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CONTEXTS OF STERNE'S SERMONS

ecco lo il vero Punchinello!

James Sladen Gow

Submitted to the University of Wales in fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Wales Swansea

2003

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SUMMARY

As soon as the reading public realized that the much-enjoyed first volumes of *Tristram Shandy* were written by a priest and, furthermore, that this parson was publishing sermons under the name of Hamlet's exhumed jester, the sincerity of Sterne towards his vocation was questioned—if not flatly denied. This immediate reticence and indignation has expanded and persisted. The stumbling blocks are two: bawdy fiction is not fitting from a priest; and, the sermons, full of plagiarism, lack evangelical heat.

The aim of this dissertation is to review the contexts of mid-eighteenth century Anglican homiletics with reference to Sterne's *oeuvres*. Once we understand what was expected from the pulpit in content and style, we are equipped to observe ways in which Sterne strove to meet those expectations. To date no published work has responsibly considered his much-alleged plagiarism. This is rectified, and the evidence unveils an interested and very capable sermon-writer.

We then consider Sterne's fictions. That, alongside ribaldry, the first volumes of *Tristram* contain an entire sermon has led some to conclude Sterne was mocking religion. On the contrary, tracing themes of the homilies through both novels we come to appreciate an intended reciprocity between the works. Of interest in this regard is Sterne's engagement with fideistic scepticism, and the manner in which he developed his parabolic contribution to this tradition of faithful, learned ignorance. I suggest that, far from the buffoonery of a snickering prankster, Sterne's fiction represents the elements of his orthodox sermons within a provocative and curiously accessible mode. As such, his canon has integrity. He *lusted earnestly, and endeavoured carefully that these little books might stand instead of many bigger books*; and his hope was that they would do us good.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed:

Date: 1 June 2003

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit reference within the text and endnotes. A bibliography is appended.

Signed:

Date: 1 June 2003

STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organizations.

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I ~ INTRODUCTION

Concluding ‘A Defence of Nonsense’ G.K. Chesterton wrote: “the well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that ‘faith is nonsense,’ does not know how truly he speaks; later it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith.”¹

The study of *things* was well attended in Sterne’s day, and their logical side was appreciated as difficult to establish. Searching for truth and accuracy scientists revealed and explicated serious curiosities, but these were tending rather to increase than to relieve perceived complexities. Current alternatives of broad scepticism and focused determinism offered little comfort to those considering their validity. The epigraph to the first two volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* is appropriate, in Cotton’s translation of Montaigne’s use of it: “men . . . are tormented with the Opinions they have of Things, and not by the Things themselves.”²

This phrase of Epictetus, echoed through centuries, alerts Tristram’s readers that a lesson in perspective will follow. We do well to register the philosophic implications that such a quotation conjures. It has been of no service to discuss Sterne’s use of Locke, for example, while Locke’s own contexts –his texts as well– have been neglected. Fortunately in recent years the heritage of epistemological discourse from which Sterne works, proposed in scripture especially by Job, Ecclesiastes and St. Paul, has begun to be accurately addressed. That the truly wise are so by understanding primarily that they know nothing is a Socratic commonplace embedded in the Bible:

I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. (Eccles. i.17-8)

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. (I Cor. i.20-1)

Gradually Sterne's appreciation of this tradition of humble access is evolving. Of late, "fideistic scepticism" is being appreciated by Sterneans through the contributions of J.T. Parnell and Donald Wehrs, and Peter Briggs wrote perceptively in 1985:

it is important to note that the perceptual relativism and consequent skepticism implicit in Sterne's methods is not necessarily bound up with moral relativism.³

Commenting upon this tradition of faithful doubting, reading backwards from Nietzsche and recalling Keats' coining of "negative capability," Melvyn New claims "resolution and positiveness are the tempting and inevitable vices of Sterne's world-view; suspension and doubt, its difficult, if not impossible, virtues."⁴ This unfortunate conclusion is repeated in the introduction to *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne* [1998]⁵ and a disservice will be done to Sterne if such a summary of Christian scepticism is allowed to stand for lack of experience with the tempers of Sterne's mentors. In *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits* New continues.

Here is skepticism pressed into the service of religious faith

A comic and tragic futility is found in the human desire for certainty and conviction, and somewhere among Rabelais, Montaigne, Burton, Locke, Chambers, and Swift, Sterne sought a skeptical stance that would deny the absolutism of dogmatists while preserving his own (and his congregation's) capacity to believe in the concept of Truth. Sterne could not abandon his own certainty concerning Anglican centrism; hence his blindness to the rhetorical gambits and dogmatics of his own argument that one need only "preach the gospel" or direct words "to the heart."⁶

New's rhetoric of poles and response leaves little room for any viable sense of an appreciation for what *faith* might entail in a believer. We have yet to be offered an accurate assessment of Sterne's considered investment in the discourse of fideism then current. Even recently in Sterne studies we continue to hear more of Nietzsche than of More, Pope, Berkeley or Hume, so it is not surprising Sterne's world-view continues to be widely misrepresented. When we become familiar with the tradition that seeks to "reconcile us to our condition"⁷ and to maintain scepticism within a sphere corresponding to that condition, a better reckoning of Sterne's epistemology –and ontology– will become possible. He did not *seek* a hoary *stance* somewhere to *press it* into service of a faithful (though allegedly blind) discourse. Sterne is a mature descendant of Erasmus and Erasmus' love child Rabelais. As such he displays the elemental truths of *that* tradition with the jocular parabolae long associated with it. The equivocal nature of dogmatic confidence does not discount the essence of faith but through questioning validities of systematic means to it, discovers that essence to be rightly mysterious, 'known' instead by the experience of grace: "an extraordinary infusion" as Montaigne called it.⁸

Pierre Charron's recitation of the creed of academic scepticism "la vrai étude de l'homme est l'homme"⁹ is a catalyst to orient one's study to its proper spheres. To assault the torments of opinions —the pedantic and frequently dangerous uses of dogma based on authority, tradition, and blind assent— is no idle frolic. Bishop Joseph Butler's sermon 'Upon the Ignorance of Man' (his text is Ecclesiastes viii. 16-7) is as good a contemporary introduction to Sterne's thought as any.

Creation is absolutely and entirely out of our depth, and beyond the extent of our utmost reach. . . . And we know little more of ourselves, than we do of the world about us. . . .

This surely should convince us, that we are much less competent judges of the very small part which comes under our notice in this world, than we are apt to imagine.

And as the works of God, and his scheme of government, are above our capacities thoroughly to comprehend; so there possibly may be reasons which originally made it fit that many things should be concealed from us, which we have perhaps natural capacities of understanding; many things concerning the designs, methods, and ends of divine Providence in the government of the world. There is no manner of absurdity in supposing a veil on purpose drawn over some scenes of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness, the sight of which might some way or other strike us too strongly; or that better ends are designed and served by their being concealed, than could be by their being exposed to our knowledge. The Almighty may cast clouds and darkness round about him, for reasons and purposes of which we have not the least glimpse or conception.

If to acquire knowledge were our proper end, we should indeed be but poorly provided: but if somewhat else be our business and duty, we may, notwithstanding our ignorance, be well enough furnished for it; and the observation of our ignorance may be of assistance to us in the discharge of it.

[The inquirer] should beforehand expect things mysterious, and such as he will not be able thoroughly to comprehend, or go to the bottom of. To expect a distinct comprehensive view of the whole subject, clear of difficulties and objections, is to forget our nature and condition; neither of which admit of such knowledge with respect to any science whatever. And to inquire with this expectation, is not to inquire as a man, but as one of another order of creatures.

Knowledge is not our proper happiness.

Our province is virtue and religion, life and manners: the science of improving the temper, and making the heart better. This is the field assigned us to cultivate; how much it has lain neglected is indeed astonishing. Virtue is demonstrably the happiness of man; it consists in good actions, proceeding from a good principle, temper, or heart. Overt acts are entirely in our power. What remains is, that we learn to keep our heart; to govern and regulate our passions, mind, affections: that so we may be free from the impotencies of fear, envy, malice, covetousness, ambition; that we may be clear of these, considered as vices seated in the heart, considered as constituting a general wrong temper; from which general wrong frame of mind, all the mistaken pursuits, and far the greatest part of the

unhappiness of life, proceed. He who should find out one rule to assist us in this work, would deserve infinitely better of mankind than all the improvers of other knowledge put together.¹⁰

Sterne's faith is part and parcel with his epistemology, his vocation as preacher: *to assist us in this work*. If we misunderstand the value and hope inherent in Socratic ignorance (and Socratic dialogue) for a person of faith, we are liable to stray from Sterne's intentions. Certainly we have missed his sincerity and conscious fidelity to this epistemology as a preacher. Our lack of familiarity with its strains in the novels has therefore fared no better.

Increased interest in the sermons this past decade has been a mixed blessing. Professor New's consistent labour is significant and well reflected in Ian Ross' biography, but we may now be tempted simply to replace Lansing Hammond's version of the preacher with theirs and to delve no further into Sterne's religion.¹¹ The impressions of Sterne one gathers through these recent works can, for their nearness to truth, be more misleading than the post-Victorian caricatures drawn by our critical forebears. Better than most on Sterne's theology, Elizabeth Kraft, for example, using New's notes concludes, "Sterne's sermons were largely secondhand stuff."¹² Ian Ross, more fair than most, repeats the bias: "his sermons show a notable dependence on the published work of other preachers."¹³ Ross presents Sterne the sermon writer as ill at ease with his alleged plagiarism, and ill at ease "dealing abstractly with such theological problems [as providence and chance]."¹⁴ He is correct to draw attention to Sterne's scepticism, but his implications leave much to be desired:

Christian faith is accounted essential: not because it provides answers, but—Sterne asserts in his conclusion [to sermon 10]—as consolation for the fact that no answers are to be found. . . .

If this seems an unlikely conclusion for Sterne, then it points to a notable tension both within his sermons and within Sterne himself.¹⁵

After quoting a passage from Sterne's sermon 'Self-Knowledge', Ross claims:

this is a repeated theme in the sermons. What is striking about such passages is that here Sterne is not, as so often elsewhere, citing or paraphrasing the sermons of other divines, but re-articulating an idea evidently important to him—the impossibility of arriving at true self-knowledge. So, in 'Evil-Speaking' he argues that 'the bulk of mankind live in such a contradiction to themselves, that there is no character so hard to be met with, as one, which upon a critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and, in every point, consistent with itself.' This, Sterne contends—in a manner which recalls Montaigne, Bayle, or even Hume more than contemporary Anglicanism—is true only of men over the course of many years: 'the observation is to be made of men in the same period of their lives that in the same day, sometimes in the very same action, they are utterly inconsistent and irreconcilable with themselves.'¹⁶

Ross is correct that this theme is central to Sterne, but the repeated bias claiming dependency, coupled with a disregard of keen Anglican divines such as Berkeley, Butler, and Swift severs Sterne's integrity. As headlines to reviews of the biography suggest, Sterne's Thackerayan persona: "All Too Human", "An Unclerical Taste for Bawdiness", will survive amongst casual readers.¹⁷

Sterne's use of innuendo in his fiction has naturally engendered incredulity regarding his sincerity with religion. It is humorous to observe that most comments on Sterne's sexuality suggest either a desperate judgementalism on one hand and hopeful assumptions, on the other, that he is really our contemporary: a faithless sex machine. Sterne's contemporaries were not so precisely preoccupied. In the 1750s Horace Walpole "recalled seeing Dr. Blackburne Archbishop of York, at dinner where 'his mistress, Mrs. Curwys, sat at the head of the table, and Hayter, his natural son by another woman, and very much like him, at the bottom, as chaplain'."¹⁸ Sterne's more discreet alleged amours are still dredged up with an unbecoming sneer. We hear of "the

overwhelming evidence of Sterne's lifelong promiscuity"¹⁹ and his "flagrant and repeated infidelities"²⁰ but, like citizens of a superpower brought to their enthusiastic knees by a presidential indiscretion, focusing on insignificant handles we are distracted from more pressing matters.

In fact, more has been read into Sterne's public character than there is evidence to support. Those accusations are based primarily on two accounts: that of John Croft, who, living away from England, is unreliable on other matters regarding Sterne, and that of Richard Greenwood who related his tales to an antiquarian sixty years after he was dismissed from the Sternes' service.²¹ When reading a conclusion such as "what Sterne illustrates is that sex is *everyone's* hobby-horse"²² one does well to recall Sterne's interest in unmasking readers' propensity to be consumed by their own prepossessions and the desire to make an author's life fit one's impressions of his fiction. Sterne may, with our chronological snobbery be forgiven *as a man*, his religion playing second fiddle to his libido and his sermons at best derivative orthodoxy. Such condescension seems accepted among writers referring to Sterne's sermons and his involvement with them. Promiscuous or not, we have taken Sterne's alleged sexual engagements too much to heart, and lacking an appreciation for more significant drives are still in danger of assuming sensuality to be Sterne's religion.

It comes as no surprise that in preparation of *Approaches to Teaching Sterne's Tristram Shandy* "respondents to the MLA questionnaire without exception omitted the *Sermons* from works they might use in teaching *Tristram Shandy*."²³ Arthur Cash, in his response for that volume begins: "a few years ago someone took a poll of graduating college seniors asking them

which of the texts assigned during their college careers they most hated. *Tristram Shandy* won.”²⁴ As students of literature we are uneasy with children of mixed background who defy immediate classification and which we have not been educated to appreciate. Sterne’s education, we should remember, was primarily theological, with a foundation of philosophy and classics.²⁵ I hope in the often tedious pages that follow to present evidence that Sterne’s publications have a valuable and quite simple integrity, and that an appreciation of his investment in sermon preparation is a useful window into the hopes behind that integrity.

We should be wary of patronizing the cleric. “You thought in your heart the vein of humour too free and gay for the solemn colour of my coat” he writes recalling Erasmus’ *Moria*, “—A meditation upon Death had been a more suiting trimming to it (I own it) —but then it could not have been set on by Me.”²⁶ Sterne’s publications are above all honest. His books are like himself, and, as such, are a study of man. But are we prepared for his media? Sterne openly struggled to communicate. By 1765 he refers to the first 8 volumes of his novel as “a moral work, more read than understood” [p. 255.5 in *The Sermons of Laurence Sterne*. Ed. Melvyn New, 1996. Subsequent quotations from Sterne’s sermons will be referenced as *S* followed by page and first line number in this Florida edition]. And he there excuses his *third* publication of ‘The Abuses of Conscience considered’ by judging “that some might better like it, and others better understand it just as it was preached” (*S* 255.9). Clearly he had previously presumed that more persons would like it, and even more understand it, in the form by which it is, even today, most usually encountered: “in the body” of “that moral work.” Thus Walter Scott:

the first two volumes of *Tristram* proved introductors—singular in their character, certainly—to two volumes of sermons which the simple name of the Reverend

Laurence Sterne (ere yet he became known as the author of a fine novel) would never have recommended to notice, but which were sought for and read eagerly under that of Yorick. They maintained the character of the author for wit, genius, and eccentricity.²⁷

Sterne's moral communication, unlike that of many of his ancestors and contemporaries, is no Treatise, no Essay or Enquiry Concerning. It is, instead, in his own words "an assay upon human nature" [p. 36.15 in *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy By Mr. Yorick*. Ed. Melvyn New and W.G. Day, 2002. Subsequent quotations from *A Sentimental Journey* will be referenced as *ASJ* followed by page and first line number in this Florida edition].

The assay is infused with titillating joy, but mightn't there be more to it? Marjory David, in her introduction to a sampling of Sterne's sermons suggests

the fact that his listeners would probably leave church thinking "'tis only a sermon' could not have failed to annoy Sterne. He clearly believed that his message, joyous or sad, could reach people better through his fiction than through his turns in the pulpit.²⁸

Given Sterne's description of *Tristram Shandy* as a moral work, one would not have expected David's to be a rare conclusion. But, that Sterne had a "message" and that he consciously shifted from homily to fiction to proclaim it, or at least that certain themes in the novels are indebted to his maintained religious perspective, is a theory slow to mature. Arthur Cash operated sympathetically with *Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments* [1966]²⁹ in which he hails his mentors: Jean Paul as developed by Edmond Scherer, and Coleridge as developed by Herbert Read. Read, we should recall, wrote that

this paradox of a moral Sterne will be found more acceptable when the world begins to read that neglected half of Sterne's genius — his Sermons. There is no inconsistency—in style, in manner, and in sincerity and aim—between the Sermons and *Tristram Shandy* or the *Sentimental Journey*. . . . there, more explicitly than in his works of fiction, Sterne reveals his approach to life.³⁰

More than thirty-five years later, one senses, Read was beginning to be heeded, and it is fitting he wrote the foreword to *Sterne's Comedy* saying Cash's use of the sermons is an "original feature" of his critical method.

Initially suggestive more of nonsense than of conclusive argument, Sterne's fiction is both an examination of human nature, and a trial of his reader's ability to cooperate with that examination. His frequent flourishes are a far cry from lines of argumentation, but they do provide an engaging entertainment. The "familiarity" [p. 9.14 in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. Ed. Melvyn New and Joan New, 1978. Subsequent quotations from *Tristram Shandy* will be referenced as *TS* followed by page and first line number in this Florida edition] that Tristram hopes will grow between himself and his readers throughout the novel of his life, is the sincere gesture of a magnanimous parson. Frankly, Sterne ushers us into a fantastic salon where ancient and recent anxieties are addressed with sincerity in an atmosphere of shocking good humor. The salon is odd, the essay disjointed, but our impressions and conversations thereby provoked are entirely applicable as authentic experience. In Tristram's first chapter, ripe with misconceptions, we are initiated into the mysteries of time and the creative process which are of singular importance to the narrator and his family. Throughout that book, images of love, death, personal identity and the challenges of conversation wheel around us so lightly we almost embrace them. For we too are weary of worrying alone with inadequate minds upon such weighty trifles as spontaneous generation and the impossibility of objective perception.

Tristram and Yorick become masters of ceremonies, intermediaries between texts and selves, perpetually present, recalling our responsibility to fertilize their narratives. The creative implications of Sterne's writing are fundamentally and ultimately redemptive. This becomes obvious when his interested and humanitarian theology is appreciated. His concentration on time and death, love and writing, remind us of Donne and Shakespeare. In his concern for the individual and his mockery of gravity, we anticipate Coleridge and Blake. As Montaigne uses Epictetus' quip to open his essay entitled 'That the Relish of Goods and Evils, does, in a great measure, depend upon the Opinion we have of them', so Sterne in giving his life and opinions is concerned to offer an accurate reckoning of life and to delineate the scope of dogmatical responses to that life. To read Sterne well we must be prepared for such an inclusive adventure. His ancestors in this vein were likewise chided and misunderstood; the *Vindication of Montaigne's Essays* addressing the virtue of honest presentation that first appeared in the third edition of Cotton's translation [1700] could well stand for Sterne too:

I do not however design to defend Montaigne in every thing; far from it, I blame his Freedom in several places, and I cannot abide, that having discours'd of the exemplary Life of a Holy Man, he should immediately talk as he does of Cuckoldom and Privy-Parts, and other things of this nature, which, tho' perhaps tolerable in another place, cannot be suffer'd in this; and I wish he had left out these things, that Ladies might not be put to the blush, when his Essays are found in their Libraries, and that they might improve themselves by reading this excellent Book, without putting their Modesty to any Torment, as they must needs do, when they come to these places.

As for the rest, there is hardly any humane Book extant so fit as this to teach Men what they are, and lead them insensibly to a reasonable Observation of the most secret Springs of their Actions; and therefore it ought to be the *manuale* of all Gentlemen, his uncommon way of teaching, winning People to the Practice of Virtue, as much as other Books fright them away from it, by the dogmatical and imperious way which they assume.³¹

Chroniclers of folly such as Rabelais and Swift likewise unnerve us explicitly by bringing the *Privy-Parts* of our nature to light in works that *insensibly* lead to reasonable observation of our most secret springs. Sterne's bawdy stems from this comprehensive desire.

Reading him now, in an age no less sceptical and even more weary of alienation, we should be glad to dig up Yorick's skull and joyfully recall the limitations and enduring worth of all things earthly. Like David Hume, we may sigh at having lingered too long with scientific approaches to integrity:

Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mine or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour's amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.³²

The mania to collect and weigh evidences, well meant and useful as it may be, tends frequently to confuse and to disorient. Opinions begin to warp rather than assist the life entertaining them. Relaxation or diversion from such lines of gravitation –in theatrical comedy and social rapport for example– may in fact be the best direction to the philosopher's stone, reconciling quest with capacity. We smile to think of Hume relaxing in the presence of the Reverend Mr. Yorick in Paris:

— I had preached that very day at the Ambassador's Chapel, and *David* was disposed to make a little merry with the *Parson*; and, in return, the *Parson* was equally disposed to make a little mirth with the *Infidel*; we laughed at one another, and the company laughed with us both—³³

Hume's challenge, in 1739, that "Human Nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected"³⁴ was met by *Parson* Sterne. By 1773 Hume was stating that *Tristram Shandy* is "the best Book, that has been writ by any Englishman these thirty Years . . . bad as it is."³⁵

So, the *best book* is naughty. Like uncle Toby's bowling green, Sterne's works are offered as havens from which pragmatically to follow, and as nearly as possible participate in, the adventures and crises of worlds around and within. By entering into these mythic encounters catharsis and revelation may occur. We enter the 'little world' he presents (*TS* 10.10) and quixotically sally forth to incarnate our readings. If attentive we may find that it is this pageant, not an efficient production, that is valuable—a value inherent in the absurdities of any high-minded quest. The author himself is not aloof. He cannot help being involved and affected by the intimacy he has encouraged, and we sense his own delight in the amusements.

Sterne's sermons, no less than his novels, engage us in conversation by developing and presenting accessible environments wherein we may see and assess ourselves. Unlike those of many of his mentors, Sterne's homilies are personable, short, uncluttered and simple. He was not alone in realizing his congregation would best profit from sensible discourses. As early as 1675 Henry Hammond begins the first sermon of a serious collection saying he will deal with his theme of sin in God's chosen people "briefly and plainly; not to encrease your knowledge, but to enliven and enflame the practical part of your souls; not to enrich your brains with new store, but

to sink that which you have already down into your hearts.”³⁶ As we shall see, Sterne goes even farther in attempting to plumb the inner motives of the personalities he presents. Reading Anthony Blackwall’s popular *The Sacred Classics Defended and Illustrated* [1725], we recognize Sterne’s fidelity to realistic theology:

True native eloquence consists in . . . such a style and manner of speaking as is proper and suitable to the subject; and such as is apt to teach, to affect, and persuade.

The sacred writers are earnest and fervent: they speak of things within their knowledge; are thoroughly acquainted with, and zealously concern’d in the importance of the great things they deliver. These good dispositions and qualifications produce a style natural, unaffected and lively; which is admirably fitted to convince and inflame the readers.³⁷

Vigor without artifice was the goal, and it should be no surprise that the products of many careful mid-century sermon writers are considerably less formal than the chambered discourses of previous generations. A sermon that is natural and in line with the divine mysteries will by definition have elements that seem arbitrary. As Bishop Berkeley states,

Is it at all absurd or unsuitable to the notion we have of God or man, to suppose that God may reveal, and yet reveal with a reserve upon certain remote and sublime subjects, content to give us hints and glimpses, rather than views? May we not also suppose, from the reason of things and the analogy of nature, that some points, which might otherwise have been more clearly explained, were left obscure merely to encourage our diligence and modesty?³⁸

As in Sterne’s novels, what would otherwise seem to be lapses of explication serve as challenges to reinforce our necessary participation; again Blackwall:

A style that imitates the different appearances of nature, and, as some express it, its beautiful irregularities, which I would rather call its beautiful varieties, entertains the mind and imagination with a most grateful variety of sensations and reflections; and gratifies the curiosity of human nature with a perpetual succession of new-rising scenes and fresh pleasures.

ELLIPSIS or defect in the first-rate authors often makes the language strong and close, and pleases an intelligent reader, by leaving something for him to fill up, and giving him room to exercise his own thought and sagacity.³⁹

In light of Sterne's reiteration that he trusts his readers to supply half the entertainment, these statements are telling in a theological context. Thus the advice of John Norris: " 'tis convenient to leave something for the Contemplative Reader to work out by himself."⁴⁰ This cooperative approach, and Sterne's reticence to rehearse dogma with a congregation already saturated, lies behind the content (or what some have seen as the lack of it) of his sermons. Once aware of this context we can begin to appreciate how faithfully Sterne applies his concern. In sermon 24, for example, he says

thus much for the illustration of this one argument of our SAVIOUR's against Pride:—there are many other considerations which expose the weakness of it, which his knowledge of the heart of man might have suggested . . . the other arguments might be omitted, which perhaps in a set discourse would be doing injustice to the subject. I shall therefore, in the remaining part of this, beg leave to offer some other considerations of a moral as well as a religious nature upon this subject, as so many inducements to check this weak passion in man. (*S* 228.25)

Following the lead of Jesus, his parabolic hero, Sterne constructs discourses that do not presume to offer a comprehensive study of his text and theme, but rather "hints and glimpses" in Berkeley's words. Sterne notes that it is to be wished that one could, for maladies of the mind "write a history of the distemper,—and ascertain all the symptoms of the malady, so that every one might know," as one may for "the more malignant and epidemical cases of the body." "—But alas!" he says (regarding slander) "the symptoms of this appear in so many strange, and contradictory shapes, and vary so wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be classed,—or reduced to any one regular system." (*S* 108.9)

Any one regular system will not do for Sterne. Realizing that the complexities of the human mind and spirit are likewise mysterious, he refrains from composing a nousapaedia. Instead he skirmishes with evils on their own chaotic turf. We should reassess the heritage that claims his meanderings trace a ‘freethinking’ or ‘sentimental’ religion; Sterne was attempting neither to entertain his parishioners nor distract them from essentials. Reviewing the history of Jacob for example, he is careful we not indulge ourselves with fruitless pathos:

—every looker-on has an interest in the tragedy;—but then we are apt to interest ourselves no otherwise, than merely as the incidents themselves strike our passions, without carrying the lesson further:—in a word—we realize nothing:—we sigh—we wipe away the tear,—and there ends the story of misery, and the moral with it.

Let us try to do better with this. (*S* 207.1)

Discussions of Sterne’s sentiment will do well to acknowledge his appreciation for the moral hidden in passions struck.

He wrote that preaching “is useless where men have *wit enough* to be honest.”⁴¹ In 1759, wit and honesty presiding, he began to accomplish a dramatic shift of his prebendal forums. If Hume, discussing ‘Personal Identity,’ would proclaim that the so-called self is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement,”⁴² then Sterne would address that *self* as it is, with a novel of dizzying proportions. The scope confused some wise heads, Johnson and Walpole for instance, but theologically we should not be surprised. A semblance of chaos usually attends significant revelation. As a congregation around the first Christian disciples at the feast of Pentecost learned, when divinity chooses to address curiosity, the effects are more often

surprising and mysterious than rational and familiar.⁴³ The elusive nature of individuals and of the Word provoked Sterne to embrace a universe of compelling media.

Consequent to this approach, much of the pliable reader's delight is in realizing the entertainment, or Holy Ghost, was already within him. That he as reader and communicant was, in fact, trusted to bring a luncheon of that entertainment with him. The reader is not so much put upon a quest to understand Sterne, as he is prevailed upon to attempt to know himself. Montaigne likewise concluded in the above referenced *essai*, "all external Accessions receive Taste and Colour from the internal Constitution, as Cloaths warm us, not with their Heat, but our own."⁴⁴ Far as this approach may seem from the straightness of pulpit discourse, it is classic preaching, from Gorgias to the Dalai Lama. "It is significant," wrote Chesterton,

that in the greatest religious poem existent, the Book of Job, the argument which convinces the infidel is not (as has been represented by the merely rational religionism of the eighteenth century) a picture of the ordered beneficence of the Creation; but, on the contrary, a picture of the huge and undecipherable unreason of it. "Hast thou sent the rain upon the desert where no man is?" This simple sense of wonder at the shapes of things, and at their exuberant independence of our intellectual standards and our trivial definitions, is the basis of spirituality as it is the basis of nonsense.⁴⁵

In an era concerned to explicate the reasonableness of religion and the accessibility of empirical knowledge, Sterne was inclined to represent and to celebrate the undecipherable unreason of *things*. I believe he hoped this would be a basis of spiritual understanding and thus of faithful optimism. The following study is meant in particular to examine the longstanding charges of plagiarism and dogmatic laxity against Sterne the sermon writer, and to see if, in a complementary way, the seeming chaos and evident humor of his fiction might be said to serve and encourage healthy, faithful, even reasonable perspectives. This should begin to illuminate

Sterne's appreciation for 'fideistic scepticism;' that communicating the value of unknowing was for him as for Job, Ecclesiastes, and Saint doubting Thomas, a transitional endeavor long-since become rhetorical and reconciled by an epiphany of grace.

This thesis proceeds first by outlining the contexts —and establishing the vigor— of Sterne's sermon preparation. The use he makes of his sources and of scripture is presented within the forum of his contemporaries' works and expectations. This milieu developed, I then suggest ways in which Sterne's understanding of the gospel, and his rhetorical skill in communicating it, is borne out in his fiction.

While he was composing what was to be the final instalment of *Tristram*, Sterne wrote to John Hall-Stevenson suggesting they attend the York races: “—If you would profit by y^r misfortunes, & laugh away misery there for a week—ecco lo il vero Punchinello! I am your man.”⁴⁶ Naples, where Sterne had enjoyed Carnival a few months before, is home to the anecdote to which he alludes. Lewis Curtis provides the setting from Samuel Sharp's *Letters from Italy* [1767].

At *Naples* there is a place called the *Largo del Castello*, not unlike our *Tower-Hill*, the resort of the idle populace. Here, every afternoon, Monks and Mountebanks, Pickpockets and Conjurors, follow their several occupations. The Monk (for I never saw more than one at a time) holds forth, like our itinerant field-preachers, to what congregation he can collect; the mountebank, by means of Punch, and his fellow comedians, endeavours to gather as great an audience as he can. It happened one day, that Punch succeeded marvelously, and the poor Monk preached to the air, for not a living creature was near him: Mortified and provoked that a puppet-shew, within thirty yards of him, should draw the attention of the people from the Gospel to such idle trash, with a mixture of rage and religion he held up the crucifix, and called aloud, *Ecco il vero Pulcinella*; —“*Here is the true Pulchinello, —come here, —come here!*” —The story is so well known in *Naples* to be true, that the most devout people tell it; and, were it not for such a sanction, I should hardly have repeated it.⁴⁷

Sterne was not so squeamish, and could appreciate the poignancy. Despite claims of many a critic, such theatrics are absent from his sermons. With his fiction however, Sterne draws a larger circle, well aware of God's apparent folly and of his own vocation as a fool in Christ.

Therefore, my dear friend and companion, if you should think me somewhat sparing of my narrative on my first setting out,—bear with me,—and let me go on, and tell my story my own way:—or if I should seem now and then to trifle upon the road,—or should sometimes put a fool's cap with a bell to it, for a moment or two as we pass along,—don't fly off,—but rather courteously give me credit for a little more wisdom than appears upon my outside;—and as we jogg on, either laugh with me, or at me, or in short, do any thing,—only keep your temper. (*TS* 9.18)

II ~ STERNE'S COMPOSITION OF SERMONS

Why Bother?

One can hardly relish the task of being critical with Sterne. Do we not with every page scribbled admit an unwillingness to follow his critical jests? Shouldn't we be cheered by Gerald Weales' Afterword to an edition of *Tristram Shandy* which, in its entirety, reads "And so it is"?¹ Awareness of personal and topical limitations is only the beginning. Because Sterne's assay of our paradigms and perspectives is masked and gentle, vivisection seems inappropriate. We are attempting to fix a character who declares, as part of his oddly placed preface to *Tristram Shandy*, "I hate set dissertations" (*TS* 235.9), and who perpetually defied his readers to anticipate their destination. These taunts engage us though, and lead us, as in all good conversation, to a previously unknown place, or to a new vision of familiar territory. This is the Sterne of *Tristram* and the *Journey*.

I recently purchased the Shakespeare Head edition of the sermons [1927] as a discard from a busy public library ~ the pages were uncut. Reading Sterne criticism we may be surprised at the lack of attention afforded these popular homilies. The sounds that have reverberated are of varying quality. Clearly, few critics have bothered to read the sermons with care and an informed sense of theological texts and contexts that would have been second nature to Sterne. Until recently, no comprehensive outline of Sterne's homiletic character had emerged. Instead, we have been offered statements suspiciously convenient to arguments of critics wishing to elaborate on theories developed according to the fiction, or conclusions presented from the exclusive domain of a certain school of thought. Otherwise perceptive scholars confidently present

statements having no possible basis in fact: “his most dramatic sermons were preached to rural congregations and never committed to paper except as notes;”² “Sterne was not a religious man. He had no true religious leanings or principles himself, and he could not appreciate them in others,”³ and so on.

Common homiletic devices and then-current theology are misread and dubbed Shandean. Dramatization of scripture has been fathered on Sterne with little understanding of its traditional place in preaching.⁴ Accusations of plagiarism are accepted with scant recourse to his alleged sources, and of secular humanism with little understanding of the context and presuppositions of his congregations.⁵ Harlan Hamilton, one of the few to devote more than a glance to the background of Sterne’s discourses, gives us extraordinary detail surrounding the Paris sermon, right down to the room’s present decor and unobtrusive heating system. But, when he renders what was preached that day into “Sterne would have us get what enjoyment we can from life. He justifies the behavior of Hezekiah, and incidentally that of Lord Hertford,” too few will realize that Hamilton is writing from the realm of extravagant fantasy.⁶ Fortunately we can be undeceived in fifteen or twenty minutes ~ by reading the sermon.

Readers of his homilies may be excused for an initial inclination to hear the bells and catch the winks with which we are familiar from the novels. But Sterne had spent over twenty years composing those sermons, and preaching from pulpits before introducing us to his fictional progeny. Like Tristram himself, the overnight success of *The Life and Opinions* was not spontaneously generated, so the influence of these decades of clerical gestation ought to be well marked. Sterne consistently reminds us of the pitfalls of prepossession. From abuses of conscience

to Diego's nose he evokes impressions of the claim that minds prematurely convinced and hearts inaccurately disposed account for the world's greatest tragedies, and for countless inconveniences. To give the sermons their due it is appropriate to forfeit expectations based on his fiction, and chronologically apt to begin with Sterne's beginning, not grasping with critical forceps an homuncular Tristram, but evaluating effects of the religious milieu enveloping his career.

Two long-reigning critical complaints about Sterne's sermons have encouraged neglect. These are alleged plagiarism and the alleged substitution of a sentimental or jocular morality for the gospel of Christ. Because these charges are as unfounded as they are persistently adopted, there is considerable merit in establishing correctives.

While it has been recognized that to weigh charges of thoughtless copying, clarification is required to understand the role of "plagiarism" in the composition of sermons, we have yet to appreciate how Sterne used and revised material available to him. He repeats himself, plunders others, and weaves hundreds of allusions to scripture through his forty-five sermons. Is he faithful to the gospel, is he dependent on his sources? Is his exegesis classic, unique or trifling? Are the forms and moods of his sermons extraordinary? May we accurately assign dates to their composition? Are there significant differences between the sermons Sterne chose to publish (Vols. i-iv) and those swept up by his wife and daughter (v-vii)? By addressing these questions towards a better understanding of Sterne's perspective on sermon composition and content, we will be prepared to examine extents to which his faith informs his more popular works.

COMPOSITION DATES & INITIAL PUBLICATION

Curiously, an issue much discussed by critics who *have* attempted the sermons is of no great importance if we have no prejudice against sincere parsons writing odd novels. Beside the overblown revelation that some of his phrases originated with others is this question of the initial dates of composition. The tedious work of sifting what Sterne probably read, in preparation for his duties as parson, sheds light on his capacities. Lansing Hammond concentrated on this in *Laurence Sterne's Sermons of Mr. Yorick* [1948], but his influential work is a mixed blessing.⁷ His appendix of source material is valuable, but the text preceding it is awash with contradictions and insupportable generalizations. It is typical of interest in Sterne's sermons that this pioneering work survived the guidance of C.B. Tinker, the suggestions of Cross, Curtis and Pottle, and thirty years of readers before its presuppositions and conclusions were publicly reassessed.⁸

One of Hammond's more suspect contributions to Sterne studies is the result of his extended attempt to assign composition dates to the sermons. The reader who takes Hammond at his word is likely to dismiss what he is told are Sterne's early sermons as, at best, youthful imitations full of plagiarized commonplaces, and to view the later as primarily proto-fictional exercises, each group void of considered religious application on Sterne's part. That, according to Hammond, almost all were composed at least a decade prior to *TS* suggests, we are told, Sterne's waning interest and argues a desire for fame and fortune. As this has fitted comfortably into most readers' sense of what the author of *TS* and *ASJ* would think of conventional religion, the dating game has sewn bells to the parson's frock.

Hammond's comments suggest that the image of a careless parson informs his attempt at devising a timeline for the sermons. While he claims to offer a comprehensive view of the sermons, he instead bequeaths to us the inherited prejudice for reading in them a weakness of commitment:

though Sterne may thus be absolved from charges of heresy, there is not a great deal of evidence to show that he was particularly concerned with the doctrines peculiar to or distinctive to the Christian religion; his precepts tend to make of Christianity a moral philosophy rather than a religion —. . . .
Yorick's Christianity was of a less strenuous, more agreeable nature; he preached what he liked to believe, always emphasizing the pleasantness of his creed.⁹

However, as James Downey makes clear in "*The Sermons of Mr. Yorick: A Reassessment of Hammond*", the more closely one reads Hammond, checks his footnotes and delves into his appendix, the more one becomes frustrated with his conjectures regarding the time-line. "My own analysis of Hammond's book ["to date the only serious study of Sterne as *preacher*"] has led me to believe that his hypotheses are not sound and that his reasoning in support of them is challengeable at many points."¹⁰

Downey's comments on Hammond's attempt to discern a pattern in Sterne's style and habits in order to date and categorize the sermons are accurate. Given the common practice of reusing well-worded phrases, even the few sermons for which we have a particular date are composites of many years' alterations and repetitions. Hammond bemoans the "brief and superficial generalizations" of his forebears, and then begins weakly to support his own.¹¹ His decision that in Volumes v-vii we are faced with Sterne immature, given to "uninspired borrowing," and that in Volumes i-iv we have "Yorick's self-emancipation from a more-or-less slavish dependence upon others" and from an "obvious and conventional use of the Scriptures"¹²

is gratuitous, without regard for the contexts that the sermons are developing or for the expectations of a mid-eighteenth century Anglican congregation — contexts and expectations we will soon address. Hammond is confused in noting that Sterne's "earlier" practice of verbatim borrowing is both "slavish" and skilful: the result of considered approval of the words and meaning of the original.¹³ Arriving at the so-called mature Sterne (still pre-1750) we find Hammond praising as unique, features that are typical of *any* good preaching:

the same ability to conceive dialogue, create characters, and furnish a scene with sharply etched backgrounds; the digressions and the eccentricities of punctuation; the obvious delight in alternately shocking and then moving people to tears by deft portrayals of the soft and delicate states of emotion; and the whole, clothed in a style as subtle and flexible in texture and showing as great an economy of means as any that English prose had yet known.¹⁴

His ancillary proclamation: "in the four earlier-published volumes . . . the majority of discourses could have been composed by no one but Yorick," is a misleading symptom of allowing an impression of Sterne's fiction to rule one's reading of his sermons. It would be prudent instead to recognize that those "distinctive" skills we appreciate in the author of *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*, were honed during and in large part a product of decades of preaching weighty matters enveloped in commonplace themes, using classic oratorical tools. Hammond's self-contradictions lead one to conclude that questions of an 'original composition date,' whether that be during an earlier or later period of Sterne's career, are better answered by thinking of Sterne choosing sermons to his liking, regardless of when they were composed, and polishing them for press. As we shall see, deftly manipulating tradition, Sterne mastered the art of commonplace religious conversation.

Melvyn New in *Laurence Sterne as Satirist* [1969] claimed that *TS* is best “understood by locating it in the mainstream of conservative, moralistic Augustan tradition.”¹⁵ Over three decades New has consistently offered provocative readings involving the sermons, recently given us the first complete edition of the sermons since Shakespeare Head, and eclipsed Hammond’s appendix with his notes to the sermons: the fifth volume of the Florida edition of Sterne’s works. New’s preface to this volume offers elements of a much improved context within which to begin to read the sermons. In a few pages he withers the presumption that Sterne, incorrigible plagiarist, was haphazardly organizing moral essays full of unique sentimental description and empty of doctrine. The introduction and comprehensive notes of the volume help to illustrate Sterne’s manner of sermon composition and his Anglican background while illuminating New’s own perspective on the extent to which that background influenced Sterne and his writing. I pick some bones with New’s generous writings in this dissertation, but without him there would be nary a bone^{to}₄ pick.

Like Hammond’s, New’s conjectures regarding the sermons’ initial publication need further consideration. I do not agree “it is important to keep in mind that the twelve sermons of Volumes iii and iv are the only ones Sterne labored over to any extent in preparing his sermons for the printer.”¹⁶ We should recall Sterne’s insertion of the sermon which a decade prior “could find neither purchasers nor readers” (*S* 1.15), into the first instalment of his surprising novel, with the “promise” (*S* 1.16) “that there are now in the possession of the *Shandy* Family, as many as will make a handsome volume” (*TS* 167.20). Sterne’s letter of November 1759, usually quoted for its “I am tired of employing my brains for other people’s advantage,” also says “as I shall

publish my works very soon, I shall be in town by March.”¹⁷ It is doubtful that “works” refers only to the first volumes of *Tristram*, and, clearly, though Croft’s lift to London may have been a surprise on the day he offered it, Sterne was not as unprepared about getting himself and his sermons to town as the Whiteford papers (and subsequent biographers until Ross) have implied.¹⁸ On 4 March *The DRAMATIC SERMONS of Mr. YORICK* were advertised in the *York Courant*, prior to Sterne’s first meeting with Dodsley the following day.

New admits “Sterne clearly knew what he wanted to do when he left York,” so one would expect that considerably to allay any remaining “wonderment” at Sterne’s having “had the presence of mind to throw some of his sermons into his bag” when he rushed to London.¹⁹ Though we remember the first two volumes of sermons were issued (22 May) only six weeks after the first London edition of *Tristram* (3 April), and just five days prior to the next, we should not conclude that he was too busy sufficiently to edit chosen sermons, that Volumes i and ii are the fruit of a careless attempt to flourish. Probably Sterne was preparing the first volumes of sermons simultaneously with those of his novel, careful to choose discourses that would “balance” his “Shandaic character” and at the same time complement what he was communicating: “at the world’s service,—and much good may they do it.” (TS 167.21)²⁰

CONTEMPORARY EXPECTATIONS

How then, was this *good* to be communicated? If one were to define the popular notion of shandyism, translated into homiletic mode, the list of requirements would include all the elements with which Sterne as published parson has been charged: scattered sentimental musings

without regard for doctrine or structure, and some form of snickering that makes light of the gospel and its requirements. Expecting this, of course, we've found it. But are his sermons really that extraordinarily poor ~ the half-plagiarized product of a winking deist? Critics of literature have displayed considerable ignorance in their attacks upon Sterne's clerical sincerity. So it is fit to review elements of what mid-eighteenth century congregations were expecting or desiring from the pulpit, as their age was witnessing a dramatic shift in sermon format. Improvements advanced over the previous century began to take root, and in the words of John Eachard, Anglican preachers were dissuaded from "high tossing and swaggering Preaching; either mountingly Eloquent or profoundly Learned," and from relying upon "hard Words, high Notions, and unprofitable Quotations out of learned Languages."²¹ Beginning with John Wilkins' *Ecclesiastes: or A discourse concerning the gift of preaching as it falls under the rules of Art* [1646] a number of guides to preaching had outlined a new emphasis, away from the embellishments and obscurities of earlier decades. John Eachard, James Arderne, and Joseph Glanvill among others, all wrote in the latter half of the seventeenth century extolling the virtues of the 'plain' sermon, simply introduced, reasonably expanded with an emphasis on practicalities.

Familiarity with these popular works is necessary to achieve a sense of how Sterne would have been educated to preach. If one parallels them with examples from Sterne's contemporaries, a just reckoning is possible. A few decades after Sterne's death, Hugh Blair the famed sermon writer and professor of rhetoric makes clear the challenge of the preacher's vocation. Though,

even *because* he speaks to a captive audience, the preacher's responsibility requires considerable investment.

His subjects of discourse are, in themselves, noble and important; but they are subjects trite and familiar. They have, for ages, employed so many speakers, and so many pens; the public ear is so much accustomed to them, that it requires more than an ordinary power of genius to fix attention. Nothing within the reach of art is more difficult, than to bestow, on what is common, the grace of novelty. No sort of composition whatever is such a trial of skill, as where the merit of it lies wholly in the execution; not in giving any information that is new, not in convincing men of what they did not believe; but in dressing truths which they knew, and of which they were before convinced, in such colours as may most forcibly affect their imagination and heart.²²

As we shall see, Blair's is a superb summation of Sterne's duty as he apparently viewed it, and critics who mark the lack of doctrinally compelling material in Sterne should note it and its precedents. For example, James Arderne in *Directions Concerning the Matter and Stile of Sermons* [1671] had long since suggested "there are another sort of Doctrines, which though useful and true, ought not to be the frequentest matter of Sermons; those are the Fundamentals of our Religion." Repetition of dogma, he claims, is not only useless, but suggests that there might still be room for doubt. "Reason" he goes on to say, is indispensable "to confirm our faith" because "Enthusiasm or bare Tradition" are "both of them bad Nurses."²³ Even the appeal to reason has limits in matters mysterious. Jonathan Swift, in *his Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately enter'd into Holy Orders* [1721] is succinct:

I do not find that you are any where directed in the Canons, or Articles, to attempt explaining the Mysteries of the Christian Religion. And, indeed, since Providence intended there should be Mysteries; I do not see how it can be agreeable to Piety, Orthodoxy, or good Sense, to go about such a Work.²⁴

The Church of England preacher, as the previous quotation of Blair makes clear, was not in a position of weekly catechizing the adult congregation before him, his duty was to rekindle and maintain gospel interest. John Conybeare [1692-1755: Lord Bishop of Bristol and Dean of Christ Church Oxford] ends his sermon on 'The Excellency of Charity above Faith and Hope' with words echoed by countless preachers in that era: "these are only hints of what has been explained to you, with much greater Advantage, on other Occasions; and in which I pretend not so much to instruct, as to remind you."²⁵ In fact, elaborate attention to details, anxiety to explicate mysteries and to say everything on one's chosen topic was by Sterne's day generally appreciated as unhelpful. The best sermons are not studied dissertations. Blair illuminates with relish themes nurtured more than a century earlier:

the eloquence of the pulpit, then, must be popular eloquence. One of the first qualities of preaching is to be popular . . . in the true sense of the word, calculated to make impression on the people; to strike and seize their hearts.

. . . never study to say all that can be said upon a subject; no error is greater than this. Select the most useful, the most striking, and persuasive topics, which the text suggests, and rest the discourse upon these. . . . It is much less for the sake of information than of persuasion, that discourses are delivered from the pulpit; and nothing is more opposite to persuasion than an unnecessary and tedious fullness. There are always some things which the preacher may suppose to be known, and some things which he may only slightly touch.²⁶

Such exhortations serve us well in observing elements of Sterne's reasoned but lively discourses which were developed to serve best the doctrines at the heart of Christianity. During the century and a half from Wilkins to Blair, simplicity and practicality became the chief virtues of a good sermon style. To fault Sterne for discourses void of complexities of critical theology is

inappropriate. “In short, a *Preacher* is to fancy himself, as in the room of the most unlearned Man in his whole Parish.”²⁷

Though we have accounts of his success, when Sterne preached “nearly extempore”²⁸ was he shirking a duty to offer a well-composed sermon? Bishop John Wilkins: “as for the manner of composing sermons, it will not be convenient for one that is a constant Preacher, to pen all his discourses, or to tie himself unto phrases: When we have the matter and notion well digested, the expressions of it will easily follow.”²⁹ Indeed a considerable distinction is made between three manners of preaching: “extempore,” “speaking,” and “reading.” *Reading* was admitted to be the unfortunate peculiarity of English preachers.³⁰ *Speaking*, that is reciting from memory or notes a carefully crafted sermon, and a well presented extempore sermon, were seen both to be valuable when coming from capable clergy. A good extempore sermon signifies interested vigor rather than laziness, as it indicates a preacher’s thorough facility. Thus Archbishop Fénelon in his *Dialogues Concerning Eloquence* [1722]:

if they who get their sermons by-heart, were to preach without that preparation, ’tis likely they wou’d succeed very ill.: nor am I surpriz’d at it: For, they are not accusom’d to follow Nature: they have study’d only to compose their sermons; and that too with affectation. They have never once thought of speaking in a noble, strong, and natural manner. Indeed the greatest Part of Preachers have not a sufficient fund of solid knowledge to depend on, and are therefore afraid to trust themselves without the usual preparation.³¹

Blair is in complete agreement:

as to the question, whether it be most proper to write sermons fully, and commit them accurately to memory, or to study only the matter and thoughts, and trust the expression, in part at least, to the delivery? I am of opinion that no universal rule can here be given. The choice of either of these methods will be left to preachers, according to their different genius.³²

Sterne's sermons are on the short side compared to those of his contemporaries and mentors.³³ Though this could indicate *wit* interest, it has noble precedent. Bishop Gilbert Burnet, suggesting a half-hour as appropriate, wrote in *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care* [1692]: "the shorter Sermons they are, they are generally both better heard, and better remembered."³⁴ The sermon at George III's coronation lasted fifteen minutes.³⁵ Sterne found his congregations similarly inclined to brevity, as is evident in his letter to the treasurer of the foundling hospital at which he was to preach in May of 1761. Sterne writes promising to "discharge my conscience of my promise in giving you, not a half hour (not a poor half hour,) for I never could preach so long without fatiguing both myself and my flock to death—but I will give you a short sermon." The oft-quoted lines that preaching is a "theologic flap upon the heart" and "useless where men have *wit enough* to be honest" conclude this letter.³⁶

A significant element of Sterne's vocation was seen to be an encouragement of this verifying *wit*. Preaching would be useless and is, among men wise enough to maintain self-knowledge. But, as the majority of mortals require a catalyst, it behooves the preacher to proceed in a manner calculated for maximum effect. Sterne does not imply that preaching was useless or beneath him, but rather that his brevity was a result of healthy sensitivity and good manners. It is not too fanciful to suggest that as in his fiction, where the reader is expected to bring half the entertainment with him, so the attentive listener could be relied upon to contribute thoughts sufficient to supplement brevity or lack of explication. Indeed the financial return for this charity sermon, 'The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus', was considerable.³⁷ It should be of interest that Fénelon's reasons for homiletic brevity parallel Sterne's:

in fine, I wou'd have every preacher make such sermons as shou'd not be too troublesome to him; that so he might be able to preach often. They ought therefore to be short; that without fatiguing himself or wearying the people he might preach every *Sunday*, after the gospel.³⁸

REPETITION OF SELF

We should now examine elements surrounding the important and reiterated charge that “Sterne’s sermons are largely secondhand stuff.”³⁹ This implication that much of his material is thoughtlessly copied is incorrect. That the reuse of one’s own sermons or parts thereof was common practice in Sterne’s day is evident from the following quotations of Thomas Sharp’s *Discourses on Preaching* [1755-7] which were initially intended for younger clergy “who were still closely employed in composition, and had neither hitherto attained a sufficient stock of sermons, nor had formed, by custom and practice, a settled mode or habit of delivery.”

Young preachers are but too apt to be solicitous about elegance in their phrases, and study to be *polite* in all their expressions; and sometimes *polish* them *so high*, that vulgar hands can lay no hold on them . . . whereas old preachers are generally so sensible of these mistaken notions and misplaced labours, that they commonly grow sick of their own juvenile compositions, and scarce know how to bring them up again into the pulpit; at least without some proper retrenchment of the redundances. . . .

I am only giving you some general hints of points which may be persued at leisure by as many of you as are yet employed in compositions, and are not already furnished with a stock of discourses sufficient for the demands of your stations and cures.⁴⁰

Once furnished with a sufficient stock of homilies, the conscientious preacher occasionally reworks them to suit his temper and that of his congregation. It should come as no surprise, then, that one inescapable conclusion in reading the forty-five sermons is that Sterne had a catalogue of preachable themes and a number of well-worded phrases he enlisted for

appropriate contexts. The themes that most engaged Sterne will be outlined in the following chapter, what interests us here is marking his use of others' material.

USE OF SCRIPTURE

Beside lack of textual evidence, perhaps the most pointed objection to the view of Sterne as uninterested copyist is his flair for communication. The sermons flow with ease and integrity, even in his use of scripture, commonplaces, or sources, auditors would not have the sense of hearing a string of quotations or clichés. Platitudes he was bound by his office, if not by his faith, to proclaim, are presented vigorously, not in formal dogmatics but with dramatic style, seeming to emanate from the heart. As indicated above, this accords with the general trend of contemporary Anglican discourse. That Sterne was not unique in so presenting the gospel⁴¹ should not lessen our appreciation for how well he works. It is especially this skill, not alleged novelty or the effects of alleged plagiarism, which his contemporaries —often in spite of themselves— admired.

Some of Sterne's critics have noticed his capacity to use the language of scripture to great advantage. Vicesimus Knox did not approve of *TS* or *ASJ*, and objected to what he took to be wit in the sermons. It is striking therefore that in *Essays Moral and Literary* [published 1778 on the advice of Samuel Johnson] he uses Sterne as his prime example of one who managed to use scriptural idiom to great effect. While our concentration is the sermons, it is imperative to note that Knox is referring to the entire Sterne canon:

there are a thousand instances of his imitating scripture interspersed in all the better parts of his works, and no reader of common observation can pass them by

unnoticed. . . . [Sterne] felt himself unequal to the task of advancing the style of pathos to its highest perfection, and sought assistance from the Bible.⁴²

Not only are Sterne's phrases, even in his letters, overflowing with biblical allusions, but his style is so saturated with the cadence and vitality of scripture and the Book of Common Prayer that in places the language is indistinguishable. Through his notes to the sermons New offers statements regarding Sterne's biblical usages, for example:

in the forty-five sermons, I suspect there are more than one thousand scriptural allusions.

The passage [S 215.32-216.11, paralleled in part at 290.1, and 320.30] glances at several scriptural verses, a good indication of just how steeped was Sterne's pulpit voice in the language of the Bible and the BCP. . . .

The ease with which Sterne (or an undiscovered source) gathers scriptural verses on the subject of pride . . . may be natural to a Bible-centered theology, but a sermon-writer could also seek help in such works as *A Common-place Book to the Holy Bible*.⁴³

Freely to quote scripture to support one's argument or prose style was of course essential.

Recalling Fénelon's requirement for a sound extempore sermon, it is vital to grasp Sterne's intimate familiarity with the Bible. We can do away with New's suspicion concerning the use of extra-biblical sources for scriptural flourishes, by recognizing Sterne's habit of alluding to a biblical phrase or event without direct citation. The consistent presence of scriptural hints in various contexts of all Sterne's writings, personal and public, highlights his ability. Most noticeable is his penchant for using relatively familiar phrases in contexts quite removed from their original. Often the use is of only a few words, but the result is striking, no less for the integrity the phrase possesses; as if what in others seems to be a technique of imitation, in Sterne after years of practice had become natural.⁴⁴

If we recall Blair's license to metaphor, Sterne's whispering use of Joseph's coat in sermon 1 may be appreciated. Biblically it is Jacob's gift to his favorite son, returned to him bloody by jealous sons as proof that the boy was dead. With Sterne it is an emblem of false happiness: a deceitful chaperone to pleasure "tells the enquirer . . . that happiness lives only in company with the great in the midst of much pomp and outward state. That he will easily find her out by the coat of many colours she has on" (*S* 3.19; cf. Gen. xxxvii.3). Two paragraphs later, Sterne conflates Ecclesiastes ii.24 and iii.22 and continues with a subtle connection of the devil to ambition: "to rescue him from this brutal experiment—ambition takes him by the hand and carries him into the world—shews him all the kingdoms of the earth and the glory of them—" (cf. Matt. iv.8; Luke iv.5-6).

Sterne's ability to conflate portions of multiple verses otherwise unconnected (e.g. at 9.10), could be attributed to undetected borrowings or 'preachers' helpers', but we would then need to account for the frequency of these allusions in miniature. His instinctive wielding of the idiom argues for thorough saturation and creative interest. Too many hints are dropped to warrant another conclusion.⁴⁵ In the following excerpt from sermon 34 for example, Sterne conflates parts of at least 4 psalms from the Authorized Version and two from the Psalter.

—He knew this infinite Being, though his dwelling was so high—that his glory was above the heavens,—yet humbled himself to behold the things that are done in heaven and earth:—that he was not an idle and distant spectator of what passed there, but that he was a present help in time of trouble:—that he bowed the heavens and came down to over-rule the course of things; delivering the poor, and him that was in misery, from him that was too strong for him; lifting the simple out of his distress, and guarding him by his providence, so that no man should do him wrong:—that neither the sun should smite him by day, neither the moon by night. (*S* 325.6-16)

Sterne's familiarity with scripture's language enabled him spontaneously to recollect phrases and to apply them in appropriate contexts. As he is a master of fragments this should not seem inconsistent. One surprising but doctrinally apt example of this is his inoculation of Jesus' statement in Matt. xix.29, for his dramatization of the man sent from the dead to reassure us that we need *not* forsake houses, lands, possessions . . .

He might tell us, (after the most indisputable credentials of whom he served) That he was come a messenger from the great GOD of Heaven, with reiterated proposals, whereby much was to be granted us on his side,—and something to be parted with on ours: but, that, not to alarm us,—'twas neither houses, nor land, nor possessions;—'twas neither wives, or children, or brethren, or sisters, which we had to forsake;—no one rational pleasure to be given up;—no natural endearment to be torn from.—

—In a word, he would tell us, We had nothing to part with—but what was not for our interests to keep,—and that was our Vices; which brought death and misery to our doors. (S 215.7-18)

Exegetes trying to apply the gist of Jesus' harder sayings to a stable community of believers had long since interpreted renunciation in like manner, but Sterne's zest is particularly compelling in having a messenger from heaven proclaim the practical morality in reversed gospel language.

We can see the same pattern in Sterne's use of certain favorite phrases of other sermon-writers, and, as New says in his headnote to sermon 13, "watching Sterne re-weave the same ideas again and again, one is tempted to argue he is reaching into materials thoroughly absorbed within his own repository of arguments and illustrations, whatever their origins might once have been."⁴⁶ This is a temptation we need not resist. Two statements of Anthony Blackwall accord with Sterne's habit of repeating himself and others often in commonplace expressions:

REPETITION of precepts and morals is often found in the sacred writers, and is design'd to waken mens attention; and by repeated strokes to impress those important truths, deeper in their minds.

