of whimsey or a trick. One wonders why Sterne should choose to perform his trick for the epic muse rather than on the one hand Terpsichore or on the other hand Erato. But a calliope is also an organ. . . . A Jew's trump is a Jew's harp, but trump also means proboscis, so the wager is not one of great odds in terms of the value of musical instruments, but a bit of bragadoccio in terms of size (he says the greatest), comparing a Jewish nose to a Shandean sexual organ.

Tristram concludes this episode, however, on a serious note in praise of those musicians who can arouse in him a sympathetic response. Then, he says, with the "most hidden strings of my heart" in motion, is the time for "Messrs. Apothecary and Taylor" to present their bills for medicines and for the replacements for dirty shirts and torn breeches (p. 372). It is obvious, then, that this interlude is another manifestation of Tristram's sublimation and that it, like Walter's theories, works "after the manner of the gentle

35 Isaacs, 96.
passion, beginning in jest,—but ending in downright earnest" (p. 53).

And it is in this spirit of earnest jesting that Tristram, like his father, coins his own principles of argumentation: "the Argumentum Tripodium, which is never used but by the woman against the man;--and the Argumentum ad Rem, which, contrariwise, is made use of by the man only against the woman . . . 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" (p. 71). This reduction of logic to its sexual dimensions is developed further by Tristram when he speaks of dissertations as being "engendered in the womb of speculation" (p. 102) and of hypotheses as begotten and grown like a pregnancy (p. 151).

The implication of these metaphors concerns, of course, the relationship between a man's mind and his body. Tristram first suggests the nature of this relationship when he remarks that a "Man's body and his mind . . . are exactly like a jerkin, and a jerkin's lining;--rumple the one--you rumple the other" (p. 160). And he states that the only exceptions to this generalization were the stoics, for "you might have played the very devil with them, and at the same time, not one of the insides of 'em would have been one button the worse, for all you had done to them" (p. 161). In his final volume, however, Tristram rules out any exceptions: "the soul and body are joint-sharers in every thing they get: A man cannot dress, but his ideas get cloath'd at the same
time" (p. 616). Tristram maintains that there is an inter-penetration of body and mind which, like the nature of love, defies precise analysis. This concept, as noted earlier, finds a humorous expression in the Shandean hypothesis for perfect health, the contention between and balance of "radical heat" and "radical moisture." And it seems to be the principal concern of Sterne's novel; for in the constant suffusion of all his material with sexuality, Tristram demonstrates the "close interdependence of the physical and the spiritual, of perception and thought." Furthermore, this concept is reaffirmed when Tristram notes that "REASON is, half of it, SENSE; and the measure of heaven itself is but the measure of our present appetites and concoctions" (p. 494).

Here, as Ernest Tuveson points out, is evidence of the influence of John Locke: "The fact of intellection is physical; and a corollary is that sense impressions, emotional drives, and reflection are all not separate operations of a soul and body, but ultimately components of an organic process. All this, of course, is quite alien to the traditional complete separation of body and mind. The problem is not to attempt to find, as Cartesians had attempted to do, some point of contact between alien entities, but to realize that the body thinks." Realizing the significance of the sexual impulses in his own life, then, Tristram reveals, at times unknowingly, the sexual dimensions of his opinions, explores

36 Fluchère, p. 71. 37 Tuveson, p. 260.
the sexual basis of man's relationships with his fellowman, and sees in this basis a possibility for sympathetic and intuitive communion between men, a possibility which Locke had not considered.

Tristram's attempts to come to terms with this material reflect, as various critics have affirmed, Sterne's response to Locke. It seems that Tristram's persistent concern over man's body provides Sterne's balance for Locke's "history-book . . . of what passes in a man's own mind" (p. 85). And John Traugott explains the basis for Sterne's disagreement with Locke in terms of the latter's rationalism: "Whereas Locke would resolutely analyze all ideas and exactly determine the significations of words in order to reconcile necessarily isolated minds (necessarily, because mind is substance and therefore unknowable), Sterne's purpose is to demonstrate and describe the constant frustration of such analysis, the impossibility of determining meaning apart from a context of human situations." 38 Sterne's antirationalism, then, explains Tristram's reaction when Eugenio asks him to define such words as "nose" and "crevice." Tristram replies that "to define--is to distrust" (p. 218) and, by way of concession, recites a tautological definition which reinforces the ambiguity: "where the word Nose occurs,—I declare, by that word I mean a Nose, and nothing more, or less" (p. 218). And the subsequent references to the "nose" underline Tris-

38 Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World, p. xv.
train's determination to keep its meaning within a context of human interpretations: it is "the external organ of smelling, or that part of a man which stands prominent in his face"; (p. 221) there are "various uses and seasonable applications of long noses," (p. 226) including its "domestic conveniences" (p. 229).