Proverbial expressions are generally very significant, and contain much sense in few words, as resulting from the long observation and constant experience of mankind.⁴⁷

Sterne's use of scriptural medleys is of course not unique to the genre. As Gilbert Burnet suggests, in preparation for a life of ministry the young priest should first "read the Scriptures very exactly, he must have great Portions of them by heart; and he must also in reading them make a short Concordance of them in his memory."⁴⁸ Thomas Sharp writes "great benefit may be made [of "scripture examples"], when they are properly selected, and discretely accommodated to the business at hand. They weigh much with the vulgar, and are easily remembered."⁴⁹ We can safely assume a glimpse of Sterne's manner and personality in the hundreds of passing allusions which, regardless of their context in scripture, are brought forth vibrantly to serve the gospel.

PLAGIARISM AND CREATIVE REAPPLICATION

As we pass now directly to observe Sterne's use of some of his alleged extra-biblical sources we should briefly note the popularity of scripture commentaries. As usual, New is useful in his introduction to the volume of notes (pp. 9-11), except that if one is unfamiliar with these gargantuan texts one could conclude that with them we have the key to Sterne's genius. Such books as Matthew Poole's *Annotations upon the Holy Bible* [I: 1683, II: 1685] and William Burkitt's *Expository Notes, with Practical Observations on the New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* [1700] with their verse by verse outlines may be said to "contain sermons in

miniature, masked as textual commentary”⁵⁰ but their simple observations would generally offer no more than obvious suggestions to Sterne’s educated imagination. These miniature sermons have little in common with Sterne’s and we would over-stretch his dependence in saying he relied on this sort of commentary for anything other than background hints and allusions from time to time. Nothing of what has been admired in his discourses owes its presence to these paraphrases and brief notes of historical interpretation.

Joseph Hall’s *Contemplations upon the Principal Passages in the Holy Story*⁵¹ are the notable exception, appealing to Sterne with conversational examinations of scripture’s sensational stories. Sterne’s interpretations, using Hall or not, were neither surprising nor original. Now and then we do find a morsel of novel interpretation, such as the extraordinary use of the event recorded in Genesis where Jacob, after toiling for seven years to gain Rachel the second daughter of Laban, is deceived. The father-in-law sends Leah, the elder daughter into the dark nuptial chamber. Sterne unites the sisters into one person, and alludes to the story as a savvy metaphor for marital undeception:

—Some disguise either of body or mind is seen through in the first domestick scuffle;—some fair ornament—perhaps the very one which won the heart,—*the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit*, falls off;—*It is not the Rachel for whom I have served,—Why hast thou then beguiled me?*

Be open—be honest: give yourself for what you are; conceal nothing—varnish nothing,—and if these fair weapons will not do, —better not conquer at all, than conquer for a day:—when the night is passed, ’twill ever be the same story,—*And it came to pass, behold it was Leah!* (S 209.18-28)

So Sterne was capable of performing, or borrowing, unusual exegesis of course, but he seems to have realized that his talent was best invested in application and illustration rather than in

imaginative readings or splenetic dogmatics. Only a handful of references are extraordinary, the majority in sermons 22 and 41, most are noted by New.⁵² This seeming lack of ‘novelty’ argues more for Sterne’s careful orthodoxy and reticence inappropriately to flourish than for disinterest or lack of theological imagination.

It is a pulpit commonplace that preachers are not only encouraged but really have no choice but to build upon the works of their predecessors. Generally the practice of simply borrowing passages and even reciting entire sermons of others has not been frowned upon. This is not a tradition of neglect or plagiarism, but the result of ordinary human beings participating in an office requiring orthodox distillation of eternity for particular congregations. Of primary importance is the flock’s health and safety. The Anglican pulpit is meant to be neither a theatrical cubicle nor an avenue for the parades of ignorance and genius. Unless the parson happens to be the risen Christ, the message coming forth from that pulpit is not expected to be original to the speaker. The preface to the *Book of Homilies* [1562] reestablishes this tradition:

CONSIDERING . . . that all they which are appointed Ministers have not the gift of preaching sufficiently to instruct the people, which is committed unto them, whereof great inconveniences might rise, and ignorance still be maintained, if some honest remedy be not speedily found and provided: the Queen’s most excellent Majesty . . . hath . . . caused a Book of Homilies . . . to be printed anew, wherein are contained certain wholesome and godly exhortations. . . . All which Homilies her Majesty commandeth and straitly chargeth all Parsons, Vicars, Curates, and all others having spiritual cure, every Sunday and Holy-day in the year . . . to read and declare to their parishoners plainly and distinctly one of the said Homilies, in such order as they stand in the book. . . . And when the foresaid Book of Homilies is read over, her Majesty’s pleasure is, that the same be repeated and read again.⁵³

Long before Sterne these Homilies had been reshaped into more familiar sermons, but this communist tradition of homiletic inheritance, in the Church stretching back beyond Augustine,

needs to be appreciated.⁵⁴ Repetition from the pulpit is not a concession, it is a moral and didactic requirement.

Gilbert Burnet echoes himself and countless others in writing: “We have so vast a Number of excellent Performances in Print, that if a Man [meaning a preacher] has but a right Understanding of Religion, and a true Relish of good Sense, he may easily furnish himself this Way.”⁵⁵ Samuel Johnson, so haughty with Sterne, breaches no decorum in composing some forty sermons to sell for others to preach as their own: “about this time [before 1760], as it is supposed, he [Johnson], for sundry beneficed clergymen that requested him, composed pulpit discourses, and for these he made no scruple of confessing, he was paid.”⁵⁶

Clearly Sterne’s culpability would lie in the *publication* of lengthy unacknowledged verbatim borrowings, and in any prefatory deception attempting to mask them. That he was fond of loaded requests, creating situations in which a reader is dishonored by refusing to follow the author, is familiar to any who know his letters, particularly those seeking subscriptions. Concluding the preface to his sermons, resting “with a heart much at ease, upon the protection of the humane and candid, from whom I have received many favours” (S 2.15), he suggests one would be miserly to accuse him of impropriety. This sort of sentimental bullying to provoke an eager accomplice is a key to the effective flow of his fiction. Sterne’s canonical salon affords ample room for conversation and participants do well to remember that their reflections are anticipated and chaperoned. However, it is imperative that we reassess Sterne’s ‘debts,’ for in his preface he is in fact being honest.

As he will later instructively play with ‘plagiarism’ in *TS* and *ASJ*, reworking Montaigne’s and Burton’s reworking of others on the subject, so, at the sensational beginning of his career as published parson, he acknowledges the nature of his debts. If, as Ross claims, we are to sense Sterne’s “uneasiness”⁵⁷ with his borrowings, that sense needs to be balanced with a full appreciation for Sterne’s hearty involvement. It has not been noticed that he is in fact ‘borrowing’ his commonplace admission and disclaimer of plagiary from a man he elsewhere uses, William Wollaston, who in dedicating *The Religion of Nature Delineated* [1722] wrote

notwithstanding what I have said, in a treatise of *natural religion*, a subject so beaten and exhausted in all its parts, by all degrees of writers, in which so many notions will inevitably occur that are no one’s property, and so many things require to be proved, which can scarce be proved by any other but the old arguments (or not so well), you must not expect to find *much* that is new. Yet *something* perhaps you may. . . . So that they are indeed *my thoughts*, such as have been *long mine*. . . . It is not hard to discern, whether a work of this kind be all of a piece; and to distinguish the genuine hand of an author from the false wares and patch-work of a plagiary.⁵⁸

In his turn, Sterne, after excusing himself for publishing discourses not penned “with any thoughts of being printed” (*S* 1.21) writes what many have assumed contributes to accuse him of plagiarism:

the reader, upon old and beaten subjects, must not look for many new thoughts,—’tis well if he has new language; in three or four passages, where he has neither the one nor the other, I have quoted the author I made free with—there are some other passages, where I suspect I may have taken the same liberty,—but ’tis only suspicion, for I do not remember it is so, otherwise I should have restored them to their proper owners, so that I put it in here more as a general saving, than from a consciousness of having much to answer for upon that score. (*S* 2.5)

“*where he has neither the one nor the other*” —Sterne is being candid. This is a blanket apology, but not for transcribing paragraphs without acknowledgment. His subjects, like Wollaston’s, are

old and beaten but his *language* is new, and we shall see that the use to which he put the language of others is new as well. John Dussinger, Judith Hawley, and Philip Stevick fault Melvyn New for over-touting Sterne's unoriginality in the sermons without delving into the ways in which Sterne makes others' words *his*. Concluding his *Scriblerian* review of the Florida volumes Stevick, recalling Sterne's sermon 'Time and chance', rightly notes the gap in New's efforts that I presume below to address.

Surely it is a conventional treatment of a conventional theme, heavily indebted to others, traditional in its rhetoric, orthodox in its theology. Yet to say so does not, for me, account for the sermon's capacity to move me: it is Sterne's voice that does so. And so it is curious that Mr. New's magisterial and magnificent edition, a result of a personal devotion to Sterne scarcely exceeded in our time, tells us everything we would wish to know about the content and the context of the sermons while minimizing those elusive elements that make the sermons sound like Sterne and not someone else.⁵⁹

That Sterne "in oral delivery" rarely acknowledges his sources for particular passages, writes New, "stems not, I think, from any sinister desire to deceive his auditors but rather from the conviction that displays of learning should be avoided."⁶⁰ This reluctance is encouraged in all sermon guides. That Sterne would maintain it for sermons published in his lifetime, in any of which contrary to critical misconception rarely are more than a few sentences copied verbatim, is small price to pay for the advantage of reading uncluttered homilies. They were, after all, intended for inspiration not criticism. "The grand maxim," wrote Thomas Sharp,

by which we are to be guided in all those compositions which are distinguished by the name of *sermons*, is this, viz. *That they are verbal instructions*, designed to be taken *by the ears* of the persons instructed, and are not originally formed to be taken *by their eyes*: therefore like all other addresses to an audience, if not understood at first hearing, are good for nothing.⁶¹

Sterne had nothing to hide. Swift in his *Letter to a Young Gentleman* is unequivocal:

as to quotations from ancient Fathers, I think they are best brought in, to confirm some opinion controverted by those who differ from us: In other cases we give you full power to adopt the sentence for your own, rather than tell us, *as St. Austin excellently observes*: But to mention modern writers by name, or use the phrase of *a late excellent prelate of our church*, and the like, is altogether intolerable; and for what reason I know not, makes every rational hearer ashamed. Of no better a stamp is your *heathen philosopher*, and *famous poet*, and *Roman historian*; at least in common congregations, who will rather believe you on your word, than on that of *Plato* or *Homer*.⁶²

Indeed during Sterne's century the caution to this form of borrowing revolves around the need for a sermon's integrity, and it is Blair the rhetorician who brings it to our attention. Interestingly the warning focuses on the very difficulty to which Sterne alludes in playfully quoting from Burton and Montaigne in *Tristram Shandy*. Blair warns the young from immediately perusing others' passages on the topic at hand before first forming and considering their own ideas. Without this preliminary preparation both preacher and sermon will appear confused and disjointed. One might also here recognize the shift, in the latter part of the century, to greater individual freedom in the composition of one's discourse.

Though the writings of the English divines are very proper to be read by such as are designed for the church, I must caution them against making too much use of them, or transcribing large passages of them into the sermons they compose. Such as once indulge themselves in this practice, will never have any fund of their own. Infinitely better it is, to venture into the pulpit with thoughts and expressions which have occurred to themselves, though of inferior beauty, than to disfigure their compositions by borrowed and ill-sorted ornaments, which, to a judicious eye, will be always in hazard of discovering their own poverty.⁶³

There is a significant difference between Sterne's theology being commonplace, and his sermons being plagiarized, derivative, lack-luster, or confused.

Wilbur Cross notes in his introduction to the sermons, that an element of Sterne's 'plagiarism' is attested by Isaac Reed who saw the sermons in manuscript. We should now be

able to read it without prejudice. “On sermon forty-four, Justifying the Ways of Providence to man, Sterne has the memorandum; ‘I have borrowed most of the Reflections upon the Characters from Wollaston or at least have enlarged from his hints, though the sermon is truly mine, such as it is.’ ”⁶⁴

From what we know of Sterne’s antics with ‘sources’ for his fiction, it behooves us to observe what use he made with the detectable mines of his sermons. Accordingly there is no substitute for reading entire blocks of homilies from John Tillotson, Samuel Clarke, and others whom he sifted. Popular and comprehensive, those who influenced Sterne are of his grandfather’s generation, elders who dominated the eighteenth-century latitudinarian forum in word and thought. Reading them after Sterne, one immediately recognizes a difference in tone and mannerism. As beloved as they were in their day, by people of similar theological leanings, most sermons of these men now seem mechanical and dry. Though colleagues held their sermons in highest regard for clarity, theology and vigor, one now may wonder at the patience of their congregations. A few of Sterne’s sources are closer to his style, encouraging one to explore those passages from which it seems likely that he borrowed. In these, what he changed is as interesting as what he deleted or retained, and the themes he chose to present offer valuable clues to his intentions.

Because Sterne’s sermons have suffered from poor critical attention, engendering fantastic misconceptions, it is necessary to establish a few important correctives before examining further elements of his borrowings. We are indebted especially to Hammond and New for direction to writers Sterne used, as he mentions only a few by name. The evidence supporting

the following claims was gathered using that direction, rooting through those and other sources, and charting Sterne's sermons accordingly. It is clear from the following selections of many possible evidences that he was not indiscriminately borrowing any of his material. The use of identified sources in lifetime volumes is almost exclusively very short if verbatim, or considerably reworked if longer. Bespeaking greater independence or sensitivity to publication, often authors used sparingly in Volumes i-iv are more fully used in v-vii, and longer borrowings used in v-vii have been reworked to shorter less verbatim usage in i-iv. None of the borrowings occurring in both the lifetime and posthumous volumes is used more boldly in the former; in every case the 'lifetime' borrowing is shorter and less verbatim.⁶⁵

As further witness to Sterne's considered involvement, often he borrows exclusively from the first or last paragraph of his source, or conflates parts of sentences from passages originally occurring many pages apart. His verbal debt to many writers (among whom: Thomas Wise, Walter Leightonhouse, John Rogers, Richard Lucas) is limited to only one of their sermons. Though future detection is probable, the only authors found to be used verbatim from more than two of their sermons are Tillotson, Clarke, Norris, James Foster, and the elder Edward Young, and of these Foster and Young barely qualify. Words of Wollaston are used roughly a dozen times, but with reference to only three two to six page areas in his book of 219 pages, and the one longer borrowing (parts of 410.20-411.30) occurs in Volume vii considerably reworked. Joseph Hall, the only other writer from whom Sterne consistently borrows for his sermons is touched upon over twenty times, with reference to six places in his voluminous *Contemplations* and to a

four page section of his sermon ‘the Righteous mammon’.⁶⁶ This is not damning evidence; a jury of his peers would shrug it out of court.

Having unearthed a desirable phrase in his notes or elsewhere, Sterne may be forgiven for avoiding the charade of hunting different words to repeat what he liked. Time after time where he borrows from a recognized text it is clear given the old and new contexts of the passages and Sterne’s customary reworkings that he would have considered himself borrowing words and aspects of the discourse, but with reference to a renewed sense of its essential message. When Sterne conflates his sources so that one sentence is made from what initially occurred on different pages, or dissects a sentence and uses its parts in different contexts, or weaves the words of two or three writers into a pattern that reads much better than the originals we cannot accuse him of plagiarism. A writer capable of such editorial resurrection is not dependent upon the originals. According to accepted homiletic practice he made good use of what was at hand, mined the riches of his predecessors, and used those catch phrases, lyrical progressions, and theological implications to anchor his congregation in the familiar while launching them into participation with the core of his text. Had Sterne been incapable of composing a passable sermon without recourse to others, his discourses would not be such as they are.

It is worth noting that the commonality of homiletic jargon and the brevity of Sterne’s borrowings in lifetime volumes would have virtually prohibited contemporaries from recognizing a ‘source;’ hence Sterne’s alterations would not have been appreciated as such. Thirty years elapsed after publication before evidence of borrowing began to trickle in to periodicals, and these were by no means condemning.

It is always pleasing to trace the origin and progress of the thoughts of eminent writers, and therefore I hope it will not be supposed, that I am possessed of the spirit of Lauder, if I point out a passage which Mr. Sterne appears to have read. I heartily wish to see any other writer employ his reading to as good a purpose.⁶⁷

➤ Charges of Plagiarism in his Sermons have been brought against Sterne, which I have not been anxious to investigate, as in that species of composition, the principal matter must consist of repetitions.⁶⁸

As we have seen, by Sterne's day a good sermon was generally regarded as one which engaged the affections of the congregation, one that did not come "too faintly" from the preacher and was easily applicable to daily practice. To some extent Sterne's alterations of his predecessors' words may be accounted for by custom. When he is borrowing from sermons or discourses initially penned up to a century earlier, in some cases for extraordinary congregations, we can expect a certain amount of fashionable or parochial rephrasing that need not imply further diligence. Nevertheless, the contemporary success of Sterne's craft should be reason enough to probe the sorts of altering he seems most consistently to have practiced.

More important though, than release from a charge of plagiarism is the unappreciated fact that, upon comparing Sterne's passages with their alleged sources, he appears fully interested. This is clear from a number of alterations he consistently practices. He personalizes exhortations, moderates condemnations, simplifies muddy prose, and often alters the original context of his borrowing, changing the use to which the words are put. Observing the short passages he seems to have borrowed, one is often at a loss to detect why Sterne even bothered (if in fact he did), as the essence of the original is disregarded in favour of something else, and the words retained are more like souvenirs of something laid aside than necessarily integral to what remains. More than this, in a number of passages containing others' words, Sterne seems implicitly to be

commenting on, even criticizing the originals. These implicit alterations, alongside his interest in natural characterization, prove Sterne to have contributed with exceptional interest. A few of these important involvements we now observe in detail. Recalling the gist of appropriate sermon preparation outlined above, we turn to witness Sterne's use of his two most-mined sources: John Tillotson and Samuel Clarke.

JOHN TILLOTSON

The sermon-writer Sterne seems most frequently to have used is John Tillotson, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1691. Considering the esteem in which the archbishop was held, and the comprehensiveness of his sermons, this is unremarkable. Gerard Reedy, without reference to Sterne, claims: "it appears that especially the sermons of Archbishop Tillotson were a staple of clerical education and a source of ideas before and after ordination. . . . Tillotson's collected sermons (1695-1704), in fourteen volumes arranged around different themes, became a *summa theologica anglicana* for succeeding generations."⁶⁹ Of course Tillotson himself was no lone wolf, as Isabel Rivers records:

Doddridge, who made a thorough study of the divines of the established church, pointed out in his *Lectures on Preaching* that Tillotson made great use of Wilkins and Barrow, going on to claim that "Many of Tillotson's finest sermons were a kind of translation from" Barrow, and that Tillotson's 'The Wisdom of Being Religious' "is taken in great measure" from Wilkins. (Doddridge also noted that Tillotson made great use of the '*Fratres Poloni*' (i.e. the Socinians) without mentioning them).⁷⁰

Though Rivers couches this assessment with “it seems safer to assume a convergence of opinion and a process of mutual influence” we do well to recall the communal heritage and free-hand borrowing discussed above. Blair, writing in retrospect, refers to the archbishop thus:

Archbishop Tillotson’s manner is more free and warm [than Samuel Clarke’s], and he approaches nearer than most of the English divines to the character of popular speaking. Hence he is, to this day [1783] one of the best models we have for preaching. We must not indeed consider him in the light of a perfect orator; his composition is too loose and remiss; his style too feeble, and frequently too flat, to deserve that high character: but there is in some of his sermons so much warmth and earnestness, and through them all there runs so much ease and perspicuity, such a vein of good sense and sincere piety, as justly entitle him to be held as eminent a preacher as England has produced.⁷¹

Obviously a fit mine for source material, but let us consider instances of what Sterne does to improve upon the ‘flat’ and ‘feeble’ style, and the ‘loose’ and ‘remiss’ composition.

The difference in structure and tone between the archbishop and Sterne is striking and, on first comparing their sermons in general, one cannot help noticing Sterne’s more conversational, less academic manner. It would be a mistake to attribute the rudiments of the difference to Sterne’s genius or trifling. Congregational expectations, location, and fashion could account for his attempt to develop short affective exhortations. Already a half century prior to Sterne’s sermons’ publication Shaftesbury noted, and lamented, the trend away from comprehensive divisioned discourses outlined above. The time-honored practice of serving an entire animal at a feast, dissected “by the appointed carver, a man of might as well as profound craft and notable dexterity, who was seen erect, with goodly mien and action, displaying heads and members, dividing according to art, and distributing subject matter into proper parts, suitable to the stomachs of those he served” was being jettisoned. Instead, many of “our religious pastors . . .

have quited their substantial service and uniform division into parts and underparts, and in order to become fashionable, they have run into the more savoury way of learned ragout and medly.”⁷² After reading thousands of pages of Tillotson’s divisible discourses one can only applaud the rebellion. What Gordon Rupp writes of Tillotson’s friend, John Sharp [1645-1714, archbishop of York], applies equally (or more so) to Sterne: “it was all lucid, moralistic, and if he lacked the *gravitas* of Tillotson, it was all gain that he spoke simply in the pulpit as a man speaketh to his friends.”⁷³

Tillotson’s style was in large measure developed to offer maximum clarity without hint of ‘enthusiasm.’ W. A. Speck’s comment on G. R. Cragg’s assessment is just. He quotes Cragg ““because the heroic note has vanished there is no deep sense of urgency in Tillotson, his sermons now dismay the reader by their uninspired repetition of arguments directed to an unimaginative common sense.’ But [writes Speck] it was this very quality which made them attractive to Augustan churchmen.”⁷⁴

After claiming that “a Divine hath nothing to say to the wisest congregation of any parish in this kingdom, which he may not express in a manner to be understood by the meanest among them,” Jonathan Swift makes a point of distinguishing between Tillotson’s

elaborate Discourses upon important Occasions, delivered to Princes or Parliaments, written with a View of being made publick; and a plain Sermon intended for the Middle or lower Size of People. . . . Besides, that excellent Prelate [Tillotson] above-mentioned, was known to preach after a much more popular Manner in the City Congregations.⁷⁵

We cannot presume to disparage the archbishop, in his day a beacon for candid, moderate Christianity expressed to various congregations. Our parson’s consistent plundering of his

sermons testifies to the enduring worth of their contents—and to Sterne’s orthodox taste. Nevertheless a difference is evident.

It is important to note that while Sterne may be following a trend away from ‘set discourses’ he is not thereby avoiding the weightier matters of a preacher’s vocation. After all, the intent of the comprehensive approach was also to clarify basic theology as appropriately as possible to the congregation at hand. John Wilkins, Tillotson’s stepfather-in-law, classically expresses the scheme of this sort of sermon, in his early *Ecclesiastes*. Wilkins begins by reminding his charges that it is presumptuous to think oneself a good preacher from simply possessing an adequate knowledge of divinity “as if the gift of Preaching and sacred Oratory were not a distinct Art of itself.” It is instructive to note how both Tillotson and Sterne, with different styles, manage skilfully to follow Wilkins’ guidelines. The event is to be organic: “a good *method* will direct to proper *matter*, and fitting matter will enable for good *expression*.”

The principall scope of a divine Orator should be to

Teach clearly
Convince strongly
Perswade perfectly

Sutable to these, the chief parts of a Sermon are these three:

Explication
Confirmation
Application

Each of these may be further subdivided and branched out according to this following Analysis. . . .⁷⁶

The scaffolding of the three-page chart that follows this in Wilkins, as we have noted, began to lose its appeal and effect. Wilkins himself was careful to warn against its heavy usage:

the *phrase* should be plain, full, wholesome, affectionate.

1. It must be *plain* and naturall, not being darkened with the affectation of a Scholasticall harshnesse, or Rhetorical flourishes. Obscurity in the discourse is an argument of ignorance in the mind. The greatest learning is to be seen in the greatest plainnesse.⁷⁷

Sterne refrains from showing us the skeleton of his message, exchanging gestures and pauses for headings and sub-headings. This is fully current with the advice of Sterne's near contemporary Thomas Sharp:

it matters not whether this disposition [to clarity] be made by regular and formal divisions into heads, or by any other artificial disposition of the several arguments, for the better engaging the attention at present, and the better helping the memory afterwards.

Some preachers too fancifully adhere to a method of splitting into heads, and into a certain number of them too, on most occasions. I do not mean hereby to blame them; for, what is in method, and due order, is, generally speaking, well. But yet this rule of splitting may oftentimes be changed into a better; and especially on those occasions where the preacher takes upon himself the part of an orator: under which character, the concealment of method often proves an advantage to the address. For a discourse, we know, may be full of art and contrivance, and even elegantly methodical, and yet shall seem, at least to the unlearned, to have no traces of skill discoverable in it.⁷⁸

One gets a fair perspective on this shift of styles and Sterne's capitalization on the tendency towards creative simplicity by observing what he does with the well-worn theme of slander as developed in Tillotson's 'Against evil-speaking'. While composing his sermon 'Evil-Speaking', Sterne seems to have been well acquainted with Tillotson's effort. New's headnote to the sermon alerts us that "much of the second half echoes Tillotson's sermon. . . . but it is worth noting the extent of Sterne's rewriting of Tillotson in almost every instance."⁷⁹ Again,

unfortunately New has yet to make public what he makes of Sterne's rewritings. On comparison here, the immediately evident shift is one of form. In place of Tillotson's sub-headed agenda, Sterne takes us on an unpunctuated ramble through this "delusive itch for slander." Preaching before the king and queen, in the last year of his life, the archbishop opens his second paragraph describing how persuasives to repentance and a good life which are ineffectual for not having touched the consciences of people in a "sensible and awakening manner," may be likened to a physician who "instead of applying particular remedies to the distemper of his patient, should entertain him with a long discourse of disease in general, and of the pleasure and advantages of health."⁸⁰ Tillotson is clearly trying to be of practical use, and he continues by telling us how this will be accomplished:

for the more distinct handling of this argument, I shall reduce my discourse to these five heads.

1. I shall consider the nature of this vice, and wherein it consists.
2. I shall consider the due extent of this prohibition, *To speak evil of no man*.
3. I shall shew the evil of this practice, both in the causes and effects of it.
4. I shall add some further considerations to dissuade men from it.
5. I shall give some rules and directions for the prevention and cure of it.⁸¹

Sterne is simultaneously less *and* more present to his congregation. As preacher he appears less central than Tillotson and others whose didactic personae are magnified by the frequent reminders of the sermon's divisions and precisely where we stand in relation to what is being conveyed. At times Sterne reminds us where we are in the course of his presentation, but this appears aside—the gesture of a guide—not as emphasis to structure.

Now bear with me, I beseech you, in framing such an address, as I imagine, would be most likely to gain our attention. (S 215.3)

Give me leave, therefore, in the first place, to recall to your observations, what kind of world it is we live in, and what manner of persons we really are.

Secondly, and in opposition to this, I shall make use of the apostle's argument, and from a brief representation of the christian religion, and the obligations it lays upon us, shew, what manner of persons we *ought* to be in all holy conversation and godliness. (S 283.27)

Sterne's showings read more like invitations to consider than pre-conceived treatises. Again, this is in line with Sharp's advice: "preachers should not appear as disputants, nor carry themselves as preceptors; they should rather put on the character of counsellors and friendly advisors."⁸²

In 'Evil-Speaking' Sterne launches into his prose without warning. Not surprisingly we hear echoes of a number of themes already rehearsed in 'Abuses' and the ten prior sermons of Volumes i and ii. Immediately we are reminded of human inconsistencies and the problems associated with fulfilling the duty of benevolence. That these are due to ruling passions and lack of self-knowledge is once again illustrated, this time as a check to slander. Tillotson is more thorough in his overview. He outlines six causes of evil-speaking⁸³ and feels it necessary to describe consequences of the vice.

Once they are well into their treatments, both preachers appeal to their congregations with a commonplace exhortation. Sterne says, as he reiterates in some form throughout his sermons, "lay your hands upon your hearts, and let your consciences speak" (S 106.6). Tillotson has "let every man lay his hand upon his heart, and consider how himself is apt to be affected by this usage."⁸⁴ Where Sterne is content to trust this appeal to his listeners' conscience, Tillotson explicitly lists *seven* practical reminders of how one should remember not to speak evil of others. Thus, it is probably with regard to Tillotson's attempt to write a summa on slander that Sterne, exasperated at the futility of comprehensively penetrating the mass of human contradictions with lists, just before his first 'borrowing' from Tillotson writes "—But alas! the symptoms of this

appear in so many strange, and contradictory shapes, and vary so wonderfully with the temper and habit of the patient, that they are not to be classed,—or reduced to any one regular system” (S 108.15). In fact, we shall see that Sterne often includes implicit criticism of those he incorporates.

An important shift of style visible in a comparison of these sermons is Sterne’s apparent lack of comprehensive completion. Unlike Tillotson he avoids covering all possible occasions of evil-speaking, and refrains from suggesting corresponding remedies. Sterne examines the causes of evil-speaking in individual consciences and asks his congregation to address the problem in personal manners. We are not confronted by a dissertation on the branches of a particular vice, but offered clues to its roots in human nature and an impression of its insidious consequences, the most accurate dissuasions possible.

After establishing a solid basis for the sin in the inconsistencies of ruling passion, Sterne concentrates on the various ways and gestures by which the sin is communicated. This is in direct contrast with Tillotson who seems compelled to berate the facts that “men generally love rather to hear evil of others than good” and that people find it easier to use their wits to blame than to praise. Sterne’s treatment is far more likely to affect those inclined toward slander. Though he uncharacteristically changes Tillotson’s “our” to “her” at 109.5, he speaks to the heart of the issue at hand. Even a passing comparison of the passages from Tillotson quoted in *Florida Works* V p.157 and their parallel in Sterne 108.28-109.7 gives an immediate sense of the fluid and personal tone of Sterne’s exhortation. The idea of slander in Tillotson is retained, but it is given

the drama of a living sin, enveloped in fittingly indulgent language. Instead of the general routine outlined by Tillotson, Sterne personalizes the victim and the gossips:

—How large a portion of chastity is sent out of the world by distant hints,—nodded away, and cruelly winked into suspicion, by the envy of those, who are passed all temptation of it themselves.—How often does the reputation of a helpless creature bleed by a report—which the party, who is at the pains to propagate it, beholds with so much pity and fellow-feeling,—that she is heartily sorry for it,—hopes in God it is not true. (*S* 108.29)

In effect we are left with two very different sermons. Sterne's borrowings are almost incidental and of no great importance to his sermon. The similarities of ideas are sufficiently commonplace to be little more than classic guidelines. Verbal borrowings, separated by more than ten pages in Tillotson, are thoroughly reworked and show evidence of restraint: incorporation of familiar ideas into a lively sermon, rather than slavish regurgitation. What is most useful to remember is that Tillotson himself was trying for an equally affecting discourse. He achieved it with at least one correspondent to the *Spectator* whose praise of Tillotson is set off by the misuse to which a junior clergyman had subjected this same sermon. Sterne managed to produce the antithesis of what that critic disapproved. Instead of the "young gentleman" who kept "all the heads and sub-divisions of the sermon" but "made so many pretty additions; and he could never give us a paragraph of the sermon, but he introduced it with something which methought looked more like a design to show his own ingenuity than to instruct the people,"⁸⁵ Sterne did away with the presumably over-rehearsed heads and sub-divisions and offered a passionate plea with less than a third of Tillotson's length. In effect he fulfilled Tillotson's promise of preaching in a "sensible and awakening manner" (p.1) what would most likely incite reform.

SAMUEL CLARKE

It should be of interest that, true to the advice of earlier divines, Thomas Sharp's two primary rules for sermon composition are "I. *Never to think one's self obliged, on any subject, to say all that one can say . . .* [And] II. *Never to pursue any subject over-curiously into its minuteness.*"⁸⁶ Personalizing and enlivening his style, we have seen how Sterne, taking hints from Tillotson, represents the vice of slander by focusing on personality and the unaccountable nature of human inconsistencies. To understand that this is not extraordinary for Sterne's canon, we can look at his reworking of his selections from a charity sermon of Samuel Clarke [1675-1729], who, like Tillotson, was very much in vogue mid-century. His collected sermons had eight editions by 1765, and of the sermon writers from whom Sterne is recognized as having drawn, in volume it appears Clarke is second only to Tillotson. William Seward writes "a friend of Dr. Johnson asked him one day, whose sermons were the best in the English language. 'Why, sir, bating a little heresy those of Dr. Samuel Clarke'."⁸⁷

It is worth considering that Sterne's two sermons published prior to the first volumes of *Tristram* are classic. Two of his most revisited themes, self-deception and benevolence, are in these treated at length, and echoes of those treatments can be heard through the rest of his works. That Sterne in some way approved of 'The Abuses of Conscience considered' seems clear from its reappearance in *Tristram Shandy*. Evidently he also retained interest in 'The Case of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath considered' first published in 1747. This was sent as an affectionate gift to Catherine Fourmantel in 1759 and became #5 in Volume i. The sermon, in support of two charity-schools, holds echoes of Clarke's sermon 'On the Duty of Charity' likewise seeking

donations for the education of poor children. Sterne's lively rendition of a charity theme, involving considerable expansion of a biblical story is neither original nor shandaic, but his particular uses of a sermon he knew well, and the differences of treatment, compel further investigation.⁸⁸

In his note to 47.10-18 New writes, "Sterne's capacity to gather scriptural fragments as he does here bespeaks great familiarity with the Bible—or with an unidentified aid."⁸⁹ This is true, though use of an "aid" would not negate great familiarity. In any case verses to which Sterne alludes in that passage have been put to use by countless preachers, but their occurrence in the last third of a sermon which parallels Sterne's #s 3 and 5 is fair evidence that in this case he drew from Clarke. In no other sermon, by the way, does Sterne so consistently italicize biblical phrases, a common practice with Clarke who stacks references that inevitably draw visual attention to his heavy use of scripture. After expanding the Elijah/widow story Sterne suggests the central theme of his sermon: that charitable acts are likely to rebound with interest on those who practice them. Clarke too makes much of this incentive:

for such is the instability of all temporal things, that, as the wise man elegantly expresses it, *Riches make themselves wings, and fly away, as an eagle towards Heaven*; that is, we cannot with all our Care, secure them to ourselves for any certain time; much less are Riches for ever, or do our possessions endure for all generations. We know not how soon they may be snatched from Us, by numberless unforeseen Accidents; or we may as suddenly be taken from them, and our Soul be required of us this very Night. In this Case no other part of them will be really beneficial to us, but that which by works of Charity hath been before *lent unto the Lord*, who in the Life to come *will repay it again*. And even in respect of our continuance in this present World, That which has been well laid out in doing Good to Mankind, has a greater Probability of turning to our Advantage even here; (considering the variety of Accidents all human Affairs are subject to;) than that which may have been covetously treasured up. For, as *Solomon* excellently expresses this matter, *Cast thy bread upon the Waters, and thou shalt find it after*

many days; Give a portion to seven, and also to eight, for thou knowest not what evil shall be upon the earth, Eccles. xi.i. and iii.31. He that doth good turns, is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth, he shall find a stay. . . .

Be as a Father unto the Fatherless, and instead of a Husband unto their Mother; so shalt thou be as the Son of the most High, and he will love thee more than thy Mother doth, Ecclus. iv.10. . . .

Shut up alms in thy storehouses, and it shall deliver thee from all afflictions. It shall fight for thee against thine enemies, better than a mighty shield and a strong spear.⁹⁰

Sterne edits these to read:

a charitable and good action is seldom cast away . . . even in this life it is more than probable, that what is so scattered shall be gathered again with increase. Cast thy bread upon the waters, and thou shalt find it after many days. Be as a father unto the fatherless and instead of a husband unto their mother, so shalt thou be as the son of the Most High, and he will love thee more than thy mother doth. Be mindful of good turns, for thou knowest not what evil shall come upon the earth; and when thou fallest thou shalt find a stay. It shall preserve thee from all affliction, and fight for thee against thy enemies better than a mighty shield and a strong spear.

The great instability of temporal affairs, and constant fluctuation of every thing in this world, afford perpetual occasions of taking refuge in such a security.

What by successive misfortunes; by failings and cross accidents in trade; by miscarriage of projects:—what by unsuitable expences of parents, extravagance of children, and the many other secret ways whereby riches make themselves wings and fly away. (S 47.9-25)

Surrounding the passages above, Clarke quotes many other verses from which Sterne could have chosen, so it is worth marking Sterne's choice and alterations. The instability/wings element is retained, and the probability of present recompense, as in Clarke, is supported with references. In the first quotation Sterne and Clarke have "and thou shalt" against the Authorised [KJV] "for thou shalt." Clarke continues with Eccles. xi.2 while Sterne jumps over to another series of quotations in Clarke and takes Ecclesiasticus iv.10, retaining Clarke's "he will love"

against Authorised “he shall love.” Then, Sterne returns to the previous block of quotations and rewords Ecclus. iii.31, which by Clarke is misreferenced but quoted verbatim, and conflates that with his rewording of Clarke’s later quotation of Ecclus. xxix.9-15. What is noteworthy is not the preacher’s ability to find relevant quotations in scripture, which with the devices to find them are legion, but the finesse with which a few are chosen to augment the sermon’s development. Sterne refrains from interrupting us with references and the seemingly endless bolstering of points with quotations. It is impossible to note such alterations and maintain the view of him as disinterested plagiarist.

Sterne’s next point, at 48.2-6, that “charity and benevolence, in the ordinary chain of effects, have a natural and more immediate tendency in themselves to rescue a man from the accidents of the world, by softening the hearts, and winning every man’s wishes to its interest” is also Clarke’s immediately following the above quoted “he shall find a stay.” ‘Immediately,’ that is, after:

but this leads me to the
 Ild Thing I proposed to speak to . . .
 1st; As has already been hinted; the Charitable man in the natural and ordinary
 course of things, lays up for himself a truer Security against the Accidents of the
 World, in the Love and Favour, the Affection and Good-Will of Men; than he
 could do by hoarding up the largest treasures.⁹¹

While their ideas are identical, Sterne’s treatment is more personal and sensually oriented. Clarke, though eminently capable, almost seems to be layering his own brief prose with scripture to avoid making a point in his own words. Sterne rushes in, imagining the situation of a compassionate man in need of pity, and elaborates with language chosen to affect the would-be donors. Clarke presents his points with more reserve, we hear nothing of “a tear of tenderness,”

“a seasonable kindness” or “the expressions of unutterable pleasure and harmony in his looks” (S 48.19, 21, 23). This difference in tone does not, of course, discourage Sterne from continuing to make use of him.

It is a reiterated theme of Platonic and latitudinarian theology that human nature needs considerably to be warped before it will succumb to a vicious life; so Sterne needed no source to remind us:

what we say of long habits of vice, that they are hard to be subdued, may with equal truth be said concerning the natural impressions of benevolence, that a man must do much violence to himself, and suffer many a painful struggle, before he can tear away so great and noble a part of his nature. . . .—then NATURE awoke in triumph, and shewed how deeply she had sown the seeds of compassion in every man’s breast; when tyrants, with vices the most at enmity with it, were not able entirely to root it out. (S 50.14-18, .32-51.3)

New gives examples from Tillotson, Herring and Norris⁹² upon which Sterne could have relied, but in the present context I suggest Sterne reviewed this portion of Clarke’s sermon, which occurs earlier in the same paragraph as the “For such is the instability” quoted above [p. 59]:

compassion is by the Wisdom of our great Creator, implanted in the very frame of our Nature; and men cannot without great and long habits of Wickedness, root out of their minds so noble and excellent an inclination. ’Tis almost as natural for us to feel an agreeable Satisfaction and unexpressible Pleasure of mind, upon *satisfying a hungry Soul with bread, or cloathing the naked with a garment*; as ’tis for Them to be pleased with the Sense of their being relieved from these natural wants.⁹³

Sterne engages our imaginations, asking us to conceive of “the most perfect and amiable character” leading up to his praise of Christ’s ultimate charity. Again, the borrowing, if it is one, is insignificant for such a commonplace utterance, but we do well to note the passion with which Sterne renders his plea. Clarke has:

we are all Members of one body, and *members also one of another*, Rom. xii.6. We all profess to be Worshippers of that One Supreme God, who *giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not*. We are all redeemed by the blood of that Saviour, and depend upon his merits, for the hope of Salvation; who voluntarily became poor, that we might be made rich; who went about doing good; who laid down his life for our sakes; and in all this, set us an *example that we should follow his steps*. . . . These considerations, if we will be Christians indeed, cannot but produce in us the greatest Endearments of mutual affection; and those, if they be sincere, must necessarily show forth themselves in suitable effects.⁹⁴

Whereas Sterne writes,

we should endeavour to think of some one, if human nature could furnish such a pattern, who, if occasion required, was willing to undergo all kinds of affliction, to sacrifice himself, to forget his dearest interests, and even lay down his life for the good of mankind.—And here,—O merciful SAVIOUR! how would the bright original of thy unbounded goodness break in upon our hearts? *Thou who becamest poor, that we might be rich*—though Lord of all this world, yet *hadst not where to lay thy head*. . . .

The consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion, in the Son of GOD, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself. (S 51.24-31, 52.6-8)

Unlike Clarke, Sterne goes on for a paragraph drawing the appeal of precedent from Christ to disciples and then moves ahead in Clarke to the conclusion of his sermon. Clarke briefly considers the ways in which the “Duty” of charity “may best and most usefully be performed.” Typically he gives a list, paraphrasing Matt. xxv.35-6: “we are to visit the sick, to relieve the needy, to feed the hungry, to cloathe the naked . . .” He goes on to say “only here I must not omit to observe, that there is one comprehensive method of Charity, which in its extent and effects is a compendium of all the instances of beneficence in one; and That is the education of poor children, to which your contribution is now desired.”⁹⁵ Clarke mentions potential social advantages, but only briefly. Sterne, instead, proceeds to make a considered plea for the by no means universally popular charity, but this he begins with an echo of Clarke’s conclusion,

(glancing at it again at 54.18 when he repeats Clarke's reference to compassion as the "compendium of all charity"):

and indeed, of all the methods in which a good mind would be willing to do it, I believe there can be none more beneficial, or comprehensive in its effects, than that for which we are here met together.—The proper education of poor children being the ground-work of almost every other kind of charity, as that which makes every other subsequent act of it answer the pious expectation of the giver.
(S 52.21-27)

Before leaving Clarke's sermon we should note Sterne's use of it in his other charity sermon in Volume i. Like Tillotson, Clarke is usually explicit in giving us the headings and sub-headings of his discourses, frequently reminding us where we are in his scheme. Sterne takes a different course, and its effect is to us perhaps best realized in these charity sermons, discourses particularly developed to work with the affections of a congregation. In order to give his listeners some scriptural context [his text is Matt. v.48: "Be ye therefore perfect . . ."], to tell them what they could but would not be hearing, Clarke explicates the word 'perfection' as it relates to humanity and divinity, the call to imitate the perfection of God, the nature of perfection, and what is signified by perfection in different passages of scripture: holiness, patience in suffering, forgiveness and charity. Then, settling on charity as his topic, he says

in this latter Sense therefore, I shall take leave to understand the words at this time; and shall accordingly endeavour in the following Discourse, to recommend to you this excellent Duty of Charity, in the following Method.

1st, By showing how many and great Obligations we are continually under, to practice this Duty.

2dly, What great Benefits and Advantages accrue to ourselves, by the practice of it. And

3dly, In what particular Methods and Instances, it may best and most usefully be performed.⁹⁶

Clarke's 'On the Duty of Charity' is aptly titled. Sterne's 'Philanthropy recommended' is an earnest plea, Clarke heavily explicates a duty.

Clarke breaks his first heading into subdivisions of obligations to God, to neighbors, and to one's self. By the time he reaches his second heading, and its five points, he admits he is running out of time. The first of these points was quoted above regarding the probability of a charitable man being repaid in this life. In contrast to this, Sterne begins his examination of Luke x. 36,37 [his text for #3, 'Philanthropy recommended'] by expanding and illustrating the background and nature of Jesus' meeting with the lawyer. Sterne carefully shows how Jesus,

instead of giving a direct answer . . . immediately retorts the question upon the man who asked it, and unavoidably puts him upon the necessity of answering himself . . .

[and] makes answer to the proposed question, not by any far fetch'd refinement from the schools of the Rabbis, which might have sooner silenced than convinced the man—but by a direct appeal to human nature. . . .

On the close of which engaging account—our SAVIOUR appeals to the man's own heart in the first verse of the text . . . and instead of drawing the inference himself, leaves him to decide. (*S* 21.13-17, 22.14-17, 22.23-27)

Then, after establishing this context at a point where Tillotson or Clarke would give us a list of headings by which to lead us to understand the benefits and reasonableness of generosity, Sterne says "in the remaining part of the discourse I shall follow the same plan; and therefore shall beg leave to enlarge first upon the story itself, with such reflections as will rise from it; and conclude, as our SAVIOUR has done, with the same exhortation to kindness and humanity which so naturally falls from it" (*S* 23.1). This he does, the enlargements and reflections on the parable consuming all but the last paragraph of his sermon. Sterne has the Samaritan offer a soliloquy on

the brotherhood of man (*S* 27.21-28.21), echoing in first-person sentiments that are warm in Clarke but studded with scriptural citations and generally less engaging.⁹⁷

Sterne leaves his lively reenactment with a statement that sums up much of his concern in the sermons: “inconsistent creature that man is! who at that instant that he does what is wrong, is not able to withhold his testimony to what is good and praise worthy” (*S* 29.21). He embellishes with sensible reflections and a marked absence of didacticism, and says :

I have now done with the parable, which was the first part proposed to be considered in this discourse; and should proceed to the second, which so naturally falls from it, of exhorting you, as our SAVIOUR did the lawyer upon it, *to go and do likewise*: but I have been so copious in my reflections upon the story itself, that I find I have insensibly incorporated into them almost all that I should have said here in recommending so amiable an example; by which means I have unawares anticipated the task I proposed. (*S* 29.24)

The significance of this remark, one of the few in the sermons where Sterne comments on the form of a particular discourse, becomes clear when we realize Sterne is emulating the teaching method of Jesus. If we compare this remark with those above from pages 21 and 22 we see him explicitly drawing attention to Jesus’ appeal to the heart of —and his refusal to ‘draw the inference’ for— his interlocutor. Sterne explains that he will “follow the same plan.” He does not blurt out correct statements to silence inquirers; he engages listeners, sets up a situation that involves them and which “insensibly” requires conclusive participation. That Sterne believed the least inaccurate way to appeal to a congregation was through this sort of communication, and that he rooted it in Jesus’ method of using parables, is our best clue to understanding his conversational style and deviation from the comprehensive bent of his predecessors. He felt free not to utter everything on a given subject, because he understood that the meaning necessary to

communicate was incorporated more in an experience of a doctrine's efficacy than in its reiteration.

As with John Tillotson's, Sterne obviously admired and found suggestive the sermons of Samuel Clarke, and was not shy of using them as a springboard. At most, in places he incorporated their gist and brief phrases, but from a very clear vantagepoint of knowing what he himself wanted to communicate. As he improved on Tillotson, so he improved on Clarke; and again Blair's perception of a deficiency speaks well of Sterne's endeavour:

Dr. Clarke . . . every where abounds in good sense, and the most clear and accurate reasoning; his applications of scripture are pertinent; his style is always perspicuous, and often elegant; he instructs and he convinces; in what then is he deficient? In nothing, except in the power of interesting and seizing the heart. He shows you what you ought to do; but he excites not the desire of doing it: he treats man as if he were a being of pure intellect without imagination or passions.⁹⁸

FURTHER EDITORIAL EXAMPLES

We may have imagined Sterne departed from proper modes of sermon delivery in forming texts without regard for apparent structure. He rarely elaborates on a noticeable 3-point theme, or proceeds by following clearly defined divisions. But James Arderne in a passage devoted to suggesting that the three homiletic parts of "Proposition, Confirmation, and Inference" are generally useful "where the matter will bear it," says although an "unmanaged heat of wit" will be unsuccessful, "if you ask me what method you should constantly use, I must tell you no one. Many things bring their own disposition and order along with them, and stubbornly refuse to be subject to any other Lawes."⁹⁹

Clearly the nature of the discourse is to be dictated by its subject matter and the capacity of its recipients. Adam Smith in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [1762-3] states

the perfection of stile consists in Express<ing> in the most concise, proper and precise manner the thought of the author, and that in the manner which best conveys the sentiment, passion or affection with which it affects or he pretends it does affect him and which he designs to communicate to his reader.¹⁰⁰

While the style of strict divisions with subsections was continued rigidly by a few preachers¹⁰¹ it was increasingly unpopular as a rule, and when practiced, was serving more conversational sermons. François Fénelon's much heeded advice is:

for the most part, Divisions give only a *seeming* order; while they really mangle and clog a Discourse, by separating it into two or three parts; which must interrupt the Orator's action, and the effect it ought to produce. There remains no true unity after such Divisions.¹⁰²

At the other end of the century, Blair refers to this advice and to the French archbishop as "a very able judge" and one with considerable authority and arguments.¹⁰³ Blair disagrees to a point though, noting that divisions, if properly and sparingly used, may still be useful to a well-ordered sermon. However, it is important to note, that one of the few preachers Blair singles out for highest admiration, Joseph Butler, did not use divisions.¹⁰⁴

We have now some sense of what Sterne does with works from which he borrowed in the homiletic tradition. He steers clear of binding passages of scripture together to prove or illustrate a point. Instead of giving references, he includes verses and bits of verses, conflates otherwise unconnected passages and offers them inextricably mixed with his own prose. This use is no more unique than his preference for a more conversational style, but by any standards his ability is remarkable. Instead of numerous biblical illustrations, he gives one, briskly, as if in passing to

people who need to be reminded rather than convinced. That, by 1760, many sermon writers were attempting the same proximity, should not blind us to Sterne's careful genius, and his improvement over those from whom he borrows. John (father of Thomas) Sharp, for example, whom New sees as closest to Sterne in theology and whose capable lucidity Gordon Rupp, above [p. 51] applauds,¹⁰⁵ still presents an uninspired understanding of vanity (one of Sterne's favorite topics) when he is preaching on Eccles. ii.11. In contrast to Sterne's brief and poignant jabs at what we all know to be our condition, Sharp has eight points listing exactly how humans may be disappointed.¹⁰⁶

Likewise, though he borrows from him elsewhere, one cannot help assuming Sterne would have come up with a more imaginative way of launching into a discussion of Matt. v.3 than John Norris [1657-1711], for example, who in his first 'practical discourse' on the Beatitudes says:

- in my Discourse upon these Words I shall,
- I Resolve what we are to understand by Poor in Spirit.
- II Shew that this Poverty of Spirit is a Christian Duty; and the Reasonableness of it.
- III Shew the Happiness of those who are so disposed.¹⁰⁷

Or, that for Norris' next discourse, on Matt. v.4, Sterne would have felt it more useful to develop one instance of human sorrow than simply to refer to numerous places in scripture where sorrow is mentioned.

The basic elements of Sterne's tendency to simplify stylistic forms of his 'sources' are these: his paragraphs flow without landmarks of headings and sub-headings. His appeal focuses on illustration of common situations rather than on comprehensive accounts of all possible proofs and scenarios. Instead of stacking scriptural references to support his position, he develops

stories and incorporates engaging allusions without fanfare. Unlike many writers from whom he borrows, Sterne rarely gives biblical citations with chapter and verse, and he avoids using or explicating words in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Like all preachers he repeats himself from sermon to sermon, but in any given discourse he is relatively free of the nauseating tautologies that seem unavoidable in the style used by Tillotson and Clarke. Marks of scholarly precision are avoided.¹⁰⁸ Sterne's rare citation of a source is integrated with his prose ("as Arch-bishop Tillotson wittily observes upon it"). Though this may be accounted for by Sterne's sermons initially not having been written for publication (*S* 1.20) he consistently makes an effort to produce verbally pleasing discourses in accordance with Swift's directions above. In short, although Sterne and those from whom he borrows share the latitudinarian perspective, the means and skill by which this is communicated vary considerably.

Removing what had become impediments to clear flowing sermons, Sterne presents himself as a man involving a congregation rather than reciting dogma, thereby provoking renewed appreciation. One of the simplest evidences of this is his frequent change of second- or third-person to first, seamlessly personalizing source material.¹⁰⁹ It is worth considering a few instances.

Tillotson in his sermon 'The Prejudices against *Jesus* and his Religion considered'¹¹⁰ has: "the excellency of the doctrine, and its proper tendency to make men holy and virtuous, are a plain evidence of its divine and heavenly original."¹¹¹ Sterne changes this to "the excellency of christianity in doctrine and precepts, and its proper tendency to make us virtuous as well as happy, is a strong evidence of its divine original" (*S* 315.6). He adds "christianity" and

“precepts,” changes “men” to “us” and “plain” to “strong,” replaces the unnecessary “holy” with “happy,” and deletes the tautology “heavenly.” Interestingly, the sermon in which this occurs, in which Stillingfleet, Tillotson, and Clarke are liberally re-ordered, re-worded and meshed together, is one Sterne did not, so far as we know, prepare for press.

Consider how Sterne further personalizes a section of Clarke’s sermon ‘The shortness and vanity of humane life’. Instead of copying Clarke’s layers of encomium (New’s note to 146.5-16 leaves out considerable repetition and embellishment), he puts the mournful man in the first person and gives him a lengthy soliloquy. He replaces “without whose direction no Evil can befall us, without whose Permission no Power can hurt us”¹¹² with “without his direction I know that no evil can befall me,—without his permission that no power can hurt me, —it is impossible a being so wise should mistake my happiness.” (S 146.15)

Sterne works in a similar way with an already passionate Walter Leightonhouse. “*Trust in God . . . who knows thy Necessities afar off, and puts all thy tears into his bottle. He eyes every careful Thought and pensive Look, afflictive Sigh, and Melancholly Groan which thou utterest.*”¹¹³ This becomes “when our heart is in heaviness, upon whom can we think but thee, who knowest our necessities afar off, —puttest all our tears in thy bottle, —seest every careful thought, —hearest every sigh and melancholy groan we utter. —” (S 188.10). The shift literally brings the congregation one step closer to an appreciation of what the text is trying to communicate: the nearness of God.

In the same spirit, Sterne is not shy of including himself as a culprit in his various catalogues of vices. In countless instances he makes a slight but telling change. It is important to

note that Sterne's inclusion of himself as part of the congregation, in the denunciation of sins, goes farther than was usually prescribed for not alienating one's parishioners; "least they should think that you are become their enemy . . . you must entertain and profess a tender respect and real desire for their welfare and hope of amendment."¹⁴ For example, Tillotson's "God hath so ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, men's cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates"¹⁵ becomes "God has so ordered it in the course of his providence, that very often in this world—our revenges return upon our own heads, and men's violent dealings upon their own pates" (*S* 120.11). Sterne's presence as simultaneously both priest and member of the congregation is not only recognizable in his reworked borrowings. His conclusion to most sermons in each volume illuminates a theme of inclusive community. "—But thou art merciful, loving and righteous, and lookest down with pity upon these wrongs thy servants do unto each other: pardon us, we beseech thee, for them, and all our transgressions; let it not be remember'd, that we were brethren of the same flesh, the same feelings and infirmities—" (*S* 176.11)

Sterne more than most sermon-writers with whom he was familiar engages us with occurrences of 'cross accidents' and unexpected events. All pastors touch on the topic to suggest that behind apparent chaos lies the providence of God. Usually the preacher presents the contradictions of humanity with copious examples, but remains aloof himself, remarking on the shortsightedness or faithlessness of his caricatures. Sterne places blame where he feels it appropriate, but includes himself in his judgments.

Alongside this tendency to simplify and personalize his discourses is an inclination to moderate harsh statements. Where his sources frequently flourish with invectives against vice, Sterne reserves elaboration for empathetic situations. Tillotson and Clarke each have a sermon with Eccles. ix.11 as text. Sterne uses both of these and Edward Young for his sermon on this passage, 'Time and chance'. It is instructive therefore to note the difference in Sterne's tone. Clarke's begins by distinguishing between the "slothful and negligent" who would wait for God to act on their account, and those "who rely with such confidence on the Effects of their own Wisdom and Industry, and so presumptuously depend upon the natural and regular Tendencies of second Causes."¹⁶ These two "extremes" are treated to copious scriptural quotations proving their pretensions to be unfounded. Sterne, in contrast, is more than willing to admit, or pretend to admit, mystification, even consternation, at the inexplicable nature of 'time and chance.' He sympathizes with the man introduced in his first sentence who "casts a look upon this melancholy description of the world [Eccles. ix.11], and sees, contrary to all his guesses and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men" (*S* 74.8). In the next paragraph he identifies himself with those seriously trying to fathom the mystery: "things are carried on in this world, sometimes so contrary to all our reasonings, and the seeming probabilities of success." (*S* 74.26)

Sterne is careful not to foist upon his congregations a foregone conclusion supported by scripture without delving into the humanity that makes the doctrine palatable. Where Sterne does borrow from Clarke's 'The Events of Things not always answerable to Second Causes', he justly

refers to him as “a great reasoner.” The style is reminiscent more of a theological treatise than of a preachable sermon. Clarke is in the abstract having just argued:

for as Chance is nothing, so Nature also is nothing but an empty word. Every effect, every Event, must have a real Cause; must proceed, immediately or mediately, from That which has a True Existence and Active Power. And to an Omnipresent Mind, there is no more difficulty in attending to every thing at one time and the same Time, than to any one thing.¹¹⁷

What follows is partially quoted at pp. 131-32 of the fifth volume of the *Florida Works*. From that, typically, Sterne removes the reference “I Kings xvii.4” and deletes the conflation of six further quotations (four of which are fully referenced) that Clarke uses to embellish his point. Clarke was no slouch with scripture, but in this instance Sterne’s treatment shines. Clarke’s offering is :

not only piously therefore, but even with the strictest and most philosophical Truth of expression, does the Scripture, tell us, that God *commandeth the Ravens*, I Kings xvii.4. that they are his directions, which *even the Winds and Seas obey*; that he causes His *Sun to rise on the Evil and on the Good*; that God prepared a *Gourd, and a Worm to smite it that it withered*, Jonah iv.7. that God feedeth the *Fowls of the Air*, Mat. vi.26. and, *without Him, not a sparrow falls to the ground*; ch.x.29. Nay, that He *clothes even the Lilies, and the grass of the field*, Mat. vi.30. and, with Him, *the very Hairs of our Head are All numbered*.¹¹⁸

Sterne focuses this jumble by taking Clarke’s well-fed fowls and his dead but noticed sparrow, returns them to the raven’s duty of ministering to prophets in hiding, and voilà, we find ourselves with Elijah, in the middle of a borrowing from Joseph Hall:

so that as a great reasoner justly distinguishes, upon this point,—“It is not only religiously speaking, but with the strictest and most philosophical truth of expression, that the scripture tells us, *that GOD commandeth the ravens*,—that they are his directions, which *the winds and seas obey*. If his servant hides himself by the brook, such an order of causes and effects shall be laid,—that the fowls of the air shall minister to his support.—When this resource fails, and his prophet is

directed to go to Zerepha,—for that, he has commanded a widow woman there to sustain him . . .”. (*S* 79.25)

Not only is Sterne’s composition superior in diction and consistency, it is also optimistic.

Clarke’s examples form a disparate list of three unrelated birds, the elements, a reluctant prophet, and the hairs of one’s head, to prove the omnipotence of God, revenges not excepted:

God can, whenever he pleases, even without a Miracle, punish the disobedient; And no Swiftmess, no Strength, no Wisdom, no Artifice, shall in any manner avail, or inable them to escape the Vengeance, which even Natural Causes only, by the direction of Him from whom they receive their Nature, bring upon Offenders. He can punish by Fires and Famine, by Plagues and Pestilences, by Storms and Earthquakes.¹¹⁹

Sterne’s relish is elsewhere. As his flowing example of the ravens caring for God’s servant leaves out the smiting worm, withering gourd, and fallen sparrow, so his examples of providence do not dwell on the divine capacity for revenge. Instead we are urged to

go one step higher—and consider,—whose power it is, that enables these causes to work,—whose knowledge it is, that foresees what will be their effects,—whose goodness it is, that is invisibly conducting them forwards to the best and greatest ends for the happiness of his creatures. (*S* 79.20)

Turning to Tillotson’s sermon on the same text we note that New claims “like Sterne, Tillotson rather laboriously repeats the argument of his opening pages.”¹²⁰ He is more correct regarding the archbishop, whose ‘Success Not Always Answerable to the Probability of Second Causes’ seems dedicated to lists, tautologies and explicating the various ways in which battle-strong, bread-wise, riches-understanding, favour-skill may be understood. Referring to Sterne’s note to 77.10 [“ *Vid. Tillotson’s sermon on this subject”] New’s comment that “Sterne’s discussion is sufficiently reworded so that here, where he actually cites a source, one is in some doubt as to whether he copied Tillotson or an intermediate borrower”¹²¹ unfortunately disregards

the creative effort implicit in most of Sterne's uses. Borrowing, Sterne makes a conscious effort to trim Tillotson's verbosity, as should be apparent to anyone who compares New's lengthy quotation with Sterne's selections.¹²² Sterne's deletion of Tillotson's biblical reference to war, and his alteration of "political skill" to "art and skill" (Tillotson was preaching at the House of Commons) is relevant. Likewise, instead of proceeding along Tillotson's lines—that it is unreasonable to assign the cause of extraordinary events to "blind necessity"—Sterne elaborates with scriptural allusions to God's goodness, not as dispenser of justice to the evil, but as "raising up the poor out of the dust, and lifting the beggar from the dunghill, and contrary to all hopes, setting him with princes." What immediately follows is a reworking of Young in which Sterne changes "they who look no farther" and "contrary both to their Intentions and their Hopes" to "we who look no further" and "contrary both to our intentions and our hopes."¹²³

JOSEPH HALL *et al* : IMPLICIT CRITICISM OF SOURCES

In all mentions of Sterne as clerical plagiarist, one element of his sermons that it seems has hardly been imagined, let alone discussed, is the possibility of Sterne's improvement of his elder colleagues not only stylistically and personally, but also temperamentally—even theologically. Presuming him to be void of either interest or capacity, we have consistently misinterpreted signs of dedicated effort to present the wisdom of an accurate gospel.

One can appreciate why Sterne frequently incorporates elements of Joseph Hall's dramatizations of scripture; they are lively, imaginative and instructive. Born in 1574, Hall's earliest works were verse satires. Fully conversant with the discourse of Erasmian and Rabelaisian theological wit, he brought his penchant for incisive composition with him to

theology, where he became a master of the new plain style. Sterne borrows from one of his sermons, but consistently uses the *Contemplations*, a fact significant for discerning Sterne's homiletic tenor. *Quo Vadis? A Just Censure of Travel, As it is Commonly Undertaken by the Gentlemen of our Nation* [1617] appears useful in Sterne's sermon 'The Prodigal Son', and this work of "the great bishop Hall" (*TS* 592.20) likewise is conjured in both novels for a laugh at Grand Tour cubs (*TS* 592.16-593.2, *ASJ* 16.16-17.10). No 'source' for Sterne's homilies is closer to his graphic presentations than Hall who engages with passionate reflections. Hall's arguments flow easily, unencumbered by menus of headings, but he is not given to weaving dialogue through his stories and is quicker to condemn with hortatory explication. Unlike Sterne, he tends toward eloquent but cutting flourishes against the world. That Sterne consistently tranquilizes Hall's invectives should be of considerable interest. New gives an example in his note to *S* 234.23-24 but his comment that Sterne's change of tone is due to "his well-known flirtatiousness" is hardly adequate.¹²⁴ For one thing, Sterne's congregation would not have been (if any is) fit target for Hall's language. As consistent an influence as Hall was, in this instance his lack of charity was a disgrace to the beauty he hoped to encourage; Sterne's improvement is frank and gracious.

Even so, John Ferriar is near the truth when he writes "there is a delicacy of thought, and tenderness of expression in the good Bishop's compositions, from the transfusion of which Sterne looked for immortality."¹²⁵ New's complementary statement, that Sterne "in the lifetime volumes . . . sought sermons more in keeping with the narrative skills he was exhibiting in *TS* and hence the predominance of the Old Testament and the influence of Bishop Hall" is worth

considering. But, referring to “Sterne’s dependence on Hall” New, following Hammond, misleads.¹²⁶ As mentioned above, frequently in Sterne’s lesser borrowings one finds oneself at a loss as to why he even bothered to copy ordinary phrases when he was in the process of giving them renewed dignity. Sterne’s six borrowings from Joseph Hall for ‘The Character of Shimei’ are typical: each is very short and capably absorbed. Hammond’s example of two of Sterne’s uses of Hall could amply be supplemented, as in his light but frequent use of Wollaston. This much of Hammond’s important comment regarding the use of Hall’s contemplation ‘The Levite’s Concubine’ is accurate:

four short but verbatim transcripts establish a relationship between the two accounts. But the choice of details, treatment of the characters, management of the story, and the spirit in which the whole was conceived differ so radically in the two narratives that Hall’s contemplation could almost be taken as an illustration of that very attitude against which Sterne was pleading.¹²⁷

But following his presupposition that Sterne was capable only of slavishly following the interpretations of others, Hammond concludes this paragraph by saying:

so different, in fact, was Yorick’s handling of the stories of the Levite and Joseph that one is forced to believe the passages taken from Hall had been transcribed into a commonplace book at least a year before use was made of them. Had Sterne gone directly to the *Contemplations* during the composition of his discourse, would not the Bishop’s interpretation have had greater influence?¹²⁸

Such has been the pall over Sterne’s sermons. On the contrary, readers need not be *forced to believe* that Sterne was anything other than a conscientious sermon writer, a slave of neither bishops nor critics. Sterne’s use of Hall is hardly the work of a conniving imitator. Too much is reworked, deleted, and divergent paths taken before and after the debts. One cannot escape the conclusion that if Sterne had been a second-rate or uninterested sermon-writer he would have

borrowed more, and altered less. For every well-phrased idea he picks up, many more are left untouched.

One of Hall's favorite devices that would have caught Sterne's eye, is to remark on ironic coincidences. Over and over again Hall drops these curious crumbs, which Sterne tends to disregard. Recounting the story of Joseph, for example, Hall writes "if Joseph had died for hunger in the pit, both Jacob and Judah and all his brethren had died for hunger in Canaan." Later in Egypt: "this second time is Joseph stripped of his garment; before in the violence of envy, now of lust." Joseph was accused by his brothers of being a spy for his father, and now he accuses them of the same crime. The one innocent brother, Benjamin, is made out to be guilty of theft.¹²⁹ Regarding Hezekiah [cf. Sterne's #17], "he [God] that delivered him from the hand of his enemies smites him with sickness."¹³⁰ I believe the only place Sterne develops Hall's sense of irony is in 'The History of Jacob considered' (*S* 210.14), but where Hall naturally notes the karmic rebound and keeps on contemplating,¹³¹ Sterne prefaces and concludes the comment with significant questions:

I know not whether 'tis of any use, to take notice of this singularity in the patriarch's life. . . .

I do not see which way the honour of Providence is concerned in repaying us exactly in our own coin. . . .

It is enough for us, that the best way to escape evil, is in general, not to commit it ourselves. (*S* 210.8, .19, .25)

If thoughts still linger of Sterne the dependent hack we can turn to Hall's treatment of the unfortunate story of the Levite and his concubine.¹³² As is generally the case, Hall is more concerned explicitly to bring a moral that relates to the reader's relationship with God, whereas Sterne focuses especially on the personal psychology of the characters involved, leaving

inferences to the reader. In this particular instance, Sterne more than Hall builds up the Levite's reflections and his compassion for the concubine as partner rather than ancilla. One important difference between the two accounts is obvious if we compare Sterne's 170.29-172.8 and the corresponding passage of Hall quoted in New's note to that section.¹³³ While New draws attention to Hall's version as "an important starting point for Sterne's mode of sermon-writing," we should notice Sterne's complete change of temper in giving the Levite a long soliloquy by which we may see the progression of compassion and forgiveness in a virtuous, slighted man. Hall's third-person rendition skims the surface of the possibilities Sterne thoroughly dives into.

Hall is eager to point out coincidences: "the four months' absence of his daughter is answered with four days' feasting." As in his treatments of the Shunammite and Hezekiah, Hall capitalizes on the conclusion of the story: "and now this feast, which was meant for their new nuptials, proves her funeral. Even when we let ourselves loosest to our pleasures, the hand of God, though invisibly, is writing bitter things against us."¹³⁴ Hall follows the father-in-law's detainment of the couple, associating it with the difficulties of human love, claiming the tragedy would not have occurred had the hospitality been refused: "an honest man's heart is where his calling is: such a one, when he is abroad, is like a fish in the air: whereinto if it leap for recreation or necessity, yet it soon returns to his own element."¹³⁵ He continues with the story (Judges xix.9-30) and graphically expands its horrible conclusion: "she had voluntarily exposed herself to lust, now is exposed forcibly. Adultery was her sin, adultery was her death." Hall does this for four pages (60 % of his contemplation) and in his conclusion concentrates on the theme of just retribution that he maintains throughout his next contemplation 'The desolation of Benjamin'.

This being Hall's purpose, he masterfully impresses it upon us, bringing the story to life, and dispensing his commentary throughout. Sterne takes stylistic cues from him, but his enrichment of the story has another purpose. After the Levite, concubine, and servant have departed from the father-in-law he says, almost as if he were conversing with Hall,

it serves no purpose to pursue the story further; the catastrophe is horrid; and would lead us beyond the particular purpose for which I have enlarged upon thus much of it, —and that is, to discredit rash judgment. . . . —many and rapid are the springs which feed it . . . let us make the discourse as serviceable as we can, by tracing some of the most remarkable of them, up to their source.
(S 172.31-173.16)

In contrast^{to}, if not in censure ^{of}, Hall, Sterne's anger is reserved for the ungenerous. After outlining four "miserable," "cruel" inlets to evil (S 173.17; 175.6) in conclusion, again as if to Hall, he says:

what then, ye rash censurers of the world! . . . Must BEAUTY for ever be trampled upon in the dirt for one—one false step? And shall no one virtue or good quality, out of the thousand the fair penitent may have left,—shall not one of them be suffered to stand by her?—Just God of Heaven and Earth!—
—But thou art merciful, loving and righteous, and lookest down with pity upon these wrongs thy servants do unto each other: pardon us, we beseech thee, for them and all our transgressions. (S 175.31-176.13)

In so saying, without naming Hall, Sterne challenges those given to "setting up trade upon the broken stock of other people's failings," to cast the first stone (S 175.10). This implicit correction of Hall's uncharitable emphasis, here and in the conclusion to #24, is not unique in Sterne's homilies. As in the examples above where Sterne rearranges sources to offer a more engaging and free-flowing prose, so in places he leaves hints of his own criticism of those sources.

Generally these challenges are private, as few would be expected to recognize any of his debts. But even in the midst of indulging an occasional whim, as in the following example, his

purpose is reform. After an uncharacteristically long borrowing from Edward Young at the beginning of sermon 28, Sterne says “but to do further justice to the text, we must look beyond this inward recompence which is always inseparable from virtue—and take a view of the outward advantages” (S 270.12). This Sterne begins to do in the rest of that long paragraph. Then, using almost exactly the very words of his next source, James Blair, he says “for the better imprinting of which truth in your memories, give me leave to offer a few things to your consideration” (S 271.19). The ‘first’ of these “few things” is “The *First*” as in Blair, from whom he continues to borrow (S 271.21-31). When Sterne moves on and says “Secondly” (S 272.1) he begins to borrow from Samuel Clarke, but the first half of Sterne’s sentence is reworked from a “2ly” of Clarke, though the latter half is a composite of *another* 2ly and then of a “1st” from three pages later in him. Then, immediately, Sterne says “First . . .” (S 272.6) and in that sentence actually borrows from a “3dly” section in Clarke. Sterne’s next sentences (S 272.9-17), use an earlier portion of that same “3dly.” When Sterne shifts at 272.17 from “plain-dealing” to “—The general . . .” he is jumping three-quarters of a folio page to a second point enveloped in Clarke’s 2dly with which this trail began. When Sterne asks us at 272.24 to “consider, in the third place” he is introducing Blair’s second point that immediately follows the point in Blair where Sterne left off to insert Clarke. Sterne goes on for his fourth and fifth points using Blair, but for his conclusion “lastly to sum up the account” (S 274.4-23) lifts a sizable portion from John Norris almost verbatim, which leads him to make the innocuous statement to those unaware of his foregoing mosaic:

I conclude with one observation upon the whole of this argument, which is this—
Notwithstanding the great force with which it has been often urged by good
writers,—there are many cases which it may not reach.¹³⁶

This is humorous, of course, as we appreciate Sterne's playfulness with who that *I* is. But it is primarily instructive for us now, noticing that Sterne combines important points of four very capable theologians on his topic of the 'temporal advantages of religion' but realizes an element of reality is wanting, so he acknowledges the common frustration that good things seem to happen to vicious people. Neither does he soften the truth with platitudes: "it is prudent not to lay more stress upon this argument than it will bear:—but always remember to call into our aid, that great and more unanswerable argument, which will answer the most doubtful cases which can be stated" (S 274.30).

This sermon, then, chock-full of words of Young, Blair, Clarke and Norris can also truly be said to be 'Sterne's' as it easily continues the theology expressed in the lifetime volumes that applauds participation in earthly joys, but simultaneously admits that these are, of themselves, fleeting and of little consequence compared with eternal joys. Even the sentence from the introduction to Norris' 'The Importance of a Religious Life considered from the happy Conclusion of it' that Sterne copied into his manuscript to conclude at 275.17 was finally edited to retain only what would leave a positive impression. Speaking of the fragile happiness on earth and sure beatitude of heaven, Norris writes "and this is a portion she can never be dis-inherited of . . ." which Sterne keeps; but where Norris continues ". . . however the Malice of Men or an ill Combination of Accidents may defraud her of the Other" Sterne instead simply concludes "—which may God of his mercy grant us all, for the sake of Jesus Christ."¹³⁷

Hammond prints this sermon *entire*, synoptic with its sources, to prove that "an analysis of [it] shows quite clearly why Sterne had not selected this discourse for printing! Not only is it

commonplace and dull but the extent of the borrowings left little room for the preacher to express either his own ideas or sentiments.”¹³⁸ Deaf to what one’s “own ideas” become in traditional homilies, and blind to Sterne’s subtler commentary, Hammond condemns himself and generations of admirers to misreading. When later he returns to this sermon saying “these various fragments were joined together so skill fully that, when combined, they read as though one man had written them all, and at one time—truly an amazing performance”¹³⁹ we are not sure whether to congratulate him for an accurate assessment or reel again with the inconsistency.

Other instances of Sterne’s implied correction exist in the sermons and offer us a glimpse of his interest in flexibly using his mentors. Briefly follow some other examples. Where Sterne is again encouraging his congregation to look beyond the immediate confusions of this life to the providence of God, in sermon 44, he has Clarke’s ‘Of Resignation to the Divine Will in Affliction’ (#96) in mind, and borrows from it for his introduction (*S* 408.21-24). Clarke in this and his previous sermon (from which Sterne borrows for #15) offers the classic ‘reasonable’ arguments for the promiscuous distribution of earthly happiness. Instead of repeating these, after paraphrasing Clarke’s copious defence, Sterne at 409.22 says “I shall desist from enlarging any further upon either of the foregoing arguments in vindication of God’s providence, which are urged so often with so much force and conviction, as to leave no room for a reasonable reply.” Immediately Sterne’s sermon becomes more personal. Instead of continuing, as Clarke does in his next sermon, to reduce the reasons for affliction to four: “1. To teach us Humility . . . 2. To lead us to Repentance . . . 3. To wean us from an over-fond Love of the present World. And 4. To

try, improve, and perfect our Virtues; and make some particular persons eminent Examples of Faith and Patience to the World,”¹⁴⁰ Sterne engages us with ourselves:

I shall, therefore, in the remaining part of my discourse, take up your time with a short enquiry into the difficulties of coming not only at the true characters of men, —but likewise of knowing either the degrees of their real happiness or misery in this life.

The first of these will teach us candour in our judgments of others;—the second, to which I shall confine myself, will teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of God. (S 410.1)

No doubt Clarke’s correspondence with Leibniz [pub. 1717] and his earlier sets of Boyle Lectures [published in 1705-6 as:] *A Discourse Concerning the Being and Attributes of God, the Obligations of Natural Religion, and the Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, specifically poised against the influence of Lockean empiricism, could well have provoked Sterne to suggest that “humility in our reasonings upon the ways of God” would develop a better exchange.

Again, using Clarke for a portion of his sermon on pride (#24; S 229.19-24) we get a taste of Sterne’s editorial capacities. Typically Sterne avoids the extremes of polemic. Referring to “some satirical pens” who concluded “that all mankind at the bottom were proud alike” (S 229.9) Sterne continues with “on the whole the remark has more spleen than truth in it” (S 229.15) but goes on to balance this with “notwithstanding this, so much may be allowed to the observation . . .,” and a hint of Clarke: “. . . that Pride is a vice which grows up in society so insensibly” (S 229.18). We hear no more from Clarke in this sermon, though Sterne follows a pattern similar to his, referring to one’s station in life and pretensions to extraordinary illumination. Sterne’s manner is entirely different from Clarke’s, so that for once, when he takes a few words from Hall

for his conclusion, it strikes us as more comical than true: “a beggarly parade of remnants is but a sorry object of Pride at best; —but more so, when we can cry out upon it, as the poor man did of his hatchet, —* *Alas! Master, —for it was borrowed.*”¹⁴¹

Note how in a similar vein, when discussing an equally commonplace situation, Sterne is careful to present a useful moderate caveat to undisciplined medievalisms: “and here, not to feign a long hypothesis, as some have done, of a sinner’s being admitted into heaven, with a particular description of his condition and behaviour there,—we need only consider . . .” (*S* 279.1).¹⁴² The loaded passage of John Norris that follows was also used by Sterne at 222.12-18 and its obvious importance in Sterne’s thinking will be addressed in chapter three. In this context, Norris’ explicit neoplatonic perspective, the need of inner sanctification for the entire self symmetrically to be redeemed, is telling. After a significant pause, in which Sterne gives an elegant lesson in how most usefully to preach, he picks up Norris again at 279.30 as he continues to question how a soul indisposed to heavenly things could ever be brought to their enjoyment. Sterne interrupts and says “the consideration of this has led some writers so far, as to say, with some degree of irreverence in the expression, —that it was not in the power of God to make a wicked man happy . . . which thought, a very able divine in our church has pursued so far, as to declare his belief . . .” (*S* 280.9-14). That Sterne would refer to Norris (and a well-worn tradition of thought)¹⁴³ in this way and as one who feigns a long hypothesis, and immediately after his borrowing say “—This, it is true, is mere speculation,—and what concerns us not to know;—it being enough for our purpose, that such an experiment is never likely to be tried,—that we stand upon different terms

with God” (*S* 280.22) confirms he was not slavishly imitating theological perspectives, but developing their articulation in line with a very clear impression of the gospel.

In ‘The Odd Couple: Laurence Sterne and John Norris of Bemerton’ Melvyn New is enthusiastically misleading when, instead of acknowledging Sterne’s derivations, additions and explicit criticism of Norris’ presentation, he claims Sterne “fully endorses” the position and suggests the appellation “a very able divine” is here meant as a rare compliment.¹⁴⁴ Regarding the labor of attempting to catch echoes of other writers in Sterne’s sermons New says:

I know I have not been able to catch every echo. As with Sterne’s borrowings from his favorite authors, Rabelais, Montaigne, Cervantes, and—in the *Sermons*—Tillotson, his debt is a question of both specific passages and more generalized dependencies; hence, rather than offering here a definitive catalogue of the relationship, I will argue only that Norris’s cannon may warrant as much attention when reading Sterne as we have given to his known favorites—as much, to be sure, as has been afforded to Locke.¹⁴⁵

For its exclusivity this is an unfortunate recommendation. Throughout the article are phrases such as “Sterne’s absorption of Norris’s thinking,” “the thoughts borrowed from Norris seem to tend in one direction,”

it is Norris’s theory of the natural goodness of our senses and passions that seems at first glance most at odds with orthodox Christian thought—and, at the same time, closest to some of Sterne’s most cherished notions, particularly in *A Sentimental Journey*. A closer examination of Norris’s writings, however, reveals the traditional theological underpinnings of this theory, not only in neoplatonic idealism, but in Augustine and Aquinas as well.¹⁴⁶

New is working backwards, towards an understanding of principles Sterne knew by heart. The sermons reveal Sterne to have been meaningfully familiar with *traditional theological underpinnings*, so we should be wary of fathering on Norris a dependence on thoughts that to Sterne would have been commonplace. Norris’ theories, like those of Locke, were well-worn

currency even as their works were published. By drawing these age-old epistemologies into the limelight of yet another context Sterne is presenting his own essay within the tradition.

Two final instances of implicit criticism in the sermons, in which the subject of illness is presented, serve to show Sterne's involvement in offering realistic comments instead of platitudes. As has been recorded by others, for the composition of his sermon 'Trust in God' Sterne trusted Walter Leightonhouse. It is a small alteration, but note that in reordering a long passage of Leightonhouse for his conclusion Sterne changes the entirely optimistic exhortations of his source—that we consider our past deliverances from evil—to the more appropriate “—if thou hast recovered, —consider who it was that repaired those breaches.” (*S* 329.26)¹⁴⁷

Again we see changes that show Sterne attempting to convey a realistic and therefore fruitful picture of the shortness and troubles of life, using a page from a sermon of Richard Bentley preached before King George I, 1716/17. First, Bentley has: “how many are daily reprieved and rescued from the very jaws of impending death by the saving care and skill of the physician!” Sterne deletes this reprieve and the physician's skill is instead that which cannot save beyond nature's period (*S* 96.8-10). In Bentley “God has so appointed and determined the several growths and periods of the vegetable race, so he seems to have prescribed the same law to various kinds of living creatures.”¹⁴⁸ Sterne declines to beat around the bush: “as God has appointed and determined the several growths and decays of the vegetable race, so he seems as evidently to have prescribed the same laws to man, as well as all living creatures” (*S* 96.10). Continuing with Blair's paragraph, instead of the qualities “stature and duration” Sterne chooses “growth, duration and extinction,” and as if his point is not sufficiently clear, doubles Bentley's

“the creature expires and dies of itself, as ripe fruit falls from the tree” to “the creature expires and dies of itself, as ripe fruit falls from the tree, or a flower preserved beyond its bloom droops and perishes upon the stalk” (*S* 96.16). Then, almost apologizing for an indulgent moment, he says “thus much for this comparison of Job’s, which though it is very poetical, yet conveys a just idea of the thing referred to” (*S* 96.19). Contrary to the popular misconception, Sterne was entirely cognizant of the moral potential latent in appropriate poetical comparisons.

This last statement, that *a just idea* may be conveyed by a *poetical* comparison is central to Sterne. His art is not in masking reality, but in translating useful conceptions and experiences of it. All sermon-writers are conscious of this need to a certain degree, but Sterne had the capacity to be particularly convincing. For example, note how James Blair, from whom Sterne elsewhere borrows, in his sermon ‘The sum of our Duty to our Neighbour’ mentions the Samaritan, and deals with his text (Matt. vii.12) comprehensively. Unlike Sterne however, in this case in sermon 3, he doesn’t try to develop a sense of interacting personalities and goes nowhere towards provoking the sentiment that he himself recognizes as necessary for reform:

It is true, most Men, from an Hard-heartedness and Unconcernedness in their Neighbour’s Calamities, will not suffer their Minds to enter into the Consideration of his unfortunate Circumstances; like the Priest and the Levite in the Parable. . . . But if we would accustom ourselves to the Spirit and Temper of the charitable *Samaritan*, and heartily concern our selves for our Neighbour’s Misfortunes, we should soon learn to act the compassionate Part as effectually, as if we ourselves had been, at the same time of our Life, in the self-same Circumstances.¹⁴⁹

Tillotson was likewise aware of the advantages of dramatic sensible representations:

The scripture loves to make use of sensible Representations, to set forth to us the Happiness and Misery of the next life; partly by way of Condescension to our Understandings, and partly to work more powerfully upon our Affections. For

whilst we are in the Body, and immers'd in Sense, we are most apt to be moved by such Descriptions of things as are sensible.¹⁵⁰

Tillotson gives an example of a depiction of torments in hell and thereby offers the rich man/Abraham passage borrowed in part by Sterne at 174.27-175.5. What should be noted are Sterne's changes to Tillotson's words, particularly his deletion of the reference to the rich man as "this wretched wicked man," and his use of this passage in a context almost opposite to that of its original. Indeed, when Sterne says, just after his borrowing that "this leads me to the observation of a fourth cruel inlet to this evil, and that is, the desire of being thought men of wit and parts, and the vain expectation of coming honestly by the title, by shrewd and sarcastick reflections upon whatever is done in the world" (*S* 175.6), we are probably hearing another private reproof of "one of our divines" (*S* 175.2). Unlike Tillotson, Sterne, practicing the forgiveness and courtesy advocated in the story, refuses to magnify the well-known sin and ultimate torment of another without publicly considering his own culpability.

When Clarke discusses the same parable, he too recognizes that it was Jesus' intention "to reprove the covetous and proud Pharisees," that in this manner the message was "more likely to take Effect" than by direct confrontation.¹⁵¹ Clarke continues to consider what the rich man's vices must have been to deserve this, and why Jesus was not explicit in saying which particular vice was the cause. Clarke's primary concentration in this sermon (sermon 115 'The Parable of the Rich Man and *Lazarus* explained') is the Pharisees' sins. Instead of his belief that "Differences of Station" are "plainly the will of God, that there should be such; and that they should be supported with proper Marks of Distinction,"¹⁵² for Sterne it is custom that imposes marks of distinction. The sumptuous examples of Solomon's excesses, which in Clarke are

passed over with the citation “I *Kings* iv.22,” Sterne fully describes (S 219.24-27). Neither Tillotson in his three sermons, nor Clarke in this or sermon 128 (which like Sterne’s has Luke xvi.31 as text), brings the dead man back to life, as does Sterne. The ideas or conclusions Sterne offers are not new, but the experience capable of being generated is entirely different. Sterne’s borrowings then, like those in *Tristram Shandy* enhance rather than detract from their originals. Tillotson and Clarke are honored and improved in the usage. He applies Hugh Blair’s advice before it was offered, and infuses his forbears with a vigor and vitality they lacked.

On the heels of this evidence of Sterne sifting reproaches and personalizing accounts it may be tempting to attribute his moderation to “his well known flirtatiousness.”¹⁵³ As themes outlined in the following chapter will illustrate, this would be a mistake; he is careful not to avoid repercussions of the Fall. A theme complementary to that of reserved punishment is presented in Sterne’s ‘The Ways of Providence justified to Man’. In it he is at pains to note the complexities of persons with limited knowledge judging one another. In so doing he uses portions from the middle of Wollaston’s *The Religion of Nature Delineated*. It is on the manuscript of this sermon that Sterne is said to have written what was quoted above [p. 45] “I have borrowed most of the reflections . . . though the sermon is truly mine, such as it is.” Regardless of the anecdote’s authenticity, its sentiments are applicable to the borrowings in all of Sterne’s sermons. Reflections are borrowed, hints are enlarged upon, and the resultant discourse is an entirely different work than a sum or arbitrary fusion of its detectable ‘sources’ (if any) would suggest.

In this particular instance, both Wollaston and Sterne have just finished a vindication of God's providence and of man's free will. Wollaston then begins to reason upon the character of the pitiable man who has many unseen reasons for having committed a vicious act. Only later does he glance at the "hypocritical" characters that mask their vices. Sterne reverses this order in Wollaston, and while he does expand the qualities of the "modest" man, he is careful to balance them with the "others." Likewise the mitigating circumstances of Wollaston are presented by Sterne in a slightly more sceptical light, as his insertions of "perhaps" (*S* 411.23), "may" (*S* 411.24, 25), and the change from "cannot be" to "is not always" (.25) suggest. These tend to soften the sense of inculpability that Wollaston does not mean, but of which he could easily be accused.¹⁵⁴

DOCTRINAL POLEMIC AND RELIGIOUS DISCIPLINE

Although Sterne consistently stabs at the practices of Methodists, Catholics, and (occasionally) Jews, he has been accused of negligence and disinterest for lacking doctrinal polemic. We read however in *Arderne* and others that the dredging up of heresies and infidelity in order to parade one's orthodoxy was going out of fashion. One was to deal only, and then seldom and swiftly, with *current* dangers: that is, with elements posing as temptations to one's congregation. Apart from good manners, the reason given for this is eminently practical: heretics will not be listening and the educated or faithful will find it tedious to be fed what they have already digested. As Wilkins put it: "the too long insisting on a confessed truth is apt to nauseate and flat the attention."¹⁵⁵ Sterne's contemporary Anglican clergy (sometimes meanly) voice

objections to the heretical tempers of enthusiasm, superstition and infidelity, but appear agreed that sustained harangue is out of place in the pulpit.

This is not to say that Sterne is shy of delineating a sound, consistent, and positive approach to the Anglican religion, or that he was reticent to call attention to devotional abuses. It may be tempting from the distance of two and a half centuries to assume Sterne's theological understandings and presentations are merely the sum of his education and milieu: unconsidered and predictable. For this reason it is important to note his assessments of current religious alternatives. In fact, a careful observation of Sterne's engagements with elements of Methodism, Catholicism, and Judaism makes an excellent introduction to his general approach not only to orthodox Anglican homiletics, but to the ribbing of wisdom's abuses in his fiction as well.

Religion in some form has always been relied upon as a moral, spiritual and social corrective, but Sterne is at pains to distinguish the religion he is preaching from others that he sees as confounding attempts at integrity. This is significant as proof of his concern for the orthodox welfare of his congregation. He reserves his heaviest rebukes for those who presume to wield God for selfish purposes. But in so doing, he upbraids constructively. Pharisees provide the classic example of a 'whited sepulchre' (Matt. xxiii.27); like the posture of gravity, a symmetrical exterior conceals confusion and decay.

Sterne may appear uncharitable for presenting follies of Jews, Catholics, and Methodists without registering their wisdom. But one should note he is careful only to rebuke establishments, organizations he believes to be spiritually dangerous. For duped individuals he has nothing but compassion. Sterne acknowledges, for example, regarding the observant but proud Pharisee who

prays in the temple (Luke xviii.9-14), it is scarce probable “that he should knowingly and wilfully have dared to act so open and barefaced a scene of mockery in the face of Heaven. . . . It must have been owing to some delusion in his education, which had early implanted in his mind false and wretched notions of the essentials of religion” (*S* 61.29-62.2). As in other sermons where the ‘Pharisee’ is Catholic, we are reminded that instead of removing self-deception, religion frequently encourages it, “wilfully set open this wide gate of deceit” (*S* 260.14). “ ’Tis a much shorter way to kneel down at a confessional and receive absolution—than to live so as to deserve it—not at the hands of men—but at the hands of God—who sees the heart and cannot be imposed on” (*S* 63.15). The deviance of Rome, shifting responsibility, parallels that of the Pharisees. In lieu of encouraging personal repentance and integrity of word and action, systems have been established that substitute outer observances for the inner work of repentance and reformation. This ‘Grand Inquisitor’ shortcut is the greatest temptation for any reformer, and Sterne rarely chides other denominations without explicit application to his parish:

even in our own church . . . so strong a propensity is there in our nature to sense—and so unequal a match is the understanding of the bulk of mankind, for the impressions of outward things—that we see thousands who every day mistake the shadow for the substance, and was it fairly put to the trial would exchange the reality for the appearance. (*S* 63.30-64.4)

Sterne’s stance is the accepted latitudinarian position: Catholics remove God with ceremony, hierarchy, and by claiming to own the Mystery. Methodists appear equally warped; presuming the deity’s sensational proximity in enthusiastic claims of illumination, they equate private hallucinations with the voice and vision of God. The sin of pride, says Sterne, is at the root of their theology; like Pharisees “—they trusted in themselves, —’twas no wonder then they

despised others” (S 241.11). Neither denomination is given to religious toleration, so Sterne shows them no quarter. One may wonder how his uncharacteristic severity in this regard accords with his aggrandizement of mercy, but he is taking his cue from Jesus who, usually forgiving and enigmatic, is lucid and ruthless with Scribes and Pharisees for turning an intimate religion into a manipulative, legalistic system.

—Christianity, when rightly explained and practised, is all meekness and candour, and love and courtesy; and there is no one passion our SAVIOUR rebukes so often, or with so much sharpness, as that one, which is subversive of these kind effects, — and that is pride. (S 241.2)

Superstitious ritual and misplaced enthusiasm are both deaths to a religion of humble, reasonable faith. Consciousness thus cheated into hypocrisy by a sense of religion sufficiently observed, in the fancies of instrumental duties and imaginary conversation, is capable of grievous deceit: “I believe there is no one mistaken principle which, for its time, has wrought more serious mischiefs” (S 264.29). The mischief of “the *Romish* church” is as serious as that of the enthusiast, who also studies more to seem than to be.

—See him ostentatiously cloathed with the outward garb of sanctity, to attract the eyes of the vulgar.—See a chearful demeanour, the natural result of an easy and self-applauding heart, studiously avoided as criminal.—See his countenance overspread with a melancholy gloom and despondence;—as if religion, which is evidently calculated to make us happy in this life as well as the next, was the parent of sullenness and discontent. (S 365.4)

True fruits of religion remain unripe for want of those willing to embrace quality over appearance.

These are not casual reprimands, issuing comfortable mediocrity. As William Spellman notes:

indeed, for Tillotson, it was the dangerous Catholics, with their sacramental guarantees of immediate pardon, “very grateful to the corrupt nature of man,” and the sectarian enthusiasts, firmly mistaken in their predestinarian credo, “the very

definition of presumption,” who together debased the gift of eternal salvation by abrogating human obligation.¹⁵⁶

Not only were Catholic and Methodist apologists presumptuous, they could also be extraordinarily mean-spirited. With critical concentration on the alleged embellishments of Sterne, it is worthwhile reading words of another camp, which Sterne obviously despised:

Thus are all you that never passed under a great change of heart, by the mighty power of the spirit of God upon your souls. . . .

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect, over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked; his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times so abominable in his eyes as the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.¹⁵⁷

Such language is not in line with the gospel. Without preying on his congregation, Sterne instead leaves conviction to the heart and Spirit of his listeners. Even as he borrows from homilies of his own persuasion, as we have seen, he is careful not to rant against vice or concentrate on another's blame, trying instead to construct a profitable discourse accessible and useful to conscientious believers. More than many of his equally well-meaning mentors, Sterne grasped what Wilkins wrote to would-be preachers: “this is generally to be observed, that in all reprehensions, we must expresse rather our *love* than our *anger*, and strive rather to convince than to exasperate.”¹⁵⁸ Sterne's untitled sermon 33 (‘God's forbearance of sin’) provides a typical example. In it he borrows from Edward Stillingfleet's ‘The Danger and Deceitfulness of Sin’. As was common when preaching on propensity to vice while encouraging reformation, Stillingfleet sets the stage with “the Jews:” “their ancient Religion, the bottom of all was a principle of infidelity, not arising from want of sufficient reason to convince them, but from a close and

secret love of sin which made them willing to quarrel with whatever was so repugnant to it, as the doctrine of Christ.”¹⁵⁹ In *Stillingfleet* this tendency to love sin is primarily evidenced by the biblical Jewish nation. A commonplace view, with roots in a branch of Pauline theology and the persecution of first-century Christians. Sterne, however, steers clear of what could lead to uncharitable polemics and self-satisfied transference of blame. In his introduction he too laments the “terrible character of the world” but quickly says

mankind have ever been bad,—considering what motives they have had to be better;—and taking this for granted, instead of declaiming against it, let us see whether a discourse may not be as serviceable, by endeavouring, as Solomon has here done, rather to give an account of it, and by tracing back the evils to their first principles, to direct ourselves to the true remedy against them.— (S 313.26)

Needless to say, these “first principles” of evil are not the Jews. In fact Sterne immediately puts his congregation in mind of the bleaker moments of *Christian* history:

let it here only be premised,—that the wickedness either of the present or past times, whatever scandal and reproach it brings upon christians,—ought not in reason to reflect dishonour upon christianity, which is so apparently well framed to make us good. (S 314.6).

By focussing on encouragement rather than hotheaded reproach Sterne endeavours to lead his congregation to an appreciation of the source and thereby the remedy of these evils. The moral is orchestrated to upbraid and challenge his flock, not to generate self-congratulatory polemic.

Falling for simulation in ceremonial and personal rubrics, Methodism and Catholicism were seen to substitute systems that could not possibly bear the weight of examination or provoke their congregations to reliable virtues. When asked for evidence of their persuasions, Methodists could only answer “ ‘they feel it is so’ ” (243.19), and the multiple rituals of Catholics (discussed at S 259.32, etc.) seem developed particularly to keep persons from honest encounters with their own

shortcomings. Sterne promotes a religion that will be useful to his parishioners, one that is sufficiently ceremonial to offer the spiritual and material blessings of the Communion of Saints, established doctrines and familiar patterns of worship, and which is, at the same time, personal enough to demand responsibilities of rigorous self-examination and active morality from each of its members.

We should recognize and acknowledge Sterne's appreciation for the disciplines and ceremonies of authentic religion. Some have suggested he was entirely earth-bound, given to emphasis from nature while disregarding heaven, but, again, Arderne has expressed the standard:

in the confirmation of practical Doctrines, (in which I hope you will chiefly employ your Preaching abilities) you may be furnished sufficiently from such heads as these, to wit, the Attributes of Gods Holiness, Justice, Sovereignty . . . furthermore from the dictates of Nature, and testimony of Conscience, and loveliness of Vertue, and deformity of Vice.¹⁶⁰

Reminding us of the beauty of creation and the blessings of this life, Sterne is not recommending to us a merely 'natural' religion, or one based primarily on pleasant immediate reward. That his mid-century presentation of a joyful gospel was no flight of Shandean fancy, should be clear from the following excerpt from a sermon of Thomas Secker [1693-1768] Archbishop of Canterbury during the run of *TS*:

but still, both religion and morals, disguised under a forbidding look, appear so much less to advantage, than when they wear an inviting one; that we wrong our profession, as well as ourselves, if we neglect to show it in as much beauty, as a modest simplicity will permit; and thus to *adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things*.¹⁶¹

In fact, preachers were encouraged to make the most of even the *temporal* beatitudes of a faithful life, using passionate oratory. Far from reducing the dignity of the pulpit, this approach offers a

tangible catalyst issuing, importantly, from the cleric who was genuinely to resonate his assent.

Thus Blair:

Dignity of expression, indeed the pulpit requires in a high degree; . . . But this dignity is perfectly consistent with simplicity. The words employed may be all plain words, easily understood, and in common use; and yet the style may be abundantly dignified, and at the same time very lively and animated; for a lively and animated style is extremely suited to the pulpit. The earnestness which a preacher ought to feel, and the grandeur and importance of his subjects, justify, and often require, warm and glowing expressions. He not only may employ metaphors and comparisons, but, on proper occasions, may apostrophise the saint or the sinner; may personify inanimate objects, break out in bold exclamations, and, in general, has the command of the most passionate figures of speech.¹⁶²

Again, Arderne had initiated the same: “beware that it come not too faintly and coldly from you; the design is to inflame and kindle the affections, and if you be but lukewarm, they may be benumbed.”¹⁶³

We may imagine that Sterne would run wild with such advice, but despite his resonance with this, and his interest in sermons dramatically presented, he is explicit that religion be untheatrical in its congregational and personal forms. The human inclination to be enamored and manipulated by sense should not be preyed upon, as it is in the elaborate masquerades of penitent Methodist and ascetic Catholic, and in the “cloud of ostentatious ceremonies and gestures” (*S* 62.30) that makes Roman high mass look “more like a theatrical performance, than that humble and solemn appeal which dust and ashes are offering up to the throne of God” (*S* 63.1).

When Sterne suggests ways in which Christians would better receive and practice their religion, he is simultaneously fencing against the problem of tempting but inefficient shortcuts that presume to enable one to be “virtuous by proxy” (*S* 137.12). The Roman confessional, for example, is a cheat to real examination, and doubly harmful for having an appearance of sufficiency:

when almost the whole of religion is made to consist in the pious fooleries of penances and sufferings, as is practiced in the church of Rome . . . it is putting religion upon a wrong scent, placing it more in these than in inward purity and integrity of heart, one cannot guard too much against this, as well as all other such abuses of religion, as make it to consist in something which it ought not. (S 350.26)

This type of religion is developed from paradigms that stretch no further than human capacities:

men of melancholy and morose tempers, conceiving the Deity to be like themselves, a gloomy, discontented and sorrowful being,—believed he delighted, as they did, in splenetic and mortifying actions, and therefore made their religious worship to consist of chimeras as wild and barbarous as their own dreams and vapours. What ignorance and enthusiasm at first introduced,—now tyranny and imposture continue to support. (S 351.4)

From such excerpts we should not infer that Sterne has no appreciation for the classic disciplines of which the above reflect misuse. As unlikely as it may seem for us to hear it from Sterne, many of his sermons revolve around the need for religious observances such as prayer and abstinence. Not, of course, as ceremonial ends in themselves, but as profitable assistants.

The distinction between religious disciplines appropriately and inappropriately practiced is of sufficient importance to Sterne that he introduces his second sermon with it, dramatically. The text is from Ecclesiastes vii:2, "*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.—*" and Sterne's first line is: "THAT I deny—." The careful reader should recognize what only the sleepest member of a congregation would have missed. Sterne is putting those words into the mouths of his listeners, and beginning an imaginary conversation on the provocative passage. Sterne, it should be noted, defends the text:

Sterne: *It is better to go to the house of mourning . . .* (S 12.5)

Congregation: THAT I deny— (S 12.7)

Sterne: But let us hear the wise man's reasoning . . . (S 12.7)

Congregation: For a crack'd-brain'd order of Carthusian monks, . . . as your text would have us... my good preacher... (S 12.9; 12.16; 12.20)

Sterne: I will not contend at present against this rhetorick . . . (S 13.7)

In this way the congregation is prepared for a survey of life which will indeed 'prove' the ultimately hopeful wisdom of the text: that sorrow is *not* good of itself, but can be made useful if "by holding up such a glass before it, it forces the mind to see and reflect upon the vanity,—the perishing condition and uncertain tenure of every thing in this world." (S 19.3)

In sermon 1 the congregation was led through the journey of life in search of happiness, and here in sermon 2 we are led by stages in search of truth. Never does Sterne deny the manifold pleasures of healthy diversions available to weary travellers. But he is careful to remind us that there is a hierarchy of blessings, and if one would study to deserve the most refreshing, "he had better purchase them at the expense of his present happiness" (S 13.30). At other times, when the faithful are inclined to depression or acts of fruitless penitence, they will be encouraged to take delight in the simple pleasures available to human nature. Both involvements may be holy or profane, depending on the heart and needs of the subject. The key is that one be involved responsibly with sincere maintenance of faith and in moral correspondence with God and neighbors.

Sterne's frequent acknowledgments of the difficulties of a sincere religious life should not be read as inconsistent with his equally frequent recommendations of its joy and ease. If nothing else, he is echoing the same seeming contradictions in scripture, where, for example, Jesus may proclaim "think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. x.34) and, soon after represent himself as "meek and lowly in heart," offering a yoke that is



easy and a burden that is light (Matt. xi.29). The good life is one of inner struggle, but this paradox is eventually appreciated as having been the way most likely for reconciliation with God, self-knowledge, and happiness. The preacher should be attuned to this, as Arderne makes clear:

we must solicit the affair, not with the understanding alone, but at the same time with the affections of the soul. Exhortation is that which makes the address to these, and causes the person's submission to his duty not out of constraint, which is the most that the confirmation could do; but willingly and with a great deal of complacency and readiness. This is procured principally by the consideration of the easiness, or at least the certain possibility of the performance and event. . . . But amongst other perswasives, forget not that, derived from pleasure and delight, by this the first temptation became unhappily successful, and by the like must we reduce men to Holiness and Vertue, even by demonstrating, that Religion is a way of pleasantness, and that Mortification it self brings joy as its fruit to those, who have made it their exercise.¹⁶⁴

That Sterne took this seemingly contradictory lesson to heart should be clear to anyone who reads his sermons 36 and 37, noted below.

One of the most persistently reiterated themes of latitudinarian theology is the 'reasonableness' of 'slight momentary affliction' (slight compared to eternal torment or beatitude) and the encouraging presence of God. Tillotson's 'The Precepts of Christianity not grievous', ("easily the most popular sermon in eighteenth-century England"),¹⁶⁵ echoes countless divines in claiming that "though 'the commandments of God be not grievous,' yet it is fit to let men know that they are not thus easy."¹⁶⁶ Thomas Secker, Archbishop of Canterbury:

It is a strange mistake, to imagine the burthens of religion insupportable; while we take much heavier upon ourselves from fancy and fashion. Were the Gospel to enjoin the fatigues, the experiences, the dangers, which on reflection we shall perceive caprice and custom do, that one argument against it would be accounted decisive.

The most serious person in the world may justly be also the cheerfullest.¹⁶⁷

Sterne is careful not to minimize the unpleasant responsibilities that true religion frequently entails. He also reminds us that the source of these difficulties is not divine but human. The “differences of station” and other sources of distress (“hunger, and pain and nakedness”), “are directed by providence, and must be submitted to” (*S* 154.23-25). But the necessary endurance of the painful effects of our wilful separation is not to be blamed on God: “if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation, but ’tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason,—before revelation was given” (*S* 314.14). To tread the path back to a light burden carried in the right direction, at times involves considerable suffering. Even, or especially, those like Job and the widow of Zarephath who have reached an apparent pinnacle of virtue are tutored by trials. A nation may likewise be brought to a deeper awareness of the blessings of God by pain; “it seemed as if God had suffered our waters, like those of Bethesda, to be troubled, to make them afterwards more healing to us” (*S* 202.16). That God “bruises” some of the best examples of his virtues, is a scriptural commonplace Sterne is not shy of representing.¹⁶⁸ Trials wean one’s observance away from expectations of earthly rewards, and encourage one to maintain an attitude centered on eternal values.

Sterne would have us use the inconveniences of this life to focus on the blessings of the future. Such a perspective enables one to see an ultimately consistent providence at work beneath apparent inconsistencies. False expectation, of what a devout life and proper Messiah should appear to be, accounted for the early lack of converts to Christianity. To avoid a similar error, we are exhorted to maintain sufficient flexibility to allow the hand of God full influence in what initially seems incongruous. Sterne points to this lesson by recalling historical reticence to embrace “a

religion whose appearance was not great and splendid,—but looked thin and meagre, and whose principles and promises shewed more like the curses of the law, than its blessings:—for they called for sufferings and promised little but persecutions.” (*S* 156.7; 342.13)

After comparing Roman high mass to a theatrical performance, and contrasting it with “that humble and solemn appeal which dust and ashes are offering up to the throne of God,” Sterne continues by saying that the character of true religion “is only to be got and maintained by a painful conflict and perpetual war against the passions” (*S* 63.1-9). That he saw no more inconsistency in this perspective juxtaposed to the statement (I John v.3) “his commandments are not grievous” is immediately evident if one reads the sermon ‘Penances’ for which that verse serves as heading. After a characteristic swing at the disastrous abuses of Catholic and Methodist clergy who spoil the reputation of Christ and his religion by a misuse of holy suffering, Sterne proceeds not to some sentimental romp on the perpetual joy of a comfortable faith, as we may have expected, but rather to say:

where there *is* a virtuous and good end proposed from any sober instances of self-denial and mortification,—God forbid we should call them unnecessary, or that we should dispute against a thing—from the abuse to which it has been put;—and, therefore, what is said in general upon this head, will be understood to reach no farther than where the practice is become a mixture of fraud and tyranny, but will no ways be interpreted to extend to those self-denials which the discipline of our holy church directs at this solemn season. (*S* 352.17)

If we remember that in his censure of unbounded submersion in the world’s fancies, Sterne was always careful to say, with the same focus as that above, far be it from us to deny the appreciative use of God-given refreshments, we may gain some respect for the middle way which informs his faith. In no instance is it essentially contradictory or extreme, though at times by

following scripture he is bound to present elements in their context that will be sure to baffle those unprepared to entertain bifocal paradigms. With this in mind, it is useful to examine a few quotations in ^{the} light of a comment of Professor New in his headnote to sermon 37 ('Penances'). After reminding us that the 'Christianity is not grievous' theme is also explicit in sermons 2, 26 and 28, he says

at the same time, it seems to contradict, at every important turn, the preceding sermon (36), with its praise of the unworldly Apostles and the implied imperative to follow their ways. The middle position that Sterne defines in this sermon, between the perceived excesses of Roman Catholicism on the one hand, Methodism on the other, was obviously broad enough to contain the contradictions between a Christianity not "grievous" and one that requires great sacrifices (of our appetites, if nothing else). Eighteenth-century Anglican sermon-writers—following Tillotson—had mastered precisely this capacity to sustain conflicting ideas in the face of conflicting pressures and changing situations.¹⁶⁹

In recognizing the inadequacies of New's perspective regarding the theological sense of what Sterne is trying to communicate, we are not neglecting the necessity of reading the sermons with an appreciation for their setting in contemporary rhetorical context. First of all, we should recognize that a mediation of seeming inconsistencies or extremes of theology is not a task exclusive to eighteenth-century Anglican sermon-writers. Tillotson notwithstanding, Christian apologists of any age, along with theologians of most religions, undertake the challenging task of presenting the ultimate blessings and spiritual comfort of the way of virtue within the realistic context of the inevitable trials and tribulations of the journey. Of course all of Sterne's theological "contradictions" have their root in the canon of Christian scripture. A moral system that would be without 'conflict' or seem consistent on New's terms would not be a biblical theology. In these sermons, Sterne is not presenting latitudinarian theology as a middle way *between* the excesses of

Roman Catholicism and Methodism but as higher, more accurate and scriptural, than the abuses of those denominations. At this point Catholics and Methodists are united in Sterne's mind and he attempts to transcend their misapplication of the gospel.

Like Secker, George Fothergill [1705-1760; principal of St. Edmund Hall, Oxford], prior to the main body of his sermon 'the Pleasantness of a Good Life', after saying he will recommend religion as the surest way to happiness, makes clear his understanding of the confusion New exhibits.

"A bold undertaking this!" will the sensualist be ready to say, "and something like that of reconciling contradictions; for what else is it to pretend, that a life of religion is still a life of pleasantness? Religion, which seems rather calculated to rob us of those enjoyments we already have, than to furnish us with any additional ones; which finds us placed in the midst of sensible objects, and continually solicited by them, and restrains us from the participation of them by a severe interdict? Which engages us in a perpetual war with our inclinations and appetites, expressly enjoining us to deny ourselves, and to mortify our affections? And can you, after all this, pretend that the practice of virtue and religion is the way to pleasure? Might you not as well tell us, that we may please ourselves at the same time that we are denying ourselves; that we may gratify our inclinations even whilst we are mortifying them: that is, that we may both please and displease ourselves at the same time?"¹⁷⁰

The responses, of course, are as would have been expected: religious discipline is only 'unpleasant' to "our degenerate nature." "Gratification is a relative thing, depending not absolutely on the outward objects themselves, but on their suitableness to the faculties employed about them."¹⁷¹ Secker himself sums it up nicely and removes any doubt regarding Sterne's alleged contradiction:

the duties, which God hath enjoined us, though reasonable and beneficial in the highest degree, are yet, through the depravity of human nature, and the prevalence of bad customs, become so unacceptable, as they are practiced, as we must be sensible, but imperfectly by the best, and very little by the largest part of the world.¹⁷²

We will return to this concept, key for Sterne, that one's faculties of emotion and cognition are primary in determining the value of phenomena; it is but a small step from here to Smelfungus. Suffice it at this point to note the acceptance of a simple spiritual hierarchy that appreciates passing refreshment but consecrates the journey to the soul's home. As Fothergill put it: "that is, we must deny the inferior, and please the superior, part of our composition."¹⁷³

Thus, the ungrivous Christianity theme should not blind us to Sterne's frequent references to the difficulties involved in following a path of sincere faith. The "sufferings, and promised persecutions" of 342.13 and the "unpalatable to all its passions and pleasures" of 344.28 are brought together in the conclusion of sermon 16 'The character of Shimei'. Statements claiming that the true character of a Christian "is only to be got and maintained by a painful conflict and perpetual war against the passions" (*S* 63.6) illustrate that Sterne openly maintained this dilemma in sermons he chose to publish.

We should note that in sermon 36, Apostolic heroism in a milieu of social persecution (at *S* 342.12-16 for example) is presented as an example to shame the congregation's disregard of the much smaller evidences required of them, evidences which it is in their advantage to give (*S* 345.17-346.18). The "prepossessions" (*S* 340.8; 341.21) and "general prejudices of the Jewish nation concerning the royal state and condition of the Saviour" (*S* 340.5) disabled them from being able clearly to recognize the majesty of God in making "himself of no reputation,—that he might settle, and be the example of so holy and humble a religion, and thereby convince his disciples for ever, that neither his kingdom nor their happiness were to be of this world" (*S* 341.30). This sentiment is not contradicted by the following sermon. In sermon 36, Sterne is preaching against the

prejudices of a comfortable religion, the reward of which is expected in this world and does not demand a sober and righteous life. Sermon 37 opens by preaching against another unscriptural ‘prejudice:’ “ “that the commandments of God *are* grievous” ”(S 347.10). So as not to be misunderstood, he immediately reminds us of the lesson in sermon 36, that there *are* demands of the Gospel which, though perhaps not grievous, certainly involve restraint: “the way which leads to life is not only strait, for that our Saviour tells us, and that with much tribulation we shall seek it” (S 347.11). Correcting the penitential focus and abuses of Catholics and Methodists, Sterne reveals the unfortunate irony, that for all their elaborate asceticisms the necessary penances which lead to eternal life are unaccomplished. “It is true, on the other hand, our passions are apt to grow upon us by indulgence, and become exorbitant, if they are not kept under exact discipline” (S 350.21); “where there *is* a virtuous and good end proposed from any sober instances of self-denial and mortification,—God forbid we should call them unnecessary.” (S 352.17)

It is not, we should now realize, the saying of something new from the pulpit that, even if it were possible, would be valued. The ability fruitfully and accurately to encourage a congregation to act in accord with the desire of heaven which is their highest pre-established happiness is the attempted mark. The discourse then literally becomes an illustration and force of enabling. In accord with this, Sterne’s pulpit practice, as evidenced in his highly conversational sermons, is tuned to fulfilling its half of the dialogue.

From the foregoing examples it should be clear that Sterne was far from the uninterested deceptive parson that he has seemed to many to be. We have countless hints in the forty-five sermons that point to his great capacity and relish for his profession. With conversational

exclamations (“one would think,” “perhaps you will say,” “O Moses!” “Eternal God! See!”)¹⁷⁴ he brings himself, his characters and congregation to life. He appears as chaperone to his dramas and galleries, appealing directly to the imaginations and hearts of his listeners: “Let us take a survey of the life,” “consider slavery,” “I see the picture of his departure,” “to bring the matter closer to us let us imagine.”¹⁷⁵ Must we think him deceiving us when he writes that he wishes Yorick’s sermons will do the world good? In each of them, subtly and to effect he orchestrates situations in which a willing communicant is encouraged not to judge the words but to consider an experience: “let us make this discourse as serviceable as we can.”

The preaching of salvation for Sterne does not dwell on or point towards an enthusiastic event of one moment, but attempts a process of communication in which elements of earth will resonate with their corresponding elements in heaven. Mercy rather than judgment is the theme he iterates: “for God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved” (John iii.17). Because this event is organic, “through” not “by,” Sterne epitomizes a high understanding of this weighty claim. In a complementary way he does not presume *by* his preaching to demand reform, but rather that *through* it his auditors may hear what will do them good. It was with this in mind that he developed his practical genius, borrowing what he liked from others and cutting through the high verbiage of less effective sermons.

Storms of hermeneutic passion such as that between Melvyn New, Everett Zimmerman and Jonathan Lamb¹⁷⁶ regarding Sterne’s interest in ‘the Job controversy’ have failed to take account of our parson’s misgivings about the importance of such polemical banter. The

antiquarian *Sitz im Leben* and its potential for contemporary political manoeuvring is of no interest to Sterne: beefy clerics arguing history to no purpose. His consistently maintained focus is the usefulness of present-day meanings surrounding biblical characters and their value for anchoring personal crises in a milieu of faithful order. He presents and develops the characters as probes to plumb the depths of human capacity. Sterne's approach is the same with New Testament stories:

Whether this parable of the prodigal (for so it is usually called)—is really such, or built upon some story known at that time in Jerusalem, is not much to the purpose; it is given to us to enlarge upon, and turn to the best moral account we can. (*S* 186.13)

It is in telling these stories, regenerating the myth, that the moral is “insensibly incorporated” (*S* 29.29), and the imagination of his congregation set to work. The consequent *experience* of one's moral responsibilities and theological perspectives brings the abstractions of dogma to life. There will always be some, however, in every congregation who fail properly to be engaged. James Swearingen writes well of Walter's misplaced appreciation of ‘Abuses’: “the meaning remains hidden to him because he listens *to* rather than *through* the words”.¹⁷⁷ We turn now to examine that “through”.