Through this humorous manipulation of words, Tristram also demonstrates his belief that wit is as necessary as judgement in man's life. He maintains that Locke, who decried wit as dangerous, was "bubbled" in this matter (p. 202). According to Traugott, "Sterne simply saw that Locke's association-of-ideas madness was also a way to learn." 39 Sterne undoubtedly realized that wit, a kind of discordia concors, was valuable both for learning and communicating. For, "if communication depends upon establishing the most comprehensive relations (since it cannot depend upon rationalistic determination of ideas), wit is its most effective technique." 40 In this context, perhaps the best example of the way in which Tristram handles Lockean theory occurs in his discussion of the three-fold causes of "obscurity and confusion, in the mind of man":

Dull organs, dear Sir, in the first place. Secondly, slight and transient impressions made by objects when the said organs are not dull. And, thirdly, a memory like unto a sieve, not able to retain what it has received.—Call down Dolly your chamber-maid, and I will give you my cap and bell

39 Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World, p. 49.
40 Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World, p. xv.
along with it, if I make not this matter so plain that Dolly herself shall understand it as well as Malbranch.--When Dolly has indited her epistle to Robin, and has thrust her arm into the bottom of her pocket hanging by her right-side;--take that opportunity to recollect that the organs and faculties of perception, can, by nothing in this world, be so aptly typified and explained as by that one thing which Dolly's hand is in search of.--Your organs are not so dull that I should inform you,--'tis an inch, Sir, of red seal-wax.

When this is melted and dropped upon the letter, if Dolly fumbles too long for her thimble, till the wax is over harden'd, it will not receive the mark of her thimble from the usual impulse which was wont to imprint it. Very well: If Dolly's wax, for want of better, is bees-wax, or of a temper too soft,--Tho' it may receive,--it will not hold the impression, how hard soever Dolly thrusts against it; and last of all, supposing the wax good, and eke the thimble, but applied thereto in careless haste, as her Mistress rings the bell;--in any one of these three cases, the print, left by the thimble, will be as unlike the prototype as a brass-jack. (p. 86)

In this passage, Tristram both demonstrates and refutes Locke's theory. For the effectiveness of Tristram's explanation depends heavily upon his wit, which "relates Locke's attempt to explain a serious epistemological problem to the epistolary amours of a chamber maid."\(^{41}\) And there is both the exactness of description, which Locke desired, and the prominent sexual undercurrent, which represents Sterne's principal qualification of Locke's theory.

Tristram makes his appeal to that understanding of his audience which is based upon natural humours and instincts. It is an appeal resulting from a concept of the self, which is, again, a modification of Locke's position. As Tuveson points out, self, for Locke, is consciousness of pleasure

\(^{41}\) Packer, p. 11.
and pain; but for Sterne, it is also the "agency of aesthetic and ethical experience." Thus, the progression of Sterne's reasoning seems to be from man's sensory experiences, which are dominated by his sexual nature, to an intuitive understanding of others and to sympathetic communication with them. And here, quite obviously, one can see a foreshadowing of Hume's doctrine of sympathy, discussed in Chapter one of this study. This vision of man's nature provides the basis for Sterne's belief that "Bodily impulses help the spirit realize man's natural, therefore divinely purposed end, for those impulses are themselves part of the spiritual being. Swift's scatology seems intended to warn us to be on our guard constantly against the physical side, and not to preen ourselves with a false confidence that we have ever conquered it. Sterne, however, calls for a cooperation of the two; let us, he urges, be 'natural.'"