III ~ “AUXILIARIES ON THE SIDE OF VIRTUE”

A LARGER CONGREGATION

Appreciating Sterne’s devotion to good sermon writing, we need still to address the elements of his beliefs because lack of explicit dogmatic argument in his sermons, the nature of his extraordinary fiction, and his social persona, have spawned critical misgivings. Ian Ross notes of Sterne’s first visitings in the milieu of Parisian *philosophes* at Baron D’Holbach’s:

One regular guest, the ‘Great Infidel’ himself, David Hume, was initially taken aback by the atmosphere of the gatherings, which were notorious among contemporaries for the anti-religious conversation. Even Edward Gibbon, another of Holbach’s guests, declared himself unable to approve ‘the intolerant zeal of the philosophers and Encyclopedists, the friends of d’Olbach and Helvétius . . . [who] laughed at the scepticism of Hume, preached the tenets of atheism with the bigotry of dogmatism and damned all believers with ridicule and contempt.’ The fact that Sterne felt so much at home among what he termed this ‘joyous set’—gives some circumstantial weight, at least, to the possibility that he was himself tempted by contemporary religious scepticism.¹

Sterne naturally was tickled by the invitations and lavish entertainments offered in the salons but, contrary to Ross, there is no evidence amongst Sterne’s papers to suggest he was tempted by heresy. Persons of Sterne’s pastoral experience, magnanimous wit, and grounding in faith are not surprised, shocked, or titillated by the opinions of others and, thus, are usually quite at home making merry with whomever is entrusted to them. In fact, during the spring of 1762, through Sterne, Diderot ordered the works of Pope, Cibber, Chaucer, Tillotson and Locke.²

Sterne’s letters during this period, to his wife and to David Garrick, discover an important focus of his philosophy of oratory and presentation. Twice he refers to “preaching” in a derogatory way—but with regard to plays:

the French comedy, I seldom visit it—they act scarce any thing but tragedies—and the Clairon is great, and Mad^{lle} Dumesnil, in some places, still greater than her—yet I cannot bear preaching—I fancy I got a surfeit of it in my younger days.—There is a tragedy to be damn'd to-night—peace be with it, and the gentle brain which made it!³

One month later Sterne criticizes another tragedy: “it has too much sentiment in it, (at least for me) the speeches too long, and savour too much of *preaching*—.”⁴

Sterne is obviously using the term *preaching* to refer to the one-sided presentation of argument—an ill-mannered way of approach—not unlike that displayed in sermons of Tillotson and Clarke discussed above. As if church and playhouse have been exchanged, Sterne recounts his appreciation of a better manner of enlightenment:

I have been three mornings together to hear a celebrated pulpit orator near me, one Père Clement, who delights me much; the parish pays him 600 livres, for a dozen sermons this Lent; he is K. Stanislas's preacher—most excellent indeed! his matter solid, and to the purpose; his manner, more than theatrical, and greater, both in his action and delivery, than Madame Clairon, who, you must know, is the Garrick of the stage here; he has infinite variety, and keeps up the attention by it wonderfully; his pulpit, oblong, with three seats in it, into which he occasionally casts himself; goes on, then rises, by a gradation of four steps, each of which he profits by, as his discourse inclines him: in short, 'tis a stage, and the variety of his tones would make you imagine there were no less than five or six actors on it together.⁵

The English pulpit did not call for such expansive theatrics, but Sterne's obvious appreciation for a style that incorporates “matter solid, and to the purpose” with a presentation that “keeps up the attention” should be noted. That, in 1762, he freely praises a French Popish priest (and repeats his patronage) suggests a mature theological confidence that Ross's assessment would deny.

While secular influences abounded, in the works of Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke and Mandeville for example, the disrepute into which ‘religion’ had fallen on the continent had not spread to England.⁶ So one is advised to recall the milieu enveloping any publication in that century.

As Melvyn New notes in ‘Modes of Eighteenth-Century Fiction’, “the most widely read and often discussed collection of narratives in eighteenth-century England was scripture. . . . the trade in scriptural commentary was by far the most thriving part of the eighteenth-century book trade.”⁷ Samuel Johnson enthusiastically retorts to Wilkes’ surprise at seeing many sermons in the library of Topham Beauclerk: “why, Sir, you are to consider, that sermons make a considerable branch of English literature; so that a library must be very imperfect if it has not a numerous collection of sermons.”⁸ Sterne’s contemporaries took umbrage at his complex publicity *in nomine Domini*; we find him difficult from some quite different prejudice. Unchurched readers then would number fewer than his Anglican readers today. Weekly those congregations repeated from memory rubrics few of us would even recognize: “the liturgy, uncompromisingly ‘Augustinian’ and repeated each Sunday, is what drums itself into the churchgoer’s mind.”⁹ We need harbour no longer the popular misconception that latitudinarian exegesis was unorthodox and deistic. Indeed, the scholarly community has in recent years been aligning itself with a more just assessment:

By seeing as results of the Fall not the complete depravity of humankind, the necessity of sinning, and the futility of moral endeavour, but rather the many natural infirmities consequent to mortality—the unruliness of the passions, the impairment of reason, the shortness and inconsistency of judgment, the preoccupation with sensual satisfaction—the Broad-Churchmen were able to prescribe solutions to the problem of depravity through the encouragements of a godly life.¹⁰

Sterne’s fiction, no less than his sermons, is designed to be part of this solution.

The previous chapter vindicates Sterne from the long-standing charge of plagiarism, and we shall see that suggestions of dogmatic laxity are equally unfounded. Though we may believe Sterne was finally fatigued by the pulpit medium,¹¹ we are unjustified to conclude he disbelieved or tired of the messages he had consistently proclaimed. Voice ground down to a hoarse whisper, he strove

to communicate with the “great world” upon which the nucleus of “a small circle described” had for so long engaged his talents (*TS* 10.12). His shift from preaching, pamphlets, and mediocre farming, to the *publication* of *Life and Opinions* was indeed dramatic, but we would be the wrong kind of fools¹² to imagine that “I Wish either my father or my mother... had minded what they were about” (*TS* 1.1) is the melancholy jest of a new or different man.¹³

One member of Sterne’s expanded congregation was the *philosophe* author of *Candide*. As Trim reads the sermon, which aptly fell out of Bishop John Wilkins’ *Mathematical Magick*, Slop snoozes and the brothers canter about, but, to Yorick’s credit, Voltaire is attentive. The deceptive quality of conscience, he wrote, “perhaps has never been better ‘treated’.”

among several pictures superior to those of Rembrandt and the pencil of Callot, there is one of a gentleman and man of the world . . .

We must agree with this priest that the great men of the world are often in this position. . . . Thus it is good to awaken often the conscience both of dressmakers and of kings with a moral story that can make an impression on them; but to make an impression, one must talk better than most do today.¹⁴

This “picture” was originally delivered and published in 1750 and, according to Sterne, “could find neither purchasers nor readers” (*S* 1.15). Two questions immediately arise upon its appearance in *Tristram Shandy*: why *this*, and why *here*? Michael Rosenblum succinctly gives the worst conceivable answer: “Sterne put in the sermon because he chose to, and that choice is totally arbitrary.”¹⁵ But, giving Sterne a little more credit, is the sermon especially significant, or is it merely the first act in a circus that was to include Walter’s *Life of Socrates* and other dancing bears?

The first sentence of Sterne’s preface to the first volumes of sermons illuminates. “THE sermon which gave rise to the publication of these, having been offer’d to the world as a sermon of

Yorick's, I hope the most serious reader will find nothing to offend him, in my continuing these two volumes under the same title" (*S* 1.2). As he tries to peel off the label 'Jesting Parson,' the words "gave rise" and "continuing" are clues to the progress of Sterne's canon. Later, as noted above, in what may be called the epilogue to readers of his sermons, he will refer to *TS* (then eight volumes) as "a moral work, more read than understood" (*S* 255.5). Initially he promised sixteen sermons for these final 'lifetime' volumes, so we may see the insertion of 'Abuses' (twelfth and last) as desperate.¹⁶ On closer scrutiny of themes, however, one concludes that he wrote "Finis" after the duo of discourses 'Advantages of Christianity to the World' and that which had accompanied the beginnings of *Tristram*, to recall to us the moral significance of his fiction—a significance he felt had been ignored.¹⁷

The considerable echoes of 'Abuses' in his first homiletic volumes should be recognized as establishing a thematic continuity. Sterne's consistency with his gospel, intimated above, will become obvious as these themes are sifted. The weight of 'Abuses', so present in his other sermons, was not in fact the favored concentration of contemporary Anglican discussions of conscience. Concentrating on the darker side of human psychology, in line with the sceptical tradition, Sterne follows a path less worn but shared with Locke, Swift, and Joseph Butler.¹⁸ Generally divines were content to praise the God-given faculty and to exhort their congregations to use it, offering at most brief remarks on the dangers of self-deception. "Conscience," writes John Balguy [1686-1748; vicar of north Allerton, Yorkshire and Prebendary of Sarum] "is God's deputy and vicegerent; and whatever sentence it really passes, is ratified in heaven. Whoever therefore enjoys this testimony, is secure of his Maker's approbation."¹⁹ Tillotson's 'A Conscience void of offence towards God and

men' is likewise classic. He acknowledges the fallible nature of conscience only in passing, and, like Sterne at 267.1-5, says that conscience "is not the law and rule of our actions; that the law of God only is: but it is our immediate guide and director, telling us what is the law of God and our duty." The majority of his sermon is, however, designed to extol the virtues of this inner guide which he calls a "domestick judge, and a kind of familiar god." We are warned to stand in awe of conscience, and to fear its reprisals.²⁰ For Sterne though, conscience as "a judge within us" is instead a "once able monitor" that "by an unhappy train of causes and impediments,—takes often such imperfect cognizance of what passes,—does its office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly, that it is not to be trusted alone" (*S* 261.10). Where Tillotson lists four reasons why conscience works efficiently, Sterne explains four reasons why it will not.

Sterne's preoccupation with this fundamental problem of human activity reverberates through his sermons and is instrumental to his novels. The clearest echoes are in 'Self-Knowledge', where many verbatim parallels to 'Abuses' are supported by Sterne's clarification of the need for "parables, fables, and such sort of indirect applications" to woo people to truth and virtue (*S* 33.27). Reading the advertisement for 'Abuses' in Volume iv, where the grave are faulted for their inability to receive morality from fiction, we begin to appreciate the reciprocity of Sterne's publications. Carol Kay acknowledges this, writing that 'Abuses' "functions not to prove the superior didactic force of the novel that surrounds it, but to work a peculiarly modern magic: to convert moral writing into literature."²¹ Too few have realized that 'the sermon in *Tristram Shandy*' is not 'The Abuses of Conscience considered', it is the *experience* of that peculiarly modern magic. The 'meaning' of Sterne's fiction, like that of the folly of the cross, is realized not in a presumed

understanding of symbol or doctrine, but by reflecting upon one's responses to it, as it were: *set for the fall and rising again of many*.

For decades Sterne had preached from scripture which, we should remember, is by no means the history of efficient individuals or of a successful nation. As Morris Golden writes, "Sterne's dramatic exchange with us . . . is a sermon pointing to specimens: a representation not of human conflicts leading to universal meaning but of man caught in a series of symbolic states."²² Like Yorick, Sterne was loath to explicate his attempts at benevolence and wisdom. Had explicit explanation been possible, the serpentine works would have been unnecessary. Though seeking to teach us better to love, he was under no illusion that many would heed him, however entertaining his presentations. "Ironically," writes Max Byrd, 'Abuses's' "moral points are, first, that we should rigorously scrutinize our consciences to root out self-deception and complacency, and, second, that we are not really likely to pay attention to the first point."²³ Fully conscious, as only a professional moralist can be, of our reticence to be undeceived, Sterne approaches his congregation with novelty and perception.

Sterne admits he is not presenting new ideas, or even set discourses (e.g. *S* 228.32). As in his novels, we are weaned from dependence on a visible text to encounter instead the mysterious communications of imagination and spirit. Without presuming to present a 'system of theology' according to Sterne,²⁴ the following chapters outline the theological and aesthetic perspectives that inform the patterns of his works. We will follow those patterns from the problems of human existence, through the state of the world and individuals, to creative avenues revealed for solutions to those problems.

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

The sermons open with “THE great pursuit of man is after happiness” (S 3.6) —since Plato and Aristotle a crux for practical discourses on human endeavour. No less in Sterne’s day: “there is not any one Point,” proclaimed Bishop Matthew Hutton in 1745, “wherein the ancient Masters of Reason have differ’d more, than in setting wherein human Happiness consists.”²⁵ The elements on which Sterne concentrates are informative: following the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the happiest life is one lived in accordance with the highest virtue, that is, with the principles of that which is divine within oneself;²⁶ and, once this contemplative virtue is attained (self-knowledge), it is necessary to use it. Aristotle is aware of the difficulty of reform, that passions yield not to argument but to force,²⁷ so he recommends training in legislation. Sterne, realizing that this too will prove insufficient, suggests a reorientation of paradigms in the sermons that follow. These discourses are eminently practical, according well with the many instances in *TS* and *ASJ* when action supersedes the sentiment of words and opinion. Avoiding abstractions, Sterne consistently plumbs the motives and characteristics of individuals to establish a workable catalyst that will overcome the curse of pagan morality that can preach but cannot practice. Jonathan Swift, usually reticent to chide pre-Christian moralists, echoes the classic conundrum:

the first point I shall mention was that universal defect which was in all their schemes, that they could not agree about their chief good, or wherein to place the happiness of mankind, nor had any of them a tolerable answer upon this difficulty, to satisfy a reasonable person. For, to say, as the most plausible of them did, that happiness consisted in virtue, was but vain babbling, and a mere sound of words, to amuse others and themselves.²⁸

To avoid “vain babbling” Sterne maintained an integrity in his discourses by never steering far from the idiom and stories of scripture: “that grand charter of our eternal happiness” (*S* 396.27). It is his reiterated conviction that the Bible beautifully conveys the human condition and is of unique value for reconciliation. Sterne’s concentration on the search for happiness is entirely in line with the fundamental gist of both scripture and his colleagues’ discourse. John Traugott’s “the zany in the pulpit gives no moral calipers by which to measure this world or the next”²⁹ is unacceptable, as is this conclusion of Francis Doherty:

the evident absurdities which are in life are the reason for laughter, the laughter of skepticism. When Sterne laughs at the misfortunes of others and the incomprehensible, he laughs, as Voltaire did, to keep his sanity.³⁰

Bloom and Bloom also muddy the waters:

since we cannot duck the blows so mysteriously intended for us, why not subsume our anxiety in hedonistic satisfactions? The pleasures that engage Sterne are selfish.³¹

Against an arsenal of critical bagatelles we come to appreciate that the passages of scripture Sterne especially relishes and wishes to address involve suffering and the unpleasant realities of human existence. The expressions of Solomon on the shortness of our lives and the length of our trials are “beautiful” (*S* 368.15-26.). Likewise, “THERE is something in this reflection of holy Job’s, upon the shortness of life, and the instability of human affairs, so beautiful and truly sublime” (*S* 91.8). These descriptions of life, he claims, are “just” (*S* 94.24) and “more to the purpose than the most elaborate proof” (*S* 95.7). As parson Yorick’s “favorite composition” is “the funeral sermon on poor *Le Fever*” (*TS* 515.23-27), so the sermon Sterne thought one of *his* best is the one he

always referred to not as ‘The House of Feasting’ but as ‘The House of Mourning’.³² Writing to Henry Egerton from Paris in March of 1762 he says:

I just rec. a Translation into french of my Sermon upon the house of Mourning, from a lady of Quality—who proposes to print it, for the *Caresm*, & to give y^e people here a specimin of my Sermons—so You see, I shall be Lent Preacher at Paris, tho’ I shall never have the hon^r at London. The Translation is very fine.³³

And writing to his daughter in February of 1767:

—I am also much pleased with the account you give me of the Abbé de Sade—you find great comfort in such a neighbour—I am glad he is so good as to correct thy translation of my Sermons—dear girl go on, and make me a present of thy work—but why not the House of Mourning? ’tis one of the best.³⁴

His contemporaries appreciated elements of the pathetic, Job and Ecclesiastes affording the finest examples. As Harry Solomon notes, “nowhere in the bible is ‘the uncertain and equivocal position of man’ more profoundly stated than in Job, and Pope’s Christian contemporaries, including Blackmore and Young, were constantly publishing paraphrases of it.”³⁵ Sterne is fond of recalling this equivocal position, not to exploit literary pathos but to encourage accurate appreciation of the human condition.³⁶ References to Job and Ecclesiastes are particularly relevant for anchoring scepticism and disappointment at the appearance of things, within the faithful context of scripture. Faith is not lessened by honest representation of our dark nature; it is placed on its true feet where the work of redemption may begin. The journey is made more light and meaningful for this realistic, historical company. The sermons are brimming with references to these two books and it is by their morals and perspectives that Sterne presents a mirror to our situations and our selves. By using scripture to explicate our frail condition, Sterne offers an orthodox and helpful avenue for further understanding.

In case readers of Tristram's first volumes anticipated sermons focusing on pleasures of this life with suggestions of our intrinsic abilities to relish them, Sterne is quick to correct. The figure of Solomon —author of Ecclesiastes— as “reformed sensualist” (*S* 6.11) and foil to vanities and illusion is complemented by that of Job, the righteous sufferer. Though appreciated by some as an unlikely poetic myth, full of exotic pathos and impossible fluctuations, Sterne concludes “that upon the whole, when we have examined the true state and condition of human life, and have made some allowances for a few fugacious, deceitful pleasures, there is scarce any thing to be found which contradicts Job's description of it” (*S* 101.13). That “description” of Job [xiv.1-2] was not unappreciated in Sterne's decades either. By an ironic twist of fate we read that William Dodd the celebrated chaplain to the king, popular preacher of charity sermons, and unsuccessful forger, likens our lot to Job's in his *Reflections on Death*:

how various, how innumerable are the shafts of *death*! They fly unerring from his quiver around us, and on so thin a thread hangs human life, to so many accidents and disasters is human life subject, that one would rather marvel that we continue to *live*, than that we should forget one moment that we are to die! Nothing can be more beautiful, nervous, and expressive, than the following fine prayer used in our *Burial Service*: . . .³⁷

Sterne too was intimately familiar with what he refers to as Job's “just and beautiful” description: “that man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of misery . . . he cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down; he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not” (*S* 94.25). Presiding over the interment of his flock and children, he would have proclaimed it often, from the Order for the Burial of the Dead “when they come to the Grave, while the Corpse is made ready to be laid into the earth.”

Sterne is explicit: the world presents a succession of “cross accidents and disasters to which our conditions are exposed” (*S* 18.10, 143.16, etc.). One who carefully observes this scheme cannot help concluding with the biblical sages that we are bound to “vanity,—the perishing condition and uncertain tenure of everything in this world” (*S* 19.4). Though laboring constantly to another end, with the best of prospects, “time and chance happeneth to them all” (*S* 74.6, Eccles. ix.11). That some “have fortunately sailed through and escaped the rougher toils and distresses” (*S* 99.7) is exceptional: “the general complaint of all ages, and . . . the histories of mankind . . . contain but the history of sad and uncomfortable passages, which a good-natured man cannot read but with oppression of spirits” (*S* 99.11-14). None is exempt from the “sad accidents and numberless calamities” (*S* 100.32) that eventually draw near. In short, for a wise observer “nothing in this world springs up, or can be enjoyed without a mixture of sorrow” (*S* 102.6). This vision of the human plight, drawn from Sterne’s first volumes, should begin to inform our definitions of Shandyism.

We are frequently reminded that good and evil are mixed in all worldly things. Indeed, from the first page of sermon 1, where the groundwork is laid for understanding the deception of worldly expectations, through each lifetime volume to ‘Advantages of Christianity to the World’ and the treachery of an undisciplined conscience, we are variously reminded that “our pleasures and enjoyments slip from under us in every stage of our life” (*S* 10.19), and that “in spite of reason and reflection” (*S* 16.22), our imaginations run wild leading us to act at odds with our ethics and to form unreasonable opinions.

These vacillations of our condition were being addressed from pulpits throughout the kingdom. John Conybeare notes :

even desire itself, of whatever kind it be (without which, from the very nature of the thing, there can ordinarily be no enjoyment) is ever accompanied with some degree of pain: And the enjoyment arising from having such a desire answered, is often little more than a short relief from this pain. The great English Philosopher hath maintained, that "the human will is ever determined by uneasiness."³⁸

Samuel Johnson begins his Sermon 5 with no uncertain terms. "There is nothing upon which more writers, in all ages, have laid out their abilities, than the miseries of life; and it affords no pleasing reflections to discover that a subject so little agreeable is not yet exhausted."³⁹ Indeed, a survey of Johnson's sermons turns up a number of phrases that resonate with Sterne's accounts:

of the uncertainty of success, and the instability of greatness, we have examples every day before us. Scarcely can any man turn his eyes upon the world, without observing the sudden rotation of affairs. . . .

Even the most simple operations are liable to miscarriage from causes which we cannot foresee; and if we could foresee them, cannot prevent. . . .

The history of mankind is little else than a narrative of designs which have failed, and hopes that have been disappointed. . . .

That almost every man is disappointed in his search after happiness, is apparent from the clamorous complaints which are always to be heard; from the restless discontent, which is hourly to be observed, and from the incessant pursuit of new objects, which employ almost every moment of every man's life.⁴⁰

One can hardly exaggerate Sterne's use of the perspectives of Ecclesiastes and Job. The conclusion implied is that regardless of talents, desires, and wisdom, the world and its inhabitants will in part remain a sorrowful mystery.

Sobriety abounds in Tristram's world too, and has not gone unnoticed: "Sterne's comedy, for all its appearances of mere zaniness and teasing caprice, is based upon a very sober conception of the state of man."⁴¹ "In the most general sense, no doubt, the world of *Tristram Shandy* is fallen."⁴² Tristram Shandy, "sport of small accidents" (*TS* 196.18, etc.), is born to confusion. Even

this youngest of travellers is faced with terrors threatening to ruffle him beyond repair. We learn early that if he makes it alive to daylight, without title or estate he will likely proclaim ours “one of the vilest worlds that ever was made” (*TS* 8.17). This “little gentleman,” reflecting, introduces us to a “hero” whom we begin to admire in the nick of time, for very quickly, “about ten years ago [Yorick] had the good fortune to [die].” (*TS* 24.6)

The black page that signifies this death illuminates one of the most pervasive themes of the lives and opinions that follow. Yorick is not, as some suspect, “killed off” by Tristram or Sterne with Oedipal vengeance or to hail a “counterstatement” to the sermons.⁴³ Melvyn New rightly warns us to remember “Yorick’s function in *Hamlet* is not that of a jester, but rather a *memento mori*.”⁴⁴ This is true of Sterne’s Yorick too, though we may come to appreciate that the work’s progress *away* from that haunting sheet—with the parson continuing to communicate in good form even unto the last line of the novel—is an emblem of extraordinary, even eternal, life. “This initial juxtaposition of origin and destiny would seem significant in itself in a work whose core is the meaning of being.”⁴⁵ Remember, had it been *sure* “that the child was expiring” (*TS* 343.17), Tristram would have been given the expendable name of his godfather. Tristram-gistus escapes with his life, but even as he finally succeeds in relating his birth and beginnings, we hear Death rapping on his door (*TS* 576.1). The line separating fiction from fact, we are reminded, is a wave. Tristram’s first generation of readers were promised a couple volumes each year under the all-too-human condition of their author’s being alive to record them. We ourselves might have read the instalments with more comfort had not that vile nagging cough prevented our laughter (*TS* 8.18, 402, 575, 663; *ASJ* 162.13).

Tristram, and Yorick in *ASJ*, are such festive fellows that we may be ashamed to register, or too preoccupied to notice, the consistently presented mementos of corruption. And it is important to understand the setting of the sermons to appreciate this corruption in context. The Shandy domain, a little world, surely provides a feast, but, like the homilies and life itself, it is a house of mourning. As in any domicile not all tears are of equal gravity, but in sundry ways, at the crescendo of expectation a hope is lost, and we step back down with the characters, to earth.

—*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?

Why not indeed! we enthusiastically cheer; but before the reason appears from our own small memories, Tristram's prayer is answered: "capriciously did she bend her head on one side, and dance up insiduous—Then 'tis time to dance off, quoth I" (*TS* 651.2-10). Sterne's Nature is not coy to exhibit the frailties of her elements. Readers are often reminded that the path of the best-intentioned travellers is strewn with "what philosophy justly calls

VEXATION
upon
VEXATION." (*TS* 625.10)

Wandering through life as a traveller, Tristram finds these vexations at every turn. After exclaiming as much (in chapter xxx of Volume vii) he takes out his list of Lyons' tourist sites: "the wonderful mechanism of this great clock of Lippius of Basil," a thirty-volume history of China "in the Chinese language" and the "Tomb of the two Lovers" (*TS* 625-627). His plan is interrupted by conversations with an ass, a commissary, and the chaise-vamper's wife who has twisted his remarks into her hair.

When he finally does get to his sites they are disappointing: the “great clock was all out of joints, and had not gone for some years;” his enthusiasm for the Chinese history cools as he approaches the Jesuits and he finds the college under the pall of an extraordinary cholic. The tomb of Amandus and Amanda, at which he longed to pay homage, he finds, does not exist. (TS 642–43)

A clock easier to describe in its decay, a locked and cholicked history in impossible characters, and a tomb of lovers from which one cannot fly, are familiar emblems to any thoughtful traveller beginning to realize that to be sustained his desires must constantly be changing targets and tunes. “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’ ” (TS 767.1). Even as he appreciates human beauty, its fragility is uppermost in his mind: “he who measures thee, Janatone, must do it now—thou carriest the principles of change within thy frame; and considering the chances of a transitory life, I would not answer for thee a moment” (TS 589.23). Even a radical moisture on the thinnest of draperies merely reveals a posture bound to decay, supreme appreciation issuing inevitable despondency: “ ‘*Quod omne animal post coitum est triste*’ ” (TS 475.16). “—But there is nothing unmixed in this world; and some of the gravest of our divines have carried it so far as to affirm, that enjoyment itself was attended even with a sigh—” (ASJ 116.7).⁴⁶ Sure enough, while Sterne has Yorick recall Montaigne and Charron for the sexual proof,⁴⁷ he is not shy of recalling us to his own clerical echo of the commonplace phrase at the conclusion of sermon 10, ‘Job’s Account of the Shortness and Troubles of Life, considered’.

When we reflect that this span of life, short as it is, is chequered with so many troubles, that there is nothing in this world springs up, or can be enjoyed without a mixture of sorrow, how insensibly does it incline us to turn our eyes and affections from so gloomy a prospect, and fix them upon that happier country, where

afflictions cannot follow us, and where God will wipe away all tears from off our faces for ever and ever? (*S* 102.5)

In such territory Sterne feels gravity appropriate, page after page witnessing that “in this night of our obscurity” “time wastes too fast” (*TS* 232.23, 754.17, etc.). Even the tenderest tokens are not exempt; we are not adamant: “*nothing in this world, Trim, is made to last for ever.*” (*TS* 684.3)

We are creatures born to habitudes (*TS* 608.27), but scuttling across these tracks is an infinity of suggestions that, if entertained, play us like pipes. Recalling the thought that floated in Slop’s mind “without sail or ballast,” each of us is host to millions which “are every day swimming quietly in the middle of the thin juice of a man’s understanding, without being carried backwards or forwards, till some little gusts of passion or interest drive them to one side” (*TS* 197.9). Regardless, or even because of the defenses of tradition and effort, Sterne suggests, we are as prey to these gusts as we are to death. They blow through his works: Tristram is governed by his pen, (*TS* 500.5) Yorick by circumstances (*ASJ* 104.17), both trumpet and excuse themselves accordingly.

Not only, then, are we reminded that the world seems inconsistently mixed, and providence blind, but Sterne is careful to demonstrate that each individual participates with infirmity. What would seem to be the simplest knowledge, that of one’s self, is in fact rarely even approached—a common observation popular in Sterne’s day as a subject for general reflection, philosophical debate, and religious consideration. Like Sterne’s other concentrations, the theme of the complexity of individuals and the difficulty of self-knowledge is one that needed little introduction and he is careful to establish this gist early with his readers. He thrives on leading us through stages of life, trusting us to concur with the implied conclusions. Reality, or the-way-things-are is the touchstone

of his works. We begin with a truism: “THE great pursuit of man is after happiness” (S 3.6), and acknowledge from experience that “in this uncertain and perplexed state” (S 5.9) we usually fall short of our hopes. He admits the world perplexes, that individual constitutions are inclined to misread the opportunities in which their true happiness lies. Favorite scriptural examples are drawn from Ecclesiastes, of which sermon 1 is a paraphrase: contrary to the best intentions and calculations of body and mind, most attempted enjoyments are insufficient to issue joy or contentment. In the spring of 1760 those who had recently finished the first *Shandy* volumes, digesting ‘The Abuses of Conscience considered’, may not have expected the theme of their selective blindness and its consequences to be so thoroughly re-encountered in Yorick’s other works. The world in *Tristram Shandy* is admittedly perplexing, and it is presented as equally so in the sermons.

After the rehearsal of this theme in ‘Inquiry after Happiness’, we meet with two recommendations. The first, in the following sermon, uses Solomon to suggest that a happy life will be one tutored by mourning:

so strange and unaccountable a creature is man! he is so framed, that he cannot but pursue happiness—and yet unless he is made sometimes miserable, how apt is he to mistake the way which can only lead him to the accomplishment of his own wishes!
(S 14.6)

The second, from sermon 3, warns that when one foregoes the inconvenience of being charitable, one forfeits humanity:

inconsistent creature that man is! who at that instant that he does what is wrong, is not able to withhold his testimony to what is good and praise worthy. (S 29.21)

By the time we arrive at sermon 4, we are prepared for its title: ‘Self-Knowledge’. Its theme, “the deceitfulness of the heart of man to itself, and of how little we truly know of ourselves” (*S* 31.6) is aptly presented using the provocative story of David and Nathan. Not only is he elaborating on the sermon from *Tristram Shandy*, but beginning with the first paragraph we are even reading some of the same lines. Again we are reminded that though “one would think” self-knowledge “could be no very difficult lesson,” it is in fact as elusive as a good conscience. Sterne anchors his theology in this basic principle of human illusion:

we are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors, and we suffer ourselves to see and reason just so far and no farther than they give us leave. (*S* 32.9)

This perspective was established in ‘Abuses’, reiterated in the first sermons of Volume i, and is influential in all that follow.

‘ABUSES’, PREPOSSESSIONS, AND INAPPROPRIATE SOLUTIONS

A number of inconveniences are associated with inaccurate knowledge, not the least of which is stated in the motto to the first volumes of *Tristram*. The hard jostlings and comical encounters of the players at Shandy Hall and of Yorick in France are clearly multiplied by *opinions*. Characters seem unable to come to terms with their environment and with those who dwell within it. Ideas formed according to the appearances of ‘things’ inevitably lead interested minds to confusion.

It is the nature of an hypothesis, when once a man has conceived it, that it assimilates every thing to itself as proper nourishment; and from the first moment

of your begetting it, it generally grows the stronger by every thing you see, hear, read, or understand. (*TS* 177.15)

The association of ideas, the unsteady uses of words, and ancillary complexities combine to fix the sermon as an anchor of Sterne's work: "surely if there is any thing in this life which a man may depend upon, and to the knowledge of which he is capable of arriving upon the most indisputable evidence, it must be this very thing,—whether he has a good conscience or no." (*TS* 145.7)

Unlike the few who heard or read this in 1750, Sterne reasonably could have expected his new congregation, after their introduction to the Shandys, to anticipate what follows:

at first sight this may seem to be a true state of the case; and I make no doubt but the knowledge of right and wrong is so truly impressed upon the mind of man,—that did no such thing ever happen, as that the conscience of a man, by long habits of sin, might (as the scripture assures it may) insensibly become hard;—and, like some tender parts of his body, by much stress and continual hard usage, lose, by degrees, that nice sense and perception with which God and nature endow'd it:—Did this never happen;—or was it certain that self-love could never hang the least bias upon the judgment;—or that the little interests below, could rise up and perplex the faculties of our upper regions, and encompass them about with clouds and thick darkness. (*TS* 147.1)

The so-far humorous instances of men being bubbles to themselves take a sinister turn. One's banker and physician are suspect enough, we are told, when personal gain is at stake. But, as Trim recalls with horror, the monstrous pride of the Inquisition is witness to how opinions fixed as law by powerful systems tend generally to torment helpless victims. Walter means well in comforting Trim, but he is wrong to say "this is not a history, —'tis a sermon thou art reading" (*TS* 162.9). 'Abuses' is the history of what occurs in public and private when Human Understanding presumes itself sufficient, thus it is an exposition of how the Fall of man is perpetually rehearsed.

It is no small part of what should be the overwhelming success of the sermon as the initial crux of the novel, that Walter and Toby applaud it while simultaneously proving the validity of its accusations. The homily of 1750 has entered another dimension, has gathered a cast. Though he seems to misunderstand Locke, in his article 'The Sermon in *Tristram Shandy*' Arthur Cash recognizes an important focus: "Locke, exploring the uses and limitations of reason, saw only an intellectual fault in man's failure to know and judge himself. Sterne made of it a central theme in his moral teaching."⁴⁸ Careful readers register this focus.

Thus conscience, this once able monitor,—placed on high as a judge within us, and intended by our maker as a just and equitable one too,—by an unhappy train of causes and impediments, takes often such imperfect cognizance of what passes,—does its office so negligently,—sometimes so corruptly, —that it is not to be trusted alone; and therefore we find there is a necessity, an absolute necessity of joining another principle with it to aid, if not govern, its determinations. (*TS* 154.3)

Henceforth we are to refrain from premature judgement and dogmatic slumbers, and to allow the author flexibility. We will then be prepared for the complementary passage in Volume iii:

—Inconsistent soul that man is!—languishing under wounds, which he has the power to heal!—his whole life a contradiction to his knowledge!—his reason, that precious gift of God to him—(instead of pouring in oyl) serving but to sharpen his sensibilities,—to multiply his pains and render him more melancholy and uneasy under them! (*TS* 239.13)

Straight *reason* has become pharisaical like the priest and Levite in the parable to which Tristram alludes (Luke x.25-37). Hope for health rests with the outsider—the Samaritan—persons like "poor Yorick" (*TS* 35.10), "poor Tom" (*TS* 162.6) and "poor Trim" (*TS* 162.4, 163.4) who have shown compassion to those in need.

Having established the elusive nature of happiness and the difficulty of self-knowledge, Sterne proceeds by demolishing expectations of unaided inclinations having capacity to suggest

appropriate entertainment. But we should not misunderstand him to mean that only passions or spontaneous reactions are untrustworthy. Reason and reflection, in other words one's settled opinions, are equally incapable of properly governing the imagination (*S* 16.21-27). They betray us if used as sufficient guides: we are "miserably cheating ourselves, and torturing our reason to bring us in such a report of the sin as suits the present appetite and inclination" (*S* 38.17). We are overthrown says Sterne, by our "wants and necessities (whether real or imaginary)" (*S* 100.20).⁴⁹

The prepossessions formed by passion and reason are variously manifest, but they stem from a few basic roots in human disposition so it is important in explicating Sterne's message to distinguish between the residue of the image of God within which people are created (a heavenly disposition), and the disposition to deviate from this (inherited from our first parents).⁵⁰ One inclined to the former is ruled by compassion, the rule of heaven, those following the latter serve themselves. Each of these will adopt by long practice and a succession of spontaneous decisions a settled principle that will govern their seemingly inconsistent actions. The establishment of priority in these dispositions serves as a foundation for one's ruling passion.⁵¹ Montaigne's essay 'Of the Inconstancy of our Actions' offers a fit representation of the difficulty of knowing one's true nature:

There is indeed some possibility of forming a Judgment of a Man from the most usual Methods of his Life, but, considering the natural Instability of our Manners and Opinions, I have often thought even the best Authors a little mistaken, in so obstinately endeavouring to mould us into any constant and solid Contexture.

We are all unformed Lumps, and of so various a Contexture, that every Moment every Piece plays its own game, and there is so much Difference betwixt us and ourselves, as betwixt us and others.

The Understanding has something more to do than simply to judge us by our outward Actions; it must penetrate the very Soul, and there discover by what Springs the Motion is guided: But that being a high and hazardous Undertaking, I could wish that fewer would attempt it.⁵²

If such classic distinctions are not recognized we are likely to misread Sterne and presume his presentations of the nature and culpability of individuals to be inconsistent. Superficially he would seem to be contradicting himself by saying we are inherently good and also inherently evil. But his perspective is compatible with reason, Christian theology and in line with contemporary Anglican dialectic. James Foster's sermon 'Of the Image of God in Man' begins:

THERE is no part of knowledge more considerable than a right knowledge of human nature. . . . And yet it may well be wondered at, that men should be such great strangers to the design of *their own* nature, and of all the objects of knowledge, know the least of themselves.

Ten pages later he continues,

for human nature, even in its present constitution, is a reasonable nature, and the reasonable nature of man has no *evil* tendency, but. . . . It must, after all, be confess'd, that there is a *sickness* and *disorder*, in our mortal frame, introduced by the fall. But this is entirely a *natural*, and not a moral defect.⁵³

Sterne's sermon 'Pride' makes a further distinction between temptations "immediately seated in our natures" (presumably lust, gluttony, etc.), and a vice such as pride, "which grows up in society so insensibly;—steals in unobserved upon the heart upon so many occasions" (*S* 229.19). "Self-love, like a false friend, instead of checking, most treacherously feeds this humour" (*S* 229.24). Thus a vice to which humans are not inherently inclined is nurtured by one to which they are. That self-love is not a vice *per se*, was in Sterne's day defended by Dean Swift: "the love we have for ourselves, is to be the pattern of that love we ought to have towards our neighbour."⁵⁴ And by Bishop Butler:

self-love, in its due degree, is as just and morally good as any affection whatever. . . . The thing to be lamented is, not that men have so great regard to their own good or interest in the present world, for they have not enough; but that they have so little to the good of others. And this seems plainly owing to their being so much engaged

in the gratification of particular passions unfriendly to benevolence, and which happen to be most prevalent in them, much more than to self-love.⁵⁵

Like all inherent dispositions or ruling passions, the value of self-love is in the use to which it is put. The influential growth of its vicious elements may be so subtle as to provoke blatant hypocrisy without the least acknowledgment in the practitioner. The priest and Levite versus the Samaritan (#3), David's unknowing judgment on his own veiled crime (#4), and the Pharisee in the temple (#6), provide examples of this blindness. The inconsistencies of king Herod are accounted for "in three words—*That he was a man of unbounded ambition*, who stuck at nothing to gratify it,—so that not only his vices were ministerial to his ruling passion, but his virtues too (if they deserve the name) were drawn in, and listed into the same service" (#9; *S* 89.5). Preparing that statement perhaps Sterne had recently perused the sermons of John Conybeare, who in part I of 'Reflections on the Conduct of Herod towards John the Baptist' speaks eloquently to this point:

Now, the first thing I would observe, on occasion of the present history, is this; that the giving ourselves up to any one irregular passion or desire, is not only, upon its own account, highly displeasing to God,—but will have such an influence upon our lives, that our innocence and virtue shall be in no instance secure. This we see plainly in the conduct of Herod; who was so over-mastered by his passion for Herodias, that he stuck at nothing to which that passion led him.

. . . whenever any [passion or desire] becomes a ruling principle within us, it draws every thing to itself; ---- hath an influence on every action; and, as the helm of a vessel, turneth us which way soever it pleaseth. So that if a man be once lost to any criminal passion (whatsoever it be), neither he, nor any one else can say, where he shall make a stand.⁵⁶

The ambition Herod manifests, as self-love unrestrained, is a God-given virtue misused. Like the desire for glory, it is a "generous and manly vice" (*S* 181.6), and is contrasted to greed (in this case of Governor Felix), which though equally treacherous, is nevertheless often "a subordinate

and ministerial passion, exercised for the support of some other vices” (*S* 180.5). With avarice, we are feeding more elemental deviances. Sterne presents evil-speaking as another “contagious malady” (*S* 107.9) springing from the seeds of rooted dispositions such as cruelty, ambition, and poverty of soul. The pitiless Shimei (#16), the pride of Hezekiah (#17), the immature confidence of the prodigal (#20), the worldliness of the rich man (#23), and the thanklessness of nations (#s 21 and 32, 40, 45) are displayed as further instances of how, by close observation of the everyday unguarded actions of people, one may most likely form accurate assessments of their temper and ruling passion (*S* 297). Already in ‘Abuses’ Sterne drew attention to the ease with which we are deceived in judging seemingly good men. It is to the advantage of the banker and physician to seem to be moral, and one would be foolish to conclude that a morality of convenience will remain constant when the underlying passion is better served by a vicious deed. The humility of Hezekiah, so apparently noble in adversity, was not able to bear the glorious “shock of prosperity” which revealed his true nature. (*S* 160.14)

These examples are not shown by scripture or Sterne as extraordinary burdens of sensational characters. In every sermon we are flapped back to practical self-accusation:

we are a strange compound; and something foreign from what charity would suspect, so eternally twists itself into what we do . . . whatever a man is about, — observe him, —he stands arm’d inside and out with two motives; an ostensible one for the world, —and another which he reserves for his own private use.
(*S* 161.25-162.1)

We are revealed as participating in a negligent farce, a collective agreement by which under ordinary circumstances, if we are not evil-speakers, we agree not to tax one another by examining the dispositions beneath our masks. The deceit is effective, we grant the same license to ourselves:

most of us are aware of and pretend to detest the barefaced instances of that hypocrisy by which men deceive others, but few of us are upon our guard or see that more fatal hypocrisy by which we deceive and over-reach our own hearts. It is a flattering and dangerous distemper, which has undone thousands —we bring the seeds of it along with us into the world—. (S 38.20)

There is scarce any character so rare, as a man of a real open and generous integrity, —who carries his heart in his hand, —who says the thing he thinks; and does the thing he pretends. (S 164.18)

According to Sterne, the ultimate prepossession is our propensity to sacrifice anything to this principle of self-love. In some characters this manifests itself as hunger for power, in others as desire to be thought wise, and in many it lurks simply, in ordinary judgment practised according to spontaneous fancies. In all cases, though one's myriad actions seem contradictory, they are in fact answering the call of one ruling passion. Many apparent inconsistencies of life and individuals may be reconciled if the ruling passion driving superficial differences is discerned. It will not, for example, then be unbelievable that Herod, a "person of great address . . . generous, prince-like" could simultaneously be responsible for monstrous crimes.

Susceptibility even to deceive one's self exponentially multiplies this problem. King David, with a history of unusual perception and sensitivity, feels no remorse at seducing Bathsheba and having her good husband butchered. Sterne begins his sermon 'Self-Knowledge' with this story, and the words

THERE is no historical passage in scripture, which gives a more remarkable instance of the deceitfulness of the heart of man to itself, and of how little we truly know of ourselves, than this, wherein David is convicted out of his own mouth. (S 31.5)

For when Nathan presents a parable paralleling David's sin, the king is quick to accuse the guilty. Again, "we are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our

passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors ” (*S* 32.9). Sterne, using the parable, recalls to us this elemental flaw in our natures. We are masters of self-deceit, in “utter ignorance of our true disposition and character” (*S* 36.29). Further, we are inclined to the “dangerous and delusive” trap of judging the actions of others according to “the various ebbs and flows of [our own] passions and desires” (*S* 36.32-37.2). Reality is misjudged because it is perceived according to insufficient terms, generated from dislodged expectations of how things are or ought to be. Man is a bubble to himself because he is generally at the mercy of forces which, even if he manages to acknowledge, remain beyond his comprehension—forces summed up in the words ‘ruling passion.’

Hopefully underlying this prevalent disease is a capacity, with appropriate reflection many will be able at least to agree with the diagnosis. In ‘Abuses’, Sterne wrote “if any man . . . thinks it impossible for man to be such a bubble to himself,—I must refer him a moment to his reflections, and shall then venture to trust the appeal with his own heart” (*S* 260.19). He iterates the same point in #4 borrowing from Swift, “let any man look into his own heart, and observe” (*S* 37.3).⁵⁷ In both sermons, he continues with Swift to see in David the human tendency to hate sins which one has no desire to commit, and to excuse those to which one is inclined. This fundamentally consistent cornerstone of self-love should not blind us to understanding the full ramifications of observed inconsistencies. Sterne himself is not being inconsistent in these pronouncements when he tackles this problem in his sermon on the Character of Herod.

—we often think ourselves inconsistent creatures, when we are the furthest from it, and all the variety of shapes and contradictory appearances we put on, are in truth but so many different attempts to gratify the same governing appetite. (*S* 86.12)

Compare this with what follows two sermons later:

the bulk of mankind live in such a contradiction to themselves, that there is no character so hard to be met with as one, which upon critical examination, will appear altogether uniform, and in every point consistent with itself. (*S* 103.25)

Melvyn New claims that these passages suggest “the difficulty of seeking a consistent view of humanity in the *Sermons*,” “Sterne appears inconsistent in trying to decide whether or not there exists an underlying unity in the inconsistencies of human beings.”⁵⁸ On the contrary, Sterne’s first statement does not claim that we are always consistent, but that when we seem inconsistent, often a closer look would reveal various attempts to feed a consistent hunger. We are consistent according to this hunger, not according to what it makes us do. Or, we are consistently ruled by our governing passion that inevitably leads us into apparent inconsistencies; we are consistent in passion, not with the expectations of reason. Sterne’s second observation approaches the enigma from another angle, and with seemingly opposite words says the same thing: we are inconsistent with the objectively reasoned idea of ‘what that sort of person does.’ We are inconsistent in our claims to moral consistency, but consistent in being ruled by one passion.

Again the fundamental human crux: “Good God! said I, turning pale with astonishment—is it possible, that a people so smit with sentiment should at the same time be so unclean, and so unlike themselves—*Quelle grossierte!*” (*ASJ* 83.14). Beneath the surface, at passion’s root there is no fundamental inconsistency. As Joseph Butler says in his sermon ‘Upon Self-Deceit’ that focuses on the David/Nathan story:

hence arises that amazing incongruity; and seeming inconsistency of character, from whence slight observers take it for granted, that the whole is hypocritical and false; not being able otherwise to reconcile the several parts; whereas, in truth, there is real honesty, so far as it goes.⁵⁹

An effective honesty though, is difficult to find. In ‘Abuses’ Sterne explicitly lauds the quality of “moral honesty” of one “who has less affectation of piety” than those zealous merely to appear religious (*TS* 159.16-27). The majority are busy with masks of appearance “stealing from [the world] a character, instead of winning one” (*S* 162.3). That those who successfully construct a mask are more accepted than those whose vices are less harmful but more public, Sterne claims, is a great moral evil of society. If justice must also be seen to be done, often it will suffer: “ ’tis the necessity of *appearing* to be somebody, in order to be so—which ruins the world” (*S* 221.24). Most conclude it is a better use of time and effort to establish an appearance of humility (*S* 231.15-27), wisdom (*S* 245.5-246.3), or honesty (273.8-20), than to embark on the difficult road of really acquiring the virtues: “numbers are every day taking more pains to be well spoken of,—than what would actually enable them to live so as to deserve it” (*S* 109.33).

This theme of corporate and self deception is a key to understanding Sterne’s message and approach. His application of honest characterization contributes gracefully to remove these masks. In the Shandy family, in Yorick of *ASJ* there are no masks, and thus the reader, if he is honest, is enabled to see himself without *his* masks in an unsuspecting manner. Turning to the fiction with this in mind, amplification of these homiletic themes becomes apparent.

In one of his early descriptions of uncle Toby, Tristram distinguishes between influences of blood and of “wind or water, or any modifications or combinations of them whatever” (*TS* 73.5). Though this, like ‘philosophy’ in both novels, comes to us veiled, it is significant for maintaining us in the environment of deviance and confusion that pervades the house and journey of his works. Remember the animal spirits, “transfused from father to son,” which account for “nine parts in ten

of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world" (*TS* 1.16-2.1). These spirits are, nevertheless, governed by "you" (*TS* 2.2), and the path they clear is the responsibility of the one who directed them. Generationally speaking, then, the deviance of blood is accountable, but that is further complicated by those of "wind and water." Environment, whether on the grand scale of natural latitude or in the smaller circle of coincidental gusts, provides a complementary chaos.

Doubtless Walter is to be understood as correct, that we are haunted by multitudes of prejudices "which we suck in with our mother's milk" (*TS* 448.6). Certainly Locke had much to say on this stumbling block of 'education.' As outlined in the sermons, it is significant that these prejudices are rarely removed by experience or 'reasoning.' "For in a great measure" anticipates Tristram, "[my father] might be said to have suck'd this in, with his mother's milk. He did his part however.—If education planted the mistake, (in case it was one) my father watered it, and ripened it to perfection" (*TS* 261.11). Feminist critics hunting for ungenerous squirts will here be disappointed. Referring to the effects of *mother's milk*, Sterne is alluding to arguments of theological epistemology:

it appears clearly indecorous and unworthy of a Christian to draw in his Religion with his Mothers Milk, and to attribute his receiving it, not to the Ingenuous Disquisition of Reason, but to the Laws of his Country, his education, to the Dictates of some learned Man in whom he has an Implicit Faith, and such like Prejudices as these.⁶⁰

As Walter is not redeemed from dogmatic misapplication by the blatant moral of 'the Abuses of Conscience', so Slawkenbergius informs us in *his* misplaced prolegomena, of the root of his life-long focus on the human nose: "that ever since he had arrived at the age of discernment, and was able to sit down coolly, and consider within himself the true state and condition of man, and

distinguish the main end and design of his being . . .” (*TS* 273.26). Indeed, “Learned men . . . don’t write dialogues upon long noses for nothing” (*TS* 271.18), but what the unenthusiastic reader will learn from his elaborate ‘dialogue,’ is sure to disappoint that illusioned though faithful analyzer of our *Disgrázias* (*TS* 272.19).

The act of establishing systematic reasoning to account for *every thing*, instead of disillusioning tends only further to confuse. As objective truth, reason is insidious. Walter’s Northwest passage to the intellectual world is an apt illustration. He has realized the need to outrun time in his education of Tristram, but what he unwittingly discovers is a shortcut to the source of his own illusions:

now the use of the *Auxiliaries* is, at once to set the soul a going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions. (*TS* 485.10)

That Walter would engage his unsuspecting Meno to discourse about a “white bear” is a jest with Sterne’s theological contemporaries that has since been hibernating. Recalling the term from his Cambridge days Sterne highlights Walter’s unfortunate appeal. Thomas Sharp gives us the convenient definition of these “extravagant conceits . . . in the compositions of preachers:”

we called them *white bears*; meaning thereby, such emblems, or similes, as were too bold and striking to be easily forgotten; and yet, from some strange impropriety or oddness in them, could not be remembered but with discredit to the brains that formed them.⁶¹

One problem consistently developed in *TS* and *ASJ* is not limited to Hudibrastic tutors, and that is the overwhelming temptation to absorb phenomena in ways that accord with one’s preconceived notions. Not only, like the consultants at the visitation dinner who each form

incorrect interpretations of “Zounds——” are we bubbled intellectually, (“how finely we argue upon mistaken facts!”) (*TS* 377.20-379.8), but even physically we are prey to CURIOSITY, FANCY and DESIRE:

“That a rill of cold water dribbling through my in-ward parts, should light up a torch in my Jenny’s——”

—The proposition does not strike one; on the contrary it seems to run opposite to the natural workings of causes and effects——

But it shews the weakness and imbecility of human reason.

— “And in perfect good health with it?”

—The most perfect—Madam, that friendship herself could wish me— (*TS* 660.9)

That Tristram would be doomed by marriage articles (*TS* 46.26-28) to have his nose squashed is just one of many instances where a well-meant attempt at order and felicity becomes an avenue of undoing. That nothing ever wrought in an ordinary way with the Shandy family (*TS* 73.26, 373.2) is slight consolation for the suspicion that “ordinary” is a figment of our nurses’ imagination and that here, as in the sermons, we are being introduced to ourselves— hinges creak in our own parlours. Walter is not the only patriarch whose “rhetoric and conduct were at perpetual handy-cuffs” (*TS* 239.8). It is hinted that this need not be. Elizabeth’s “*Pray, my dear . . . have you not forgot to wind up the clock?*” (*TS* 2.9) was unnecessary and, some may argue, Walter need not have been put out. The mechanism of things is, of course, merely an inclination, but if given license it assumes autonomy, and like hobbyhorses, becomes a rule: “so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong . . . --away they go cluttering like hey-go-mad” (*TS* 2.3).

We are humorously introduced to the hobbyhorse as ruling passion, even Solomon stabled a few, but Tristram's apparently rhetorical question "pray, Sir, what have either you or I to do with it?" is in earnest (*TS* 12.17). It is not a grave discussion we are entering, as Sterne makes abundantly clear, but it is essential. "From the first moment I sat down to write my life for the amusement of the world, and my opinions for its instruction, has a cloud insensibly been gathering over my father." (*TS* 253.15)

As the novels unfold, inconsistencies of characters are one element upon which we come to rely. Only "Sir Critick" who fancies himself untainted, would dare be surprised:

—How, in the name of wonder! could your uncle *Toby*, who, it seems, was a military man, and whom you have represented as no fool,----be at the same time such a confused, pudding-headed, muddle-headed fellow as---. (*TS* 97.18)

The humbler reader instead will try to "dive deep enough into the first causes of human ignorance and confusion" (*TS* 97.24). But what will he find? What sort of -paedia will he be tempted to puzzle together? The research is treacherous. Toby's early attempts to describe events at Namur prove that perplexities of intelligible communication are not lessened by the dubious privilege of being an eyewitness, rather they become "almost insurmountable difficulties" (*TS* 94.1-12). Like Tristram telling *his* story, at times he can relate *when* but not *how* (*TS* 42.4), and at others *how* but not *why* (*TS* 74.13-15). The most obvious things have dark sides. Toby admits a month's contemplation will not associate a crevice with the right end of a conversation (*TS* 117.5-118.9), though elsewhere fast as you can say "bridge," he fords the gap: "'Tis very obliging in him . . .—pray give my humble service to Dr. *Slop*, *Trim*, and tell him I thank him heartily." (*TS* 252.16)

Humorous, and of no eternal account perhaps, but one cannot help seeing Walter gravely nodding at recent versions of chaos theory involving, as did his, “the dust of a butterfly’s wing:” “error, Sir, creeps in thro’ the minute-holes, and small crevices, which human nature leaves unguarded” (*TS* 171.26). The best intelligence brought by the best of messengers cannot divert the imagination of poor Phutatorius:

it is curious to observe the triumph of slight incidents over the mind:—What incredible weight they have in forming and governing our opinions, both of men and things,—that trifles light as air, shall waft a belief into the soul, and plant it so immoveably within it,—that *Euclid’s* demonstrations, could they be brought to batter it in breach, should not all have power to overthrow it.
(*TS* 383.11; cf. *S* 413.2-7.)

Once heated, by burnt brandy or some other radical element, deviance is established. What begins in jest ends in earnest as by long journeys and much friction, the hobby becomes the man, and centaur-like they gallop away (*TS* 86.6-19, 20.11). Sterne consistently makes sport of our tendency to overreach ourselves: “there is but a certain degree of perfection in every thing: and by pushing at something beyond that”~ Tristram is tripled in Auxerre. Again this helpfulness of classic scepticism; the nature of things admits only so much penetration, according to the limited capacities of its seekers. “WHEN the precipitancy of a man’s wishes hurries on his ideas ninety times faster than the vehicle he rides in—woe be to truth!” (*TS* 621.22; 586.10).

This approach by way of disclosure is as visible in the homilies as it is in the fiction. While Sterne’s message is orthodox and not uncommon it is also fresh and poignant. He consistently challenges us to assess our prepossessions and devotional integrity. He carefully engages the congregation by anticipating its rational or familiar views concerning his focus: “to know one’s self, one would think could be no very difficult lesson” (*S* 31.12), “it seems strange at first sight . . .

Would not one have imagined" (*S* 114.10, 18). This sense of our inability initially to judge well is carried through the sermons, often as an aside or implied reminder that reflections provoked by the text, though familiar, may still be valuable to those needing to of be wakened out of dogmatic or undogmatic slumbers.

As we are comically surprised at the antics in Shandy Hall and en route in France, in the sermons Sterne frequently uses a fictitious onlooker to express the inconsistencies of reality and our expectations: "an unexperienced man, who only trusted his ears, would imagine" (*S* 110.29; 286.23; etc.); "a stranger,—when he heard— . . . would conclude" (*S* 307.27, 31; 420.28-31); "a speculative man would expect" (*S* 121.14). With these utterances, Sterne reveals the foundation of a world that does not act according to 'laws' fabricated to explain it. This established, he has the necessary ammunition to combat a hasty, comfortable, or superficial reading of our conditions and ourselves. That he roots this perspective in scripture is of considerable importance.

Critics unaware of this heritage laboriously repeat the misunderstandings that Sterne's 'turning on his text' is *Shandean* frolic, that his sermons offer quaint recommendations. Ross can stand for them all; he begins by damning the first sermon with faint praise and continues:

by contrast with the extreme conventionality of this [first] sermon, the second, 'The House of Feasting and the House of Mourning Described', opens with strikingly audacious wit. . . . The apparent denial of Holy Writ is powerful, even shocking. It is hard to believe that this sermon could have been preached for Sutton or Stillington; indeed, the continuation . . . suggests a very broad-minded audience indeed. . . . comparative audacity certainly enlivens a number of Sterne's sermons.⁶²

One needn't really be broad-minded, familiarity with pulpit discourse would be sufficient. This may be audacious wit, but it is as conventional as the Lord's Prayer. The following four examples from a Dean of St. Patrick's, an Archbishop of York, and a Bishop of Norwich should suffice to steer our

appreciations. The biblical text discussed is printed in italics, and the preacher's opening remarks upon them given below:

And there sat in a Window a certain young Man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep Sleep; and while Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with Sleep, and fell down from the third Loft, and was taken up dead. {Acts xx.9}

I HAVE chosen these Words with Design, if possible, to disturb some Part in this Audience of half an Hour's Sleep, for the Convenience and Exercise whereof this Place, at this Season of the Day, is very much celebrated.⁶³

Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself: sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. {Matt. vi.34}

WHAT? Take no thought, no thought at all for the morrow? Attend only to the day that is passing over us, and make no provision for the future? Are we not to look forward; to suppose a continuation of life, and a want of the means which are necessary to support it? Should we sit still, with our arms folded, and expect that Providence will supply us with those means, without using our own endeavours?