It is this philosophy which Tristram reveals in the conclusion to the tale of Slawkenbergius. The story of Diego and Julia, as previously analyzed, is permeated by sexual symbolism, especially the nose-penis equivocation. And Diego's Ode, composed as he is hurrying to Julia, makes the relationship between sex and sympathy quite clear:

Harsh and untuneful are the notes of love,  
Unless my Julia strikes the key,  
Her hand alone can touch the part,  
Whose dulcet movement charms the heart,  
And governs all the man with sympathetic sway.

O Julia! (p. 269)

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42 Tuveson, p. 262.  43 Tuveson, p. 261.
Furthermore, it is the absence of this naturalness which forms the principal target of Tristram's satire in the story of the Abbess of Andoüillets. The pilgrimage of the nun and the novice is for the purpose of curing their ills: the nun "had got a white swelling by her devotions . . . by long matins," (pp. 504, 507) and the novice "had been troubled with a whitloe in her middle finger, by sticking it constantly into the abbess's cast poultices, etc." (p. 505). The two mules that frustrate their journey are "natural symbols of sterility." Though it seems ironic that Tristram, in maintaining man's natural rights to the pleasures of sensuality, an advanced concept for his time, should utilize contemporary religious intolerance, he undoubtedly realized that his ideas would be less objectionable to the common reader if linked to a conventional attack on Catholicism. And it is precisely the sexual morality of the Catholic clergy that Tristram condemns, for sexual abstinence denies man one of his most basic means of expression and thus prevents him from experiencing fully the delights of his human state.

That the "obscenity" in Tristram's narration "has never been . . . [a problem] of morals or aesthetics" is obvious from the philosophical-psychological concepts upon which it is based. It does seem, however, that man's sexual nature constitutes a significant principle in Tristram's aesthetic. In the context of his various statements about

44 James, p. 75. 45 Fluchère, p. 239.
his art, most of which, as has been noted, cast the artist in the role of a "lover" or "bridegroom," Tristram asserts that he intends to draw his characters by careful depiction of their hobby-horses. And this intention is realized in the characterizations of Toby, through his games; Walter, through his theories; and Tristram, through his writing. Furthermore, Tristram decries the methods of character portrayal through studying man's "wind instrument," (p. 75) his "evacuations" and "repletions," his "Non-Naturals," pentagrams, (p. 76) and the "Camera" (p. 77). Here, as Stedmond notes, Tristram "deliberately denied the efficacy of 'mechanical help.'"46 The one alternative to using man's hobby-horse, Tristram points out, would be Momus's glass, if it were available:

If the fixture of Momus's glass, in the human breast, according to the proposed emendation of that arch-critic, had taken place,—first, This foolish consequence would certainly have followed,—That the very wisest and the very gravest of us all, in one coin or other, must have paid window-money every day of our lives.

And, secondly, That had the said glass been there set up, nothing more would have been wanting, in order to have taken a man's character, but to have taken a chair and gone softly, as you would to a dioptrical bee-hive, and look'd in,—view'd the soul stark naked;—observ'd all her motions,—her machinations;—traced all her maggots from their first en-gendering to their crawling forth;—watched her loose in her frisks, her gambols, her capricios; and after some notice of her more solemn deportment, consequent upon such frisks, etc.—then taken your pen and ink and set down nothing but what you had seen, and could have sworn to:—But this is an advantage not to be had by the biographer in this planet,—in the planet Mercury (belike) it may be so, if not

46 Stedmond, p. 75.
better still for him;—for there the intense heat of the country, which is proved by computators, from its vicinity to the sun, to be more than equal to that of red hot iron,—must, I think, long ago have vitrified the bodies of the inhabitants, (as the efficient cause) to suit them for the climate (which is the final cause); so that, betwixt them both, all the tenements of their souls, from top to bottom, may be nothing else, for aught the soundest philosophy can shew to the contrary, but one fine transparent body of clear glass (bating the umbilical knot);—so, that till the inhabitants grow old and tolerably wrinkled, whereby the rays of light, in passing through them, become so monstrously refracted,—or return reflected from their surfaces in such transverse lines to the eye, that a man cannot be seen thro';—his soul might as well, unless, for more ceremony,—or the trifling advantage which the umbilical point gave her,—might, upon all other accounts, I say, as well play the fool out o'doors as in her own house. (pp. 74-75)