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him DENY HIMSELF. {Matt. xvi.24}

A hard saying; who can bear it? Has God then implanted appetites and affections in me, only that I may be at the trouble of crossing and mortifying them? Has he spread pleasures and delights before me, for no other end than that I may act the self-tormentor all my days, by abstaining from them? It is a conduct unreasonable in itself, and dishonorable to his nature. It cannot be. I will go back and and walk no more with the author of such a religion as this.⁶⁴

In the middle of his sermon on Philippians iv.6, [*Be careful for nothing; but in every thing, by Prayer and Supplication, with Thanksgiving, let your Requests be made known unto God*], Archbishop John Sharp exclaims: "*be careful for nothing*, saith the Apostle: *Take no Thought for your Lives*, saith our Saviour. What! no Care? no Thought? That, I have already told you, is idle and extravagant."⁶⁵

Sterne's periodic use of beginnings that surprise is also, of course, a call to question our prepossessions against the background of scripture and the authority of our own contemplated

experience. We remember this from the sermon in *Tristram Shandy*. “TRUST!—Trust we have a good Conscience!—Surely, you will say . . .” (S 255.24). Sermon 2 has “*It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to the house of feasting.—*” as text, which Sterne follows with “THAT I deny— but let us hear the wise man’s reasoning upon it—” (S 12.5). After another heading from Ecclesiastes for ‘Time and Chance’ (#8), he begins “WHEN a man casts a look upon this melancholy description of the world, and sees contrary to all his guesses and expectations, what different fates attend the lives of men . . . —he is apt to conclude . . .” (S 74.8). Regarding Hezekiah’s hospitality in #17: “— AND where is the harm, you’ll say, in all this?” (S 157.9)

The introduction to sermon 18 “The Levite and his Concubine” is not only awakening, it is highly instructive. The text is provocative: “*And it came to pass in those days, when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of Mount Ephraim, who took unto him a concubine.—*” Sterne begins by echoing the congregation: “— A CONCUBINE!” then relieves them with “— but the text accounts for it” then, within the same breath, he anticipates their second response, “the Levite, you will say . . . did what was right in his own eyes, —and so, you may add, did his concubine too —.” Anticipating self-righteous judgement of her, the preacher reminds us of what actually happened. Like us he imagines the Levite’s response to her exit, but then quickly corrects himself: “the text gives a different picture of his situation.” Within a few lines we are presented with a socially objectionable situation in scripture, and have two presuppositions challenged accordingly by a parson who is willing to submit his own imagination to the bar of his text. Sterne is far from humoring his congregation, he is anxious to present it with any available clues leading away from the deceptive serenity of independent speculation and inherited bias to the

darker complexity of pragmatic faith. In one of his rare forays away from contemporary latitudinarian exegesis we realize he is in earnest. That Christ brought not peace but a sword, Sterne suggests,

may be understood,—as a beautiful description of the inward contests and opposition which christianity would occasion in the heart of man,—from its oppositions to the violent passions of our nature,—which would engage us in a perpetual warfare. . . . dividing a man against himself” (S 387.8).

He realizes this signifies a battle of the soul in hibernation, the preference for prepossession over thoughtful engagement.⁶⁶

For Sterne, as for Locke and all in the broad sceptical tradition, the deception inherent in our use of words and in the association of ideas is the implied impression that one is accurately experiencing a ‘something,’ when one is merely possessed of opinions based on subjective perception. We become enthused by our opinions and they then further complicate our faculties. Enthusiasm, writes Locke, “laying by Reason would set up Revelation without it. Whereby in effect it takes away both Reason and Revelation, and substitutes in the room of it, the unguarded fancies of a Man’s own Brain, and assumes them for a foundation both of opinion and conduct.”⁶⁷ There is an important historical connection between ‘enthusiasm’ and monaxial interest that immediately illustrates an element of Sterne’s characterizations. Henry More in *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* [1656] reiterates that an enthusiast may be entirely lucid on all points except that with which he is enthused:

THAT which is most observable & most usefull for the present matter in hand is, That notwithstanding there is such an enormous lapse of the Phancy and Judgement in some *one* thing, yet the party should be of a sound mind in *all other*, according to his naturall capacities and abilities. . . .

Amongst whom I do not deny but there may be some who for the main practical light of Christianity might have their judgments as consistent, as those *Melancholists* above named had in the ordinary prudential affairs of the world: But as for this one particular of being supernaturally inspired, of being the *last Prophet*, the *last Trumpet* . . . and the like, this certainly in them is as true, but farre worse, dotage, then to fancy a mans self either a *Cock* or *Bull*, when it is plain to the senses of all that he is a *Man*.⁶⁸

Granted the Shandy men do not fancy themselves to be such instrumental beasts, but their lives and opinions make for an exquisite parable of enthusiasm. Even, Sterne suggests, an awareness of subtle self-established deviances will not prevent repetition of past mistakes. Following the gist of John de la Casse's warning: first thought = evil thought, Walter is sufficiently wise to acknowledge that the prejudices of education "which we suck in with our mother's milk—are *the devil and all*" (*TS* 448.7). He gamely proceeds to attempt an alternative system for his son that, naturally, is doomed. Like clocks and other mechanisms fabricated to interpret life, the Tristra-paedia, trying to anticipate what is already being experienced, cannot keep time with the inevitable. The tragedy of this is not that the endeavour or its fruit is useless, but that its lucubrations abandon the essence of what it was vital to preserve. "—Certainly it was ordained as a scourge upon the pride of human wisdom, That the wisest of us all, should thus outwit ourselves, and eternally forego our purposes in the intemperate act of pursuing them" (*TS* 448.26). We may recall one of the earliest 'explanations' Sterne gave of his design in a draft of *TS* to his prospective publisher Robert Dodsley:

the Plan, as you will perceive, is a most extensive one,—taking in, not only, the Weak part of the Sciences, in w^{ch} the true point of Ridicule lies—but every Thing else, which I find Laugh-at-able in my way—⁶⁹

Science's weak part is the attempt to fix life in what is bound to be an inappropriate fashion. For Sterne, quacks and critics—the Scribes and Pharisees of arts and science—are more than targets for ridicule, they are walking parables. His criticism of them is the root of what Wilfred Watson calls 'Sterne's satire on mechanism,'⁷⁰ a satire that emanates from and parallels his scorn of religious pride. Sterne is not mocking attempts at clarification, or imagining some pre-edenic lack of curiosity; he sallies forth against the proud who refuse to see things in any light but their own. Madness in the great needs a few observers, and the symmetry of these systematic reasoners, as that of polemical divines (*TS* 462.13-464.28), is suspect for failing to incorporate nature's inconsistencies. More than this, the quest, for Walter and his ilk, is something other than humble searching, it has inappropriately become a line of argument, of gravitation:

like all systematic reasoners, he would move both heaven and earth, and twist and torture every thing in nature to support his hypothesis. In a word, I repeat it over again;—he was serious. (*TS* 61.15)

With comments like this, Sterne has Tristram expose a fundamental flaw in all attempts to solve the mysteries and riddles of our existence.

That men particularly subject to their own prepossessions (or men subject to those men) would miserably overreach their capacities is a foregone conclusion; and it is no small part of the ensuing complexities that persons thus enthusiastically bubbled are, at times and on certain topics, wholly lucid and correct. Appreciating Sterne's concentration on the apparent fluctuations of Biblical personalities we recognize that what seem to be outrageous inconsistencies in Sterne's main characters are in fact the various phases of focused passion, working itself out in the frames of

changing bodies as fluctuating circumstances are encountered. Confusion is not original with creation, it festers in synthetic opinions and immature associations and will scarcely be undeceived by tangible proof. “*Mon Dieu!*” exclaims the Count at Versailles, “*Vous etes Yorick*” (ASJ 113.6).

The learned do not concern themselves with facts, they reason (TS 305.26-306.5), so a true science is impossible. As with the hypothetical resurrection of the beggar Lazarus, the enlightenment of individuals and any BODY-CORPORATE does not depend upon visible evidence. Seeing, we fail to see. To prove “*That poor Master Shandy ****” NOT “****** entirely*” Toby suggests:

I would shew him publicly . . . at the market cross.

—’Twill have no effect, said my father. (TS 521.4-28)

Sadly, in this state, as happens during the muleteer’s story of the abbess, or the Strasbourg divines’ nasal argumentation, the further one goes in an attempt to communicate, the further one gets from the point to be reconciled.

One is tempted, then, to echo Walter’s concerned words to Toby and conclude that our “appetites are but diseases” (TS 424.20), and that these appetites, present in the homunculus, sucked by the infant and nurtured by subsequent systems to be practiced upon subsequent generations, are not entirely to be undone by better education:

—I tremble to think what a foundation had been laid for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind, which no skill of the physician or the philosopher could ever afterwards have set thoroughly to rights. (TS 3.26)

The most flourishing of those professions are quacks, their high-flying conclusions the inevitable residue of misconceived ideas wrapped with insufficient maxims. They act and speak by rote or

by fantastic inspirations; discoursing with them, their unsuspecting prey get nothing “beyond the *proposition*, the *reply*, and *rejoinder*” too often manipulated to silence or, worse, conviction (*TS* 630.18-631.1). Certainly, “philosophy has a fine saying for every thing. —For *Death* it has an entire set,” this, for Sterne, is its poverty (*TS* 421.5). Great *sayings* are repeated ad nauseum as if the words themselves were healing. The connoisseurs of words, as of paint [“the whole set of ’em are so hung round and befetish’d with the bobs and trinkets of criticism” (*TS* 212.19)] are least likely to appreciate the variety of creation: “their heads, Sir, are stuck so full of rules and compasses, and have that eternal propensity to apply them upon all occasions” (*TS* 213.1). The critic, like an ill-prepared scientist, follows a straight path, deviates neither to the left nor right and yet, with all his auxiliaries, finds nothing of substance.

If conscience, reason and passion are consistently liable to deception, even one’s identity is in jeopardy. Tristram is puzzled when asked who he is, and Yorick finds it easier to describe almost anyone other than himself (*TS* 633.16; *ASJ* 112.3-5). Those like Walter who trust misinformed systems have become dupes to their eloquence. As Cicero at the death of his daughter exchanged the voice of nature for philosophical sayings, so Walter takes comfort in his own eloquence at the death of Bobby. What was one’s strength of perception freezes into weakness with nothing accomplished:

My father was as proud of his eloquence as MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO could be for his life . . . it was indeed his strength—and his weakness too.—His strength—for he was by nature eloquent,—and his weakness—for he was hourly a dupe to it. (*TS* 419.17)

No redemptive element can interrupt such a cycle as one indulgence is substituted for another. The bulk of thought swells while the stock of learning withers, and the *relics of learning* become curiosities without effect (*TS* 408.1-10).

These bubbles are not easily burst, we are no longer ‘innocent.’ The good ship Shandy floats like an ark on waters of God’s wrath:

unto the woman he said . . . in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree [of the knowledge of good and evil] . . . cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shall thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee . . . In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground. (Gen. iii.16-19)

Loyal son of Adam, Walter “pick’d up an opinion, Sir, as a man in a state of nature picks up an apple.—It becomes his own,—and if he is a man of spirit, he would lose his life rather than give it up—” (*TS* 262.20). The curse is earned: “the sweat of a man’s brows, and the exsudations of a man’s brains, are as much a man’s own property, as the breaches upon his backside” (*TS* 263.22). Breaches, we may remember, are another consequence of our primitive disobedience. As Tristram discovers with “noses,” the more one tries to clarify one’s situation with words, the more Babel is bound to be conjured. Those who, like Walter, would force every event into an hypothesis (*TS* 804.21) crucify truth. In response to Toby’s request to be told “what a polemic divine is,” Yorick produces “the best description . . . I have ever read,” which occurs in Rabelais’ *Gargantua*. An ounce of *practical* divinity, or a thrust of the bayonet, we see, is worth more than the best of equestrian capers (*TS* 464). Such presentations have led readers of the novels to conclude that Sterne endorses or sees no way out of this chaotic hopelessness:

Sterne's view, like Fielding's, is that life is not going to change very much and that any attempt to transcend its imperfections and ambiguities, like Walter Shandy's systems or the Man of the Hill's delight in the nectar of infinity; is ridiculous.⁷¹

Sterne's skepticism gives rise to a genuine relativism, to a conviction that absolutes are not only difficult to come by, but unnecessary. . . .

The world of *Tristram Shandy* is thus a determined world, and this is one reason why the novel contains so little true satire. . . . in *Tristram Shandy*, a man is not damned for following his own lights; he has no other choice.⁷²

To challenge these assumptions we should recall the gist of Sterne's sermons.

AIDS TO REFORMATION

Sterne consistently reveals how self-love and specific interests taint judgments. Therefore, "there is nothing generally in which our happiness and honour are more nearly concerned, than in forming true notions both of men and things" (*S* 182.7) and "whatever our condition is, 'tis good to be acquainted with it in time, to be able to supply what is wanting" (*S* 132.22). According to Sterne, the necessary disillusionment happens by a series of three helps. First is the importance of taking "a little time for reflection" (*S* 13.27; also e.g. 39.12; 183.24; 260.21) at the expense of one's present happiness (*S* 13.31). The second help is another's artful presentation of one's situation that engages the unsuspecting mind and heart, leading one to conclusions otherwise obscured by prejudice. Such is the journey on which the prophet Nathan leads David.

Because both of these aids ultimately remain dependent on the individual's perception, the third element of disillusionment is an appeal for direct divine support; David's request of God to cleanse him from secret faults, for example (*S* 39.26; Psalms xix.12). Frequently Sterne reminds us that personal reform is the responsibility of each individual. But he is careful we do not presume

reformation to be an exclusively human endeavour. The journey will inevitably be fruitless unless accompanied by the grace of Providence thwarting prepossessions, directing one in ways which would otherwise be impossible to discern. We now observe Sterne's treatment of these ways of regaining integrity.

He reminds us that the human quest to be reconciled with the troubles of this life has assumed such a focus that "the patient enduring of affliction has by degrees obtained the name of philosophy, and almost monopolized the word to itself, as if it was the chief end, or compendium of all the wisdom which philosophy had to offer" (*S* 143.28). But again, the problem of disengagement is encountered. No amount of eloquence will translate into valuable experience for one in torment: "what they said proceeded more from the head, than the heart, 'twas generally more calculated to silence a man in his troubles, than to convince, and teach him how to bear them" (*S* 144.1).

In line with the gospel, Sterne is fond of representing ways in which the wisdom of this world proves an untrustworthy guide. Even when borrowing from Edward Stillingfleet for sermon 33, we can see how he consciously tempers explicitly positive references to human reason, by shifting the tenor of his source. He deepens Stillingfleet's observations by altering the role of reason in revelation. Just before his borrowing Sterne writes "if the morals of men are not reformed, it is not owing to a defect in the revelation [of Christianity], but 'tis owing to the same causes which defeated all the use and intent of reason,—before revelation was given" (*S* 314.14).

Stillingfleet has:

Such is the frame and condition of humane nature considered in it self, so great are the advantages of reason and consideration for the government of our actions, so much stronger are the natural motives to vertue than to vice, that they who look no farther, would expect to find the world much better than it is. For

why should we suppose the generality of mankind to betray so much folly, as to act **unreasonably and** against the common interest of their own kind? as **all those do, that** yield to the temptations of **sin, to sin is nothing else but to act foolishly and inconsiderately.**⁷³ [bold type mine]

Sterne incidentally changes “such is the frame” to “whoever considers the state,” deletes “that they who look no farther,” after “better than it is” adds “or ever has been,” and alters “sin” to “what is wrong.” But the three deletions of references to the unreasonableness of sin are most significant. He consciously disconnects Stillingfleet’s link of sin and virtue with reason. Sterne follows this with three lines of verbatim borrowing: “but on the other side,—if men first look into the practice of the world, and there observe the strange prevalency of vice, and how willing men are to defend as well as to commit it . . .” So far, except for the dash, this is verbatim Stillingfleet; however when Stillingfleet continues, “. . . they would be apt to imagine that either there is no such thing as Reason among men or that it hath very little influence upon their actions” Sterne again avoids the ‘reasonable’ passage and instead, to continue the same sentence, skips the equivalent of two folio pages to lift and rework part of another sentence that becomes “—one would think they believed that all discourses of virtue and honesty were mere matter of speculation for men to entertain some idle hours with; and say truly, that men seemed universally to be agreed in nothing but speaking well and doing ill” (S 314.24-31). Then, Sterne picks up his reason/revelation thread from 314.16 and inserts “—but this casts no more dishonour upon reason than it does upon revelation;—the truth of the case being this” before going back in Stillingfleet to a section occurring even earlier than Sterne’s first borrowing: “that no motives have been great enough to restrain those from sin who have secretly loved it” (S 315.1-3). The value of reason is not being denied, but Sterne implicitly questions its utility in unconvincing one

who is passionately devoted to vice. A useful appeal is one that appropriately counters the problem. If one has been led into vice through passion and imagination, one will best be discouraged through the same avenues.

When Sterne to conclude the sermon finally glances at a use of “reason” in reformation, it is not, as in *Stillingfleet*, with surprise that it did not conquer one’s evil inclinations, but to remark that it is only “by reason, and the probability of things” that one may trust that Christianity has serviced the world with provocations to reform. This faith is justified, claims Sterne, because Christianity “gives us the most engaging ideas of the perfections of God,—at the same time that it impresses the most awful ones of his majesty and power;—a Being rich in mercies, but if they are abused, terrible in his judgments;—one constantly about our secret paths, —about our beds;—who spieth out all our ways” (*S* 320.30). That is, he presents an immanent God of a religion that engages and impresses, initially seeming to be more effective than reasonable. And so, because Sterne is aware of the subtleties of temptations to vice and to virtue he says (as he does with similar words at 216.14 and 289.30) “if either the hopes or fears, the passions or reason of men are to be wrought upon at all, such principles must have an effect, though, I own, very far short of what a thinking man should expect from such motives.” (*S* 321.7)

Sterne fully endorsed the belief that ‘learned ignorance’ is the beginning of wisdom, which he filtered from the Bible, Erasmus, Montaigne, and—on his own turf—the Royal Society and Cambridge Platonists. One cannot help hearing echoes of More, Sprat, Glanvill and the host of reticent knowers in his canon:

ONE of the first things to be done in order for the enlargement, and encrease of Knowledge, is to make Men sensible, how *imperfect* their *Understandings* are in the present state, and how *lyable to deception*. . . .

For all things are a great *Darkness* to us, and we are so to our selves: the *plainest* things are as *obscure*, as the most *confessedly mysterious*. . . .

And *these* prejudices, by *custom* and *long acquaintance* with our Souls, get a *mighty* interest, and shut them up against every thing that is different from these *Images of Education*.⁷⁴

The “calamities and cross accidents” are so great, and the actual comforts of refined philosophy so little, that faithful stamina was found to be impossible “upon moral principles --- which had no foundation to sustain this great weight, which the infirmities of our nature laid upon it” (S 143.21). The “infirmities of our nature” demand that a consistent anchor of strength be found beyond our own contrivance.

Sterne closes his second volume of sermons by read¹ressing the central question with which he opened the first: the search for happiness. The way to contentment, he suggests, is not by riding the wheel of inappropriate hopes and subsequent frustrations, but to recognize with Job that “we are born to trouble,” and that “in whatever state we are, we shall find a mixture of good and evil; and therefore the true way to contentment, is to know how to receive these certain vicissitudes of life” (S 148.19; Job v.7). Due to unfulfillable desires and unchecked imaginations people are perpetually vacillating and seem to have no inner consistency, when in fact they have traded a consistent spring of heaven for a ruling passion that feeds on arbitrary desires. It is not by chance that events in the world seem to mirror our own inconsistencies. As we have invented a god that corresponds to our perceptions,

God, for wise reasons, has made our affairs in this world, almost as fickle and capricious as ourselves. ---- Pain and pleasure, like light and darkness, succeed each other; and he that knows how to accommodate himself to their periodical returns, and can wisely extract the good from the evil,—knows only how to live:—this is true contentment, at least all that is to be had of it in this world, and for this every man must be indebted not to his fortune but to himself. (*S* 149.4)

An important focus of the chaotic nature of Sterne's fiction is this presentation of an argument for the subtle providence of God that revolves around the lottery of chance. It is an old fideistic commonplace and he consistently represents the belief that *because* the race is not to the swift, nor riches to the wise, and *because* we cannot control the outcome of events, “there is some other cause which mingles itself in human affairs, and governs and turns them as it pleases” (*S* 76.28) and that this is the Providence of God.⁷⁵ Improbabilities inherent in our existence are placed there and so ordered to testify to our dependence.

You must call in the deity to untye this knot,—for though at sundry times—sundry events fall out,—which we who look no further than the events themselves, call chance, because they fall out quite contrary both to our intentions and our hopes,— . . . are [however] pure designation, and though invisible, are still the regular dispensations of the superintending power of that Almighty being. (*S* 77.16)

He is not merely offering a dogmatic context for suffering; the understanding is resolved and the mind satisfied by a sense that the Source of one's being is active for one's best interest. So Joseph is able to say to his brothers, “ye verily thought evil against me,—but God meant it for good” (*S* 79.6; Gen. 1.20). This view refuses to mask the reality of human suffering, and instead somewhat accentuates the gulf between heaven and earth by acknowledging the fact of wilful human evil.

Sterne cushions the foregoing argument that chaos proves Providence, by saying “the providence of God suffered every thing to take its course . . . though it did not cross these events,—yet providence bent them to the most merciful ends” (*S* 78.22-31). That God is present beneath the

riddles and mysteries of life is the support of Sterne's confidence to represent the "*natural* and *moral* vanity of man" (S 94.29) and the harsh realities of life that would otherwise be intolerable.

Sterne drew confidence from a spiritual integrity discerned in the mayhem of creation, integrity he ascribed to the providential hand of God. This is of more than occupational significance. Certainly he inherited from birth and education a facility and understanding of latitudinarian principles, but his presentation of the content of those doctrines is clearly sincere so we should challenge the facile assumption that fideistic confidence is incompatible with the author of *Tristram Shandy*. In fact, the carefree elements we associate with *Shandyism* are in large measure made possible by Sterne's *faith*. Such jocularitas is otherwise entirely inconsistent with his poignantly reiterated perspective on the enigmas and troubles of this life. His sermons fully incorporate the Christian elements of fall and redemption. The themes he revisits and the way in which he presents them clarify the concerns uppermost in Sterne's communication.

The morals of Job and Ecclesiastes, which Sterne was fond of rehearsing, were literally close to his heart. He did not learn that life is a parade of vanity, subject to unearned catastrophe, from books. Probably the most lasting lesson he carried away from Cambridge was the practical knowledge that he could bleed a bed full, that the world is fleeting and his temporal existence bound to it. From this he developed understandings that life is too short to be long about its forms, and, that to be sustained, happiness needs an eternal focus. These are the catalysts to what he calls *Shandyism*. Occurrences in "this scurvy and disastorous world of ours" on "this vile, dirty planet of ours" (TS 8.4,9) are rightly enveloped in clouds and thick darkness (TS 147.14, 225.14; cf. Ex. xiv.20, xix.9), but may become beacons to a universe of abiding joy.

This is the ultimate in wish-fulfillment, as New is fond of proclaiming, but what else are we to expect eternal truth to be? The paradoxical nature of Christian faith, Sterne believed, is the reasonable key to our riddles, emancipation from the horror of opinionated self-sufficiency. Welling up from this realization is laughter. Not sophisticated snickering or stoic composure but a good hearty chuckle at our tendency to strain^{at} gnats while swallowing camels —the same beasts we would drive through needles' heads. Seeking to grasp a universe we outwit ourselves in small-minded enterprises. Our critiques of his endeavours, Sterne knew, would not reveal *him*, but our own folly in trying: "his final joke is again and again that he is not joking."⁷⁶ Sterne does not 'agree with' the sentiments of Ecclesiastes or plagiarize faithful sceptics, he is possessed of the very same spirit. Not entertainment by a jesting priest, but ejaculations of a grinning prophet, Shandyism is a theological perspective that accounts for our limitations and encourages our potential with an uncritical spirit of good cheer. This divine gift of freedom from the shallows of humanistic skepticism and religious enthusiasm forms a bridge between his sermons and fiction. To our peril we ignore the pontifical supports girding *Tristram* and the *Journey*.

A thoughtful acceptance, if not a festive participation, in life-as-it-is is a vital element of Shandyism. One of the most important clues to Sterne's art, and a considerable contribution to the moral element of his work, is the sustained recognition that we appreciate the pleasures of this life best when they are snatched from us. That the quest for happiness inevitably involves the vale of sorrow is the root of Sterne's sermons as it is of his fiction. In the latter we sense it fittingly encased in palatable vignettes and phrases. Tristram recalls Montaigne as having said,

the world enjoys other pleasures . . . as they do that of sleep, without tasting or feeling it as it slips and passes by—We should study and ruminate upon it in order

to render proper thanks to him who grants it to us—for this end I cause myself to be disturbed in my sleep, that I may better and more sensibly relish it. (*TS* 347.10)

This is more than another plea for digressional integrity. It is the essence of Sterne's work that he attempts to bridge the gap between unconsidered experience and contemplative fantasy. It is the interruption, digression, and surprise that brings with it hope for a sensible assessment of who and where one is. And it is, of course, those very surprises that render his works so life-like. Calculating that he lives 364 times faster than he writes (*TS* 342), Tristram discovers considerable autobiographical reflection, even with the best of intentions, to be an impossible task.

Thus it is the preacher's vocation to assist those, like him, struggling to discern their way in life. So we should not be surprised to see Sterne developing a gallery from which we may gain perspective sufficiently removed from our prepossessions to offer a glimpse of who we are. If we "consider man, as fashioned by his maker---innocent and upright---full of the tenderest dispositions—with a heart inclining him to kindness, and the love and protection of his species," we must also balance the account by considering him "—not as he was made ---- but as he is --- a creature by the violence and irregularity of his passions capable of being perverted from all these friendly and benevolent propensities" (*S* 84.2-12). By the time we open Volume ii of the sermons, we have had numerous overviews of our tendency to deceive ourselves regarding our characters, our expectations, the insufficiency of our enjoyments to procure happiness, the treachery of men to one another, and the susceptibility of the world (for lower intents and purposes) to the apparent mayhem of time and chance. Thus it is fitting that concluding his first sermon on Job Sterne remarks :

but some one will say, Why are we thus to be put out of love with human life? To what purpose is it to expose the dark sides of it to us, or enlarge upon the infirmities which are natural, and consequently out of our power to redress?

I answer, that the subject is nevertheless of great importance, since it is necessary every creature should understand his present state and condition, to put him in mind of behaving suitably to it. (*S* 101.21)

With sentiments such as this, Sterne begins to advocate reform.

He repeatedly highlights the need for intervals of self-examination by introducing scriptural tags and awakening phrases that seem initially pessimistic: “it is better to go to the house of mourning,” “trust we have a good conscience!,” “I returned and saw under the sun that the race is not to the swift,” and so on. With these we are introduced to patterns of discovery revealing the need to reassess prepossessions in order to achieve a wider perspective. In a quotation of unidentified origin, Sterne acknowledges the paradox that, although man has the unique and God-given capacity inwardly to reflect, he is “ ‘generally so inattentive, but always so partial an observer of what passes, that he is as much, nay often, a much greater stranger to his own disposition and true character than all the world besides’ ” (*S* 31.30). To remedy this Sterne suggests we converse

more and oftener with ourselves, than the business and diversions of the world generally give us leave.

We have a chain of thoughts, desires, engagements and idlenesses, which perpetually return upon us in their proper time and order,—let us, I beseech you, assign and set apart some small portion of the day for this purpose—of retiring into ourselves, and searching into the dark corners and recesses of the heart, and taking notice of what is passing there. (*S* 39.7)

It would be a mistake to write off these exhortations as dutiful repetitions of disciplinary thoughts expected at Lent or Communion services. Half the sermons chosen for Volume i are specifically Lenten, the others not frivolous, and it is difficult to find a sermon in those following that does not at least implicitly call for hearty self-examination. If one is significantly ruled by a

“grand bias,” it behooves one to know what it is, and to strive to entertain it accordingly. Because time is fleeting, reflection must be embraced as a discipline if it is ever to be practiced. The stages of life as recounted in ‘Job’s Account . . .’ are presented specifically to remind us of this duty, because life “generally runs on in such a manner, as scarce to allow time to make reflections which way it has gone” (S 97.5).

Does not the consideration of the shortness of our life, convince us of the wisdom of dedicating so small a portion to the great purposes of eternity? (S 102.1)

It is worth remarking that the lesson Sterne leads us to take from his survey of the justice of Job’s pronouncement is, as in so many of his sermons, that reflection on the numerous tribulations in our short span of life should incline us to “turn our eyes and affections from so gloomy a prospect, and fix them upon that happier country” (S 102.8). He is adamant that true happiness is not of this world. Critics lacking an appreciation for Sterne’s anchoring of misery in strictly human attempts at transcendence have concluded “from the lamentations of Job, Sterne extracted scriptural support for his premise that man is beholden to ‘contingency’ for much of his success and failure, joy and grief.”⁷⁷ Sterne’s view is the very opposite. Job and Ecclesiastes resonate with recommendations to *faith*, an act of the will that recognizes ‘contingencies’ to be enveloped by the mystery of God’s presence and ‘future’ blessings. We are reminded that if one would escape being bound to the fluctuating wheel one had best reassess one’s opinions concerning the nature of success and failure, joy and grief.

—There is a giddy, thoughtless, intemperate spirit gone forth into the world, which possesses the generality of mankind,—and the reason the world is undone, is, because the world does not consider,—considers neither awful regard to God,—or the true relation themselves bear to him. (S 132.10)

So, there can be a mercy in the loss of earthly supports. Job is able to acquaint himself with God when his friends prove faithless. “Nothing so powerfully calls home the mind as distress” (*S* 188.4); the prodigal begins his journey home: “his first hour of distress, seem’d to be his first hour of wisdom” (*S* 188.24). When his concubine runs off, the Levite is afforded a “blessed interval for meditation upon the fickleness and vanity of this world and it’s [sic] pleasures!” (*S* 167.17) The same interval is offered by God to self-satisfied nations who have forgotten the source of their prosperity: “a long and undisturbed possession of their liberties, might blunt the sense of those providences of God, which had procured them” (*S* 196.1).⁷⁸ Therefore,

whether it was to correct an undue sense of former blessings,—or to teach us to reflect upon the number and value of them, by threatening us with the deprivation of them,—we were suffered, however, to approach the edge of a precipice, where, if God had not raised up a deliverer to lead us back—all had been lost. (*S* 202.8)

Clearly Sterne’s commendations of contemplative self-awareness and active reform should not be understood as moralistic advice for a ‘good life’ apart from God. The enjoyment of created things is encouraged only in the context of their ability to reflect or renew heavenly enjoyment. When Sterne says that “to judge rightly of our own worth, we should retire a little from the world, to see all its pleasures—and pains too, in their proper size and dimensions” (*S* 183.24), he is not claiming that the prospect is dark and hopeless. We may be surprised to find, he never tires of hinting, that deeper than the passions which disorient us on to unrequited tracks, there is potential to redeem the ‘upright’ nature of our heart and judgment (e.g. *S* 183.3). It is not, of course, the distractions that are at fault. “The truth is, they are often too dangerous a blessing for God to trust us with, or we to manage” (*S* 221.1). The rich man is “the more empty for being full” (*S* 221.12), “had he fared less sumptuously, —he might have had more cool hours for reflection” (*S* 220.2); so he is

distracted from seeing the plight of Lazarus at his gate, and from seeing the state of his own soul.

This mania for temporalities Sterne calls a “universal ruling principle, and almost invincible attachment, to the interests and glories of the world.” With no uncertain terms he claims

there is no one point of wisdom, that is of nearer importance to us,—than to purify this gross appetite, and restrain it within bounds, by lowering our high conceit of the things of this life, and our concern for those advantages which misled the Jews.—To judge justly of the world,—we must stand at a due distance from it. (*S* 343.14-23)

In spite of the attainment of enjoyments, happiness remains elusive. We are tormented not by things but by the images we have created surrounding them. (*S* 236.25):

And in truth there is nothing so common in life, as to see thousands, whom you would say, had all the reason in the world to be at rest, so torn up and disquieted with sorrows of this class, and so incessantly tortured with the disappointments which their pride and passions have created for them, that tho’ they appear to have all the ingredients of happiness in their hands,—they can neither compound or use them.

Our sorrow at the loss of these things is as inordinate as our joy in having them:

If there is an evil in this world, ’tis sorrow and heaviness of heart.—The loss of goods,—of health,—of coronets and mitres, are only evil as they occasion sorrow;—take that out—the rest is fancy, and dwelleth only in the head of man. (*S* 212.30)

Eventually we understand that by ‘appropriate reflection’ Sterne means sincere, reasonable inner searching before the tribunal of heaven. Initially, but not ultimately, this quest may be unpleasant, the beginning of accurate communication. To this end he recommends we adopt simple disciplines to keep ourselves in perspective. These seeds lodged within the heart of each person suggest that regardless of the many instances of brutality (e.g. Herod), the humanity of compassion is “still so great and noble a part of our nature, that a man must do great violence to himself, and suffer many a painful conflict, before he has brought himself to a different disposition” (*S* 29.10).

Sterne's hope in human beings is founded on this secret spring, not on the image of an 'enlightened' humanism. Without God, even the moral man is presented as an object of pity, desperately trying to accomplish nobility with insufficient faculties.

All is not lost, in 'Vindication of Human Nature', Sterne uses James Foster to remind us that the image of God within which we have been created, though obscured, remains. Though the body cannot help resonating with the virtues (or vices) of the soul, this image is not primarily "in the sensitive and corporeal part" (*S* 66.16). Experiences of moral rectitude correspond with the body of another and tend to appropriate appreciation of the spiritual element supporting them. It is necessary to understand this complementary sympathy of spirit, mind, and body if one would engage others in spiritual conversation. Its effects may most readily be seen in commonplace instances where a physical gesture is laden with symbolic meaning. Though we are frequently deceived by appearances, we rely upon action to articulate inner dispositions. Joseph's brothers, after artfully imposing upon their father, and probably upon their own consciences, were undeceived by their brother's later act of charity and forgiveness. This act, though beyond their capacity, was understandable in the sense that it was deeply affecting, and the result is a clear sense of grace which words could not have communicated:

joy is not methodical . . .—words are too cold; and a conciliated heart replies by tokens of esteem. . . .

When the affections so kindly break loose, Joy, is another name for Religion.

(*S* 190.21-29)

Ritual, such as that expressed by the peasant family in the part of Yorick's journey where the above words are repeated, is vital to maintaining a sound constitution. We are advised that the day should be opened and closed with prayer: "a frequent correspondence with heaven by prayer

and devotion, is the greatest nourishment and support of spiritual life:—it keeps the sense of a God warm and lively within us,—which secures our disposition” (S 401.31). Good and pious recommendations, but to what extent are most persons willing or able to abide them in that form? As we recall from ‘The Abuses of Conscience considered’, without careful observances, our inner guide of conscience becomes “safely entrench’d behind the letter of the law, sits there invulnerable, fortified with *cases* and *reports* so strongly on all sides,—that ’tis not preaching can dispossess it of its hold” (S 259.23). If we are to penetrate the preaching Sterne embraced we need to come to terms with that quotation lodged in the sermon Trim read out. Sterne shows a healthy regard for the limits of didactic communication. Recall his derogatory use of the word ‘preaching’ in Paris, and his request to be excused from the anticipated half hour of preaching at the Foundling Hospital by writing

I never could preach so long without fatiguing both myself and my flock to death—but I will give you a short sermon, and *flap* you in my turn:—preaching (you must know) is a theologic flap upon the heart, as the dunning for a promise is a political flap upon the memory:—both the one and the other is useless where men have *wit enough* to be honest.⁷⁹

Sterne was confident that most men, though lacking stimuli to exercise it, have the potential to sustain wit enough to be honest. If they could be approached with parables, as David was by Nathan, and observe their image as in a glass, the majority could be trusted to arrive at appropriate conclusions. As Spellman writes, “latitudinarian Christian discipleship operated on the unshakable premise that appeals to reason alone would fail to inspire most men to obey God’s law for them.”⁸⁰ Swift, in classic form, is even more succinct: “reasoning will never make a man correct an ill opinion, which by reasoning he never acquired.”⁸¹

ARTFUL PRESENTATION

What Sterne composed to flap the eventually charitable congregation, one year after publishing his first volumes of sermons, is intriguing. If the political theme of numbers 32, 40, and 45 is excluded, one is hard pressed to find among “the sweepings of the Author’s study” (S 255.15) a theme publicly important to Sterne not presented in ‘The Rich Man and Lazarus’. It is a sort of ‘greatest hits,’ having verbatim parallels to passages in nine of the posthumously published sermons. We are presented with a quilt of themes: remember former languishings; fortune’s wheel; our brief existence; the ultimate justification of God and his beneficent presence. Again we are told Christianity is surprisingly poorly represented as it asks only that one forfeit what one is better off without; ‘morality’ seems to be more a matter of idle speculation than serious intent; even the most insensible person feels the joy inherent in moral activity. The bed upon which Sterne lays this quilt is the understanding that both reason and passion are affected by considerations that awaken, and that the enjoyment of any heavenly or earthly good requires some qualification in the faculty of its recipient. What we sense most strongly in this sermon, preached when the ideas of the early volumes of *Tristram* were fresh, is a lucid presentation of Sterne’s impressions of communication:

mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced,—and so long as the pre-engagement with our passions subsists, it is not argumentation which can do the business;—we may amuse ourselves with the ceremony of the operation, but we reason not with the proper faculty, when we see every thing in the shape and colouring, in which the treachery of the senses paint it. (S 216.21)

In this sermon Sterne has us imagine God sending back to life a dead man, to “call home our conscience” (S 214.29). The resurrected one will appeal to interest, the channel to our heart’s attention, “but what?—with all the eloquence of an inspired tongue, What could he add or say to

us, which has not been said before?" (S 216.13). If one would lead another to a conviction of divine truths, the best way is not by sensational trickery or repetition of texts, but by an appeal to the heart. Vicesimus Knox, who so admired Sterne's agility with scripture, wrote: "I never yet saw any external evidence of [evangelical history] which might not admit of controversy; but the internal proofs have a counterpart in every man's bosom, who will faithfully search for it, which gives it incontestable confirmation."⁸² Passion and reason are appropriately tutored by meaningful experience of *internal* proofs. The right use of riches, for example, "may as well be known from an appeal to your own hearts, and the inscription you shall read there,—as from any chapter and verse I might cite upon the subject" (S 221.30). It is the *experience* of moral delight in a human action that best recommends it:

in a word, a man's mind must be like your proposition before it can be relished; and 'tis the resemblance between them, which brings over his judgment, and makes him an evidence on your side. (S 222.26)

How then does Sterne presume to make hoary theological reasoning experiential? He readily admits that what he says is neither original or unique; "the reader, upon old and beaten subjects, must not look for many new thoughts,—'tis well if he has new language." (S 2.5)

There can be little left to be said upon the subject of Charity, which has not been often thought, and much better expressed by many who have gone before: and indeed, it seems so beaten and common a path, that it is not an easy matter for a new comer to distinguish himself in it, by any thing except the novelty of his Vehicle. (S 40.20)⁸³

However, the *novelty* of Sterne's *vehicle* should not go unnoticed. We have recalled his alleged note on the manuscript of sermon 44: "I have borrowed most of the reflections upon the characters from Wollaston or at least have enlarged from his hints, though the sermon is truly mine,

such as it is.”⁸⁴ It is of singular importance to appreciate Sterne’s genius in the preparation of sermons evoking reflections upon characters. Despite the popularity of attempts to develop the personalities and psychologies of biblical personae in Sterne’s (and any) day,⁸⁵ the preponderance of his sermons in which this is the central medium is remarkable. No other table of contents sports such titles: ‘The Character of Herod’; ‘The Character of Shimei’; ‘Felix’s behavior towards Paul examined’; ‘St. Peter’s character’. For this reason it is interesting that while Joseph Hall is prominent amongst ‘sources’ in the lifetime volumes, as far as I can tell he is verbally absent from the posthumous.

Sterne’s consistent plumbing of psychological profiles and characterizations is extraordinary, but the intimate manner in which he skilfully lays open the windings of the human heart for his congregation should not be mistaken for a repressed literary urge. He was in fact, masterfully accomplishing what most of his peers could only admire. “Study above all things,” wrote Hugh Blair in his discourse ‘Eloquence in the Pulpit’,

to render your instructions interesting to the hearers. This is the great trial and mark of true genius for the eloquence of the pulpit. . . . The great secret lies in bringing home all that is spoken to the hearts of the hearers, so as to make every man think that the preacher is addressing him in particular. . . .

Whenever you bring forth what a man feels to touch his own character, or to suit his own circumstances, you are sure of interesting him. No study is more necessary for this purpose, than the study of human life, and the human heart. To be able to unfold the heart, and to discover a man to himself, in a light in which he never saw his own character before, produces a wonderful effect. . . . Perhaps the most beautiful, and among the most useful sermons of any, though, indeed, the most difficult in composition, are such as are wholly characteristical, or founded on the illustration of some particular characters, or remarkable piece of history, in the sacred writings; by perusing which, one can trace, and lay open, some of the most secret windings of man’s heart. Other topics of preaching have been much beaten; but this is a field, which, wide in itself, has hitherto been little explored by the composers of sermons, and possesses all the advantages of being curious, new, and highly useful. Bishop

Butler's sermon on the *Character of Balaam*, will give an idea of that sort of preaching which I have in my eye.⁸⁶

If we understand Blair's contention that good characteristical sermons are particularly appropriate, difficult to compose, and rare, we should appreciate Sterne's interest and genius. It is important also to note that, as scripture does not mask the defects of its heroes, neither should its preachers. The first paragraph of Thomas Secker's sermon on David and Nathan is:

In Holy scripture, not only the great and good notions of pious persons are *written for our learning*, that we may admire, and, as far as we are concerned, imitate them; but their chief transgressions also are recorded, for a caution to be on our guard, and a direction, if, like them, we have done amiss, like them, to repent and reform. Amongst all the instances of this kind, there is none more fruitful of instruction than that well-known history of David being seduced from a religious course of life to most dreadful wickedness, and continuing regardless of his guilt till the prophet Nathan at length having awakened him to a sense of it, by a home application of the parallel case of a poor man and the ewe lamb, brought him to confession, and administered to him the comfort expressed in the text.⁸⁷

Clearly, what Secker refers to as "home application" is desirable in preaching and we should examine the use Sterne makes of this particular incident in Scripture to that end, by which he deftly ties together a number of themes prominent throughout his canon: self-deceit, the value of plumbing the inconsistencies of characters, and the value of parables to excite reform.

The importance of the David and Nathan story for Sterne is highlighted by its placement between the two charity sermons of Volume i. The favored themes of human inconsistency and the nature of our dispositions are continued, and the problem of knowing one's self is again presented. To begin, Sterne notes "THERE is no historical passage in scripture, which gives a more remarkable instance of the deceitfulness of the heart of man to itself, and of how little we truly know of ourselves, than this, wherein David is convicted out of his own mouth" (S 31.5). To emphasize the

conviction, the common-sense position to the contrary, that we *do* know our true springs and motives, is stated in words echoing the ‘Abuses’ sermon. The claim is addressed on terms of experience, and Sterne moves swiftly on to claim that

we are deceived in judging of ourselves, just as we are in judging of other things, when our passions and inclinations are called in as counsellors, and we suffer ourselves to see and reason just so far and no farther than they give us leave. How hard do we find it to pass an equitable and sound judgment in a matter where our interest is deeply concerned? (*S* 32.9)

Knowledge of one’s self, he proceeds to explain, “was a point always much easier recommended by public instructors than shewn how to be put in practice” (*S* 33.17). The observation is made that self-love guards the direct path to disillusionment and reformation, hence “a different and more artful course was requisite” to “remove this flattering passion,” “stratagem” and “skilful address” are called in,

if possible, to deceive it. This gave rise to the early manner of conveying their instructions in parables, fables, and such sort of indirect applications, which, tho’ they could not conquer this principle of self-love, yet often laid it asleep, or at least over-reached it for a few moments, till a just judgment could be procured.
(*S* 33.22-30)

The parable or fable by indirection succeeds where blatant advice or censure will not. A mirror is held up and the viewer’s eyes are oriented in such a way that the image may clearly be seen. William Spellman writes “in a manuscript fragment of 1693, Locke wrote that men must be made alive to virtue, must be made to ‘tast’ it” [Locke continues:]

to do this one must consider what is each man’s particular disease, what is the pleasure that possesses him. Over that general discourses will never get mastery. But by all the prevalencys of friendship all the arts of persuasion he is to be brought to live the contrary course.⁸⁸

In Sterne's words the voluptuous epicure, for example, must be made to "take in your discourse greedily" or else "however glorious and exalted, [it] will pass like the songs of melody over an ear incapable of discerning the distinction of sounds" (*S* 279.21, .27-9). His excursions, like those of most preachers, always lead back to self-consideration within the developed context. The value of "indirect applications" is in providing an opportunity to experience, as nearly as possible without unnecessary offence, that which would otherwise remain theory, of little value for developing practical awareness. Sterne distinguishes between the useful encouragements of a skilful address, and the artifice of a deceptive oration. At the core of this distinction is an understanding between the correspondents. Like Job, we are led through the valley of the shadow with hope for eventual benefit from a qualitative advance in communicating with heaven and ourselves: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job xlii.5-6). The *cogito* and *opinio* of pride and speculation give way to the *credo* of faith. For those unprepared to benefit, parables veil; for others they reveal.

Sterne explicitly points to this at the beginning of sermon 3, and maintains its implication. When a lawyer asks Jesus the way to eternal life, the Saviour refrains from giving a direct answer and "immediately retorts the question upon the man who asked it" (*S* 21.15). He "refers him to his own memory" (*S* 21.22). And when the lawyer wants a fuller description, the way least likely to leave an inappropriate impression is "not by any far fetch'd refinement from the schools of the Rabbis, which might have sooner silenced than convinced the man—but by a direct appeal to human nature" (*S* 22.14), i.e. the parable of the good Samaritan. The quality Sterne reveals here is that the curse of pagan moralists, who teach but cannot practice, is finally undone. "Our SAVIOUR

appeals to the man's own heart . . . and instead of drawing the inference himself, leaves him to decide" (*S* 22.23-27). The possibility that the lawyer will decide correctly is the key to the vindication of human nature. A legal expert of a religion rooted in legislation is brought to an appreciation of the true meaning and intended application of the law, by an experience of conversation in which certain elements necessary to the progress of the parable are anticipated and drawn forth from him.

The repentant publican and charitable Samaritan are examples of the possibility of exchanging one's own self-saddled hobbyhorse for the consistent ruling passion of heaven, the springs of which are already inside one. The histories of Job and Joseph upon which Sterne elaborates are further examples of human expectations thwarted by time and chance, which in the end are fully redeemed by the hand of a Providence proved ultimately to be consistent with scripture's omniscient and compassionate God. The abiding value of Sterne's outlook is nowhere more clearly visible than in this bifocal consideration of the problems of human existence and the gifts of God available for our succour and assistance. Again, he is confident that primarily inherent in us is a disposition to good; we are made in the image of God.

That such wrong determinations in us arise from any defect of judgment inevitably misleading us,—would reflect dishonour upon God; as if he had made and sent men into the world on purpose to play the fool. His all bountiful hand, made his judgment, like his heart, upright; and the instances of his sagacity in other things, abundantly confirm it: we are led therefore in course to a supposition, that in all inconsistent instances, there is a secret bias some how or other, hung upon the mind, which turns it aside from reason and truth. (*S* 182.30)

The "secret bias" only supersedes the "image" after much violence. The inconsistency is not initially part of creation and, although it occurs with frightening results and must be dealt

with accordingly, one is mistaken to believe chaos is the predominant mode of heaven. We are warned that it is at least as great a misreading of ourselves and the world not to recognize the foundational consistency of Providence as it is to ignore the deceitful elements of our dispositions and character.

Regarding time and chance: “some, indeed, from a superficial view of this representation of things, have atheistically inferred Whereas in truth the very opposite conclusion follows.” (S 76.11-19)

All history is full of such testimonies, which though they may convince those who look no deeper than the surface of things, that time and chance happen to all,—yet, to those who look deeper, they manifest at the same time, that there is a hand much busier in human affairs than what we vainly calculate. (S 79.10)

This bifocal aspect of redeemed circumstances initially challenging limited perception is especially important for Sterne’s view of the way humans presume to judge God, the workings of His creation, and the character of others. The tragedy of misperception and alienation from God, he suggests, stems from a lack of considered application to the essential causal effects of each element involved. Human nature is capable of being vindicated because it incorporates and may cooperate with divine nature. The virtuous are to be commended because they have wilfully made the necessary sacrifices to maintain and nurture this image. Such reconciliation and redemption Sterne celebrates. “The wisdom that is from above,” he says, expanding scripture, “is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy. . . . pure, alike and consistent with itself in all its parts; like its great author, ’tis universally kind and benevolent in all cases and circumstances” (S 105.26-31; James iii.17). It is important when reading the sermons to note these

references to the ultimate consistency of heavenly things. From this security Sterne draws courage honestly to represent the world's inconsistencies.

When, in *A Book for Free Spirits* and *Critical Essays*, New claims "resolution and positiveness are the tempting and inevitable vices of Sterne's world-view; suspension and doubt, its difficult, if not impossible, virtues,"⁸⁹ he drastically misrepresents the focus of Sterne's freedom. Christian scepticism, and Sterne's perspective *is* Christian, is not operative in the elements of *faith*, it is a guide for inquisitive souls in knowledge inessential to belief. Where the stoic has the cold comfort of acceptance, the faithful are granted a confident perspective. Joseph is able to triumph and show himself truly brave in almost unbearable circumstances, forgiving his brothers because he is convinced of God's providence. Echoing Steele, Sterne agrees that forgiveness is "the most refined and generous pitch of virtue, human nature can arrive at . . . the power of doing it flows only from a strength and greatness of soul, conscious of its own force and security." (*S* 120.18-23)⁹⁰

Job's heroic reticence to curse is similarly rooted, not in the alterable baubles of God's lesser gifts or in some proud maintenance of existential doubt, but in the immutable governance of God himself. This sort of "firmness and constancy of mind" Sterne commends. Elsewhere, pharisaical firmness or critical constancy is challenged as being a caricature of the fruits of a faith that is earned. To attempt resolute firmness on one's own strength and limited vision is presented as folly. One is to follow the Samaritan, acting from a deeper principle, ready to leave the straight path of prepossessions. One should imitate the publican and engage in honest *self*-doubt. Symmetry is not to be mistaken for greatness.

Sterne's mistrust of certain forms of consistency has two fronts. One involves the self-induced blindness of those who ignore evidence, expanded in *Ecclesiastes* and *Job*, of prevailing inconsistencies of life in this world. The other, related to that, confronts the rigidity stemming from an inability to develop one's virtues according to the nature of one's actual environment. Priest and Levite maintain straight tracks at all cost, Pharisees strain^{at} gnats to uphold the letter of the law. The deceit of these observances is that the only valuable consistency, the eternal one of charity, is inevitably neglected. Substituting pious frauds for spontaneous compassion and honest labour, Sterne repeats, does not make the ascent to truth and virtue.

For Sterne and all 'latitudinarians,' true religion involves the mysterious realities that ritual is meant to serve, while at the same time offering appropriate checks to subjective fallibilities. Within the closed system of pharisaical ritual or self-satisfied illuminations there is no room or need for authentic reflection: "there is nothing in nature to induce him to this duty of examining his own works" (*S* 138.3). Early in the sermons, Sterne establishes the 'straight' theme as one of his most important. In juxtaposition to the Samaritan who goes "out of his way" to answer the call of humanity, the straight-hearted walk preoccupied with religious pretensions, unwilling to be distracted from their "selfish track."

Look into the world—how often do you behold a sordid wretch, whose straight heart is open to no man's affliction, taking shelter behind an appearance of piety, and putting on the garb of religion, which none but the merciful and compassionate have a title to wear. Take notice with what sanctity he goes to the end of his days, in the same selfish track in which he at first set out—turning neither to the right hand nor to the left—. (*S* 24.14)

In his frequent exposure of the incapacity of straight-hearted individuals to be charitable or to know themselves, we have a valuable clue to Sterne's theological message. What seems most

direct and efficient, he reminds us, is frequently illusory. Self-chosen diversions and penances teach us little, they are bound to be part of the practical or sentimental system we imagine ourselves to be controlling. Worship itself is fraudulent if the god at its centre is subtly controlled. Herod and Felix are presented as men of classic consistency, the heart's disposition stemming through the head into all activities of the body. This symmetry of elements in individuals enables Sterne to capitalize on examples reinforcing his arguments for a better symmetry rooted in heaven. Inner virtue, he claims, is unavoidably complemented by a countenance of harmony and joy. Speaking of the mind and body of a compassionate man, Sterne relies on this commonplace notion of sympathy: "as nothing more contributes to health than a benevolence of temper, so nothing generally was a stronger indication of it" (*S* 49.15). Health in the individual may then be communicated to society:

should not charity and good will, like the principle of life, circulating through the smallest vessels in every member, ought it not to operate as regularly upon you, throughout, as well upon your words, as upon your actions? (*S* 106.9)

The Samaritan, Sterne's icon of compassion, transcended national scruples and, though an 'infidel,' showed himself more devoted to the intent of Judaism than the 'orthodox' priest and Levite. His performance of a spontaneous sacrificial act welling up from "a settled principle of humanity and goodness which operated within him" (*S* 27.11), is neither mechanical nor methodical. The "principle" is settled, what it leads to is curiouser. Jesus' parabolic response to the lawyer is of a similar quality. When the path to a man's heart is blocked, he must be engaged by indirections. The parable succeeds, and our undeniable enjoyment of it enables Sterne to remind us of the principle of universal sympathy: "I am a stranger to the man—be it so, —but I am no stranger to his condition" (*S* 28.3). "I think there needs no stronger argument to prove how universally and

deeply the seeds of this virtue of compassion are planted in the heart of man, than in the pleasure we take in such representations of it.” (S 28.31)

As has been illustrated throughout these chapters, Sterne encountered ecclesiastical encouragements to develop such representations. Nor were incentives lacking beyond the Cloth. Shaftesbury in the introduction to the dialogue of Treatise V of *Characteristicks*, as elsewhere, employs examples from painting and music to connect with writing and virtue, and mourns the decline of written philosophical dialogue (which he calls “a sort of Moral Painting”) as it was “the politest and best way of managing even the graver subjects.”⁹¹ Mandeville in the introduction to part II of his *Fable* says: “the Reason why Plato preferr’d Dialogues to any other manner of Writing, he said was, that Things thereby might look, as if they were acted, rather than told.”⁹² Shaftesbury and Mandeville are not referring to sermon writing, nevertheless the sentiments are alive and well in Sterne.

When he and his colleagues condemn ‘art’ it is not with reference to affecting presentations; studied academic posture is nearer to their meaning. Clergy were seeking to present the realities of our conditions in ways most likely to provoke appropriate responses. As Shaftesbury writes at the very beginning of his book: “the Appearance of Reality is necessary to make any Passion agreeably represented: and to be able to move others, we must first be moved ourselves, or at least seem to be so, upon some probable Grounds.”⁹³ The orator is to resonate with the passions he hopes to excite. Later with reference to what he calls “Moral Magick” Shaftesbury writes :

of all the other Beautys which *Virtuoso*’s pursue . . . the most delightful, the most engaging and pathetic, is that which is drawn from real *Life*, and from the

Passions. Nothing affects the Heart like that which is purely *from it-self*, and of *its own nature*; such as *the beauty of Sentiments*; the Grace of Actions; the Turn of *Characters*, and *the Proportions and Features of a human Mind*.⁹⁴

Further on, recalling Plato's dialogues that he says resemble the pre-philosophical mimes and which elsewhere he refers to as "real POEMS," Shaftesbury says :

they were Pieces which, besides their force of Stile, and hidden Numbers, carry'd a sort of *Action* and *Imitation*, the same as the *Epick* and *Dramatick* kinds. . . . 'Twas not enough that these Pieces treated fundamentally of *Morals*, and in consequence pointed out *real Characters* and *Manners*: They exhibited 'em *alive*, and set the Countenance and Complexions of Man plainly in view. And by this means they not only taught Us to know Others; but, what was principal and of highest virtue in 'em, they taught us to know *Our-selves*.

THE Philosophical *Hero* of these Poems . . . was in himself *a perfect Character*; yet in some respects, so veil'd, and in a Cloud, that to the unattentive Surveyor he seem'd often to be very different from what he really was: and this chiefly by reason of certain exquisite and refin'd Raillery which belong'd to his Manner, and by virtue of which he cou'd treat the highest Subjects, and those of the commonest Capacity both together, and render 'em explanatory of each other. So that in this Genius of writing, there appear'd both *the heroic* and *the simple*, *the tragick* and *the comick Vein*. However, it was so order'd, that not withstanding the oddness or mysteriousness of the principle Character, the *Under-parts* or *second Characters* shew'd Human Nature more distinctly, and to the Life. We might here, therefore, as in a *Looking-Glass*, discover our-selves, and see our minutest Features nicely delineated, and suted to our own Apprehension and Cognizance.⁹⁵

As Hugh Blair complains later that century in his recommendations on "the pathetic part of a discourse," "there is a great difference between showing the hearers that they ought to be moved, and actually moving them. This distinction is not sufficiently attended to, especially by preachers."⁹⁶

Sterne notes that scripture itself, though full of vigorous prose and engaging histories, is not given to overstatement. The story of the prodigal son is typical. "The account is short: the interesting and pathetic passages with which such a transaction would be necessarily connected, are

left to be supplied by the heart:—the story is silent—but nature is not” (*S* 186.23). Critical concentration on ‘sentimental’ elaborations of Sterne, and on his skill at expanding scriptural narrative, misses or ignores the fact that he practiced a healthy reticence to say too much. In sermon 23 he reiterates the rhetorical value of knowing what not to say. First at 216.12:

He might add—

But what?—with all the eloquence of an inspired tongue, What could he add or say to us, which has not been said before?

(at 223.5):

—What can I say more?—it is a subject on which I cannot inform your judgment,—and, in such an audience, I would not presume to practice upon your passions.

(finally 224.15):

Hast thou—

—But how shall I ask a question which must bring tears into so many eyes?

He goes on to finish the melancholy descriptions, but quickly ends with the purpose of his sermon:

“—as we have felt for ourselves,—let us feel for CHRIST’s sake—let us feel for theirs” —apt conclusion to a well-crafted argument on the value of feeling over words to induce compassion.