Tristram's presentation of the myth of Momus and his glass seems to function as "a symbol uniting the mockery and wisdom there may be in folly." The folly, of course, is the impossibility of such a glass existing on earth where man is "in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood" (p. 75). Tristram's mockery, throughout his work is directed at those hypocritical concepts which subvert and falsify man's nature. And Tristram's wisdom consists largely of his ability to understand the full significance of man's sexuality; "he has seen and accepted himself for what he is," and it is significant that even Momus's glass would be unable to penetrate and expose this aspect of humanity. For the bodies of the inhabitants of Mercury are "vitrified" except for the "umbilical knot." The umbilicus symbolizes the individual's

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47 Fluchère, p. 76.  48 Stedmond, p. 69.
link with humanity, and a knot is both the point of union and coition. Thus it is human sexuality which resists precise, mechanical analysis. And it is principally this element in man that Tristram studies as it is manifested in the hobby-horses of his family.

The episode in Tristram's own hobby-horse which, thus far, has been neglected is Yorick's sermon on conscience. It may be, of course, that in including this sermon, Sterne is merely testing public opinion, the reader's reaction to his sermon. Tristram does state "that there are now in the possession of the Shandy family, as many [sermons] as will make a handsome volume, at the world's service,—and much good may they do it" (p. 143). But this interpretation seems to challenge Sterne's artistry since it questions the organic significance of the sermon in his novel. Then it may be, as Stedmond maintains, that in publishing his sermons simultaneously with Tristram, Sterne "took steps to provide his audience with supplementary evidence that his humour was not, at bottom, heterodox, and that his basic view of human nature was benevolent and compassionate." For this same argument seems applicable to explain the inclusion of Yorick's sermon in the novel. And the sermon does, indeed, indicate a conservative and orthodox religious position, but the vision of human nature which it reveals is more complex than benevolence and compassion suggest.

49 Stedmond, p. 137.
First, as Trim reads the text for the sermon, "For we trust we have a good Conscience," the emphasis is upon trust rather than upon conscience: 50 "Trust!—Trust we have a good conscience!" (p. 123). And although Walter charges Trim with giving "a very improper accent" to the line (p. 123), the conclusion to the sermon justifies Trim's interpretation: "In a word,—trust that man in nothing, who has not a good Conscience in every thing" (p. 140). Then, Yorick's defense of conscience is based upon an adaptation of "two of Locke's concepts: judgement and self-awareness." 51 And that the belief in good conscience as an absolute is ironic 52 is obvious from both the exceptions which Yorick enumerates and the demonstrations of sexual interest throughout the novel.

Yorick reasons that each man can know "whether he has a good conscience or no," for "he must be privy to his own thoughts and desires . . . and know certainly the true springs and motives which, in general, have governed the actions of his life" (pp. 125-26). However, the fact is that those men who are victimized by society's prudery do not have this self-knowledge, a fact demonstrated by the sexual sublimations which the hobby-horses reveal. Nonetheless, it

52 Hnatko, 64.
is this self-awareness coupled with "the judgment, whether of approbation or censure, which it unavoidably makes upon the successive actions of our lives" (p. 126) that Yorick defines as man's conscience. The implication of Yorick's argument, then, is that if a man knows his own nature, then sexuality should not trouble his conscience, and he is innocent regardless of what society says.

Yorick points out, however, that man's conscience can "by long habits of sin . . . 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" (p. 127). In this way, Yorick prefaces his list of men who, though guilty of sin, are uncondemned by their consciences.

The first example is the man who is "vicious and utterly debauched in his principles" (p. 128). The sexual metaphor by which Yorick describes the hardening of the conscience through much "stress and continual hard usage" is undoubtedly applicable to this man. Thus it seems obvious that the sexual awareness which is being inculcated is not an advocation of promiscuity, an invitation to engage in lustful activities which would dull the senses as well as the conscience. For this man is culpable, though unaccused by his conscience which was "either talking or pursuing, or was in a journey, or peradventure he slept and could not be awoke" (p. 128).

The second man is selfish, "a strait-hearted, selfish
wretch, incapable either of private friendship or public spirit" (p. 129). This man defends his quiet conscience by professing that he has strictly followed the moral mandates of society: "I have no fornication to answer to my conscience;—no faithless vows or promises to make up;—I have debauched no man's wife or child; thank God, I am not as other men, adulterers, unjust, or even as this libertine, who stands before me" (pp. 129-30). Through his profession, this man reveals his immense spiritual pride, which is, ironically, society's metamorphosis of his pettiness. And here, Yorick's comment in "The Case of Elijah and the Widow Zarephath Considered" seems particularly appropriate: "I cannot but conceive that the very mechanical motions which maintain life, must be performed with more equal vigour and freedom in that man whom a great and good soul perpetually inclines to show mercy to the miserable, than they can be in a poor, sordid, selfish wretch, whose little heart melts to no man's affliction; but sits brooding so intently over its own plots and concerns, as to see and feel nothing; and in truth, enjoys nothing beyond himself."53 This man, whom Trim describes as a "viler man than the other," (p. 129) completely misses the sensual pleasures of life and thus subverts the divine scheme of things. He is, by Tristram's standard of morality, the greatest sinner.

In the third and fourth types of men who escape the

53 Laurence Sterne, The Sermons, I, 84.
censure of conscience, Yorick satirizes the lawyer, whose "conscience has got safely entrenched behind the Letter of the Law," (p. 130) and the Catholic, who can cheat, lie, perjure, rob, and murder because "his priest had got the keeping of his conscience" and who, therefore, needs only to go to confession (p. 131).

Ultimately, according to Yorick, the conscience must have assistance to guide man: "call in religion and morality . . . Consult calm reason and the unchangeable obligations of justice and truth" (p. 132). Then, "Let CONSCIENCE determine the matter upon these reports;--and then if thy heart condemns thee not . . . the rule will be infallible" (pp. 132-33). It is, finally, a "good heart" which Yorick says can be trusted over "a thousand casuists" and "law-makers" (p. 133). And this good heart, as Tristram repeatedly demonstrates, is that sensibility which is based upon sympathy and understanding, upon an awareness of that indefinable blend of the physical and spiritual in man. Once again, then, Yorick returns to self-knowledge as the internal guide for man's actions.

The external guides are religion and morality: "To have the fear of God before our eyes, and, in our mutual dealings with each other, to govern our actions by the eternal measures of right and wrong:--The first of these will comprehend the duties of religion;--the second those of morality, which are so inseparable connected together, that you cannot divide these two tables, even in imagination (tho'
the attempt is often made in practice) without breaking and mutually destroying them both" (p. 135). These concepts lead Yorick to an orthodox diatribe against both morality without religion and religion without morality. Either of these, he affirms, will lead to a petty humanity. The latter will result in pridefulness, and the former, in egoism. Yorick describes "Religion . . . [as] the strongest of all motives" in man's life and "Interest, the next most powerful in the world" (p. 136). Man's religion, his fear of God, directs him to follow the divine scheme of creation in order to fully realize both the limitations and the potentials of terrestrial life.

Arthur Hill Cash describes Sterne's belief that a "man will not be virtuous until he is prodded. [And the] . . . really important prod is the fear of God." Here, Sterne's fundamentally conservative theology is obvious, but the "good heart" which man must possess to act and to judge those actions morally is predicated upon that self-knowledge which is not purely rational. For when Cash further maintains that reason "can discover the eternal laws and obligations . . . [and] uncover internal springs and motives," he is clearly attributing a power to reason which Sterne does not. Indeed, Tristram continually demonstrates the failure of reason and places his faith in the intuition and impulses of the man of "good heart." And as Tristram's work indicates,

54 Cash, 414. 55 Cash, 414.
the sexual impulse is the strongest element of man's "Interest," which is second only to religion for the power of motivating man.

Thus, Yorick concludes, man's conscience is subject to the perversities and hypocrisies of both the individual and society. It "is not a law. . . . 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" (p. 140). In this sermon, then, as in many of his others, Sterne's "main emphasis is on the finitude of human experience, the built-in limitations in life as we know it, and the consequent necessity of positing a life beyond this one. The approach is pragmatic rather than mystical, calculated to appeal to the common sense of the ordinary man." 56 Sterne, through Tristram and Yorick, his personae, advocates the regulation of life according to God's rules by an enlightened and sensitive conscience, which is unbiased by personal or societal pressures and is sympathetic to both the spiritual and physical needs of humanity. And as he continually demonstrates, the most compelling of man's physical needs is sexual.