Elsewhere, after considerably developing the Old Testament text of Elijah and the widow, Sterne says “to illustrate this the more, let us turn our thoughts within ourselves; and for a moment, let any number of us here imagine ourselves . . .—I appeal to your own thoughts” (*S* 51.8-14). This leads him to the crux of his argument, presented on Good Friday:

the consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion, in the Son of GOD, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself. . . . by reflecting upon the infinite labour of this day’s love, in the instance of CHRIST’s death, we may consider what an immense debt we owe each other. (*S* 52.6-18)

By coming to terms with the experience of that sacrifice, one may be led to understand its value and purpose for oneself. This correspondence informs Sterne's style of ecclesiastical communication:

lessons of wisdom have never such power over us, as when they are wrought into the heart, through the ground-work of a story which engages the passions: Is it that we are like iron, and must first be heated before we can be wrought upon? or, Is the heart so in love with deceit, that where a true report will not reach it, we must cheat it with a fable, in order to come at truth? (*S* 186.7)

Critics of Sterne have recorded the importance of this passage to an understanding of his presentations.⁹⁷ It has not, however, been noted that he developed the gist of it from the closing paragraph of *De La Sagesse*, in which Charron defends the use of eloquence:

a man may say against Eloquence that truth is sufficiently maintaind and defended by it selfe, and that there is nothing more eloquent then it selfe: which I confesse is true, where the minds of men are pure, and free from passions: but the greatest part of the world, either by nature, or arte, and ill instruction is preoccupied, and ill disposed vnto virtue and verite, whereby it is necessary that men be handled like iron, which a man must soften with fire before he temper it with water: so by the firie motions of eloquence, they must be made supple and manageable, apt to take the temper of veritie.⁹⁸

The idea or story “depends upon the telling. . . —the danger is, humanity may say too much” (*S* 168.20). As outlined in chapter one, we are not forced to abide the pretences of long-winded overly refined sermons. “*Truth*, like a modest matron, scorns art—and disdains to press herself forwards into the circle to be seen” (*S* 174.10). “There are two sorts of eloquence,” Sterne notes, borrowing from Blackwall,⁹⁹ there is a “vain and boyish eloquence” consisting “chiefly in laboured and polished periods, an over-curious and artificial arrangement of figures”; the other, represented in scripture, “does not arise from a laboured and far-fetched elocution, but from a surprising mixture of simplicity and majesty” (*S* 392.22-393.7). The language of redemption has been accommodated to those for whom it is intended. Scripture speaks out of a depth of

consistency, established beneath the impenetrable chaos and seeming inconsistencies of visible phenomena. The Bible's verbal power is not electric; the art of its language is not primarily to embellish or convince but to represent reality to differing perspectives in a way least likely generally to be misunderstood. This is also true of the best poetry, in which we read not the poet and his imagination, but ourselves. In scripture, the *thing itself* appeals to us. Parables numb prepossessions, shuffling messages into the heart.

As noted in the introduction above, Sterne's contemporaries were appreciating a modicum of artful disarray, reflected in scripture. Phillip Doddridge, beginning his sermon 'Faith is the Gift of God' [1741] writes:

IN the works of nature, many of those things which to a superficial eye may appear as defects, will on a careful inquiry be found to be marks of consummate wisdom, and kind contrivance. And on the same principle, I confess, I have often thought there is reason to be thankful for the very inaccuracies of scripture.¹⁰⁰

Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester, makes clear a point commonly made (by Addison for example) regarding 'oriental' wit. Reading it, one would be obtuse not to think of Sterne.

Moreover, as to the Nature and Genius of *Scripture-Style*, we should ever bear in Mind, that the Eastern Nations are a People of great Vivacity and quick Apprehensions; that they conceive Things, and enter into the Spirit of what was intended to be said, without the Formality of a long Series of Propositions, and of producing each Argument in its full Length. They would have disdained, as heavy and spiritless, the methodical Compositions of our Times and Climate. They delighted in bold figurative Expressions, and quick Sallies from one Subject to another.---And St. Paul was remarkable for this oriental Cast and lively Imagination. For God, when he makes the Prophet, or the Apostle, doth not unmake the natural Temper and Disposition of the Man. This Vivacity therefore, both of Style and Imagination, is easily discernable in all his Writings. His Eloquence was strong and impetuous; his Apostrophes, or turning from one subject to another, sudden and unexpected.---In this very Epistle to the Romans he often lays down the Premises, and only hints at the Conclusion; or gives us the Inference, with but just pointing at the Topick he took it from. In the second, third, and following Chapters, he carries

on a Dialogue between himself and an unbelieving Jew, without giving any previous Notice of it.---In the seventh Chapter he personates the Character of an unregenerate Man describing his State of Mind at large; *The Good that I would*, says he, *I do not, but the Evil, which I would not, that I do*.---This has made some persons weakly imagine, (because he did not tell them expressly, that he only personated *another* Man's Character) that he was describing *his own* State of Mind, and speaking of *himself*. But to mention no more, I have shewn in the Exposition of the Context, how often he answers and solves the Objections, without formally stating them, as is the Manner with *us*.---Nay he was distinguished for this Vivacity of Genius, and Suddenness of Thought, even in his own Times, and among his own Countrymen. For St. PETER hath observed that there were *many Things hard to be understood* in his Epistles:---Which doubtless was occasioned by his Writing in so concise and figurative a Style. For this naturally begets Obscurity, unless great Care and Attention are used to unravel the Subject.¹⁰¹

From the following assessment of Gerard Reedy, who has the patience of Job in seeing the useful side of long-winded discourse, we can appreciate an element of Sterne's awakening impressions.

Although sermons are supposed to be clear, Tillotson from time to time left an audience puzzled about intention . . . Here he joined in a favorite eighteenth-century literary game, wherein the text disturbed readers into examining their own interpretive bias . . . The text thus dissuades readers from confidence in their interpretive skills; in Tillotson's hands this process becomes one of conversion from a religion of common sense to a religion of mystery.¹⁰²

If religion is valid, that which is behind the reasonable unknowability of it will correspond with sympathetic recipients. "Representations" of affecting scenes abound in Sterne's sermons and fiction. Wilbur Cross writes:

Sterne was more than an actor. His best sermons are embryonic dramas, in which an effort is made to visualize scene and character, as though he were writing for the stage. Everywhere a lively imagination is at work on the Biblical narrative. If the preacher wishes to vindicate human nature against the charge of selfishness, he simply portrays the life of an average man, like scores in his congregation, from boyhood through youth, and through manhood on to old age, and lets the proof of his thesis rest with the portrait. . . .

Safe to say, no more readable collection of sermons came from the press of the eighteenth century, and none with a clearer stamp of literature upon them.¹⁰³

Cross is correct in his estimation of Sterne's prowess, though we would like to have heard an appreciation for this style as being particularly adapted for *religion*. It has obviously been tempting to discount the worth of Sterne's sermons by aligning his skill with a penchant for sentimental and literary flourishes. As Hogarth referred to his works as moral essays, so Sterne, I believe, educated his genius with language to express something far greater than the sum of literary urges. Thus Fénelon, in his *Second Dialogue Concerning Eloquence*:

B. I see too that Eloquence is not a trifling Invention to amuse and dazzle People with pompous Language; but that 'tis a very serious Art; and serviceable to Morality.

A. It is both a serious and a difficult Art. For which Reason Tully said he had heard several Persons declaim in an elegant engaging manner; but that there were but very few compleat Orators, who knew how to seize, and captivate the Heart. . . .

A. We have seen that Eloquence consists not only in giving clear convincing Proofs; but likewise in the Art of moving the Passions. Now in order to move them, we must be able to paint them as well; with their various Objects, and Effects. So that I think the whole Art of Oratory may be reduc'd to *proving, painting, and raising the Passions*. Now all those pretty, sparkling, quaint Thoughts that do not tend to one of these Ends, are only *witty Conceits*.

C. What do you mean by Painting? I never heard that Term apply'd to Rhetorick.

A. To *paint*, is not only to describe Things; but to represent the Circumstances of 'em, in such a lively and sensible manner, that the Hearer shall fancy he almost sees them with his Eyes. For instance: if a dry Historian were to give an Account of DIDO'S Death, he wou'd only say; She was overwhelm'd with Sorrow after the Departure of ÆNEAS; and that she grew weary of her Life: so she went up to the top of her Palace; and lying down on her Funeral-Pile, she stab'd herself. Now these Words wou'd inform you of the Fact; but you do not *see* it. When you read the Story in VIRGIL, he sets it before your Eyes. When he represents all the Circumstances of DIDO'S Dispair; describes her wild Rage; and Death already staring in her Aspect; when he makes her speak at the Sight of the Picture and Sword that ÆNEAS left, your

imagination transports you to Carthage; where you see the Trojan Fleet leaving the Shore, and the Queen quite inconsolable. You enter into all her Passions, and into the Sentiments of the suppos'd Spectators. It is not VIRGIL you then hear: You are too attentive to the last Words of unhappy *Dido*, to think of him. The Poet disappears: and we see only what he describes; and hear those only whom he makes to speak. Such is the Force of a natural Imitation, and of Painting in Language. Hence it comes that the Painters and the Poets are so nearly related: the one paints for the Eyes; and the other for the Ears: but both of them ought to convey the liveliest Pictures to People's Imagination.¹⁰⁴

Such presentations, for better or worse, evolve emotions that transcend the barriers of prepossession and accumulated reasonings. As Joseph Butler says of the effect of a worthy presentation of Christian compassion: "by this voluntary resort to the house of mourning, . . . we might learn all those useful instructions which calamities teach, without undergoing them ourselves; and grow wiser and better at a more easy rate than men commonly do."¹⁰⁵ Yorick too, in a veiled way, makes clear the potential value of honoring this capacity for being refreshed by leaving one's self behind. The Count, mistaking him for Shakespeare's Yorick, has abruptly slipped out to procure the desired passport, "so taking up, "*Much Ado about Nothing*," I transported myself instantly . . ."

Sweet pliability of man's spirit, that can at once surrender itself to illusions, which cheat expectation and sorrow of their weary moments!—long—long since had ye number'd out my days, had I not trod so great a part of them upon this enchanted ground: when my way is too rough for my feet, or too steep for my strength, I get off it, to some smooth velvet path which fancy has scattered over with rose-buds of delights; and having taken a few turns in it, come back strengthen'd and refresh'd—When evils press sore upon me, and there is no retreat from them in this world, then I take a new course—I leave it—and as I have a clearer idea of the elysian fields than I have of heaven, I force myself, like Eneas, into them—I see him meet the pensive shade of his forsaken Dido—and wish to recognize it—I see the injured spirit wave her head, and turn off silent from the author of her miseries and dishonours—I lose the feelings for myself in hers—and in those affections which were wont to make me mourn for her when I was at school.

Surely this is not walking in a vain shadow—nor does man disquiet himself in vain, by it—he oftener does so in trusting the issue of his commotions to reason only.—I can safely say for myself, I was never able to conquer any one single bad sensation in my heart so decisively, as by beating up as fast as I could for some kindly and gentle sensation, to fight it upon its own ground. (ASJ 114.11)

This may seem sentimentally far from legitimate cogitation, but Hume, in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* resonates sympathetically:

the perusal of a history seems a calm entertainment; but would be no entertainment at all, did not our hearts beat with correspondent movements to those which are described by the historian. . . .

The indifferent, uninteresting style of Suetonius, equally with the masterly pencil of Tacitus, may convince us of the cruel depravity of Nero or Tiberius: But what a difference of sentiment! While the former coldly relates the facts; and the latter sets before our eyes the venerable figures of a Soranus and a Thræsea, intrepid in their fate, and only moved by the melting sorrows of their friends and kindred. What sympathy then touches every human heart! What indignation against the tyrant, whose causeless fear or unprovoked malice gave rise to such detestable barbarity!

If we bring these subjects nearer: If we remove all suspicion of fiction and deceit: What powerful concern is excited, and how much superior, in many instances, to the narrow attachments of self-love and private interest!¹⁰⁶

J. T. Parnell has written with understanding on Sterne's place in the sceptical tradition,¹⁰⁷ so it comes as no surprise that his assessment of 'sentimentalism' in Sterne is equally perceptive. Parnell roots the sentimental in elements that appeal more to the heart than to the head. Pity, sympathy and philanthropy are not ways of becoming distracted from devotion, but necessary encouragements and participants in it. Indeed, the gospel itself seems more directed at provoking one to *feel* for others, while taking no *thought* for one's self. In "A Story Painted to the Heart? *Tristram Shandy* and Sentimentalism Reconsidered," Parnell writes:

in spite of Sterne's role as a Church of England man, and in spite of the fact that the first instalment of the *Sermons of Mr. Yorick* ran to more lifetime editions than *Tristram Shandy*, so little effort has been made to comprehend its pathos and

sentiment from the perspective of Anglican theology and pulpit rhetoric. Thus we have ignored not only the most obvious, but what is surely the most fruitful context for comprehending the nature of sentimentalism in *Tristram Shandy*. . . .

No small part of what makes Sterne's sentimentalism 'unreadable' for twentieth-century readers is that its theological underpinnings are almost entirely lost to us. While we can recover, from eighteenth-century sermons, part of the religious context that gave it meaning we can never, perhaps, reconstruct the belief that made it sincere.¹⁰⁸

Understanding this, Parnell does well, for example, to liberate the Le Fever episode from the clutches of cynicism. To appreciate Sterne's use of affecting discourse is not to imply that the effervescence and pathos evoked in *Tristram* and *Yorick* are whole-heartedly endorsed. The narrators fully attest to the pitfalls of this avenue to awareness; the misuse of sentiment is of course roundly mocked—in order to liberate honest affective correspondence.

Sterne, we should remember, was no slave to vocabulary and definitions. It has been infrequently noted that the first translators of *ASJ* into both French and German struggled to find appropriate corresponding words for its title. Thus Joseph Pierre Frénais in his 1769 preface: "no exact French equivalent could be found for the English word 'sentimental' and hence it has been left untranslated. Perhaps the reader will conclude that it deserves to pass into our language."¹⁰⁹ If Cash is correct that "the word *sentimental* very likely was taken to mean 'moral'," ¹¹⁰ we must admit that Sterne will often have none of it. He uses the word and its derivatives in a variety of settings, with various accents. Moglen makes an interesting attempt:

Sterne shares Hume's belief in the possibility of a man's entering into the sentiments of others. This concept does in fact become the cornerstone of his ethical and social philosophy. . . .

Sentimentality, according to Sterne's view, is a self-conscious stage in the development of the empathic process. It is a self-induced state of empathy which attempts to retain the valuable elements of instinctual emotionality.¹¹¹

What should be realized alongside these assessments is that Sterne frequently presents sentiment as an emotion of the head; as fruitless as an enthusiastic heart attempting to reason. The *Journey* opens with a sentiment soon to be disproved by experience: "—THEY order . . . this matter better in France—" (*ASJ* 3.4). Sentiment's lack of significant communication will tutor the well-heeled traveller to seek characters less conniving. Watson recognizes this establishment by Sterne of a "distinction between the merely speculative and the practical . . . in his doctrine of the head and the heart."¹¹² Sterne was no dupe to the poses of either organ:

the duce take all sentiments! I wish there was not one in the world!—My wife is come to pay me a sentimental visit as far as from Avignon—and the *politesses* arising from such a proof of her urbanity, has robb'd me of a month's writing, or I had been in town by now.¹¹³

POTENTIAL EMANCIPATION

Yorick's specific criticism of French characteristics in *ASJ* is tempered by his presentation of the great joy expressed in humane folk with whom he interacts. His "*Quelle grossierte!*" is tutored by the well-travelled French officer.

Le POUR, et le CONTRE se trouvent en chaque nation; there is a balance, said he, of good and bad every where; and nothing but the knowing it is so can emancipate one half of the world from the prepossessions which it holds against the other—that the advantage of travel, as it regarded the *sçavoir vivre*, was by seeing a great deal both of men and manners; it taught us mutual toleration; and mutual toleration, concluded he, making me a bow, taught us mutual love. (*ASJ* 83.23)

Yorick's musings upon this speech of "the kindly French officer"—an officer in an army at war with England—illuminate his reflexive capacity:

the old French officer delivered this with an air of such candour and good sense, as coincided with my first favourable impressions of his character—I thought I loved the man; but I fear I mistook the object—’twas my own way of thinking—the difference was, I could not have expressed it half so well. (*ASJ* 84.5)

It is a practical, not a sentimental lesson that the officer suggests and with which Yorick concurs. We should remember what has just transpired between the German and the dwarf: “injury sharpened by an insult.” Referring to himself as a man of sentiment, Yorick claims he “could have leaped out of the box to have redressed it.” But, with a nod and a gesture, “the old French officer did it with much less confusion” (*ASJ* 81.27). This unsentimental gesture, fitting a remedy to its cause, is significant in Yorick’s education. The gesture accomplishes what he is capable of imagining but would not do, a spontaneous link of *true* sentiment with virtuous act. Sterne was vocationally tuned to the efficacy of gesture in preaching.¹¹⁴ His extraordinary punctuation for the printed sermons attests to his understanding of Thomas Sharp’s conclusion to his discourses on preaching: “a *period*, delivered by one who is master of *pronunciation*, shall be better remembered, and do more good, than a whole sermon from the mouth of another who is regardless of his *delivery*.”¹¹⁵ “It is not a case of supplanting words with gestures,” writes Lamb, “but of finding the complemental force of both that makes words, bodies, and things speak.”¹¹⁶

There is hope in ‘The Dwarf. Paris’ as there is liberally sprinkled throughout Sterne’s works, if we have eyes to see it. Tempering Ross’ suspicion that Sterne was tempted away from himself by the philosophic salons, “for three weeks together,” says Yorick,

I was of every man’s opinion I met. . . .—And at this price I could have eaten and drank and been merry all the days of my life at Paris; but ’twas a dishonest *reckoning*—I grew ashamed of it—it was the gain of a slave—every sentiment of honour revolted against it—the higher I got, the more was I forced upon my

beggarly system—the better the *Coterie*—the more children of Art—I languish’d for those of Nature.” (*ASJ* 147.27)

What begins delicious has become prostitution. Nature, art, travel, sentiment, learning, religion, each involves mixed qualities, and both novels suggest that the way not to confuse sympathetic commerce with lines of gravitation is to forfeit one’s monopoly on perception:

for my own part I never wonder at any thing;—and so often has my judgement deceived me in my life, that I always suspect it, right or wrong,—at least I am seldom hot upon cold subjects. For all this, I revere truth as much as any body; and when it has slipped us, if a man will but take me by the hand, and go quietly and search for it, as for a thing we have both lost, and can neither of us do well without,—I’ll go to the world’s end with him:—But I hate disputes,—and therefore (bating religious points, or such as touch society) I would almost subscribe to any thing which does not choak me in the first passage, rather than be drawn into one— (*TS* 439.1)

As Walter kindly leads his friends and acquaintances by the hand to chat an hour by the recovering Toby’s bedside (*TS* 88.14-89.9), we too are led in Sterne’s fiction to converse with wounded men struggling to clarify their situations. The injuries proceed more from *gravity* than projectile force (*TS* 88.11), and if “the history of a soldier’s wound” does not beguile the pain of it (*TS* 88.25), at least it provokes one to search a map, reconnoiter, and seek a creative avenue to health.

———Endless is the Search of Truth!
No sooner was my uncle *Toby* satisfied which road the cannon-ball did not go, but he was insensibly lead on, and resolved in his mind to enquire and find out which road the ball did go. (*TS* 103.9)

Sterne implies, and at times more than insensibly hints, ways in which truth may be encountered. Paul McGlynn offers a classic misunderstanding of Yorick: “he is philandering and downright uncharitable, and nowhere does he show any signs of romantic irony on his own part or any sign of awareness of the lack of virtue in his acts.”¹¹⁷ Apart from being untrue, such faulty

reading exhibits a neglect to fulfil a necessary role in Sterne's literary conversation. The notion that he or Yorick or Tristram is presenting a blueprint for happiness in their lives and opinions is Walter's mistake with Trim's oratory. The characters he presents, even more than those of scripture in his sermons, are to be looked *through*, not *at*. We underrate Sterne's art if we miss the winking grin with which he presents himself and his biographers. Charles Moran registers the corrective. "Just as Yorick the narrator judges Yorick the traveller in the *Journey*, so Tristram the narrator judges Tristram the traveller in the novel."¹¹⁸ Their deeds are represented knowingly. One wouldn't have expected this to be so elusive a conclusion. "But Sterne did not release the starling, cry the critics . . . his praiseworthy sympathy does not issue in action and is therefore the grossest sentimentality and self-indulgence. As if Sterne himself were unaware of that irony."¹¹⁹

W.B.C. Watkins notices and writes well on this high capacity of Sterne which so many have so obviously missed.¹²⁰ From *Perilous Balance*: "Sterne . . . is eminently self-conscious; he sees himself complexly." "He thoroughly knew himself, and knowing himself, he knew what weakness and wretchedness and temptation are."¹²¹ Sterne's novels are another Lillabullero—he is not trying to *say something*, but in the lives and opinions of his characters an impression is left reflecting an appreciation for the layers of consciousness in fallible persons. His interest in developing the characters of biblical personae is, in the fiction, evolved towards the same end of personal reflection. Integrity in this focus remained central to him, as we see in one of his earliest and fullest apologies for *Tristram*:

reason and common sense tell me, that if the characters of past ages and men are to be drawn at all, they are to be drawn like themselves; that is, with their excellencies, and with their foibles—and it is as much a piece of justice to the world, and to virtue too, to do the one, as the other.—The ruling passion *et les egarements du cœur*, are

the very things which mark, and distinguish a man's character; —in which I would as soon leave out a man's head as his hobby-horse.¹²²

Sterne trusts his readers to be equally self-conscious. Just as his 'digressions' (*egarements*) are not from his story but from the image we have of what we are reading, so we do well to remember we are not enjoying the story his narrators speak of writing, but rather the whistling of some sort of music of which that writing is merely one instrument. Critics who drive a wedge between Sterne and, especially, Yorick and Tristram, have failed to come to terms with the complex catharsis that these narrators embody and present. To conclude "this is what *Tristram Shandy* is finally all about: the triumph of the uncreating spirit in man, the celebration of chaos and confusion, destruction and death, whether in Toby's bowling-green, Walter's household, or Tristram's study"¹²³ is to mistake a progressive sceptical stage for the last word in a man's philosophy. Sterne does not define his characters satirically, or indeed in any way whatsoever. They are fragments of life, alive and wriggling, not on display, but encounterable as they themselves record reflections. Sterne's desire in this, as in his sermons, is development of fruitful experience. As Henry More stated in what was essentially the Cambridge Platonists' handbook of ethics:

to estimate the fruit of virtue by that imaginary knowledge of it which is acquired by mere definition, is very much the same as if one were to estimate the nature of fire from a fire painted upon the wall. . . . Every vital good is perceived and judged by life and sense. . . . If you have ever *been* this, you have *seen* this.¹²⁴

D.W. Jefferson:

the charge of false feeling, of indulgence in sentiment, has frequently been leveled against [Sterne]. But may it not be said in reply that his indulgence is always allied to a self-knowledge, that an ironical consciousness of the limitations of his feelings adds just the right flavour to his presentation of them?¹²⁵

Yes. Sterne referred to *ASJ* as his *Work of Redemption* because it is a confession, the explication of a journey challenging assumptions of the heart and head.¹²⁶ After being chided as an “English philosopher,” for sending notices to the brain that reverse the heart’s knowledge—“when the situation is, what we would wish, nothing is so ill-timed as to hint at the circumstances which make it so” (*ASJ* 24.11)—Yorick is quick to learn. A few sheepish moments later, after a glance at the biblical Samaritan (*ASJ* 24.21), instead of a dissertation on romantic posture he simply says “some way or other, God knows how, I regained my situation” (*ASJ* 25.3). Over the page he is still on track: “I had infallibly lost it a second time, had not instinct more than reason directed me.” (*ASJ* 25.21). Again, in the very next scene, “I blush’d in my turn; but from what movements, I leave to the few who feel to analyse—;” and “I knew not that contention could be rendered so sweet and pleasurable a thing to the nerves as I then felt it.—We remained silent” (*ASJ* 26.15-25). This leads to the exchange of snuffboxes with the *Catholic* monk—Father *Lorenzo*—whom he had misused. The exchange is sentimental according to one translation, but it is entirely of a piece with the meanderings of a compassionate heart in search of happiness that Yorick would

guard this box, as I would the instrumental parts of my religion, to help my mind on to something better: in truth, I seldom go abroad without it; and oft and many a time have I called up by it the courteous spirit of its owner to regulate my own, in the justlings of the world. (*ASJ* 27.11)

Yorick finds a noble use for the token, he is under no illusion regarding his need of some *thing* to help his mind and regulate his spirit, and considering its fruits the ‘instrumental’ comparison is well appointed. As Yorick proved to himself when Lorenzo was begging just minutes before, one’s prepossessions often will not be dislodged even by affecting gestures: “—I

was bewitch'd not to have been struck" (*ASJ* 8.23). Such epiphanies are strewn throughout the sermons. Recall the warning in 'Abuses': "what is there to affright his conscience? —Conscience has got safely entrenched behind the Letter of the Law; sits there invulnerable, fortified with **Cases** and **Reports** so strongly on all sides —that it is not preaching can dispossess it of its hold" (*TS* 151.16).

To his credit, Yorick writes "not to apologize for the weaknesses of my heart in this tour, — but to give an account of them" (*ASJ* 21.13). Again, his journey is an *Assay* upon human nature. He does not travel with a checklist of destinations and popular sites. A plain is as fertile as a valley, because 'sights' are merely ways of enabling him to see himself. Hume admitted that to regain humanity he had to forego authoring critical speculations. In contrast Sterne's writing-in-transit, and that of his narrators, is life itself: "the pleasure of the experiment has kept my senses, and the best part of my blood awake, and laid the gross to sleep" (*ASJ* 36.16). The voyage leads up and down unsuspected paths and into dark alleys. One who would search nature has no choice but to follow her, and most appropriately this is primarily an attempt of the pragmatic heart. As Phutatorius' *de Concubinis retinendis* will be most useful where concubines are most practical (*TS* 387), so Yorick's visitation sermon is cut up—to the scholastic doctors' horror—to be used to light pipes:

I was delivered of [the sermon] at the wrong end of me—it came from my head instead of my heart—and it is for the pain it gave me, both in the writing and preaching of it, that I revenge myself of it, in this manner.—To preach, to shew the extent of our reading, or the subtleties of our wit—to parade it in the eyes of the vulgar with the beggarly accounts of a little learning, tinsel'd over with a few words which glitter, but convey little light and less warmth—is a dishonest use of the poor single half hour in a week which is put into our hands—'Tis not preaching the gospel—but ourselves—For my own part, continued *Yorick*, I had rather direct five words point blank to the heart—(*TS* 376.23)

Sterne focuses on the inability to forgo trust in self-propelled reason and conscience, and never relents showing us the inevitable consequences, offering statements suggesting his method: “now consider, sir, what nonsense it is either in fighting, or writing . . . to act by plan” (*TS* 704.18).

We do not bear Momus’ glass; a true artist clarifies human nature instead:

—our minds shine not through the body, but are wrapt up here in a dark covering of uncrystalized flesh and blood; so that if we would come to the specifick characters of them, we must go some other way to work. (*TS* 83.26)

Tristram is adamant in requiring the courtesy of patience when he seems sparing of narrative or trifling in detail (*TS* 9.9). Readers are warned of the inevitably mysterious nature of the essay and requested not to mistake strangeness for absurdity, or foolishness for lack of wisdom. The novels are presented as works in progress. We are, for instance, perpetually challenged to anticipate events and ideas, but invariably reminded that such an attempt for that end will prove fruitless, “inasmuch as I set no small store by myself upon this very account, that my reader has never yet been able to guess at any thing” (*TS* 89.13). We are called to attentive reading: “read, read, read, read, my unlearned reader!” (*TS* 268.1). As with ellipses in St. Paul’s letters and Sterne’s impressionistic sermons, in his fiction he trusts that we will begin to understand what we have not explicitly been told (“as the reader must have observed him” *TS* 57.10, etc.). Such daunting challenges are prologues to effective communication, a relationship grounded not on introductions and formalities, but in assumed histories of ideas and experiences shared now in friendly gestures of assent rather than hortatory epistles. The reader’s capacity for the adventure is trusted, the author’s task is to lead him through it. To be sure, for some the “slight

acquaintance” will never grow into “familiarity” (*TS* 9.13-16), but Sterne admits he writes not for them, offering many intermissions from which to skulk away.

The novels are best read with our infirmities close at hand. “It is important to note,” writes Peter Briggs,

that the perceptual relativism and consequent skepticism implicit in Sterne’s methods is not necessarily bound up with moral relativism. . . . if the powers of the mind are themselves in apposition and understanding is finally only appositive, then the artistic forms which would express understanding must be similarly appositive, tentative, and forever unfinished. A well-formed work does not offer ‘conclusions’ but coherent *options* for interpretation.¹²⁷

The extraordinary nature of the novels, we come to realize, is a release from the mechanisms of those who, writing or preaching in straight lines, are incapable of puncturing prepossessions. Working with these notions Sterne provides, if not Momus’ glass, at least an effective mirror in which attentive readers may view themselves and proceed with fresh eyes to behold the mysteries. Writing of Montaigne, Howard Anderson relates the importance of giving an “appropriate form to his inquiring ignorance”:

if this inquiry is to reveal, beneath the ignorance, a solid new understanding of human nature, the form which it takes must also be new. . . . The form that he chooses, though apparently random, is in fact an artfully artless assembly of thoughts that, beneath their superficial irrelevance, cohere in the mind of the writer.¹²⁸

In Sterne even the old clichés are resurrected.¹²⁹ ‘Life’ becomes the journey it has always been, and the novel follows suit: “being determined to write my journey, I took out my pen and ink, and wrote the preface to it in the *Desobligeant*” (*ASJ* 12.15).

At an impasse, Sterne is concerned to upbraid the critic and encourage weary pilgrims that a journey in search of, and therefore reflecting truth, is bound to be full of inconveniences:

“the judgment is surprised by the imagination” (*TS* 655.4). Even the most earnest of cabbage — planters will have to bend a line or two. As Cervantes wrote in captivity, so Tristram’s seasickness issues in appropriate prose because his imagination is tutored by actuality (*TS* 578.7-15). After all, the chief advantage of travel is to encounter that which would evade one at home—due perspective issuing from unexpected, often thoroughly disagreeable occurrences. This value of feeling life at basic levels is supplemented with the Pythagorean need to get “*out of the body, in order to think well*” (*TS* 593.21). Getting out of one’s body to think, and out of one’s mind to feel, are complementary adventures. It is for this reason that elements such as the ‘pathetic’ preached in a way so as to arouse the passions are valuable criteria of a good sermon. If undertaken with a wise humility, the voyager may find that the arguments (and sentiments) lead toward the gentle irony of reconciliation. Otherwise, a neglected body offers no frame with which to practice wisdom, and, similarly, a body without reason is a liability.

Attempting authentically to address his readers, the structure of Sterne’s novels is itself an image of ensuing complexities. In Wayne Booth’s phrase, he performs “in public the tasks which most writers perform behind the scenes.”¹³⁰ Like the Centre Pompidou, the shell of his work is inside out, flesh inside the skeleton. “—A just medium,” Toby was advised by Walter, “prevents all conclusions” (*TS* 726.23). As in the surprising rhetorical turns of his sermons, in the fiction Sterne anticipates our preconceptions and uses them accordingly. He leads us skilfully because he has visited our destination. The contribution of style to Sterne’s purpose in this regard is recognized by Howard Anderson:

Sterne repeatedly manipulates us by deliberately disappointing expectations of narrative form that we have developed through our prior reading. By arbitrarily

departing from conventions of customary narrative form in the epic, the novel, and the romance, Sterne insists that arbitrariness lies in the conventions themselves and that our allegiance to them is a sign of preference for convenient artifice over inconvenient reality. . . .

especially in the first part of [TS], when he offers his parables of preconception to the reader, Tristram usually takes pains to ensure that we will apply them to ourselves and not sit back and smile in amused complacency at the folly of others.¹³¹

His fiction, no less than his homilies, is a caged starling, interrupting us in the hey-day of our soliloquies. The terror of the Bastille is *not* “in the word,” but “folly, or nonchalance, or philosophy, or pertinacity” or any other self-driven quality is incapable of undeceiving us (*ASJ* 94.9-20). So masks, parabolae and such are conscripted for duty. To claim “for Joyce, as for Sterne, there can be no self-discovery. There is only the endless repetition of the quest”¹³² is to misunderstand Sterne’s purpose. His works differ from other accounts of the human journey that appear in the novels. Locke’s essay and Smollett’s travels come to life, implicitly criticized but, more importantly, presented in a way that exhibits their lack of personality. As he implicitly criticized Tillotson and Clarke for telling us our duty without inspiring us to do it, the shame of the “learned SMELFUNGUS” is not that his book was “nothing but the account of his miserable feelings,” but that nothing further proceeded from those feelings (*ASJ* 37.5-9). Like Locke on time, words, education or wit, the most insightful of paragraphs is a bubble to readers if they cannot access the extent of the meaning that gives significance to the words. The history of what passes in a man’s mind is only valuable to recollect if it be brought to bear on some current presently flowing in the minds thus engaged. Somewhat paradoxically Sterne’s extraordinary technique brings us closer to a balanced understanding of what passes in conversation.

This is tricky business, in numerous ways an author of life and opinions is challenged inexplicitly to communicate. The preacher cannot expect fresh assent to commonly phrased platitudes. This is equally true for situations involving lower passions. Tristram burns to reveal the two words without which “a French post-horse would not know what in the world to do” (*TS* 605.9). They “must be told [the reader] plainly, and with the most distinct articulation;” but to preserve decorum a story is developed by which characters and readers shoulder the articulation: “Now a venial sin . . . by taking it all, and amicably halving it betwixt yourself and another person—in course becomes diluted into no sin at all”—said the abbess to the novice (*TS* 613.16-21). This amicable halving of spells is what enables Sterne’s vehicle to move. Vocabulary, and its imaginative translations from reader to reader, keeps us involved. His works are a mastery of balance between prevention and disclosure. As Tristram observes in the quest of widow Wadman, “there is an accent of humanity—how shall I describe it? —’tis an accent which covers the part with a garment, and gives the enquirer a right to be as particular with it as your body-surgeon” (*TS* 792.13). The key to Sterne’s effective involvement with readers is his skill in generating an experience without seeming to force it. Trim’s ‘funeral oration’ is an example of the excellency of this way. In contrast to Walter’s dislocated fragments that serve at best for himself only as momentary diversion from tragedy, Trim brings the full weight of this moment home to everyone in the kitchen. By now we are prepared to encounter such juxtaposition.

Like his interpretation of the fifth commandment, Trim’s oration would have pleased Yorick. Recalling Yorick’s theory of preaching [quoted above, pp.195-96], Trim’s dirge was delivered at the *right end* of him: “five words point blank to the heart” (*TS* 377.10). He is successful

by engaging the passions of those willing to be thus engaged. Trim adopts the stance he held reading the sermon (*TS* 431.4), eloquence natural without seeming arbitrary. Tristram interpolates an opinion: “the preservation of our constitution in church and state . . . may in time to come depend greatly upon the right understanding of this stroke of the corporal’s eloquence” (*TS* 431.17). Indeed the scaffolding of Sterne’s entire work could be summed up in ‘Trim’s hat,’ its profound effect emanating from the fact that we are neither stocks, stones nor angels, but “cloathed with bodies and governed by our imaginations” and are best addressed accordingly. (*TS* 431.26-432.2)

That “the soul and body are joint-sharers in every thing they get” (*TS* 764.9) is a commonplace Sterne never lets us forget. The jerkin and its lining (*TS* 189.19) informs his self-consciousness as author and he strongly suggests that the implied sympathy will have far reaching effects on his readers. Like Yorick in his *Desobligeant*, the elements of life and writing are mingled: “a man cannot dress, but his ideas get cloath’d at the same time; and if he dresses like a gentleman, every one of them stands presented to his imagination, genteelized along with him—so that he has nothing to do, but take his pen, and write like himself” (*TS* 764.9). In context this is one more angle of the author as spontaneously present, but it is particularly telling if we are aware of the hints by which Sterne is presenting that well-dressed gentleman to our companies.

Trim’s address is valuable because it speaks not only to the heart of the listeners, but from the heart of what is being communicated. In simultaneous contrast, Walter’s recitation of antiquity (from dust to dust) is more than one chamber apart. An exact or explicit articulation of the desired effect spoils the relation. Trim is not teaching his congregation, he is giving them a focus by which to mourn, or, at least, personally to consider the event. The moral, if one calls it that, is incorporated

in the act. This may seem like a detour, a fanciful untrustworthy way of sharing sentimental information, but considering alternate routes, it is least offensive. The artifice of oratorical capering gives way to the art of appropriate gesture. A form of sympathy exists between participants in this exchange. The author has freedom to tell his story in his own way, and readers are sufficiently prepared to accommodate what they are hearing. Tristram is resonating with his subjects and cannot help writing himself:

FROM the first moment I sat down to write my life for the amusement of the world, and my opinions for its instruction, has a cloud insensibly been gathering over my father. . . .

I enter upon this part of my story in the most pensive and melancholy frame of mind, that ever sympathetic breast was touched with.—My nerves relax as I tell it.—Every line I write, I feel an abatement of the quickness of my pulse. (*TS* 253.15-254.8)

The author changes with his subject; Tristram aligns his text with the extremes of human temper (*TS* 524.13-525.23), and here too is paradox.

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 manufactory of the arts and sciences. (*TS* 525.4)

“A man of the least spirit,” says Tristram, in recounting history, “will have fifty deviations from a straight line to make with this or that party as he goes along” (*TS* 41.13). For this reason, the writers and readers who are mocked in Sterne's fiction are those bent on proceeding like Pharisees and cabbage planters. Despite Johnson's “nothing odd will do long,”¹³³ in a fallen world authenticity abides most nearly with what seems strange.

Mundungus, with an immense fortune, made the whole tour . . . without one generous connection or pleasurable anecdote to tell of; but he had travell'd

straight on looking neither to his right hand or his left, lest Love or Pity should seduce him out of his road. (*ASJ* 37.24)

Writer or reader, one who travels thus gets nothing for his pains. The *Journey* pivots on this understanding. Smelfungus and Mundungus, lacking heat in this faculty of exploration will be numb even to the warmth of heaven. To be inappropriately heated is sin, but not to be heated is the recourse of prudes and cowards. The glory of Sterne's work, then, is in providing provocative distractions from our own soliloquies, inclining and tempering us toward discovery. "I like the sermon well, replied my father,—'tis dramatic,—and there is something in that way of writing, when skilfully managed, which catches the attention." (*TS* 165.15)

Sterne presents myths; following his heroes we are caught up in the *life* while at the same time considering the *opinions* of that life. Richard Lanham quotes a provocative passage from Kenneth Burke:

"in sum, the comic frame should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be *passiveness*, but *maximum consciousness*. One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles. He would provide a rationale for locating the irrational and the nonrational."

And then immediately condemns himself:

unless we greatly mistake it, *Tristram Shandy* destroys such a rationale. It includes and illustrates too many kinds of comedy. . . . neither Tristram nor Sterne tells us which meaning is the reference one, which comic theory is to be applied.¹³⁴

The point of a reference *meaning*, of course, is that it can not be told. The *rationale* insensibly builds upon the reader's wit.

The spontaneous rhetorical styles of Tristram and Yorick support the progression of their mythic quests. During the journeys especially, the events are recorded as they happen, but as seen

through the calmer eyes of one participating in hindsight. The principal participant gives us the action and, simultaneously, criticism and context of it:

HAVING, on first sight of the lady, settled the affair in my fancy, “that she was of the better order of beings”—and then laid it down as a second axiom, as indisputable as the first, That she was a widow, and wore a character of distress—I went no further; I got ground enough for the situation which pleased me—” (*ASJ* 30.1)

Humble reflection redeems the apotheosis of sentiment. The implied self-criticism does not negate the value of unaffected reactions and initial impressions of the heart, but it acknowledges the need for these to be tempered by considered experience. As D. W. Jefferson notes of Sterne’s (and Yorick’s) bifocal perception:

it is surprising that he has not been more valued for these corrective effects. There are two kinds of sophistication in him which our age might well find enjoyable: his recognition of foibles and vanities in the sphere of the affections and sympathies, and his uninhibited expression of the latter, notwithstanding this recognition.¹³⁵

Events, even the books themselves, are presented under way, chapters haphazardly divided, deleted or bound out of order, expanding the reader’s appreciation for being able *at the same time* to be elsewhere considering. ‘Digressions,’ which Tristram honestly presents as the soul of his work, like Montaigne’s alarm clock, serve as punctuation and the chief medium by which we assess what is otherwise the works’ progress. What is accomplished is more than realism, as the creation is greater than the sum of one man’s representation of life. That nothing ever wrought with the Shandy family, or with Yorick, after the ordinary way is why authentic presentations of their lives and opinions will of themselves need to be extraordinary. Again the focus of the communication is on indirection. The “drawing” of Toby’s character goes on “gently all the time” (*TS* 80.21) while we are otherwise concerned.

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time! (*TS* 80.27)

Knowing that a man's mind requires sympathy with a proposition in order to accept it, Sterne forms propositions accessible to the minds he encounters. Because definitions are a mark of distrust, the reader is asked to suffer mysteries and riddles for the sake of comprehensive communication. Without *much reading* (*much knowledge*), the moral of the “motley emblem of my work” remains impenetrable (*TS* 268.7).

“*Mysteries*” exclaims Yorick, “*which must explain themselves, are not worth the loss of time, which a conjecture about them takes up*” (*ASJ* 114.5). In the crises and monotony of life, perspective is synonymous with health. One track or passion is most fruitfully challenged by another of equal or greater intensity; to exchange enthusiasm for complacency is inappropriate. As Yorick transports himself to Messina via *Much Ado About Nothing* and again admits to losing his own feelings in thoughts of Dido (*ASJ* 114), so the reader is encouraged to encounter a form of entertainment and perspective in the somersaults of Sterne. Tristram *is* trying to let us “into the whole secret from first to last, of every thing which concerns” him (*TS* 5.1), but knows that indirection, or parabola, is our only hope of accurately interacting with his character as it is. The narrators are concerned to place words as close to activity as possible: “Ptr..r..r..ing—twing—twang—prut—trut—” “there are such an infinitude of notes, tunes, cants, chants, airs, looks, and accents with which the word fiddlestick may be pronounced” (*TS* 443.14; 789.1). But their offspring are antitheses of a prose version of say, Smollett's ‘Register of the Weather, kept during a Residence of Eighteen Months in that city’. Trim's } says as much as Walter's syllogisms (*TS*

744); the grisset's gestures say more than the barber's sentimental proof (*ASJ* 67-71). Time, enemy and accomplice of autobiographers, must be warped if one is to relate anything useful:

there is not a secret so aiding to the progress of sociality, as to get master of this *short hand*, and be quick in rendering the several turns of looks and limbs, with all their inflections and deliniations, into plain words. (*ASJ* 77.5)

By this means, demanding we take upon us the "translation" of gestures in the works, Sterne incorporates us into his pages. "'Twill come out of itself, by and bye.—All I contend for is, that I am not *obliged* to set out with a definition of what love is." Thus we are invited, in this instance, not to comprehend a definition to "conceive this right," but instead to *paint* a representative figure (*TS* 564.21-567). This figure becomes our responsibility, our Beatrice or Dulcinea. By inviting us to acts of creation, we are led into an experience of what the author would falter to define. Sterne's criticism of the misuse of sentiment takes its cue from this understanding. One natural example of relational shorthand and accelerated formalities is repeated in *ASJ*. As the lady in their first fortunate meeting (*ASJ* 24.8-17) tutored Yorick, so he is given a chance to tutor her in their second. Again they have "been left together by a parcel of nonsensical contingencies" (*ASJ* 33.4), but instead of proceeding in the manner of a Frenchman "to make love the first moment, and an offer of his person the second," he offers an explanation for a way more likely to succeed:

—To think of making love by *sentiments*!

I should as soon think of making a genteel suit of cloaths out of remnants:—and to do it—pop—at first sight by declaration—is submitting the offer and themselves with it, to be sifted, with all their *pours* and *contres*, by an unheated mind. . . .

—What a want of knowledge in this branch of commerce a man betrays, whoever lets the word come out of his lips, till an hour or two at least after the time, that his silence upon it becomes tormenting. A course of small, quiet attentions, not so pointed as to alarm—nor so vague as to be misunderstood,—with now and then a

look of kindness, and little or nothing said upon it—leaves Nature for your mistress, and she fashions it to her mind.— (*ASJ* 33.15-34.11)

The Lady is attentive, and declares that Yorick has been making love to her “all this while.” On the very next page, when his unarticulated proposal is interrupted, she assures him that a man “has seldom an offer of kindness to make to a woman, but she has a presentiment of it some moments before—” (*ASJ* 35.11). Yorick attributes this to a natural instinct for preservation of females, but we are to understand that this is simply one more facet of works, like sermons, that thrive on presentiments orchestrated by “a course of small, quiet attentions.” As Yorick’s prejudices are tutored more by his recollection of the monk’s gestures, than by verbal argument, so the reader is led insensibly but surely to encounter elements of his own misconceptions.

It is not “the most important matters of state” but “nonsensical *minutiae*” that explicate natural characters, and it is “ye small sweet courtesies of life” that open doors “and let the stranger in” (*ASJ* 69.1). Yorick’s philosophy is educated by the “complexional philosophy” of La Fleur: “there was a passport in his very looks.” This “*prevenancy*” engages us in the windings of the *Journey* (*ASJ* 43.19; 59.13).

That the medium resembles characters floating in it, is appropriate. Led by words’ unsteady use to question the full effect of a spectrum of possible meanings, the reader’s view of his own mind, not necessarily that of the author, surfaces. The pronunciation of “noses” and “whiskers,” thus *any* word, unavoidably involves accents implying “something of a mystery” (*TS* 410.19). And, to penetrate truth, the mystery must be recognized as such. The point of Sterne’s stories, like those of Ecclesiastes and Job, is not to tell us what we do not know, but to represent our common situation in such a way as to emphasize the fragile supports of what seems fundamentally to be

reliable. An old saw perhaps, and we hear hints of worn expressions, but the application of these phrases, and the importance of the way in which they are revisited is integral to the moral they are enlisted to convey. By using the complexities of words, with a reader willing to consider, a new ‘definition’ or ‘translation’ may present itself. Because this occurs conversationally, the laurels, or blame, are shared, and the offence of a didactic treatise is avoided.

A window into Sterne’s mastery is provided by the complementary passages on plagiarism that appeal to the precedents of Montaigne and Burton. The scene most illustrative of Sterne’s self-image as ‘plagiarist’ or translationist occurs in *ASJ*. Yorick, to “gratify” La Fleur, chops incidents in the borrowed letter, “took the cream gently off it, and whipping it up in my own way—I seal’d it up” (*ASJ* 64.3). What we see in *TS* though, is even more revealing. The first passage relates to the torn-out chapter that prevents the reader’s shock from a piece “so much above the stile and manner of any thing else I have been able to paint in this book” (*TS* 374.18). Tristram, humming Homenas’ sermon notes, recalls Montaigne as having “complained in a parallel accident” when forced to read a dull text in which occurred an air “so fine, so rich, so heavenly” that it served only to discredit the mire within which it was sunk. Editions of the novel duly point to the section in ‘Of the Education of Children’ to which Sterne refers but the original context should be fully appreciated.

First it will strike one as a particularly wry bit of humor to see that Sterne has lifted the *words* of Cotton’s translation; in so doing, of course, he proclaims himself equal to the essayist. Annotations for the most part have disregarded the fact that Montaigne is far from suggesting that borrowing well-phrased elements of others is in itself culpable; certainly he is sufficiently experienced to know the folly of presenting any ideas as ‘new.’ Montaigne admits that he too is

naturally subject to self-repetition, borrowing and patching. “I know very well,” he says two sentences after the portion used by Sterne,

I know very well how imprudently I myself at every Turn attempt to equal myself to my Thefts, and to make my Stile go Hand in Hand with any one of them, not without a temerarious Hope of deceiving the Eyes of my Reader from discerning the Difference; but withal, it is as much by the Benefit of my Application, that I hope to do it, as by that of my Invention or any Force of my own.¹³⁶

Again, as with Sterne’s borrowings for his sermons, it is in the *application* that we discern genius. Here, Sterne’s hidden quotation of Montaigne’s own flourishing comment originally occurring in an argument against the juxtaposition of poor original—excellent quotation, beside what it *says*, implies that we are in the hands of a capable applicator; from Montaigne to him is no precipice.

The lesson is immediately repeated the following year (sooner for most readers now). Upon opening the next instalment, Volume v, we are told that a couple of “mettlesome tits” and their madcap postilion, flying “like lightning” over “a slope of three miles” (juxtaposed to the London wagon, scarce progressive) suggested to both “brain” and “heart” that a little zest would not be unwelcome in a book bulky with borrowings. As we know, the “castigation of plagiaries” that follows is “itself cribbed from Burton!”.¹³⁷ Again, fully to appreciate Sterne’s presence in *his* presentation, Burton requires review.

In the same sentence as the “apothecaries” of *TS* 408.4, Burton first anticipates Yorick’s use of La Fleur’s letter in *ASJ*: “we skim off the cream of other men’s wits, pick the choice flowers of their tilled gardens to set out our own sterile plots,” and then “they lard their lean books with the fat of others’ works.”¹³⁸ Sterne, in turn, rightly asks, “shall we for ever be adding


so much to the *bulk*—so little to the *stock*?” (TS 408.1).¹³⁹ But indeed, as Montaigne also realized, to swell the bulk seems inevitable, the secret is meanwhile to improve the stock. The London wagon with its “eight *heavy beasts*” could use a push, out of “the same track” and according to a different pace (TS 408.6). We are again encountering Sterne’s implicit contention that *this* is not his way.

James Work rightly makes note of the fact that “Burton himself had borrowed heavily in these particular passages.”¹⁴⁰ Without reading this preliminary section of *The Anatomy*, full of others’ castigations of plagiarists, it is impossible to feel Sterne’s sympathetic glee. Even so, the primary slant of Sterne, Montaigne, and Burton is not the jest they share, or a sophomoric prank of patchwork. They allude to an important philosophical struggle within the literature of ideas. Burton’s magnificent confession stands for all three: “for my part I am one of the number [of plagiarists], *nos numerus sumus*: I do not deny it, I have only this of Macrobius to say for myself, *Omne meum, nihil meum*, ’tis all mine, and none mine.”¹⁴¹ *Touché*. “I have borrowed . . . though the sermon is truly mine.”

As Sterne makes abundantly clear throughout his works, pilfered words, like drugs and spices, of themselves are impotent, application determines their efficacy (TS 404-5). Regarding the first three chapters of Volume v, H. J. Jackson notes, “in the introductory sentences, Sterne implied that his use of materials from Burton’s neglected *Anatomy of Melancholy* was not to be a tedious display of ‘the *relics of learning*’ but a kind of resurrection.”¹⁴²

The method of Sterne and his narrators is variously exhibited. As we have seen, one of the most pervasive literary stances is that of the wily prophet; we are challenged with the fact that

we cannot guess where next the author will take us. These junctions, though presented with a veneer of spontaneity, are not to be misunderstood as inessential. We are told that Tristram (alluding to St. Paul foregoing traditional prejudice: Gal. i.16) at an impasse never stands conferring “with pen and ink one moment” (*TS* 763.9), and that his “most religious” way of starting a book is to “begin with writing the first sentence—and trusting to Almighty God for the second” (*TS* 656.18). Lighthearted as these statements are, we should realize that the challenge of writing, conceiving, this sort of conversation is an act necessarily complex and mysterious. A play is formed in which the pen and other elements initially outside exact control of the mind will operate alongside, even roll over, what was at first thought to be one’s agenda. The confusion we have in pinning down Sterne and Tristram, is really an image of the conundrum of human nature.

Sterne’s works bear witness, as we have seen, to the presence of the inscrutable. No simple answer is given, no easy path marked  happiness this way. As Fluchère justly notes, “the avowed didacticism of the work is only an amusing or mock-heroic mask which hides a second didacticism that is much more profound.”¹⁴³ Answers devised under the sun are trotted out to pasture. What is established as trustworthy is a sense of chaos, the unexpected, so much so that otherwise perceptive scholars have mistaken this means for an end. Overriding the mayhem, however, and giving strength to Sterne, to Tristram and Yorick, is the experience of benevolence—of sanctified humanity. Toby and the grisset, for example, spark something in their beneficiaries that is invigorating and undeniable:

I felt every vessel in my frame dilate—the arteries beat all chearily together, and every power which sustained life, perform’d it with so little friction, that ’twould have confounded the most *physical precieuse* in France: with all her materialism, she could scarce have called me a machine— (*ASJ* 5.19)

We remember how long this sentiment is sustained, but it is at least a starting point, a recognized way out of the hopeless confusion which otherwise reigns in all campaigns for happiness. Yorick later admits “if ever I do a mean action, it must be in some interval betwixt one passion and another: whilst this interregnum lasts, I always perceive my heart locked up—I can scarce find in it, to give Misery a sixpence” (*ASJ* 44.20). While not particularly noble, this confession is instructive in offering readers a chance to judge for themselves which way *their* passions or coolnesses sway them.

IV ~ “ECCO LO IL VERO PUNCHINELLO!”

HOMILETIC HUMOR?

On the heels of the first *Tristram* volumes, opening the *Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, many readers could not help wondering if Sterne was mocking his clerical past. A gesture to this phantom of a clergyman in motley is appropriate. Earliest faultfinding focused on the impropriety of a parson publishing what Owen Ruffhead referred to as “an obscene romance,” and then, soon after, offering sermons from a jester’s namesake. “But are the solemn dictates of religion,” continued Ruffhead, “fit to be conveyed from the mouths of Buffoons and ludicrous Romancers? Would any man believe that a preacher was in earnest, who should mount the pulpit in a *Harlequin’s coat*?”¹ Broadly understood, these two queries form the nucleus of private and public criticism of Sterne’s sermons: may the imagination stretch to appreciate sincerity in sermons from the author of *Tristram Shandy*, and, if so, what sort of religion is capable of that sort of presentation? Unorthodox, one might presume, but even Ruffhead himself, in the same review, admitted that his quarrel was with “the *manner* of publication,” “the *matter* of his sermons” on the other hand “may serve as models for many of his brethren to copy from. They abound with moral and religious precepts, clearly and forcibly expressed.”²

Indeed, as soon as 1762 three of Sterne’s sermons appeared in *The Practical Preacher*, a collection of exemplary homilies, side by side with those of Tillotson, Clarke, Sherlock and Sharp. The popularity and evident orthodoxy of Sterne’s sermons was established, and we find another two of his included in *The English Preacher* [1774].³ This later publication, in nine

volumes, is subtitled: 'Sermons on the Principal Subjects of Religion and Morality, selected, revised, and abridged from Various Authors'. It is significant that the sermon of Tillotson chosen for Volume 8, 'Against Hypocrisy in Religion' is in fact edited snippets of his three sermons on the text II Tim. iii.5, each titled 'Of the Form, and the power of Godliness'. In contrast, in this same volume the 'revision and abridgement' of Sterne's 'Vindication of Human Nature' and 'On setting Bounds to our Desires' consists in removing his dashes.

In various forms this challenge of a 'heteroclit parson' has survived. In Sterne criticism of any era one encounters either indignation at the juxtaposition, or disbelief that fiction and sermons could simultaneously be presented for any other reason than to advance the fortunes of their author. Even Melvyn New offers this poor sensational impression:

indeed, in his heady success, Sterne made a major blunder. In May 1760, four months after his "triumph," he tried to "cash in" by publishing two volumes of sermons (hastily scraped together from his drawer) under the name "Mr. Yorick"; Sterne may have wanted fame, but after a lifetime on a country vicar's stipend, he seems to have had a healthy interest in fortune as well.⁴

Some would have felt more comfortable enjoying *Tristram Shandy* were it written by a coachman, and been more attentive to the sermons had they no association with jest. Perhaps, we hear, Sterne was not as vicious as Thackeray implied,⁵ but he was personally imprudent with the Decalogue and not wholly sincere in his preaching. Accordingly he inserted 'The Abuses of Conscience considered' into his novel as "a shameless plug"⁶ to advertise sermons composed at least a decade prior, immediately to capitalize on the projected success of his newfound anti-clerical love of bawdy satirical fiction. With some notable exceptions, critics of Sterne have felt

inclined to accept some form of this argument. But is it a just reckoning of *any* of Sterne's works?

We are examining the sermons, and threads in Sterne's fiction to reveal an integrity that suggests desires other than cash and notorious preferment. Even if the reader chooses to maintain these practical (and of themselves innocent) ends as having been uppermost in the author's desire to publish his homilies, the examination is useful in proving Sterne to be far more involved in presenting theology than has been assumed. The answers to Ruffhead's questions above may in fact be a resounding "yes." And when he asks "must obscenity then be the handmaid to Religion --- and must the exordium to a sermon, be a smutty tale?"⁷ we may indeed open the first volume of sermons and, gazing at Reynolds' portrait of Sterne's "own comic figure at the head of them" imagine it responding: "not necessarily, but . . ."⁸

In late 1759 Sterne mounted a broad fictional pulpit with cap and bells, in a harlequin's coat, but perhaps most odd is that after that ascension --upon closing Volume ii of *Tristram*-- what we see and read from his clerical post is actually black and white, no jangling bells, no flashing jerkin. Persevering to read the sermons, one may well agree with Thomas Gray that they "are in the style I think most proper for the Pulpit, & shew a very strong imagination & a sensible heart," though disagree with his prepossessed vision: "but you see him often tottering on the verge of laughter, & ready to throw his perriwig in the face of his audience."⁹ The sermons are vigorous and engaging, but as we have seen, their rare frolics have both point and precedent, so it is strange that this impression of Shandaic sermons has been so persistent. Sterne was keenly aware of the folly of an "insatiate lust of being witty" (*S* 107.5): "this all-sacred system, which

holds the world in harmony and peace, is too often the first object, that the giddy and inconsiderate make choice of to try the temper of their wits upon" (*S* 184.23). Margaret Shaw is precise in writing "there is nothing [in the sermons] that can rightly be described as an unseemly use of humor."¹⁰ Considering the extent of Sterne's wit it is surprising how *reserved* he is in the pulpit.