56 Stedmond, p. 141.
CONCLUSION

This, then, is the essence of Sterne's sexual ethic in *Tristram Shandy*. It exposes the need for man to cast off the hypocritical morality by which society causes him to view his sexuality as shameful and to subvert the ends for which he was created. As Tristram depicts this concept, he reveals both the comic and tragic aspects of the personal lives which are thus perverted. Nevertheless, Sterne's thesis does not involve a heterodox theology, nor does it invite man to follow his instincts to the detriment of himself or others. For as Yorick explicates the idea, one sees man's acceptance of the common physical humanity as necessary to the fulfillment of God's purposes.

Thus, the theological dimensions of Sterne's ethic are expressed in Yorick's sermon. That Sterne should entrust so important a statement to a minor figure in his novel is explained by Piper's comment upon Yorick's brief but structurally significant role: "Yorick's death may seem excessive, dangerously sentimental, for all the wit and humor of its telling; but its emotional power has also been reduced—chiefly by Yorick's appearing alive and well later on in Tristram's discourse and by his becoming dear to us only after his death is safely behind him. It may be worthwhile to notice that he, whose death virtually opened Tristram's story, is the one who makes its closing comment, its last
Yorick's jest marks the final instance of the juxtapositioning of sex and death, for the "Cock and Bull" label is applied by Yorick to Walter's diatribe concerning sex and war and to Obadiah's suggestion that the Shandy bull is impotent. Furthermore, Yorick's comment is an appropriate conclusion to Sterne's novel; for, in the comic perspective which it supplies, it is "a sort of esoteric symbol of the whole."^2

Sterne's novel represents Tristram's "effort to give a verbal form to a succession of states of consciousness, emotional and intellectual, experienced by him in the past and in the present."^3 The fragments which Tristram unites through his fiction are given a thematic coherence by the omnipresent sexual symbolism. The full significance of sexuality to his life, as well as to that of mankind, is manifested through this coherence, which is Sterne's artistic accomplishment. According to Fluchère, the "originality of Sterne consists in his successful attempt to reconcile the historical value of events with the emotion that accompanies them in the consciousness of his characters."^4 And far more often than not, the ultimate connection between these events and emotions involves man's sexual interest.

^1 William Bowman Piper, Laurence Sterne, p. 57.

^2 Henri Fluchère, From Tristram to Yorick, p. 232. See also Wayne C. Booth, "Did Sterne Complete Tristram Shandy," MP, 48 (1951), 172-83, for the presentation of another thesis that Yorick's jest completes Sterne's novel.

^3 Fluchère, p. 23. ^4 Fluchère, p. 99.
There are the sexual ramifications of Walter's "rational" theories concerning names, noses, and education. The illusion of reason, which Walter attempts to maintain throughout his life, leads him only to frustration and failure. In his communications with others, he constantly attempts to control emotional and sexual forces, where the impotence of reason is greatest. Toby, completely at the mercy of society's hypocritical morality, is totally unaware of the sexual sublimation which he manifests in his military games. Although he submits readily to emotions, his psychological impotence prevents him from fully participating in normal human experiences, and he remains a child in sexual matters. And Tristram, though heavily influenced by his father and uncle, discerns the significance of sexuality in human life, its importance to self-knowledge. Furthermore, he realizes that he, like Walter and Toby, has been victimized by social morality and that there should be neither an aura of sinfulness surrounding sexuality nor restrictions upon personal expression concerning it. For he sees sexuality as a source of both exquisite pleasure and of supreme humor.

And although he is unable to alter his own impotence, Tristram wants to create an awareness in his readers, to communicate to them, through his sexual tragicomedy, the necessity for their seeing, understanding, and accepting the fact that sexuality is the basis for the sympathetic communication between human beings that makes this life meaningful.
This is Sterne's "message," and this is the reason that it is impossible to imagine a bowdlerized *Tristram Shandy*.
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