Marjorie David offers this inaccurate reckoning: "Sterne probably meant his preaching to be, like 'true Shandyism,' against nothing except 'spleen.' If he did not throw his perriwig into his congregants' laps, he did make them laugh."¹¹ That Sterne's sermons would be misread in the twentieth century, when most readers are unfamiliar with the manner and tempers of eighteenth century Anglican homilies is understandable. But that some in Sterne's generation, while praising the addresses, still read them as part of a jest is testament to extreme prepossession:

but will you allow his sermons no merit? I allow some of them the merit of the pathetic; but the laborious attempts to be witty and humorous have spoiled the greater part of them. The appearance of sincerity is one of the best beauties of a sermon. But Sterne seems as if he were laughing at his audience, as if he had ascended the pulpit in a frolic, and preached in mockery.¹²

Tristram's asterisks, blanks, and whimsies encourage readings of *things* that are not. Readers are thereby offered glimpses of themselves clutching the handle which best "suits their passions, their ignorance or sensibility"¹³—grand challenge from "a moral work, more read than understood" (*S* 255.5). But to say *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick* ["where no jest was meant" (*S* 1.10)] are 'shandaic' is either to grasp a handle that is not there, or considerably to expand the adjective. Sterne's lament that "the world has imagined, because I wrote *Tristram Shandy*, that I

was myself more Shandean than I really ever was,”¹⁴ suggests it is fitting to probe possible meanings, even perhaps an agenda, beneath his seeming folly.

Of course his sermons are not void of cheerfulness. It seems typical of Sterne that some of the most pathetic scenes imaginable would be enveloped in hearty optimism. This balancing of intent and medium was widely acknowledged to be the cornerstone of good sermons. One preface after another echoes this hope; thus John Norris:

upon these Considerations I am encouraged to send these Discourses abroad . . . they consist of very weighty and serious matter, and are indifferently Correct as to their Composition; that they speak both to the Reason and to the *Affection* of the Reader, and are in good measure fitted both to Convince and to Perswade; In short that they may be read with a great deal of *Profit*, and not without some *Entertainment*.¹⁵

Though they would have disagreed on other matters, and allowing for a measure of difference in the type of discourse, I believe Sterne would have shared Shaftesbury's view that

provided we treat Religion with good Manners, we can never use too much *good Humour*, or examine it with too much Freedom and *Familiarity*. For if it be genuine and sincere, it will not only stand the Proof, but thrive and gain Advantage from hence: if it be spurious, or mix'd with any Imposture, it will be detected and expos'd.¹⁶

As Bishop John Sharp generously wrote, “the truth of it is, so long as we consist of *Bodies* and *Souls*, we cannot always be thinking of *serious Things*.”¹⁷ Isaac Barrow, no mean preacher, sums up the godly use of wit:

when plain declarations will not enlighten people, to discern the truth and weight of things, and blunt arguments will not penetrate, to convince or persuade them to their duty; then doth Reason freely resign its place to Wit, allowing it to undertake its work of instruction and reproof.¹⁸

Frequently we hear bantering jibes as otherwise staid preachers take relish in outwitting sinful devices. New notes this with regard to Joseph Hall,¹⁹ and samples from virtually every sermon-writer of any denomination could be found. Usually these are brief and carefully chosen; Jeremiah Seed, for example, comments on the immoral rich by saying simply “they are in the *right* to value themselves upon, what is the *only* valuable Thing they have, Their great Wealth.” And elsewhere, as if addressing Walter Shandy: “it seems to be something providential, that those who trusted too much to the Strength of their Reason, should always be the Proofs of the Weakness of it.”²⁰ In fact, Sterne’s title page motto for *A Political Romance*, taken from Horace’s *Satires*, unequivocally orients the morality of his wit: “for ridicule often decides matters of importance more effectually and forcefully than gravity.”²¹

Taking up the belief that Christianity is primarily a religion of joy, Shaftesbury refers to David’s triumphal dance (II Sam. vi.14) saying that Jesus’ manner was likewise “mild,” “*sharp, humorous, and witty*,” “his Miracles themselves (especially the first he ever wrought) carry with them a certain Festivity, Alacrity, and Good Humour so remarkable, that I shou’d look upon it as impossible not to be mov’d in a pleasant manner at their Recital.”²² In Sterne as in Shaftesbury “*melancholy and Gloominess*” are relegated to the wilds of enthusiasm with its concentrations on judgment, self-incapacity, God as tyrant, and a world void of intrinsic beauty: “in the main,” Shaftesbury comments, Christianity is “a *witty* and good-humoured RELIGION.”²³ Sterne’s published sermons give no evidence that he overstepped the bounds of propriety. The examples we have attest to his use of wit not to get a laugh or to lessen the sacred nature of his office, but

to envelop his congregation in an experience that will ultimately be rewarding (S 169.9-15, 210.13-14, 257.4-7).

A few scholars recently have complained that by reiterating that Sterne's sermons are conventional, and by passing over Sterne's alterations of his borrowed passages, New's *Notes* to the *Sermons* conceal a "Shandean" bent in the homilies. The question of why some contemporaries found the sermons over-laden with wit is well elaborated upon by Paul Goring using the critique of Thomas Weales' *The Christian Orator Delineated*. However, that Weales, in 1778, praises Tillotson's simplicity and unity of design while blasting Sterne for impressionistic renderings should best be understood as testament to the range of opinion and taste in the midst of shifting styles.

[Sterne] hath adulterated the word of God with a vicious mixture of foreign or unnatural ornaments. Loose sparkes of wit, luxuriant descriptions, smart antitheses, pointed sentiments, epigrammatical turns or expressions, are frequently to be met with. The great truths of the Gospel are enervated by the supernumerary decorations of stile and eloquence. In fine, his oratory is decked in all the glowing colours of poetry, as it first appeared in *Greece*.²⁴

Weales of course is welcome to his opinion, but his critical assessment is heavy-handed, if not entirely unfair. Much to which he objects was, devotionally, what was desired and praised by others. As noted above [pp.214-15], in the same decade in which Weales was writing, *The English Preacher* (nine volumes, usually with 15 sermons in each) was issued and included two of Sterne's homilies. The compiler, noting the huge output of sermons in the past hundred years, explains the purpose of such a collection in his preface:

. . . it is then extremely desirable, that those pieces which are most excellent in each kind should be selected from the rest, and brought into one view. . . .

A Collection of such discourses as shall fall in with the taste for practical preaching, which seems at present to be happily gaining ground, and which should by all means be encouraged, is therefore to be wished for. . . .

Moreover, the method formerly used in the division of sermons, according to which all the thoughts in a discourse, both leading and subordinate, were parcelled out in regular divisions and subdivisions, numerically distinguished, is so different from the present, that the best discourse in which this peculiarity is retained, appears formal and antiquated. And lastly, such is the variable nature of language, that many words and phrases which would not formerly have been noticed, now appear low and inelegant.

That a Collection of Sermons may be generally acceptable, it seems therefore proper, that the Compiler, while he faithfully retains the sentiments and diction of each author, should venture to omit those parts of a discourse which may be spared; to take off, in some degree, the air of formality from the ancient manner of dividing sermons; and occasionally to change a word or phrase which time has rendered obsolete or offensive. . . .

The Editor flatters himself that this publication may possibly be of use to PRIVATE FAMILIES, by furnishing them with a large collection of discourses on the most important topics of morality and religion; and to YOUNG PREACHERS, by exhibiting before them at one view, a great variety of the best MODELS for their imitation; and will, he hopes, contribute somewhat towards the support of the interests of religion and virtue in the world.²⁵

Sterne's able companions in Volume 8 are: John Tillotson, Francis Atterbury, Thomas Walker, James Foster, Edward Owen, John Balguy, Jeremiah Seed, John Holland, William Wishart, and Benjamin Hoadly. The editor, we should note, did not find the spirited opening to 'Vindication of Human Nature' offensive. The text is Romans xiv.7, *For none of us liveth to him^eslf*. Sterne begins:

THERE is not a sentence in scripture, which strikes a narrow soul with greater astonishment—and one might as easily engage to clear up the darkest problem in geometry to an ignorant mind, as make a sordid one comprehend the truth and reasonableness of this plain proposition.—No man liveth to himself! Why—Does any man live to any thing else?—In the whole compass of human life can a prudent man steer to a safer point?—Not live to himself!—To whom then? (S 65)

One easily imagines Weales' response to such poetic vigor. This editor, however, contents himself by removing Sterne's dashes, replacing the first with a semicolon and the third with an exclamation mark (!). Weales' bias for reading *Shandean* antics aside, Sterne's sermons exhibit the virtue of devotional flexibility paralleled by the Yorick of *Tristram Shandy* who, though despising postured gravity, when appropriate could be most grave (*TS* 28.9-16).

—What a vein of indolence and indevotion sometimes seems to run throughout whole congregations!—what ill-timed pains do some take in putting on an air of gayety and indifference in the most interesting parts of this duty [prayer],—even when they are making confession of their sins, as if they were ashamed to be thought serious with their God? (*S* 406.15)

MOITIÉ MORAL & MOITIÉ BUFFON

Throughout Sterne's works we are given clues to an earnest, joyful perspective on the value of searching well into human nature. Professions most concerned to explicate our condition are naturally especially scrutinized. Throughout Sterne's canon we have a running invective against the vice of inappropriate criticism and the all-too-inhuman tendency to separate wit and judgment. Instead of criticism, Sterne offers authentic ways of interacting with sources of happiness and discomfort, "trusting to the passions excited in an air sung, or a story painted to the heart,—instead of measuring them by a quadrant" (*TS* 233.16). In so doing, he exchanges pharisaical modes of judgment that offer secure prepossessions, for a magnanimous fragility at the beck and call of fortune's whims. Frequently in Sterne, as in life, we encounter perspectives broad enough to reconcile seemingly opposite extremes.

The structure and means of Sterne's fiction is Gothic: tipling and sober, and then probably tipling again. He represents our condition in media capable of bearing the extremes of that condition. His 'beds of justice' appropriately involve appetite—full and fasting—, as the measure of heaven, he elsewhere explains [TS 593.26, and concluding 'Abuses'], for better or worse is the measure of that faculty. By approaching us with wit and judgment both, fool's cap and mirror, his works lack neither vigor nor discretion;

betwixt both, I write a careless kind of a civil, non-sensical, good humoured
Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good—
 —And all your heads too, —provided you understand it. (TS 525.20)

He is, we are reminded in his letters, writing a world of nonsense, as a man of sense. Wisdom is approached by ways that, though complementary, would initially seem to be irreconcilable. Elizabeth Kraft concludes her chapter on Sterne in *Character & Consciousness* with a paragraph that calls for attention.

The three lives of his sermon on the abuses of conscience witness his commitment to the truth it contained, his belief in the ability of that truth to transcend and even profit by the various contexts, and his desire to bring to the attention of his readers and followers the disjunction between himself, his various roles in life, and the truth he voiced by divine authority. He reveled in his celebrity, but in its comedy, its fundamental instability, not in anything it suggested about his importance or his ultimate identity. His adoption of both Yorick and Tristram as pseudonyms speak to the temporality of fame and the public mask, as does his lack of concern about the consistency of the personae. He donned each, however, to point us toward what he saw as the fundamental truth of human existence—mortality—and the fundamental truth of spiritual existence—immortality. In spite of the implications of narrative and of Lockean psychology, Sterne maintains that identity is finally a matter, not of proof, but of faith.²⁶

As Sterne indicates in the motto to the second instalment of *Tristram Shandy*, which followed upon the first set of sermons, his purpose is 'to pass from the gay to the serious and

from the serious again to the gay' (*TS* 183). That he expands his quotation to be cyclical is as appropriate as his borrowing it from a preface to Rabelais.²⁷ His mottoes throughout the run of *TS* follow this theme, so prevalent in Rabelais, of provoking readers to give him credit for being a jester in earnest. With the mottoes to v and vi, chiding tartuffes who are to be damned for knowing laughter-inciting words, he prays to be excused by those who think him excessively jocular. In the motto to the following instalment we have more than an excuse for the meanderings of Volume vii. By this time the attentive reader understands that for Sterne digressions really are the heart and soul of writing, that in like manner what is read first as comic whim is in fact of central importance to his communication. As he later informs us, there is a "just balance betwixt wisdom and folly, without which a book would not hold together a single year . . . if it is to be a digression, it must be a good frisky one, and upon a frisky subject too, where neither the horse or his rider are to be caught, but by rebound." (*TS* 761.5)

Volume ix attests to Sterne's fatigue at writing for misunderstanding heads. It contains none of the creative plagiarisms that formerly challenged the author and his readers. Its motto, a sort of swan song, reiterates his understanding that a more polite amusement was desired, but that nevertheless his friskiness was not meant "badly," it was meant to ease, not burden the reader's heart. Indeed Sterne seems happy enough to hint that as the entertainment-value of a novel is shared by author and reader, so too is the shock- or vice-value. "If [*ASJ*] is not thought a chaste book, mercy on them that read it, for they must have warm imaginations indeed!"²⁸ The line following Tristram's farewell to Maria, to which many have objected: "——What an excellent inn at Moulins!" (*TS* 784.18), is at once testimony to the often absurd juxtaposition of

travel-writers' thoughts and mandates, and a very real admission of how quickly *our* sentimental and physical attachments vanish. This too is a human condition, and one can only suppose that those who fault the author for evoking it, would hesitate to recognize themselves in a mirror. Here Sterne has Tristram reflect in writing how people act but wish not to feel, a lesson rehearsed in the sermons,²⁹ where, for example, we are reminded "that we bear the misfortunes of others with excellent tranquility" (*S* 148.10). Again, in 'The History of Jacob considered':

every looker-on has an interest in the tragedy;—but then we are apt to interest ourselves no otherwise, than merely as the incidents themselves strike our passions, without carrying the lesson further:—in a word—we realize nothing:—we sigh—we wipe away the tear,—and there ends the story of misery, and the moral with it. (*S* 207.1)

Sterne's entertainment follows through. Recalling the bawdy undertones of the fiction for which he has been scolded, we do well to leave ourselves open to moral entertainment.

After creatively bewailing "imitators" via passages borrowed from Burton (*TS* 407-409), Sterne shows us his difference. He is not "sneaking on at this pitiful—pimping—pettifogging rate" (*TS* 408.17) by which, as Burton had said, a "new invention" is "but some bauble or toy which idle fellows write, for as idle fellows to read, and who so cannot invent?"³⁰ Instead we are offered an example of shared-writing, "the affair of *Whiskers*." Sterne's novelty, in applying a horsical disease to humans continues the juxtaposition between the "mettlesome tits" and "eight heavy beasts" of page 407. The "chain of ideas" (*TS* 408.25) which leads us from "farcy" to "whiskers" (and for that matter back to poor Tom and into the lap of the abbess of Andouillets) is left "as a legacy in *mort main* to Prudes and Tartufs to enjoy and make the most of" (*TS* 409.1). Like *La Fosseuse*, Sterne pronounces the *word* with an accent that "implies something of a

mystery” (TS 410.18). But it is our fault for being so curious. As with “nose,” the accent is not sensuality, but the effect of a new creation in the reader’s imagination: “the Queen went directly to her oratory, musing all the way, as she walked through the gallery, upon the subject; turning it this way and that in her fancy—*Ave Maria* †—what can *La Fosseuse* mean?” (TS 411.19). The queen is ourselves, led to question the full extent of all possible meanings and effects *we* can discover. The author is not telling us who *he* or one of his characters is, our translations are a reflection of the “accessory ideas” in our own minds (TS 414.15).

Just as Locke’s *Essay* is presented by Tristram early in his memoirs as a history “of what passes in a man’s own mind” (TS 98.22), so the “cause of obscurity and confusion, in the mind of man” (TS 99.2) is best related by easy similes—in this instance Dolly. Locke’s use of the properties of wax to describe the cognitive faculties of perception and retention is used bawdily by Sterne not primarily to establish the philosopher’s point or to titillate, but to give us a simple, undeniable example of the pervasive quality of the association of ideas. *We* jump from Locke to sex. The thing itself is inert, our reception of words used to describe it, and the opinions formed upon that foundation, will determine our interaction with it. Thus Tristram is able to say that Locke’s reasoning was not, in this case, the cause of Toby’s confusion. Instead it was “the unsteady uses of words”—“and a fertile source of obscurity it is” (TS 100.6). This is fit fodder for the upcoming sermon, preparing us to appreciate self-impressions as untrustworthy.

Connection between aesthetic principles, language and sex are especially present in *TS*. A few post *whiskers* pages, we are again reminded of the fragile nature of oratorical communication. The snapping of Walter’s pipe is given as “one of the neatest examples of that

ornamental figure in oratory, which Rhetoricians stile the *Aposiopesis*" (TS 115.22). We are told eloquence and fame depend upon "slight touches" and "the insensible MORE or LESS". Catching Tristram's nuances, and simultaneously noticing ourselves catching them, the "true swell which gives the true pleasure" of the book is revealed. (TS 115.25-116.2)

Sterne often referred to his writing in procreative terms. Yorick and Tristram also see their books as "children," their work as creative reproduction. Walter, we cannot fail to have forgotten, is unamoured with the natural vent of childbirth; and finally our suspicions that he is equally sceptical of the manner of conception are fully endorsed. That "the race of so great, so exalted and godlike a Being as man" is continued "by means of a passion which bends down the faculties, and turns all the wisdom, contemplations, and operations of the soul backwards—a passion . . . which couples and equals wise men with fools" is what we have been hearing throughout *Tristram Shandy* (TS 806.1).

He's in good company of course, and Sterne's alleged misogyny in this regard [as with "mother's milk," above pp.140, 148] is best clarified by recognizing his interest in representing the effects of passion on reason. As Swift, in "Thoughts on Religion", explains:

although reason were intended by providence to govern our passions, yet it seems that, in two points of the greatest moment to the being and continuance of the world, God hath intended our passions to prevail over reason. The first is, the propagation of our species, since no wise man ever married from the dictates of reason.³¹

That folly and wisdom are mixed or coupled by fortune, chance, or grace in all worldly endeavours is a fact Walter is loath to face. Passion and reason are a necessary and dangerous couple engendering fruitful commerce from one generation to another. This is no less a

redemption of passion than it is of reason; either wielded exclusively issues in dissatisfaction or despair. Sterne's writing is an attempt to repair the natural bridge between these elements. Like Rabelais', his bawdy neither excites desire nor suggests a philosophy of sexuality, it embarrasses us into laughter and roundly reminds us of our humble beginning and susceptibility to folly. Drunkenness, ignorance, and bawdy are classic rungs on the ladder of wisdom. For aspiring souls they encourage a receptivity more appropriate than premature, calculated judgment. It is unfortunate that Erasmus has been largely absent from discussions on Sterne. In explaining the ribald nature and profitableness of his *Colloquies*, Erasmus wrote:

I judge it to be much better to instruct those out of this little Book, than by Experience, the Mistress of Fools. . . . I cannot tell that any Thing is learn'd with better Success than what is learn'd by playing: And this is in Truth a very harmless Sort of Fraud, to trick a Person into his own Profit. . . .

What can you do with those of a sour Disposition, and averse to all pleasant Discourse, who think all that is friendly and merry, is unchaste. . . .

I have taken upon me to sustain the Person of a Fool, in blazoning my own Merit; but I have been induc'd to it, partly by the malice of some who reproach every Thing, and partly for the Advantage of Christian Youth, the benefit of whom all ought with their utmost Endeavour to further. . . .

But, say they, it does not become a Divine to jest; but let them grant me to do this, at least among Boys, which they themselves take the liberty to do among Men, in their Vesperiae, as they call them, a foolish Thing by a foolish Name.³²

An exceptional gloss on Sterne's canon is Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, hinted at in the motto to Volumes v and vi of *TS* and in Sterne's early apologetical letter. The preface, to Thomas More, makes clear this connection.

There may well be plenty of critical folk rushing in to slander it, some saying that my bit of nonsense is too frivolous for a theologian and others that it has a sarcastic bite which ill becomes Christian decorum. . . .

If they want they can imagine I've been amusing myself all this time with a game of draughts, or riding my stick if they like that better. How unjust it is to allow every other walk of life its relaxations but none at all to learning, especially when trifling may lead to something more serious! . . . Nothing is so trivial as treating serious subjects in a trivial manner; and similarly, nothing is more entertaining than treating trivialities in such a way as to make it clear you are doing anything but trifle with them.³³

In the amusement that follows, the magnanimous theologian parades the extent of human foolishness and the value of folly to initiate accurate perspectives. To recall a few of these perceptive capers sheds light on the tradition from which Sterne drew strength. "The life of man," he writes, as if gazing at baby Tristram, "is nothing but the sport of folly."³⁴ And, anticipating Walter, it is immediately established that the "halter of matrimony" demands foolishness of even the bearded stoic. Folly says what "my father" (*TS* 807) was never able to articulate: "the propagator of the human race is that part which is so foolish and absurd that it can't be named without raising a laugh. There is the true sacred fount from which everything draws its being, not the quarternion of Pythagoras."³⁵ Recalling Lucian's *The Cock*, a further incarnation of Pythagoras expresses the most obvious human folly that Yorick experiences on his journey:

far more to be desired is the life of flies and little birds who live for the moment solely by natural instinct. . . . Once they are shut in cages and taught to imitate the human voice all their natural brightness is dulled, for in every way nature's creations are more cheerful than the falsifications of art. And so I could never have enough praise for the famous cock who was Pythagoras. When he had been everything in turn, philosopher, man, woman, king, commoner, fish, horse, frog, even a sponge, I believe; he decided that man was the most unfortunate of animals, simply because all the others were content with their natural limitations while man alone tries to step outside those allotted to him.³⁶

Beneath this bold view of our "farce"³⁷ is great optimism, rooted in reality: "nature hates any counterfeit, and everything turns out much more happily when it's unspoilt by artifice."³⁸

The ultimate folly for all within this high tradition is love, “for anyone who loves intensely lives not in himself but in the object of his love. . . . the more perfect the love, the greater the madness—and the happier.”³⁹ As folly continues we come to realize it is Christ, the king of folly, who is being praised: “because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” (I Cor. i.25)

Christ too, though he is the wisdom of the Father, was made something of a fool himself in order to help the folly of mankind. . . . Nor did he wish them to be redeemed in any other way save by the folly of the cross and through his simple, ignorant apostles, to whom he unfailingly preached folly. He taught them to shun wisdom, and made his appeal through the example of children, lilies, mustard-seed and humble sparrows, all foolish, senseless things, which live their lives by natural instinct alone, free from care and purpose.⁴⁰

For this reason Tristram devotes a chapter to praising the communicative provocations of an ass (*TS* 629-632). No other animal is appropriate, not because of some bawdy connection or sentimental attachment, but because the donkey is, historically, the comic beast of humility. Thus Erasmus: “Christ seems to have taken special delight in little children, women and fishermen, while the dumb animals who gave him the greatest pleasure were those furthest removed from cleverness and cunning. So he preferred to ride a donkey.”⁴¹ Tristram’s and Yorick’s presentations of sentiment and conversation with this beast of burden continue to be grossly misinterpreted, so it is useful to lift a page from Walter Kaiser’s fine study of folly in Erasmus, Rabelais, and Shakespeare. We pick up near the end of his chapter on Panurge, and the significance of Her Trippa. References are to Agrippa’s *De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum et Artium* [1529], the first and third paragraphs being paraphrased translations.⁴²

It is because learning frustrates our approach to this truth that Christ was rejected by the learned scribes and pharisees and received by fools, idiots, and children.

And it is because of their ability to approach the Word directly that Christ chose as his disciples ignorant common people, the unread, the unlearned, and the asses (*è rudi vulgo idiotas, omnis literaturae expertes, inscios et asinos* [II.241]).

The last word here provides Agrippa with the subject of his penultimate chapter, 'Ad Encomium asini Digressio' (CII), which was probably suggested by Stultitia's concluding encomium of the Fool in Christ and which in turn may have suggested Giordano Bruno's encomium of the Asino Cillenico at the end of his *Spaccio della bestia trionfante*. The ass, of course, is nothing less than the fool in Christ, with no pretense to learning but with a simplicity of heart, lack of pride, patience, and an endurance of persecution that make him, as Agrippa says, more than any other animal capable of divinity. It is upon this symbol of the fool, the ass, the pure in spirit, that Agrippa brings his long treatise to a close, extolling not the learned, but the 'gens de bien' who are able to approach God. Just as Stultitia's message was summed up in her portrait of the Fool in Christ, so Agrippa's is finally contained in his evocation of that foolish creature who has challenged the imagination from Philo to Tolstoy, the ass of Balaam, symbol of the wisdom of ignorance:

For when that prophet and learned man Balaam went forth to curse the people of Israel, he did not see the angel of the Lord, but his ass did and spoke to Balaam his rider with a human voice. Thus often a rude and simple idiot sees what the scholastic doctor, corrupted with human learning, is unable to see.

It is the scholastic doctor who is the simple idiot; it is Balaam, as Ronald Knox was fond of observing, who was the ass.⁴³

Lacking appreciation for the historical and scriptural context, pointing to Sterne's use of the term ASS and to his use of names such as Jenny and Toby to suggest it, scholars have naturally turned to their buttocks for clarification. Juliet McMaster, for instance, calls attention to Sterne's use of St. Hilarion's appellation of his body as an ass (*TS* 715.14-21), suggesting:

this explanation of the ass as the body (particularly the lowest end of it) comes late in the novel; but it accounts for the prominence of all those horses, hobby-horses, asses, mules, donkeys, jackasses, and jennys that cavort their quadruped way through *Tristram Shandy*: Yorick's Rosinante, Tristram's mule that he rides through France when he is in flight from death, and Don Diego's mule, which he addresses alternately with his beloved Julia, in Slawkenbergius's Tale. The Abbess of Andoüillet neatly reverses the story of St Hilarion by exhorting her

mules to “*bou-ger*” and “*fou-ter*,” words which she has heard “will force any horse, or ass, or mule, to go up a hill.” Tristram holds a conversation with an ass in an entrance-way in Lyons: “with an ass,” he claims, “I can commune forever.” Sterne’s characters, that is to say, are in constant communion with the flesh. Tristram implores his reader not to confuse *his* hobby-horse with Walter’s ass, but the request is about as disingenuous as the claim that a nose means a nose and nothing else. The relation of the rider to his hobby-horse, carefully explained, is yet another metaphor for the mind’s relation to the body; and both sink inevitably towards the unmentionable.⁴⁴

Elizabeth Kraft recalls Tristram’s conversation with the ass in Lyons concluding that the sympathy therein is “self-flattery, for Tristram reads into the ass’s face the conversation he wishes to hold. . . . To his credit, Sterne finds such a relationship ludicrous.”⁴⁵ Twenty pages later, addressing the dead ass that diverts Yorick and La Fleur in *ASJ*, Kraft writes:

the mourner’s lament prompts Yorick to say to himself, “Did we love each other, as this poor soul but loved his ass—’twould be something.” Yorick’s insight is as old as the gospels; it is, in fact, a comic restatement of the second “great commandment” (Matthew 22:36-39): Each of us should love the world as he loves his own ass. More decorously put, in the words of Christ, we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves. This sentiment is not a cold moral principle but one that is underwritten by the emotions. And it is best understood in spontaneous bursts of feeling for another, as Yorick’s later adventures demonstrate.⁴⁶

A fitting moral for Sterne, but there is more to it, and Kraft herself almost hits it between those two passages when she refers to Tristram’s query of Maria, whether she finds any resemblance between himself and her goat. Checking his wit in the presence of sorrow, Tristram gives us the nod to look a little higher than we may be inclined for the significance of such allusions:

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— (*TS* 784.1)

To those familiar with the tradition informing Sterne's presentations, the statement "what a *Beast* man is" is significant. We are returned, here at the close of *Tristram Shandy*, to the basic principles of a humble, compassionate perspective. The scriptural precedent, popular with Sterne's contemporaries, is, as might be expected, in the book of Job.

Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is as high as heaven; what canst thou do? Deeper than hell; what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. If he cut off, and shut up, or gather together, then who can hinder him? For he knoweth vain men: he seeth wickedness also; will he not then consider it? For vain man would be wise, though man be born like a wild ass's colt.
(Job xi.7-12)

Alongside the importance of Agrippa's testimony to the sanctified ass, we should be made aware of the familiarity Sterne's contemporaries had with the image of man as a wild ass, and of its root in the inscrutable nature of divinity for mortals. Such understanding reinforces Sterne's place in the tradition of humble access or "fideistic scepticism." Alexander Pope glosses line 16 of his *Essay*, "But vindicate the ways of God to man," writing "main Drift of ye Whole, Justification of ye Ways of Provi," and "16. Verse, To ye Subject wch runs thro ye Whole Design, Justification of ye Methods of Providence." Noting this, Harry Solomon suggests "a primary connective in Pope's mind is Bishop William Sherlock's enormously popular *Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence* (1694)." Solomon continues:

Sherlock rails against philosophers who "are impatient to think, that God should do any thing which they cannot understand," citing the verse from Job that "Vain man would be wise, tho man be born like a wild asses colt." He argues that "this is a matter of such vast consequence, to silence the Sceptical Humour of the Age, and to shame those trifling and ridiculous Pretenses to Wit and Philosophy, in Censuring the Wisdom and Justice of Providence, that it deserves a more particular Discourse." Pope's manuscript notes to line sixteen make it clear that he characterized the initial epistle as just such a discourse. Sherlock especially

recommends stressing the limits of human reason: “There is not one thing in Nature, which they do understand: And if we cannot understand the Mysteries of Nature, why should we expect to understand all the unsearchable Depths and Mysteries of providence?” This tradition of apologetics inherited from the Hebrew scriptures and recently reinscribed in Matthew Prior’s *Solomon* reaches its eighteenth-century acme shortly after publication of Pope’s *Essay* in Joseph Butler’s *Analogy of Nature* [i.e. *Religion*] (1736). Immediately above his gloss to line sixteen on the Houghton manuscript, Pope notes the “Limits of Reason” as one theme of the “second book”; and near the beginning of Epistle II, Pope uses Isaac Newton as an example of the metaphysical blindness of even those who have seen most deeply into the mysteries of nature:

Superior Beings, when of late they saw
A mortal man unfold all Nature’s law,
Admir’d such wisdom in an earthly shape,
And shew’d a NEWTON as we shew an Ape.
Could he, whose rules the rapid Comet bind,
Describe or fix one movement of his Mind?

Revelatory of his debt, on the manuscript of Epistle II immediately beneath these lines on Newton, Pope has interlineated the identical verse cited by Sherlock: “Job. Man is as a wild ass.”⁴⁷

Indeed the Son of Man is recorded as having entered Jerusalem “meek,^{and} sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (Matt.xxi.5). Jesus, we recall, without education, as a child and as a man confronted the established opinions, the mother’s milk of his environment, and the irony was not lost on his apostles.

Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. . . .
But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. (I Cor. i. 20, 27)

This tradition of God thwarting human systems of strength is as old as the expulsion from Eden and the destruction of Babel. Each of the prominent players in scripture’s vast theatre is an

unlikely hero by ordinary criteria and this is explicitly reiterated to signify the grace of God overarchingly active in human frailty. This is why Leigh Hunt is correct to call Uncle Toby the “high and only final Christian gentleman.”⁴⁸ For Toby is presented as a fool in Christ.

As we saw in his use of ‘sources’ for his sermons, so in his fiction Sterne is not shy of undercutting the *wisdom of this world* by referring to popular theories and the great names behind them with a measure of censure. Locke was bubbled regarding wit and judgment. Burton’s castigation of war is tempered in Toby’s oration, and Burton’s enquiry into the ins and outs of “what love is” is exposed as comically insufficient (*TS* 557; 563). Plato is blasted for allowing himself a “monstrous liberty in arguing,” his opinion that love is below a man is pronounced “damnable and heretical” (*TS* 563.14; 565.14). These lead us to the blank page, upon which we are encouraged to paint an object of love, and to the following pages of squiggly lines, by which we are to appreciate Tristram’s digressive progress. We have been led from the black page of death, through the motley chaos of our interpretations to the white sheet with which to please our fancy (*TS* 566). Intellectual cabbage-planters will scarce be able to participate in the adventure. Prudes and Tartuffes, wormed out of the woodwork in criticizing Sterne’s diversions, proclaim themselves incapable of life’s variety. Of course one of the beauties of human nature is that few self-styled anythings are adamantly so. Sterne appreciates Plato, Burton and Locke, builds with their folly and their wisdom. Though Walter is the epitome of the incapable knower, he is inspired to claim “every thing in this world . . . is big with jest,—and has wit in it, and instruction too,—if we can but find it out” (*TS* 470.1). But because his manner of ‘finding’ is unmatched to

his quarry, he is incredulous with Trim's naive but practical commentary on the fifth commandment.

SYMPATHY AND GRACE

Christian faith is not knowledge *per se*. One is provoked to worship an invisible Person and engage in self-sacrifice without assurance of tangible recompense. While steering clear of abuses, fit worship retains "external parts" (*S* 63.29) that "tend to excite and assist it" (*S* 63.32). Thus an experience may develop from rhetoric. Sterne pivots his communication on this need to transcend Smelfungus' incapacity to relish pleasure. As noted above, the proposition that one's faculties need appropriately to be tuned to the object to be enjoyed was reiterated by divines, most of whom use it along the lines of Yorick in *ASJ*, that the enjoyment of heaven is impossible to one who is not aligned with its principles here below.

We may appreciate how this is appropriate to Sterne's artful manner of presenting a realistic view of our condition when we notice its frequency in contemporary homilies. George Fothergill, in his sermon 'The Pleasantness of a good life', for example, writes, "gratification is a relative thing, depending not absolutely on the outward objects themselves, but on their suitableness to the faculties employed about them."⁴⁹ Clearly the sentiment is not merely a neoplatonic hangover, or quaint conceit of poetic divines. Phillip Doddridge picks up the phrase in *his Practical Discourses on Regeneration*:

I know, sinners, it will be one of the most difficult things in the world, to bring you to a serious persuasion of this truth. You think heaven is so lovely, and so glorious a place, that if you could possibly get an admittance thither, you should certainly be happy. But I would now set myself, if possible, to convince you that . . . that

unrenewed nature and unsanctified heart of yours, would give you a disrelish for all the sublimest entertainments of that blisful place, and turn heaven into a kind of hell to you.⁵⁰

Sterne's interest in this concept of sympathy is not limited to our relatively passive reception and extension of phenomena. If one is to live with integrity, released from the hypocrisy inevitable to the inconsiderately inclined, one must especially endeavour to make one's inner and outer 'person' coincide with a pattern of heavenly virtue. "In vain shall we celebrate the day with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets,—if we do not do it likewise with the internal and more certain marks of sincerity,—a reformation and purity in our manners" (*S* 382.25). The development of sincerity and clarity of the inner man is important, but it is vain to think one's responsibility is exempt from manifestations. "External behaviour is the result of inward reverence, and is therefore part of our duty to God, whom we are to worship in body as well as spirit" (*S* 406.6). In short,

we find such a strong sympathy and union between our souls and bodies. . . . to argue against this strict correspondence . . . is disputing against the frame and mechanism of human nature.—We are not angels, but men cloathed with bodies, and, in some measure, governed by our imaginations, that we have need of all these external helps which nature has made the interpreters of our thoughts. (*S* 402.14-24)

It is clear that for Sterne visible elements can raise us to appreciate their suggested invisible counterparts, and that our interactions with each other and God must take into account this sympathy. Thus Henry More:

HENCE it appears, that all the animal Instincts and Impulses do belong to the Region of Nature, and are but imperfect Shadows and Footsteps of the Divine Wisdom and Goodness, which vouchsafes as in this manner to glimmer in the dark. . . .

Wherefore if we can but skill our Passions aright, They are as lamps or Beacons, to conduct and excite us to our Journey's end.⁵¹

Sterne builds on these notions of sympathy to turn the pessimism inherent in accounts such as Doddridge's to more hopeful horizons. With appropriate catalysts a person may be brought to develop a disposition that will appreciate the virtues of heaven. In his sermon 'The excellency of Charity above Faith and Hope' John Conybeare writes:

our nature itself must be reformed before we are capable of those pleasures, which are suited only to an innocent, or to a reformed, nature. Now this is done by the introduction of Charity; by implanting and cultivating in us an ardent desire of the good of others; --- that principle which renders us most like God himself, ---- and teaches us to practise every virtue whereby we may serve ourselves or others.⁵²

Christianity "in its doctrine, its precepts, and its examples, has a proper tendency to make us a virtuous and a happy people;—every page is an address to our hearts to win them to these purposes" (*S* 253.26). "Religion ever implies a freedom of choice" (*S* 254.2), and this freedom, Sterne shows us throughout the sermons, is comprehensive. In 'Asa' Sterne reiterates what he consistently implies: "men are apt to be struck with likenesses in so different a manner, from the different points of view in which they stand, as well as their diversity of judgments, that it is generally a very unacceptable piece of officiousness to fix any certain degrees of approach" (*S* 381.31). Montaigne, in his exquisite apology for scepticism makes clear the difficulty of true faith:

'tis *Faith* alone, that lively and certainly comprehends the deep Mysteries of our Religion. . . .

We must here do the same, and accompany our Faith with all the Reason we have, but always with this Reservation, not to fancy that it is upon us that it depends, nor that our Arguments and Endeavours can arrive at so supernatural and Divine a Knowledge. If it enters not into us by an extraordinary Infusion; if it only enters, not only by Arguments of Reason, but moreover, by human Ways, it is not in us, in its true Dignity and Splendour; and yet, I am afraid we only have it by this way. If we laid hold upon God by the Meditation of a lively *Faith*: if we laid hold of God by him, and not by us: If we had a Divine Basis and Foundation, human Accidents

would not have the power to shake us as they do; our *Fortress* [*pace* Toby] would not surrender to so weak a battery.⁵³

Thus St. Paul, after establishing the redeeming quality of folly, clarifies the value of this necessary *extraordinary infusion*:

and my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. (I Cor.ii.4-5)

Christianity properly presented is therefore not a catalogue of inflexible regulations and dogma, but fundamentally a development of "a true sense of our dependence, and of the mercies by which we are upheld" (S 400.26). Because the religion is founded on individuals encountering historical fact established within them, the essence of it transcends the mere moralizing of philosophers and the regulations of judges. Sterne would remind us that righteous development is enabled by grace:

that the necessities of society, and the impossibilities of its subsisting otherwise, would point out the convenience, or if you will,—the duty of social virtues, is unquestionable:—but I firmly deny, that therefore religion and morality are independent of each other: they appear so far from it, that I cannot conceive how the one, in the true and meritorious sense of the duty, can act without the influence of the other: surely the most exalted motive which can only be depended upon for the uniform practice of virtue,—must come down from *above*. (S 252.6)

The reunification of religion and morality is central to Sterne's vision of a happy, or at least most likely to be contented, individual. Without a due sense of the nature of God and of one's position with relation to the divine, one is bound incorrectly to relate to one's self and surroundings. The simple concluding advice of Solomon is that of Sterne as well: "he advises every man who would be happy, to fear GOD and keep his commandments" (S 11.21). Commandments without fear of God become divorced from their original intent, and fear of God without active morality becomes hypocrisy.

Only by anchoring one's faith in the omniscient God of providence, Sterne suggests, may one escape the illusions inherent in the tendency to judge, by appearances, what cannot be fathomed. It is important to acknowledge this accent in his sermons. The title of sermon 7, 'Vindication of Human Nature' might suggest a confident humanism, but he points us elsewhere. Human nature is 'vindicated' precisely because of its root and participation in the nature of God. The best in our natures, courage and compassion, originates in God and suggests a universal bond of mutual dependence: "to the honour of human nature, the scripture teaches us, that God made man upright" (*S* 67.20); "with what impressions he is come out of the hands of God,—with the very bias upon his nature, which prepares him for the character, which he was designed to fulfil" (*S* 68.28); "God having founded that in him, as a provisional security to make him social" (*S* 69.7); "he is but an instrument in the hands of God to provide for the well-being of others, to serve their interest as well as his own" (*S* 71.1); "so closely has our creator link'd us together, (as well as all other parts of his works) for the preservation of that harmony in the frame and system of things which his wisdom has at first established." (*S* 72.8)

Following Sterne's theological map we should note his insistence on the activity of God through Christ as the necessary catalyst enabling persons to live according to the image within which they were created. The communications of God with humans, whether initially involving comfort or affliction, are poised ultimately to benefit the human recipient. From what we have seen of the importance of tangible communication for Sterne, it is not difficult to imagine his sense of reverence for an incarnated God: "this is my body which is given for you" (Luke xxii.19). To settle religion and happiness on a base of holiness and humility, established not on earth but in heaven,

Christ came down from heaven and assumed the form of a servant. The temper of Christianity was sympathetically established by the temper of its instigator (*S* 341.17-342.16). Regardless of how frequently rehearsed, Sterne finds it useful to engage us with the ramifications of this kenosis. By sincere interaction with an image of the saviour, Sterne tries most effectively to communicate his Gospel. “The consideration of this stupendous instance of compassion, in the Son of God, is the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man, for the reasonableness of it in himself” (*S* 52.6). To perfect “the most refined and generous pitch of virtue, human nature can arrive at. . . . we must call in to our aid that more spiritual and refined doctrine introduced upon it by Christ” (*S* 120.18; 121.2).

Jesus was fundamentally conversational; we remember how he engaged the lawyer (Luke x.25-30). Though equal with God, his manners were not sensational. He did not presume to manipulate persons by offering more than half a conversation. Hints of profound religious importance were presented to ordinary people through story, parable, and symbolic acts of compassion; theological argument being reserved to correct abuses of religious systems. Common congregations were simply and mysteriously invited to follow their hearts. As theologian T. W. Manson writes, “the true parable . . . is not an illustration to help one through a theological discussion; it is rather a mode of religious experience.”⁵⁴ And, as M.A. Screech reminds us, “parables are not ways of revealing religious truths to simple understandings; they are ways of hiding it from everybody except those to whom God chooses to unfold their meaning.”⁵⁵ The Gospel was initially presented not as argument or treatise, but mysteriously in simplicity through

example and experience. Sterne, within the sceptical and latitudinarian traditions, is comfortable maintaining this priority.

Concluding ‘Abuses’ he notes that judging the merit of a notion by its fruit is a short and decisive rule left by our Saviour “worth a thousand arguments” (*S* 266.3). This virtue of a religious touchstone becomes eminently practical if we consider our tendency to resonate with virtuous images, of which Christ is chief. Regarding humility, again we are confronted with

the most unanswerable appeal that can be made to the heart of man . . . every believer must receive some tincture of the character or bias towards it from the example of so great, and yet so humble a Master, whose whole course of life was a particular lecture to this one virtue. (*S* 240.1)

It is interesting that in the lines immediately above these, Sterne, with a favorite image from painting, presents Jesus exhorting his disciples “to copy the fair original he had set them of this virtue, and *to learn of him to be meek and lowly in heart.*” (*S* 239.30)

For Sterne the direct appeal of Christ is of value not only as the supreme *example* of the virtues leading to integrity and happiness, but, as the Son of God and by way of the Holy Spirit, Christ *enables* believers to fulfill the otherwise impossible elements of these virtues. He has instigated a way of reflection that enables one to search one’s self (using will and reason) in such a way as to generate experiences of truth rather than mere assent to platitudes. The example of his life, and the wisdom of his reflections, speaks “more to the heart” and has “more coercion . . . than all the see-saws of philosophy” (*S* 181.30). This holds true for inner virtues, redeeming our clouded self-knowledge, and for the outward acts of charity that follow:

by reflecting upon the infinite labour of this day’s love, in the instance of CHRIST’s death, we may consider what an immense debt we owe each other: and by calling to

mind the amiable pattern of his life, in doing good, we might learn in what manner we may best discharge it. (*S* 52.16)

Thus for all his relish of worldly refreshments, Sterne still exhorts us to maintain the perspective of heaven. He suggests that the way to self-knowledge and accurate interaction with present circumstances depends upon a cooperation with the spirit of Christ exemplified in humility, compassion, and healthy unattachment to the fugitive glories of this world. The otherwise abortive attempts of stoical philosophy to tread this least grievous of paths are finally vindicated by an effective empowering which is the property of a well-placed faith. It is only on the ground of this faith that the cooperation of religion and morality may be established with a root of compassion, maintaining the courage and strength necessary to meet subsequent demands. “—Blessed Jesus! how can the man who calls upon thy name, but learn of thee to be meek and lowly in heart?—how can he but profit when such a lesson was seconded—by such an example” (*S* 240.29).

Though this theology is explicated, we are not to lose appreciation for the mystery at its heart. Sterne goes on to say that the cooperation of our wills and the “inspiration of God’s spirit” within us is so intermixed that it would be presumptuous to attempt to distinguish between the effects of “the efforts and determinations of our own reason” and those of the Spirit (*S* 241.31-242.2). Religion and morality, faith and reason, are servants to the “stupendous instance of compassion” which is ultimately the greatest riddle and parable. As these guides are not to be forced, many neglect them: “the fact is, mankind are not always in a humour to be convinced” (*S* 216.21). However, without the opportunity offered by God through Christ, “the world would be infinitely worse;—and therefore we cannot sufficiently bless and adore the goodness of God, for these advantages brought by the coming of Christ” (*S* 321.15).

Regarding the fruits of a faithful life, we should note the renewal of individual integrity, a redemption of the proportionate alignment of body, mind and spirit. Physical and moral happiness is presented as dependant upon having one's mind wrought with the corresponding virtues of God. As this is accomplished, one eventually comes to enjoy the blessings of life, as one's receptive faculty is reoriented in sympathy with the blessings as they were actually intended to be enjoyed:

—without some previous similitude wrought in the faculties of the mind, corresponding with the nature of the purest of beings, who is to be the object of our fruition hereafter;—it is not morally only, but physically impossible for it to be happy. (*S* 278.25)

We are returned to the theme of inherent correspondences and the necessity of incorporating them well to fulfil the purpose for which God gave us birth (*S* 97.23).

This gradual conversion to our simple natures as rooted in God allows the original image unlimited prominence in the life of an individual. Acting according to intimations of this principle enables the “settled principles” of humanity, goodness, and generosity to operate without hindrance from inhibiting ruling passions, in the Samaritan (*S* 27.11) and Joseph (*S* 115.12). These same principles are made sure and more explicit by the activity of Christ, instigator of “that more spiritual and refined doctrine” (*S* 121.3). Just as the works of Christ were more effective than rhetoric on his contemporaries, so actions of the devout will involve a similar integrity. They will be known by their fruits and need no human commission to prove their worth. The wisdom from above, Sterne uses St. James to say,

is pure, peaceable, gentle, full of mercy, without partiality, without hypocrisy. . . . alike and consistent with itself in all its parts; like its great author, 'tis universally kind and benevolent in all cases and circumstances. Its first glad tidings, were peace upon earth, good will towards men; its chief corner stone, its most distinguishing character is love, that kind principle which brought it down, in the pure exercise of

which consists the chief enjoyment of heaven from whence it came. (S 105.26-106.2; cf. Jas. iii.17)

The true Christian, Sterne reminds us, will be in sympathy with this, consistent in the way of heaven that, though often mysterious and seemingly contradictory, is manoeuvred by the best of beings with perfect intent. On this note, finally, we come to the key to Sterne's fiction: the amours of Uncle Toby.

UNCLE TOBY

In line with scripture, Sterne's sermons and novels incorporate elements of the heroic — in weakness, dressed in common garb. Yorick and Tristram, in a way inseparable from their author, introduce us to his saint. The campaigns of uncle Toby are the salt of Sterne, the man himself the standard by which characters and readers may be measured. Toby's colossal simplicity, unwavering faith and generous compassion confound all manner of counterfeit living, including immoderate judgment of those manners. Yorick, Tristram, Walter and Trim all bow to him as a significant presence, so it is good to try to plumb the aspects of Sterne's presentation of this singular character.

One of Toby's chief recourses in matters of philosophy or surprise is the *Argumentum Fistulatorium* (TS 78-9). Juxtaposed to Walter's many systems we come to appreciate its virtues. Various we are told and shown that Toby is the antithesis of scholasticism. Capable of logic and rhetoric he nevertheless troubles himself little with matters even of common speculation. Happily he admits his ignorance: "I know no more of calculations than this balluster... [THWACK]" (TS 335.5). Unlike Walter (and Tristram) "he had as little skill, honest man, in the

fragments, as he had in the whole pieces of antiquity” (*TS* 423.3). But this does not keep him from acting well, even when abused.

—That’s impossible, cried my uncle *Toby*.—Simpleton! said my father,—’twas forty years before Christ was born.

My uncle *Toby* had but two things for it; either to suppose his brother to be the wandering *Jew*, or that his misfortunes had disordered his brain.—“May the Lord God of heaven and earth protect him and restore him,” said my uncle *Toby*, praying silently for my father, and with tears in his eyes. (*TS* 423.18)

With the prevalence of *time* in the novels, it is of importance to recall “my uncle *Toby* was no chronologer” (*TS* 443.3). And this can be understood as widely as possible, for the more we learn of *Toby*, the more he seems literally to be out of this world. Walter, on his best behavior, trots out a little Locke:

to understand what *time* is aright, without which we never can comprehend *infinity*, insomuch as one is a portion of the other,—we ought seriously to sit down and consider what idea it is, we have of *duration*, so as to give a satisfactory account, how we came by it.—What is that to any body? quoth my uncle *Toby*. (*TS* 224.4)⁵⁶

Toby’s smoak-jack, like the Decalogue on Sinai, smoldering in clouds and thick darkness, gradually seems a more suitable medium for terrestrial conjectures. To Walter’s credit, in his sober moments, he almost admits it: “—there is a worth in thy honest ignorance, brother *Toby*, —’twere almost a pity to exchange it for a knowledge.” Though he fails himself to unlearn: “—But I’ll tell thee. —” (*TS* 224.1).

Toby is blessed with this ‘ignorance,’ and to his credit maintains it steadfast. “—My uncle *Toby* could not philosophize upon it; ’twas enough he felt it was so” (*TS* 95.25). More than this, he acts upon such feelings. Ordinarily a character incapable of philosophy acting on feeling

flashes red in Sterne's reader's mind, but with Toby we are going elsewhere. The terminus is his *amour*, presented in simplicity.

THE world is ashamed of being virtuous—My uncle Toby knew little of the world; and therefore when he felt he was in love with the 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. (*TS* 711.1)

As the *situation* continues we eavesdrop on another conversation at Shandy Hall, on the subject of love. It is a fine scene, complete with one of the many gestures of fraternal affection that incorporate what is being said: "my uncle Toby stole his hand unperceived behind his chair, to give my father's a squeeze—" (*TS* 719.8). Again, we are given a glimpse of where Toby's lack of philosophy got him:

there is at least, said Yorick, a great deal of reason and plain sense in Captain Shandy's opinion of love; and 'tis amongst the ill spent hours of my life which I have to answer for, that I have read so many flourishing poets and rhetoricians in my time, from whom I never could extract so much— (*TS* 720.6)

But Walter is astride, platonically cantering, and cannot "stop to answer" that question by now we knew would be asked "—Pray brother, quoth my uncle Toby, what has a man who believes in God to do with this?" (*TS* 720.24) This refrain is the libretto of his whistling. At every significant moment this is Toby's question to himself and to those with whom he shares the stage. Not words but action, not confusion but faith, not sentiment but practicality: these support Toby's frame. Tristram is familiar with this perspective. He counteracts one vexation by an extravagant sally in another direction. Wisely he refrains from philosophizing on this oft-revisited quality:

we know not why—But mark, madam, we live amongst riddles and mysteries—the most obvious things, which come in our way, have dark sides, which the quickest sight cannot penetrate into; and even the clearest and most exalted understandings amongst us find ourselves puzzled and at a loss in almost every

cranny of nature's works; so that this, like a thousand other things, falls out for us in a way, which tho' we cannot reason upon it,—yet we find the good of it, may it please your reverences and your worships—and that's enough for us. (*TS* 350.10)

To the Walters of this world, “that's enough for us” is “cutting the knot” (*TS* 332.22), but the rest of us are thereby taught to know better. It smacks of wishful thinking, simply to transfer the riddles to another realm and rest assured, but, particularly through Toby, Sterne asks that we consider faith to be the reconciliation of quest with ultimate response. Of course, this is the classic Christian sceptical stance. As George Berkeley says concluding his sermon preached before the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1731.

The Christian religion was calculated for the bulk of mankind, and therefore cannot reasonably be supposed to consist in subtle and nice notions. From the time that divinity was considered as a science, and human reason enthroned in the sanctuary of God, the hearts of its professors seem to have been less under the influence of grace. . . . Doubtless, the making religion a notional thing hath been of infinite disservice. And whereas its holy mysteries are rather to be received with humility of faith, than defined and measured by the accuracy of human reason; all attempts of this kind, however well intended, have visibly failed in the event; and, instead of reconciling infidels, have, by creating disputes and heats among the professors of Christianity, given no small advantage to its enemies.⁵⁷

Joseph Butler echoes the same sentiments in his sermon ‘Upon the Ignorance of Man’.

Men of deep research and curious inquiry should just be put in mind, not to mistake what they are doing. If their discoveries serve the cause of virtue and religion, in the way of proof, motive to practice, or assistance in it; or if they tend to render life less unhappy, and promote its satisfactions; then they are most usefully employed. . . . But it is evident that there is another mark set up for us to aim at; another end appointed us to direct our lives to: an end which the most knowing may fail of, and the most ignorant arrive at. . . . The only knowledge which is of any avail to us is that which teaches us our duty, or assists us in the discharge of it.⁵⁸

What by all reasonable accounts would be poverty in Toby's understanding is no grounds for alarm. A true soldier, he has learned the value of life, and of a grateful, contented disposition. Speaking of the young Le Fever's sword he says:

'tis all the fortune, my dear *Le Fever*, which God has left thee; but if he has given thee a heart to fight thy way with it in the world,—and thou doest it like a man of honour,—'tis enough for us. (*TS* 518.3)

Faith supports Toby, and he becomes a conduit for its strength to others. In this realm he is no enthusiast. He “never spoke of the being and natural attributes of God, but with diffidence and hesitation—” (*TS* 692.9). When he does speak, defending God's compassion in refusing a port to Bohemia for example, his suggestions are noble, if fit for a God who looks at the heart. This composure is effective:

it is one of the most unaccountable problems that ever I met with in my observations of human nature, that nothing should prove my father's mettle so much, or make his passions go off so like gun-powder, as the unexpected strokes his science met with from the quaint simplicity of my uncle *Toby's* questions.—

'Twas all one to my uncle *Toby*,—he smoaked his pipe on, with unvaried composure,—his heart never intended offense to his brother,—and as his head could seldom find out where the sting of it lay,—he always gave my father the credit of cooling by himself. (*TS* 283.15-284.3)

So Walter nods and proceeds—after saying that but for the “aids of philosophy, which befriend one so much” he could not bear Toby's inattention—to explain the “causes of short and long noses,” to which Toby confidently replies:

—There is no cause but one . . . because that God pleases to have it so . . . 'Tis he . . . who makes us all, and frames and puts us together in such forms and proportions, and for such ends, as is agreeable to his infinite wisdom.—'Tis a pious account, cried my father, but not philosophical,—there is more religion in it than sound science. 'Twas no inconsistent part of my uncle *Toby's* character,—that he feared God and revered religion.—So the moment my father finished

his remark,—my uncle *Toby* fell a whistling *Lillabullero*, with more zeal (though more out of tune) than usual.— (TS 284.17)

Then, as if we had forgotten *Walter's* incapacity for sound activity, “what is become of my wife’s thread-paper?”

In a nutshell we have the faith of Toby, impenetrable to the passionate, systematic artillery of proud ‘science.’ This is no isolated anecdote. Toby’s simplest of philosophies buoys the family. We remember him, untalented with words, silently bearing Walter’s grief over Tristram’s nose. It is not the full hour and a half of self-indulgence, but the benignity of Toby’s countenance that melts down the ice of Walter’s grief “in a moment” (TS 327.6-328.4). This does not quench Walter’s sorrow but it releases his tongue towards what for him will be somewhat of a catharsis. Humorously enough, for all beside himself, Walter breaks the silence echoing the weeping prophet Jeremiah; naturally Toby cannot help bringing him back to earth with an anecdote of misfortunes *worth* “lying down and crying over” (TS 329.22). When Walter is given a chance to resume his oration, again he echoes scripture in the commonplace list of the dark side of affliction that men must undergo in this world. And again Toby cannot help correcting him. Toby has come to terms with the fact that life under the sun does not proceed according to one’s calculated philosophy, and, though events may seem to contradict doctrine, this should, in a world where even soldiery is necessary, be no cause to doubt providence. Wounded Toby says *he* was *not* born to “eat the bread of affliction,” and neither is it by any “hidden resources” of his mind that he is able to stand it out and bear up under the “cross reckonings and sorrowful *items* with which the heart of man is over-charged” (TS 332.1-15). No:

'tis by the assistance of Almighty God . . .—'tis not from our own strength, brother *Shandy*—a sentinel in a wooden centry-box, might as well pretend to stand it out against a detachment of fifty men,—we are upheld by the grace and the assistance of the best of Beings. (*TS* 332.15)

Walter, then, seeking instead to *untie* this knot, assumes Raphael's pose of Socrates to proclaim as we have heard so often that "there is a secret spring within us" "that great and elastic power within us of counterbalancing evil, which like a secret spring in a well-ordered machine, though it cannot prevent the shock—at least imposes upon our sense of it" (*TS* 333.22-334.9). Walter sloughs off Toby's belief that this "spring" is "Religion" ("it makes everything strait for us"), as being merely a figurative comfort. That the "greatest good" of which Walter's spring is capable, involves the christening of "*Trismegistus*" should need no further comment. The efficacy of the sacred occasion is, or was meant to be, transferred from act to name, and we prepare ourselves for yet another hard justling.

Cynicism over the fool's comfort of cutting the knot instead of persevering to untie it in another way than Walter's still looms over Toby in some critical eyes, but one cannot understand the gist of Sterne's sermons and fail to appreciate the heroic nature of this uncle. He is unequivocally Sterne's embodiment of Christian virtue. His foibles do more than endear him to readers, they make him believable, and his virtues accessible. In the midst of the scene outlined immediately above, it is Toby who chides Trim that "tears are no proof of cowardice" (*TS* 329.7). Throughout Tristram's life and opinions Toby is graciously present as the most brave, most compassionate of men—qualities that for Sterne are the acme of Christianity. As Walter writes his life of Socrates, and upon occasion adopts Socratic postures, Toby lives a life of which Socrates would have approved:

—there never was a better officer in the king’s army,—or a better man in God’s world; for he would march up to the mouth of a cannon, though he saw the lighted match at the very touch-hole,—and yet, for all that, he has a heart as soft as a child for other people.—He would not hurt a chicken. (*TS* 437.22)

With his life anchored in a world more capable of joy than even his bowling-green, Toby fears not death. Brave, he is capable of forgiveness, the most difficult of social virtues. Forgiveness cuts the knot. Toby’s actions, his beaming face, accomplish more for the little Shandy world than the most eloquent *Tristapaediae* or sermons. We should not ultimately be confused by the semblance of inconsistency in a man so good *and* so tethered to his horse. Traugott calls him “*exactly Locke’s madman*.”⁵⁹ But we are relieved by his obsession, to balance our growing suspicion that he is not to be mocked. To encourage this perspective, in *A Sentimental Journey* before recording the efficient compassion of the French officer, Sterne has Yorick carefully “rescue one page from violation” by writing the name and telling the world of “Captain Tobias Shandy, the dearest of my flock and friends, whose philanthropy I never think of at this long distance from his death—but my eyes gush out with tears” (*ASJ* 76.7). He admires Toby as the epitome of “the man whose manners are softened by a profession which makes bad men worse” (*ASJ* 76.5). Any critical discussion of Toby’s equivocal participation in the evils of war must account for the *actions* of this most gentle of captains juxtaposed to those who sally near him. There is a fundamental difference in the two brothers’ mounts. Walter’s horse does not lead him to a reconciliation with the sorrows and mysteries of life, he feels them keenly and at best skips quickly from one to the next to avoid eternal persecution. He is buoyed by words and, not unlike Trim, the sound of himself talking. Toby also has his crises, the treaty of Utrecht was no guarantee of peace to him, but we miss the peak of his character if we fail to recognize that,

unlike his brother's horse, his—like young Yorick's noble mounts (*TS* 21.9-28)—is subject to the cries of others.

Critics have long loved and long mocked Tristram's uncle from a plethora of angles. To say, as does Sallé, "my uncle Toby is the first full-length study of a man whose life has lost its meaning, and who merely survives in order to recapture the excitement of his past" is entirely to miss Sterne's point.⁶⁰ As Golden remarks, "though motivation may—perhaps must—derive from delusions, merit lies in transcending them. The more heated the rider, the greater his goodness in dismounting in sympathy for someone else."⁶¹ Walter's horse feeds on misery, Toby's is sacrificed to those in need.

It was to my uncle *Toby's* eternal honour,—though I tell it only for the sake of those, who, when coop'd in betwixt a natural and a positive law, know not for their souls, which way in the world to turn themselves—That notwithstanding my uncle *Toby* was warmly engaged at that time in carrying on the siege of *Dendermond*, parallel with the allies, who pressed theirs on so vigorously, that they scarce allowed him time to get his dinner—that nevertheless he gave up *Dendermond*, though he had already made a lodgment upon the counterscarp; — and bent his whole thoughts towards the private distresses at the inn; and, except that he ordered the garden gate to be bolted up, by which he might be said to have turned the siege of *Dendermond* into a blockade,—he left *Dendermond* to itself, —to be relieved or not by the *French* king, as the *French* king thought good; and only considered how he himself should relieve the poor lieutenant and his son.
(*TS* 509.2)

Thus he enlightens Trim to a distinction we had perhaps not thought him capable of drawing: "thou didst very right, *Trim*, as a soldier,—but certainly very wrong as a man" (*TS* 510.6). The entire force of the difficulty of maintaining virtue in a world of inconsistencies is hereby brought home. Exchanging the horse of battle for that of extravagant succour, Toby accurately distinguishes between the natural and the positive laws. Trim's well-meant actions, those of a

servant, are nevertheless pharisaical for being straight, learned by rote. For Toby the epitome of soldiering is that which it would seem not to be: mercy. His bravery is his humanity, shown in tears effective, at least, in the realm where accusing spirits and recording angels hold sway.

This *humanity* is the philosopher's stone for which Tristram and Yorick yearn. The palpitations of the heart and campaigns of the imagination are blessed through compassionate action. Circumstances and elements of earthly life are transmitted to the eternal realm. Toby's brief encounter with the elder Le Fever clearly demonstrates how sincere affection hurdles needless formalities. Toby "without preface or apology, sat himself down upon the chair by the bed-side, and independantly of all modes and customs, opened the curtain in the manner an old friend and brother officer would have done it, and asked him how he did" (*TS* 512.2). This sort of communication is as close to Momus' glass as flesh can fathom. Versed in various arts of communication and intimacy, Tristram and Yorick acknowledge Toby's superiority of spontaneous action over artful calculation and avoidance. Tristram and Yorick, who struggle to translate gestures and to communicate directly with those they encounter, acknowledge Toby's extraordinary simplicity.

There was a frankness in my uncle *Toby*,—not the *effect* of familiarity,—but the *cause* of it,—which let you at once into his soul, and shewed you the goodness of his nature; to this, there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him. (*TS* 512.16)

Ripples of his effect on those around him shimmer throughout both novels. He is not prone to rash judgment, and his difficulties are resolved by riding (*TS* 87). Rider and horse are of a piece and, unlike Yorick, Toby is blessed with troubling "his head very little with what the

world either said or thought about it" (*TS* 87.15). This freedom earns others' trust of him. Like Jesus' dying glance to his mother and the apostle John, Le Fever "looked up wishfully⁶² in my uncle *Toby's* face,—then cast a look upon his boy,—and that *ligament*, fine as it was,—was never broken.—" (*TS* 512.28; John xix.26-7).

Time and again it is Toby's countenance, gesture, or simple inquiry that instantly enlightens an impasse, or confounds a galloping illusion (e.g. *TS* 133.2, 392.3). Oblivious conduit of grace, he becomes an artful rhetor. His actions give the lie to Walter's mathematical nature; the antitheses of those "working with might and main at the demonstration" wasting "all their strength upon it, [having] none left in them to draw the corollary, to do good with" (*TS* 125.4). But for all this, Toby's character is not the offspring (or father) of any system. When Trim asks if he might presume to differ from his master, he mildly replies "—why else, do I talk to thee Trim" (*TS* 712.9). On a voyage not of self-satisfaction but of honest advancement, he would happily be led deeper into the mysteries. Though we are to be reconciled through experiencing him, we should remember that the riddles are reoriented, not *solved* in Toby. Susceptible to misapprehension, his benevolence is not subject to his hobby. He is void of guile, kindest of translators, "the benignity of [his] heart interpreted every motion of the body in the kindest sense the motion would admit of" (*TS* 192.12). Ill at ease in the presence of one of the greatest mysteries to him, when beholding a woman "in sorrow or distress; then infinite was his pity" (*TS* 741.10).

This benevolence has far-reaching effects on his family. Toby's amours run in Tristram's head as he journeys toward the shorn lamb Maria, and "the kindest harmony" which he thereby

finds vibrating within him puts him “in the most perfect state of bounty and good will . . . so that whether the roads were rough or smooth, it made no difference; every thing I saw, or had to do with, touch’d upon some secret spring either of sentiment or rapture” (*TS* 781.17). Toby is the guardian spirit of the better part of these encounters. When Tristram speaks of his uncle’s death “the first—the foremost of created beings” it is with more than an ordinary sense of the levelling effect of grief:

all my father’s systems shall be baffled by his sorrows; and, in spite of his philosophy, I shall behold him, as he inspects the lackered plate, twice taking his spectacles from off his nose, to wipe away the dew which nature has shed upon them—” (*TS* 545.18)

Indirectly Toby confounds the congregations around him, without artifice; his frank responses cut through storms of passion and hyperbole:

I believe, an’ please your reverence . . . when a soldier gets time to pray,—he prays as heartily as a parson, —though not with all his fuss and hypocrisy.—Thou shouldst not have said that, *Trim*, said my uncle *Toby*,—for God only knows who is a hypocrite, and who is not. (*TS* 506.14)

—They are a pack of liars, I believe, cried *Trim*—

—They are some how or other deceived, said my uncle *Toby*. (*TS* 690.17)

Toby’s heroic presence is established early in *Tristram Shandy*. Embodying so many facets of Sterne’s philosophy, we are never long without the Captain. The critically revisited anecdote involving an over-grown fly is, for once, explicitly instructive. Tristram reiterates that Toby’s “peaceful, placid nature” was not owing to cowardice, “insensibility or obtuseness of his intellectual parts” (*TS* 130.15-25). But what is especially to be noticed is that Tristram believes he owes half of his “philanthropy to that one accidental impression” (*TS* 131.22). It is significant

that Toby's moral character cannot, initially, be communicated to us according to "mere HOBBY-HORSICAL likeness" (*TS* 131.72). Tristram makes special note, that, as Toby's simple act of releasing the fly, "has never since been worn out of my mind," so the recounting of the event and its harmonious effects "is to serve for parents and governors instead of a whole volume upon the subject" (*TS* 131.17,23). Critics dismissing this passage as gross hyperbole (thee *and* me) or sentimental cliché, have misunderstood Sterne's valuation of "philanthropy" in the sermons, and his contention, reiterated only a few pages above the fly incident (*TS* 125.15-23), that a well-mannered author leaves something for his reader to imagine. Searching too high, or too low, for Sterne's thumb print, separating him from his characters, they have missed what, for once, should be perfectly obvious. The lesson is wordless, even beyond an exact determination of its elements:

whether it was, that the action itself was more in unison to my nerves at that age of pity, which instantly set my whole frame into one vibration of most pleasurable sensation . . . or in what degree, or by what secret magick,—a tone of voice and harmony movement, attuned by mercy, might find a passage to my heart, I know not. (*TS* 131.8)

Here again we are in the realm of authentic communication, melting otherwise petrified articulations. The incident itself is in parentheses, and when we return to Walter's insult we find Toby maintaining benevolence, looking "up into my father's face, with a countenance spread over with so much good nature;—so placid;—so fraternal;—so inexpressibly tender towards him;—it penetrated my father to his heart" (*TS* 133.2). The ironic folly of a soldier unwilling to harm a fly is played deftly by Sterne.

Toby's virtue is no myth, or misremembered event of a confused lad; it is a living force of grace to the Shandy household. Tristram wishes to honour this, and is explicit that we understand "the choicest morsel of [his] whole story" is the amours of uncle Toby. It is no accident, that in the last pages of the second instalment of *TS*, when "FROM this moment" we are to consider Tristram as heir-apparent to the Shandy family, the focus is on his "earnest desire" to relate these amours (*TS* 400-402). Likewise it should not surprise us that Tristram's hopeful language anticipating this task would involve the more amorphous aspects of communication, nor that Sterne's three decades of clerical vocation would ring in our ears:

I lament . . . that things have crowded in so thick upon me, that I have not been able to get into that part of my work, towards which, I have all the way, looked forwards, with so much earnest desire; and that is the campaigns, but especially the amours of my uncle *Toby*, the events of which are of so singular a nature, and so Cervantick a cast, that if I can so manage it, as to convey but the same impressions to every other brain, which the occurrences themselves excite in my own—I will answer for it the book shall make its way in the world, much better than its master has done before it— (*TS* 400.19; cf. 779.1-7)

Gradually we come to anticipate this unveiling. A significant point in our approach to the mystery occurs well into Volume vi, just after the corporal has discovered a means of incessant firing (*TS* 546-549). We are asked to assist Tristram "to wheel off my uncle *Toby*'s ordnance behind the scenes—to remove his sentry-box, and clear the theatre" (*TS* 549.16). From here to the end of the novel we are upon new footing. With Volume vii Tristram is racing death. As Sterne indicates in the motto to this instalment, this journey is not out of step with the book, as suddenly we too may be caught up in cart wheels and forced to flee (*TS* 576). But, getting back to Toby, we are told that he will now be exhibited "dressed in a new character, throughout which the world can have no idea how he will act" (*TS* 549.22). This is common Shandy-talk, Walter is

likewise unguessable; however, with Toby we are told something extraordinary. After the countless times we dared to guess and were mocked for prophetic incapacity, we are now told

and yet, if pity be akin to love,—and bravery no alien to it, you have seen enough of my uncle *Toby* in these, to trace these family likenesses, betwixt the two passions (in case there is one) to your heart's content.

Vain science! thou assists us in no case of this kind—and thou puzzlest us in every one.

There was, Madam, in my uncle *Toby*, a singleness of heart which misled him so far out of the little serpentine tracks in which things of this nature usually go on. (TS 550.2)

Toby takes the Samaritan's path. Though critical eyes cannot discern it, readers who have felt the beat of his heart on theirs finally *can* have some conception of how the man will act in untrodden territory. For Toby the precipice from war to love has already been scaled. His “singleness of heart” is an innocence that in any situation is consistent with its source; not immune to mistakes and oddity, but fundamentally trustworthy. Sterne elaborates this virtue throughout his sermons:

a charitable and benevolent disposition is so principal and ruling a part of a man's character, as to be a considerable test by itself of the whole frame and temper of his mind, with which all other virtues and vices respectively rise and fall, and will almost necessarily be connected. (S 30.11)

Toby himself, alas, uses this as a rule by which to measure the widow's affection: “that which wins me most, and which is security for all the rest, is the compassionate turn and singular humanity of her character” (TS 801.20). His “plainness and simplicity of thinking, with such an unmistrusting ignorance of the plies and foldings of the heart of woman” (TS 550.11) lead him to dignified slaughter:

He took it like a lamb—I say. (TS 710.1, 10)

Toby is faithful throughout to things of importance; this is what matters. In context it is impossible to read his oration on war as anything but a tribute to this best of captains. Toby thoroughly embodies the virtues of peace, indeed he is not at all war-like. Melvyn New makes a provocative attempt to debunk warm-hearted readings of Toby's perspective on war.⁶³ To claim that his "definition of war is amazingly naïve (and obtuse)" misses the point, and to suggest Sterne is satirizing war with the "pompous conclusion" of Toby's oration squares not with Sterne's life.⁶⁴ "As a political journalist in the 1740s he bitterly denounced those who criticized the notion of a standing army."⁶⁵ During the Jacobite rebellion "he began by making a personal contribution to the defence fund of £10—a far from insignificant sum for one of his means."⁶⁶ In the memoir of his family, written for his daughter, he refers to his soldiering father with tender words, as Ross says:

emphasizing as it does the soldier's kindness, amiability, and innocence, this touchingly warm account recalls Uncle Toby even more strongly (and indeed Sterne was later to have Tristram apply the last phrase of the account to Toby).⁶⁷

No, it is grossly sentimental to conclude Sterne was a modern pacifist. New disregards the explicit and reiterated notices of Toby's capacity to understand all the criticisms that would be laid against him.

I Am not insensible, brother *Shandy*, that when a man, whose profession is arms, wishes, as I have done, for war,—it has an ill aspect to the world;—and that, how just and right soever his motives and intentions may be,—he stands in an uneasy posture in vindicating himself from private views in doing it. (*TS* 554.5)

Toby's oration is a confession, even more clear than those of Yorick in *ASJ*.

What, I *hope*, I have been in all these, brother *Shandy*, would be unbecoming of me to say:—much worse, I know, have I been than I ought,—and something worse, perhaps, than I think: But such as I am, you, my dear brother *Shandy*, who

have sucked the same breasts with me. . .—Such as I am, brother, you must by this time know me, with all my vices, and with all my weaknesses too, whether of my age, my temper, my passions, or my understanding. (*TS* 554.19)

Significantly he asks Walter “upon what one deed of mine” is his cynicism grounded. And this is exactly Sterne’s point. Toby’s deeds are justified. The test of a good hobbyhorse, if we glance from entertainment to values, is the nature of its fruition. “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Matt. vii.20)

The concluding pages of ‘The Abuses of Conscience considered’ as presented in *Tristram Shandy* serve to set the military endeavours of Toby and the Corporal in their true light. The necessary marriage of morality and religion is reiterated, and the “moral honesty” of those not given to affectation praised:

and you will find that such a man, thro’ force of his delusion, generally looks down with spiritual pride upon every other man who has less affectation of piety, -tho’, perhaps, ten times more moral honesty than himself. (*TS* 159.23)

The horrors of unhinged power are then ably laid out:

in how many kingdoms of the world has the crusading sword of this misguided saint-errant spared neither age, or merit, or sex, or condition?—and, as he fought under the banners of a religion which set him loose from justice and humanity, he shew’d none; mercilessly trampled upon both,—heard neither the cries of the unfortunate, nor pitied their distresses. (*TS* 160.13)

The interpolation that follows is significant for linking Trim, with all his passions and misinterpretations, to the man of moral honesty; it illuminates his heart and that of his master:

I have been in many a battle, an’ please your Honour, quoth *Trim*, sighing, but never in so melancholy a one as this.—I would not have drawn a tricker in it, against these poor souls,—to have been made a general officer.—Why, what do you understand of the affair? Said Doctor *Slop*, looking towards *Trim* with something more contempt than the Corporal’s honest heart deserved.—What do you know, friend, about this battle you talk of?—I know, replied Trim, that I

never refused quarter in my life to any man who cried out for it;—but to a woman or a child, continued *Trim*, before I would level my musket at them, I would lose my life a thousand times.—Here’s a crown for thee, *Trim*, to drink with *Obadiah* to-night, quoth my uncle *Toby*, and I’ll give *Obadiah* another too.—God bless your Honour, replied *Trim*,—I had rather these poor women and children had it.—Thou art an honest fellow, quoth my uncle *Toby*.----My father nodded his head,—as much as to say,—and so he is.———(TS 160.20)

The simple and unwavering humanity expressed by Trim and Toby in this scene is amply reinforced in the inquisition scene that follows, where we are given to understand that mercy is the key to religion.

—See him dragg’d out of it again to meet the flames, and the insults in his last agonies, which this principle,—this principle, that there can be religion without mercy, has prepared for him. . . .

The surest way to try the merit of any disputed notion is, to trace down the consequences such a notion has produced, and compare them with the spirit of Christianity;—’tis the short and decisive rule which our Saviour hath left us, for these and such-like cases, and it is worth a thousand arguments,——*By their fruits ye shall know them.* (TS 163.14-24)

Like the better sermons of Yorick, tied fast with the unraveling of his whiplash (TS 514.15-23), Toby’s militancy is one of Christian service. His faith, we are told, informs his capacities; he broadcasts compassion.

By deftly switching from the oration in Volume vi to the apostrophe in Volume ix, New ignores the jovial context in which the latter conversation takes place. Toby has proceeded from the oration *on war* “—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?” (TS 557.9) to a last thought before rapping on the widow’s door: “that branch of it which we have practised together in our bowling-green, has no object but to shorten the strides of AMBITION, and intrench

the lives and fortunes of the *few* from the plunderings of the *many*—” (*TS* 753.13) New continues:

it is Sterne, not I, who italicizes the two words that remove war from the “humanity and fellow-feeling” Toby invokes in his oration, two words that place war where it truly belongs, among privilege and inequity and the preservation of property and wealth. Many years ago, I pointed out that whatever “humanity” means to Toby, it does not encompass the masses, since his fellow-feeling is limited to *few* rather than to *many* “fellows.” In all the many readings of Uncle Toby as a sentimental hero, no one mentions this passage, much less attempts to explain it.⁶⁸

On the contrary, in war it is the *few*—the preyed upon—who are usually vanquished by the *many*. It is a scriptural commonplace analogous to that of the folly of God’s wisdom, that divine power and favour is made visible and unconfused with human strength by small armies vanquishing those far larger. The unlikely few are to be preserved from the brutish maw of the many: “the Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Deut. vii.7). Of course a more Shandean twist could be given to Toby’s words at this critical shift from bowling-green to courtship couch, for what is it to woo a nubile widow but to hope one might “intrench the lives and fortunes of the *few* from the plunderings of the *many*?”

Certainly Toby’s oration and apostrophe, as any from the heart on war, love or another crisis, is quixotic. But the “Cervantic cast” is one in favour of brave souls who with no thought of personal danger sally forth in quest of adventures to benefit those entrusted to them. These soldiers imitate their noble ancestors with what swords God has given them to fuel mercy and justice in their generations. As the Don’s Trim comes to appreciate at the end of *their* first Book, ‘results’ are rarely what they seem to be, and nobility consists in perceiving what is unseen:

Under the Noise of his Arrival *Sancho Panza's* Wife made haste thither to enquire after her good Man, who, she was inform'd, went a Squiring with the Knight. . . . Have you brought me home e'er a Gown or Petticoat, or Shoes for my Children? In troth, sweet Wife, reply'd *Sancho*, I have brought thee none of those things; I am loaded with better things. Ay, said his Wife, that's well. Pr'ythee let me see some of them fine things; for I vow I've a hugeous Mind to see 'em. ...All in good time Wife, said *Sancho*; Honey is not made for an Ass's Mouth; I'll tell thee what 'tis hereafter. . . . Pr'ythee *Joan*, said *Sancho*, don't trouble thy Head to know these Matters all at once, and in a heap, as a Body may say: 'Tis enough I tell thee the Truth, therefore hold thy Tongue. Yet, by the way, one thing I will assure thee, That nothing in the varsal World is better for an honest Man, than to be Squire to a Knight-Errant while he's hunting of adventures. 'Tis true, most Adventures he goes about do not answer a Man's Expectation so much as he cou'd wish; for of a Hundred that are met with, Ninety Nine are wont to be crabbed and unlucky ones. This I know to my cost: I myself have got well kick'd and toss'd in some of 'em, and soundly drubb'd and belabour'd in others; yet for all that, 'tis rare Sport to be a watching for strange Chances, to cross Forests, to search and beat up and down in Woods, to scramble over Rocks, to visit Castles, and take up Quarters in an Inn at pleasure, and all the while the Devil a Cross to pay.⁶⁹

Compassion flows in Toby by NATURE, war, like preaching in others, by NECESSITY (*TS* 557.6).

As Jonathan Lamb points out, "we would be obtuse not to understand the relative but still real value of the sacrifice and the complex significance of Toby's bowling-green campaigns."⁷⁰

Shifting from the campaign on the green to that in red plush, the full force of Toby's vindication is upon us. New sets us off in the wrong direction by claiming Toby to be "Sterne's version of Shaftesbury's ideal moral being . . . [embodying] Shaftesbury's tendency toward moral secularism."⁷¹ Instead of recognizing Toby's anchor in a simple faith, New places it in a sentimental "moral self-sufficiency"⁷² that Toby in fact nowhere displays. Morals of secular sentiment seem in this question to be more the property of Toby's critics. New joins a number of them in claiming Toby's ultimate refusal to bed the widow is a mark against him:

Toby's virtue—his sentimentalism and feeling heart—fails in its encounter with human desire; indeed his most overt sexual response comes when he sits by

himself in the corner of the sentry box, puffing on Trim's cannon/water-pipes. The essence of the "morality of pity," Sterne observed, is, paradoxically, self-indulgence rather than a legitimate response to the "other," which is possibly one reason why more traditional moral systems (such as Christianity) do not trust the unaided human heart (that is, the human mind).⁷³

On the contrary, it is not "Toby's fear of sexuality"⁷⁴ that is self-indulgent and fruitless, it is the widow's concupiscence and lack of communication over *a twelve year period*, which should be registered. Toby is not *afraid* of sexuality, he is blissfully ignorant and, like Yorick, knows better than to engage himself with an insidious partner. When Fred Pinnegar claims, "the affair with Wadman ends because of Toby's revulsion at her aggressive sexuality and his denial of both it and life"⁷⁵ one shudders to imagine what sort of *life* he would have Toby adopt. Must we all, like Sterne, be coupled with a conniving spouse? Militants in the service of humanity, like Don Quixote, are not to be disillusioned by well-meaning characters knowing not what they do.

REDEMPTION: LOVE WITHOUT DEFINITION

A few critical years pass between the squiggly lines at the end of *TS* Volume vi and the "vile cough" with which we begin vii. The book, and body, as all creatures, is subject to time. Volume vii leads quite a chase, but death supersedes the dance, and we end not in Nanette's lap, but with another attempt to give some account of Toby's love (*TS* 651). We need to remember that though the "memoirs of my uncle *Toby*'s courtship of widow *Wadman*" are "one of the most compleat systems, both of the elementary and practical part of love-making" we are not to expect "a description of *what love is*" (*TS* 562.15-24). Such theories and "monstrous liberty in arguing" are reserved for Walter and his ilk; theories "with which, by the way, he contrived to crucify my

uncle *Toby*'s mind, almost as much as his amours themselves" (*TS* 564.7). We are made to pant for this choicest of morsels severed by science. Volume ix weaves toward chapter xv, which 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!
(*TS* 767.1)

We begin to suspect in these amours, as with other revealings in Sterne's works, that the destination is in fact the journey. As Tristram learns more by vibrations than words, we are to be treated accordingly.—

Let us drop the metaphor.

—AND the story too—if you please: for though I have all along been hastening towards this part of it, with so much earnest desire, as well knowing it to be the choicest morsel of what I had to offer to the world, yet now that I am got to it, any one is welcome to take my pen, and go on with the story for me that will—I see the difficulties of the descriptions I'm going to give—and feel the want of my powers. (*TS* 778.24; cf. 400.19-401.6)

Nestled in this exhaustion is the exclamation that in speaking of Toby generally, he *has* recorded his love. In writing his life and opinions Tristram has approached death. To articulate the "SITUATION" (*TS* 723.12) of love in any other way would literally have spoiled the romance. Losing blood, Tristram feels his powers wane, he may as well have said "cup" as "pen." To anyone familiar with scripture the language with which we are prepared unmistakably parallels Christ's ultimate ascent to Jerusalem for the Passion.⁷⁶ For Tristram, enabling us to *feel* the amours of his uncle is, in a way, to participate in a eucharist. When Battestin claims "what matters [in *ASJ*] to Sterne is, as it were, the human face of Christ, not the orthodox doctrines of

grace or the redeeming efficacy of the crucifixion,”⁷⁷ he fails to see Sterne’s appreciation of the reason that human face was assumed. Without the mysteries that become doctrines, the humanity of Jesus is without purpose.

Sterne maintains a due distance by calling upon the “GENTLE Spirit of sweetest humour, who erst didst sit upon the easy pen of my beloved CERVANTES” (*TS* 780.1). The invocation, we suppose, remounts him. This jaunt, however, fuelled by Toby’s amours having “the same effect upon me as if they had been my own” (*TS* 781.17), leads to Maria—an immediate test of the essence of the amours he is trying to convey. An obvious complement to this focus of Tristram is encountered in the last scenes of *ASJ*, where it is Yorick’s ‘sentiment’ that is put to the test. We remember from the earliest pages of *TS* that this heteroclite parson was acquainted with grief. He rides the horse he does as it accords best with a thoughtful soul hourly called forth to visit “the many comfortless scenes . . . where poverty, and sickness, and affliction dwelt together.” (*TS* 22.16)

Of interest further south is the popular legend with which Sterne would have been familiar, that Maria Magdalene with her siblings Martha and Lazarus sailed to the south of France. A tomb said to be hers was venerated during the Middle Ages at Aix-en-Provence. Joseph Addison in *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. In the years 1701, 1702, 1703* recalls:

we were here [Cassis, near Marseilles] shown at a distance the Deserts, which have been rendered so famous by the presence of Mary Magdalene, who, after her arrival with Lazarus and Joseph of Arimathea at Marseilles, is said to have wept away her life among these solitary Rocks and Mountains. It is so romantic a Scene, that it has always probably given occasion to such chimerical Relations.⁷⁸

Now Yorick, as Tristram before him, is on the outskirts of Moulins. Having left the children of Art in Paris, Maria takes precedence even as he feels “the distress of plenty” with the “hey-day of the vintage” beginning to beckon. He goes out of his way to enquire after her. A Samaritan of sorts, well aware of his capacity for self-indulgence:

’tis going, I own, like the Knight of the Woeful Countenance, in quest of melancholy adventures—but I know not how it is, but I am never so perfectly conscious of the existence of a soul within me, as when I am entangled in them. (ASJ 149.20)

His affection, whatever the mixture of springs, is not mechanical:

I felt such undescribable emotions within me, as I am sure could not be accounted for from any combinations of matter and motion.

I am positive I have a soul; nor can all the books with which materialists have pester’d the world ever convince me of the contrary. (ASJ 151.4)

He takes leave of her with words that again recall the Samaritan’s charity, and a benediction acknowledging the superiority of a better Comfort.

Adieu, poor luckless maiden!—imbibe the oil and wine which the compassion of a stranger, as he journieth on his way, now pours into thy wounds—the being who has twice bruised thee can only bind them up for ever. (ASJ 154.13)

For her, he is at most a passing refreshment, and for him Maria is another starling.

THERE was nothing from which I had painted out for myself so joyous a riot of the affections, as in this journey in the vintage . . . but pressing through this gate of sorrow to it, my sufferings had totally unfitted me. (ASJ 155.2)

This difficulty he has in casting a shade across her influence continues the redemptive strain of the journey. It remains a mystery to him, but he embraces it fully. The wound, the oil and wine are media by which the grace of *feeling* becomes one of faith by the act of another whose resources are spontaneously available to the needy. Mourning is turned to dancing as the

cycle of seasonal festivity gives way to perpetual thanksgiving, but not without reflection. The issue of this heart-rending journey is only nominally ‘sentimental,’ for the fruits involve the long anticipated capacity to begin to appreciate happiness on authentic terms, at home in this house of mourning, as well as celebrating our destination in the great Feast.

—Dear sensibility! source inexhausted of all that’s precious in our joys, or costly in our sorrows! thou chainest thy martyr down upon his bed of straw—and ’tis thou who lifts him up to HEAVEN—eternal fountain of our feelings!—’tis here I trace thee—and this is thy divinity which stirs within me——not that, in some sad and sickening moments, “*my soul shrinks back upon herself, and startles at destruction*”—mere pomp of words!—but that I feel some generous joys and generous cares beyond myself—all comes from thee, great—great SENSORIUM of the world! which vibrates, if a hair of our heads but falls upon the ground, in the remotest desert of thy creation. (*ASJ* 155.9)

This is highflying language, and though some have concluded it to be sarcastic, unearned, or deistic, it is Sterne’s voice at its most earnest, as if from a pulpit. When Yorick does move on to sport with the generous swain and his lambs, it is not insidious as with the frivolous Nanette, it is instead the sacrament for which we have been prepared.

Like Toby, Yorick is not long about the forms of human companionship. He walks directly into the peasant home, finds an honest welcome and a “feast of love.” Lentil-soup, bread, “and a flaggon of wine . . . promised joy thro’ the stages of the repast” (*ASJ* 157.26). Common enough ingredients, but significant in the context of what follows:

was it this [welcome]; or tell me, Nature, what else it was which made this morsel so sweet—and to what magick I owe it, that the draught I took of their flaggon was so delicious with it, that they remain upon my palate to this hour?
(*ASJ* 158.12)

As Toby’s act with the fly remains with Tristram to this hour, and as *TS* leads to the morsel of Toby’s amours, so *ASJ* has led to this. And as Tristram at ix.15, so Yorick sees that his projected

joys have slipped from under him, that in writing his journey it has been accomplished. So he is given a glimpse of eternal happiness—fancies he “could distinguish an elevation of spirit different from that which is the cause or the effect of simple jollity” (*ASJ* 159.17). “I thought I beheld *Religion* mixing in the dance,” he says; and, with the self-doubt many have felt he lacked, makes the scene infallibly holy, by continuing: “—but as I had never seen her so engaged, I should have look’d upon it now, as one of the illusions of an imagination which is eternally misleading me, had not the old man . . .” (*ASJ* 159.18). ‘The Grace’ New rightly calls “the penultimate chapter of everything Sterne ever wrote. . . . Importantly, the ‘grace’ is not spoken but acted out; but equally important, Yorick is able to find the words to express the joy of the dance without equivocation or innuendo.”⁷⁹

It is a commonplace that Sterne’s hodgepodge is a serving of life. Elizabeth Harries reminds us of Jesus’ command to “gather up the fragments” after the miracle of loaves and fishes (John vi.12). “The fragmentary,” she writes,

was always connected with the notion of overflow—or plenitude in apparent dearth; with the command to collect that overflow—or the significance of the apparently insignificant; and ultimately with the Eucharist—a memorial that is also a renewal. . . .

By giving us fragments and thwarting ordinary coherence, Sterne forces us to contemplate a different kind of order—an order not governed by ‘any *man’s* rules’ but by rules more inscrutable and divine. [her italics] . . .

the fragmentary for Sterne always had biblical overtones, overtones that suggested the importance of the fragment as a gesture towards a greater fullness and as a reminder of a more perfect communion.⁸⁰

Sparks, Sterne realizes, momentarily visible, are the most of illumination we are likely to see or be able to bear. His brief flourishes serve instead of hypothetical treatises. Tristram

implies, suggests Elizabeth Kraft, “the importance of the momentary as a suggestion of the ineffable, the inexpressible spark of divinity that resides in the corporeal form.”⁸¹ This element within the individual is awakened sporadically, by justlings maintained by grace.

V ~ CONCLUSION

With so much ink shed over Sterne's use and impressions of Locke, it is curious to realize that the apparent 'influence' is rather a shared *mood* sympathetic to this redeeming "inexpressible spark." He shows no concentration on Locke's philosophy *qua* philosophy; what stares back at one from every chapter of each of these men's *opera* is an undogmatic gaze comfortable with its limitations, convinced of the vitality of that spark within them. This issues a broad freedom for both. Sterne's playful use of words is a return to the chaos from which an initiating experience of their limits and the value of direct experience is gained. The 'riddles and mysteries' passage is the *theme* of Locke's great *Essay*, not a glib apology. He is explicit:

there is not so contemptible a Plant or Animal, that does not confound the most enlarged Understanding. Though the familiar use of Things about us, take off our Wonder; yet it cures not our Ignorance. . . . The Workmanship of the All-wise, and Powerful God, in the great Fabrick of the Universe, and every part thereof, farther exceeds the Capacity and Comprehension of the most inquisitive and intelligent Man, than the best contrivance of the most ingenious Man, doth the Conceptions of the most ignorant of rational Creatures. Therefore we in vain pretend to range Things into sorts, and dispose them into certain Classes, under Names, by their *real Essences*, that are so far from our discovery or comprehension.¹

This is Christian scepticism—freedom from Walter's need to make life meaningful by systems. The essential unknowability of the riddles, confidence that this mystery is as it should be, and the hopeful exposure of fancies that presume to be certainties, pervades Locke's *Essay* and all of Sterne's works. Hence their relish of the demise of systems prematurely or unnaturally mechanical. We know few things certainly, but given the good magnificence of our creator, we should neither expect nor require to know more. The understanding, and the refusal to equate 'unknowable' with 'nonexistent' or 'irrelevant' led Locke to condemn magisterial opinions and to

believe God-given human faculties sufficient to all *necessary* endeavours. This *attitude* is what Sterne shares most with him. A theological mood of toleration, humility, and unwavering confidence in providence steers the works of both writers. This should not be surprising. Other great minds have reiterated the claim:

it would be well, if people would not lay so much weight on their own reason in matters of religion, as to think every thing impossible and absurd which they cannot conceive. How often do we contradict the right rules of reason in the whole course of our lives? *Reason* itself is true and just, but the *reason* of every particular man is weak and wavering, perpetually swayed and turned by his interests, his passions, and his vices.²

The ‘riddles and mysteries’ refrain in Sterne is a basis for accurate hope, not the triumph of confusion.

That in many dark and abstracted questions of mere speculation, we should err—
—is not strange: we live amongst mysteries and riddles. (*S* 182.21)

The main purport of this discourse, is to teach us humility in our reasonings upon the ways of the Almighty. . . .

—Does not the meanest flower in the field, or the smallest blade of grass, baffle the understanding of the most penetrating mind? (*S* 414.18, 415.3)

Sterne was not dependent on Locke (or Norris) for so classic a notion, but it is good to be reminded of its context and its centrality to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. The section in which the ‘riddles’ passage occurs begins

our Knowledge being so narrow, as I have shew’d, it will, perhaps, give us some Light into the present State of our minds, if we look a little into the dark side, and take a view of *our ignorance*: which being infinitely larger than our Knowledge, may serve much to the quieting of Disputes, and Improvement of useful Knowledge. . . . He that knows any thing, knows this in the first place, that he need not seek long for Instances of his Ignorance. The meanest, and most obvious Things that come in our way, have dark sides, that the quickest Sight cannot penetrate into. The clearest and most enlarged Understandings of thinking Men find themselves puzzled, and at a loss, in every Particle of Matter.³

As Donald Wehrs justly notes, “from a Christian perspective, the desire for certitude is potentially heretical.”⁴ Indeed, what must have been a reticence actually to *read* Locke’s formidable tome (evidenced by this passage’s use by Sterne being publicly first noted in 1985)⁵ has cheated students of what Sterne really admired in his sagacious philosopher. The ‘reasonableness’ of Christian doctrine is its unassailable mystery. And he is most reasonable, in matters of faith, who ceases to rattle infantile opinions. Even Hume has his Philo speak it in *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*: “to be a philosophical skeptic is, in a man of letters, the first and most essential step towards being a sound, believing Christian.”⁶ *Step*.

Locke would agree with our equally sagacious preacher that “a little time for reflection ... is all that most of us want to make us wiser and better” (*S* 13.27). But for Sterne the way to this wisdom and virtue depends on something more than judgment according to distinctly known terms. The least inaccurate way to truth is through a medium mysterious as truth itself, one not presuming to bring all the revelation with it. It is vain, Locke also claims, to expect demonstrative certainty of those things that transcend the limits of our faculties.⁷ “We must therefore, if we will proceed, as Reason advises, adapt our methods of Enquiry to the nature of the Ideas we examine, and the Truth we search after.”⁸

Contrary to Locke, however, Sterne believed the way best to receive and wield reason and revelation is by the complementary activities of a spontaneous congruity of various ideas (wit), and a contemplative sifting (judgment).⁹ The value of this conjunction, writes Sterne, was missed by Locke precisely because of the insidious problem of inherited prejudice (*TS* 235-238). The way to disillusionment is through demonstration: the chair’s two knobs, Nathan’s parable. The

fact (for Locke) that all human knowledge derives from sensation and reflection, sets up the primary importance of sensual experience for the understanding. Diagrams are not liable to the same uncertainties as words; they should be stamped in the margins of dictionaries.¹⁰ Sterne's fiction presents paintings, diagrams, conversation-pieces of themes not foreign to his sermons, appealing thereby to the experiences of his readers. Because reason alone is incapable of forming accurate perceptions, he develops encounters of what Locke calls "intermediate terms," by which seemingly unrelated ideas may be connected. To be effective a *word* must be demonstrable: "active" and "shewn."

At Versailles Yorick explains to the count that he has come to spy out the nakedness of hearts; the "original drawings and loose sketches" in the temple of each individual being of more delight "than the transfiguration of Raphael itself" (*ASJ* 111.6-15). By recognizing grace in common human endeavour, we too may trace a map through the complex varieties of our own existence. Eve Tavor^{Barnett} offers a perceptive reading:

Tristram Shandy is the culmination of the sceptical tradition in the novel developed by Defoe, Richardson and Fielding. It is a parody which exposes and explodes the genre they created by taking its techniques and underlying assumptions to their absurd conclusion. And, at the same time, it represents a return from scepticism to reality, convention and belief, which lays the foundation for the nineteenth-century novel. By demonstrating that scepticism is no more true of the world than the systems it was used to question and subvert; by insisting that the sceptical problem exists only on the level of opinions, not on the level of things themselves; and by redefining the way God has given men 'whatsoever is necessary for the conveniences of life' and 'Light enough to lead them to a knowledge of their Maker and the sight of their own duties,' *Tristram Shandy* undermines scepticism and prepares the ground for a new positivism and a new belief.¹¹

As Yorick moves from 'The Grace' to 'The Case of Delicacy' he is back in the realm of veiled exchanges: "we were both too delicate to communicate what we felt to each other upon the occasion" (*ASJ* 162.24). Thus transpires the last of Sterne's 'paintings' of human nature and its coincidental meanderings. The humor of this nether part does not snicker, it displays the inescapable jest of fortune presenting its backside to an adventuresome soul. Yorick, we are told early in *TS*, loved a jest in his heart, and was never shy of involving himself as its object (*TS* 20).

Judges complaining of immorality in *TS* have either not comprehensively looked into the matter, or have no aptitude for good fun and parabolic wisdom; as Tristram says, "their honours and reverences had not seen my *bills*" (*TS* 764.24). The Rabelaisian elements in Sterne's stories are a blatant contention that as nothing is unmixed in the world, so fiction, or sermons, or any painting of life, will be bound somehow to involve elements that remind us we are creatures. Yorick, who we recall could not bear the affectation of gravity, carries a copy of Rabelais in his coat pocket (*TS* 463). We may well wonder if this is a device, like that of his horse, perpetually to remind him of the earthiness of his calling, as much as it should remind us of the parabolic religion of that monk's book. Just as Sterne's "dearer Cervantes" (*TS* 225.21) represents the quest for active integrity in a boorish and critical age, so Sterne's "dear" Rabelais is not a flag of extravagant bawdy, but a jovial and unrelenting critic of systems, of education, of discovery, of anything that makes of small things a kingdom and mistakes passing sights for paradise. "The most ingenious way of becoming foolish," wrote Shaftesbury, "is *by a System*."¹² Ecclesiastes, tutored by suffering and grace, from a ruined castle, farts in the general direction of misapplied

scientia. Panurge is no hero, but he accomplishes the very moral service of awakening self-styled nobility from pretentious dreams.

The Church, and by implication a good sermon, is not an institution founded on rules, but on the experience of the meanings from which dogma are formed. The doctrine, precepts and examples have a “proper tendency to make us a virtuous and a happy people;—every page is an address to our hearts to win them to these purposes . . . religion was not intended to work upon men by force and natural necessity, but by moral persuasion, which sets good and evil before them” (*S* 253.26). This is the Sterne of the sermons. He steers clear of offering ‘good sayings’ and tries for ‘good remedies’ in an even-minded, conversational way that has its prime example in Jesus the perfecter of the faith. The fruit, he seems sincerely to have hoped, would be encouragement of “a just sense of God’s providence, and a persuasion of his justice and goodness in all his dealings.—Such an example, I say, as this, is of more universal use, speaks truer to the heart, than all the heroic precepts, which the pedantry of philosophy have to offer” (*S* 145.27). By this artful course, his congregation may be led to an experience of the meaning of symbols whose effective value has been forgotten. This is achieved conversationally because within us are the seeds he is trying to nurture. Time and again we are referred to our own reflections, left to consider, and from an appeal to our hearts decide for ourselves the value of that experience or idea.

Without this heart-rending participation, preaching is useless, morality insufficient, and self-deception will continue to dominate. From the sermon in *Tristram Shandy* and the ones with which he chose to open Volume i, we see that first in Sterne’s mind is the necessity of encouraging the congregation away from harmful illusions and into a way wherein happiness will be the fruit of a

faithful life. The virtues he finds most consistent with this are humility, pity, forgiveness and love: to live well, one must endeavour to be philanthropic. “What divines say of the mind, naturalists have observed of the body; that there is no passion so natural to it as love, which is the principle of doing good” (*S* 50.8). The image of God in man is “moral rectitude, and the kind and benevolent affections of his nature” (*S* 66.18).

Christianity, according to Sterne, was designed specifically to reconcile us to that image in God and within each other (*S* 384.6-23). Believing this reconciliation to have been accomplished by Christ on Calvary, Sterne suggests we pursue its personal significance by cultivating a due sense of the priority of eternity in our lives. Having one’s happiness rooted beyond fluctuations of “the little interests below” encourages one toward the mysterious virtue of self-sacrifice. We are exhorted to live in such a way as to accustom ourselves here to the economy of heaven, by cutting the knot of distraction with which the world and our opinions have bound us. Finally, in this journey of disillusionment and its fruit in mercy, we may arrive with the author of Ecclesiastes at the classic conclusion,

—that to fear God, and keep his commandments, is the whole of man;—that, to be serious in the matter of religion, and careful about our future states, is that which, after all our other experiments, will be found to be our chief happiness,—our greatest interest,—our greatest wisdom,—and that which most of all deserves our care and application.— (*S* 371.21)

Thus we have Sterne’s fiction: parables of humane understanding, “auxiliaries on the side of virtue” (*TS* 517.11). Championing a complementary experiment, the Right Reverend Thomas Sprat in his *History of the Royal Society* wrote :

if we shall cast an eye on all the *Tempests*, which arise within our Breasts, and consider the causes and remedies of all the violent *desires*, malicious envies,

intemperate *joyes*, and irregular *griefs*, by which the lives of most men become *miserable*, or *guilty*: we shall find, that they are chiefly produc'd by *Idleness*, and may be most naturally cur'd by *diversion*. Whatever *Art* shall be able to busy the minds of men, with a constant course of *innocent Works*, or to fill them with as vigorous and pleasant Images, as those ill *impressions*, by which they are deluded; it will certainly have a surer effect in composing, and purifying of their thoughts, than all the rigid precepts of the Stoical, or the empty distinctions of the *Peripatetic Moralists*.¹³

In fact, the beginnings of the Royal Society provide a fitting backdrop to Sterne's endeavors, linking Christian Platonists, Latitude-men, and Locke. They were in agreement that

the spiritual and supernatural part of *Christianity* no *Philosophy* can reach . . . How small assistance it brings, may be seen in those very points, in which its Empire seems most to be plac'd, in *God's Decrees*, his *Immateriality*, his *Eternity*, and the holy Mystery of the *Trinity*: In all which we are only brought into a more learned darkness by it; and in which unfathomable Depths a plain Believing is at last acknowledg'd by all to be our only Refuge.¹⁴

As much as we may read Locke as epistemologically contrary to "innate ideas," ontologically he concurs with the classic Christian principle that, as Sterne says, each person comes "out of the hands of God,—with the very bias upon his nature, which prepares him for the character, which he was designed to fulfil" (S 68.29). This bias towards "undisguised tenderness and disinterested compassion" (S 68.27), warped through experience, requires fit remedies. As Sprat says, "the corruptions, and infirmities of *human Nature* stand in need of all manner of allurements, to draw us to good, and quiet manners."¹⁵ As wheels turned to explicate and champion *experimental learning* in the realm of *visible* and *sensible* things, there was no question of the sustained value of experiential *faith*.

What can hinder him from loving and admiring this *Saviour*, whose *Design* is so conformable to his own, but his *Ability* so much greater? . . . Who . . . though he knew the thoughts of men, and might have touch'd and mov'd them as he pleas'd; did yet not rely on his *Doctrine*, on his *Life*, on the irresistable assistance of

Angels, or on his own *Divinity* alone; but stoop'd to convince men by their *Senses*, and by the very same cours by which they receive all their *Natural Knowledge*.¹⁶

This comprehensive, good-natured and tangible appeal is suggested in Fraser Mitchell's assessment of Cambridge Platonists and latitudinarians:

from a world in which doctrines and systems of church government had set men by the ears, they turned to the contemplation of the great principles underlying all conduct and dependent, not on the fiats of inspired Book or infallible Church, but on the moral constitution of the Universe; "they transferred the emphasis" (as Professor Grierson reminds us) "from doctrines, 'the eternal decrees,' 'justification by faith,' 'effectual calling,' 'imputed righteousness,' to the Christian life;" and what is more, in doing so they were able to give striking literary expression to their deepest conviction. For with them one is dealing not with the exponents of a theological position, nor with the eccentricities of genius ... but with men of a larger and more generous outlook, which, though it found individual expression in ways which are interestingly various, yet in its broad outlines remained the same. For a higher synthesis than cult or dogma could supply had been discovered, and, although at the time it seemed inappropriate and unnoticed, was afterwards to bear fruit.¹⁷

Sterne, within the tradition, declares open season on tartuffes and hypocrites: those given to rigid precepts and empty distinctions. Other sinners are treated with mercy, gently encouraged to find and proceed along their heart's highest desire. The greatest deviance is implied in those who would proclaim *this* life to be ultimate and fritter that life away in attempts to maintain its caprices. They have yet to realize the wisdom of scripture, that this world *is* a vain farce, and subsequently have not been led to appreciate that the one unforgivable sin "against the Holy Spirit" (Mark iii.28) is not satiated flesh, but a renunciation of love. Busy establishing their figurative and literary kingdoms here, they have had nothing to spare for honest misery. The one unpardonable jest is that which disregards human frailty, our common lot (*TS* 784). This is where Sterne faults his critics. They fail to realize his engagement with the reader *entire*, and in their

criticisms, know not what they write. Sterne is explicit that wisdom involves a kind of foolishness in well-tuned souls. As Bacon and Sprat had in other forums long before complained, Tristram's Preface is devoted to showing that the arts and sciences are sufficiently displaced that an out-pouring of wit and judgment would turn them upside down (*TS* 227-238).

When Tristram proclaims the sort of kingdom he would advocate, it is a lay Thélème, and we should smile remembering that Rabelais borrowed "fay ce que voudras" from Erasmus' letter to Luther.¹⁸

It should be a kingdom of hearty laughing subjects: And as the bilious and more saturnine passions, by creating disorders in the blood and humours, have as bad an influence, I see, upon the body politick as body natural—and as nothing but a habit of virtue can fully govern those passions, and subject them to reason—I should add to my prayer—that God would give my subjects grace to be as WISE as they were MERRY; and then should I be the happiest monarch, and they the happiest people under heaven— (*TS* 402.3)

For Sterne, such a place exhibits the Christian 'law' of love. This he sees active in creation, waiting to be established as a ruling passion; sustaining, provoking, and preventing individuals, drawing forth reactions to itself as in a hall of mirrors.

Sterne himself seems to have been far less concerned about the way he appeared to the world than he was about living true to that passion. He applauds human familiarity in his writings, and we have glimpses of his sincerity in life as well. The five letters he sent from Toulouse in 1763, relating the death of George Oswald, attest to the sincerity of his allegiance to *humanity*. Reading them, one cannot help recalling elements of his fiction. We see the full force of a compassionate man, acquainted with grief, as he records the death of this young man to his father in England. Notably, recalling the "moral honesty" of Trim and Toby at the conclusion of

‘Abuses’, the first quality Sterne lists of Oswald is that he was “inflexibly honest in his sentiments.”¹⁹ After receiving thanks for his attendance, Sterne writes:

I return you my acknowledgements for the kind Things you say of me—but in truth, there deserves no more to be said of it, but that I acted here & hope I ever shall do, so, only as I wish others w^d act by me or mine, in like distress,—& that is with humanity.²⁰

Foreshadowing the snuffbox he would write of four years later, Sterne received two gifts from the dying lad.

This is all, our friend has left me in trust—except, as I told you, my engagement to wear his watch for his sake to my death—and his Sword whilst I was abroad—which I shall do, because I think it an honour to wear a mark of any good Souls friendship—²¹

For lack of any other reference or context, I cannot help wondering if we have a memento of Sterne’s fidelity to his promise. Arthur Cash describes one of the most enduring images of Sterne, composed by Thomas Patch when the parson was in Florence two years later:

Patch rendered Death as a skeleton holding a scythe and an hourglass flanked with bat’s wings. Sterne, in clerical black with white bands, but curiously wearing a sword, bows with hands folded across his breast to Death while still looking at him in the face—so to speak.²²

The sword is not to be drawn against death—that battle is already won—but in wearing the token he has turned a weapon into a symbol of humanity.

That sin lurks in Sterne’s world, does not imply license for despair or unanchored frivolity.

I love you for this—and ’tis this delicious mixture within you which makes you dear creatures what you are—and he who hates you for it—all I can say of the matter is—That he has either a pumpkin for his head—or a pippin for his heart.
(*TS* 435.16)

We are not faulted for being born, for the machinations of our education, or for thoughts that pop into our heads, but our responsibility to act well is underlined.

If nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece—must the whole web be rent in drawing them out?—Whip me such stoics, great governor of nature! . . . Wherever thy providence shall place me for the trials of my virtue—whatever is my danger—whatever is my situation—let me feel the movements which rise out of it, and which belong to me as a man—and if I govern them as a good one—I will trust the issues to thy justice, for thou hast made us—and not we ourselves. (*ASJ* 124.6)

Critics triumphantly pointing to Yorick's or Sterne's lechery in the scene that leads to this exclamation would do well to familiarize themselves with the parable to which it alludes. In Erasmus' colloquy 'A Lover and a Maiden' we read:

is Virginitie to be violated, that it may be learned? Why not? As by little and little drinking Wine sparingly, we learn to be abstemious. Which do you think is the most temperate Person, he that is sitting at a Table full of Delicacies, and abstains from them, or he who is out of the Reach of those Things that incite Intemperance?

Pray tell me, is not your Soul and Body bound together?

Yes I think they are.

Just like a Bird in a Cage; and yet, ask if it would be freed from it, I believe it will say no: and what's the Reason of that? Because it is bound by its own Consent.²³

This, of course, is the point of 'the Temptation' in *ASJ*, a scene paralleled by that involving the caged starling which Yorick attempts to free but finds "there was no getting it open without pulling the cage to pieces—" (*ASJ* 95.17).²⁴ The "web of kindness" is not to be destroyed *here* for the sake of a few bastard threads. The moral to which Sterne points is presented in Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares, Matt. xiii.24-32.

So, 'The Conquest' is not of nature (or of a fille de chambre) but of two propensities: that of lust, but more importantly that of cowardice, or inhumanity, in the sense that to presume to

feel differently would be to hope not to feel as one was created and thereby to forfeit the capacity for pleasure and responsibility reserved for the truly virtuous. This humanity, and the delicious fragility of that which is mixed within it, is the spice of life. In one of his lucid moments, Walter encourages Trim by saying he read the sermon “extremely well” *because* his heart was so full (*TS* 164.24). Nature, wrote Bacon, is to be obeyed if she is to be commanded. Because time is fleeting, Sterne searches for a North-west passage to the heart; for this he “lusted earnestly, and endeavoured carefully” that, like Toby’s gesture with the fly, “these little books . . . might stand instead of many bigger books,” and waged war against spleen (*TS* 359.13). Unlike Walter’s theory involving auxiliary verbs, Sterne’s passage involves *seeing*, even being, that about which one is speaking. In partaking of these images, and recalling one’s place in them, the reader can be brought to a valuable experience of another’s life and opinions. As Yorick makes many whimsical excuses for riding the sort of horse he does, but never really tells the true reason, so Sterne canters, walks, and pauses, not explicit in his underlying appeals, but insensibly offering entertaining, if not comforting words. A perceptive editor hit the mark early:

to the taste, therefore, the feelings, the good sense, and the candour of the public, the present collection of Mr. Sterne’s Works may be submitted, without the least apprehension that the perusal of any part of them will be followed by consequences unfavourable to ^{the interests of} society. The oftener they are read, the stronger will a sense of universal benevolence be impressed on the mind; and the attentive reader will subscribe to the character of the author given by a comic writer, who declares he held him to be “a moralist in the noblest sense; he plays indeed with the fancy, and sometimes, perhaps, too wantonly; but while he thus designedly masks his main attack, he comes at once upon the heart; refines, amends it, softens it; beats down each selfish barrier from about it, and opens every sluice of pity and benevolence.”²⁵

His life, like that of his principal narrators, is bound up in words. Their instability is his. When Yorick sells his post-chaise he loses his “remarks,” the very means by which he turns misfortune to profit. Without these remarks he is left facing the tyranny of this world—having no creative vehicle with which to enter into jests worth at least what he has been taxed (*TS* 638; 645). Thus, with all the talk of fleeing death we come to realize that in making his remarks Sterne is actually turning to face it, marching up to the mouth of the canon and, in the manner of Job, Toby, and all Quixotic saints, cocking a snook.

Sterne’s sermons are not polemic (“ ’Tis wrote upon neither side . . . for ’tis only upon *Conscience*” *TS* 139.20); he carries this good nature with him into fiction. By 1759 much of his life had been spent composing sermons and attempting to reach the heart of his flock. His stories spring from the same hopes, desires and fears as those homilies, while offering more room within which to turn himself and by which to accommodate a significantly larger congregation. Yorick’s voice is whispering in the theatre of that fiction ~ Tristram remarks on his habit of making notes on his own sermons (*TS* 517.4): a few short, musical characters are written before the text,

—but at the end of his discourse, where, perhaps, he had five or six pages, and sometimes, perhaps, a whole score to turn himself in, —he took a larger circuit, and, indeed, a much more mettlesome one; —as if he had snatched the occasion of unlacing himself with a few more frolicksome strokes at vice, than the straitness of the pulpit allowed. —These, though hussar-like, they skirmish lightly and all out of order, are still auxiliaries on the side of virtue—; tell me then, Mynheer Vander Blonederdondergewdenstronke, why they should not be printed together?

ENDNOTES

Notes to I

¹ G. K. Chesterton, *The Defendant*, new ed. (London, 1907), p. 70.

² Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. Charles Cotton, 5th ed. (1738), I 285.

³ Peter M. Briggs, "Locke's *Essay* and the Tentativeness of *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985): 493-520. Donald R. Wehrs, "Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Skepticism and the Rhetoric of Desire," *Comparative Literature Studies* 25 (1988): 127-51, and "Levinas and Sterne: From the Ethics of the Face to the Aesthetics of Unrepresentability," in *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne*, ed. Melvyn New (New York, 1998), pp. 311-29. J.T. Parnell "Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 220-42, and "A Story Painted to the Heart? *Tristram Shandy* and Sentimentalism Reconsidered," *Shandean* 9 (1997): 122-35.

⁴ Melvyn New, *Tristram Shandy: A Book for Free Spirits* (New York, 1994), p. 10.

⁵ Melvyn New, ed., *Critical Essays on Laurence Sterne* (New York, 1998), p. 9.

⁶ New, *Free Spirits*, pp. 38, 62.

⁷ Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel; To which are added Six Sermons Preached on Public Occasions*, new ed. (London 1839), sermon xiv, p. 142.

⁸ Montaigne, *Essays*, II 120.

⁹ This phrase concludes the opening paragraph of Pierre Charron's *De la Sagesse*. Quoted by Harry M. Solomon in *The Rape of the Text: Reading and Misreading Pope's Essay on Man* (Tuscaloosa AL, 1993), p. 127.

¹⁰ Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, sermon xv, pp. 151-59.

¹¹ Lansing Van Der Heyden Hammond, *Laurence Sterne's Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (New Haven CT, 1948). Of great use are *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, Volumes IV and V: *The Sermons* ed. Melvyn New, and *The Notes to the Sermons* Melvyn New (Gainesville FL, 1996). A number of New's provocative studies will be referenced throughout.

¹² Elizabeth Kraft, *Laurence Sterne Revisited* (New York, 1996), p. 26.

¹³ Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life* (Oxford, 2001), p. 241.

¹⁴ Ross, *Life*, pp. 198-99, 232-45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁷ Reviews in *The Economist* (April 14, 2001), pp. 78-9; and *The Globe and Mail*: Toronto (June 9, 2001), p. D4.

¹⁸ Brian Fothergill, *The Mitred Earl: An Eighteenth-Century Eccentric* (London, 1975), pp. 20-21.

¹⁹ New, *Free Spirits*, p. 94.

²⁰ Ross, *Life*, p. 117.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

²² New, *Free Spirits*, p. 80.

- ²³ *Approaches to Teaching Sterne's Tristram Shandy*, ed. Melvyn New (New York, 1989), p. 7.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.
- ²⁵ Daniel Waterland's *Advice to a Young Student with a Method of Study for the Four First Years* (Cambridge, 1730) provides a helpful glimpse.
- ²⁶ *Letters of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis (Oxford, 1935), p. 76. Cited hereafter as *Letters*.
- ²⁷ Sir Walter Scott, *Lives of the Novelists* (Paris, 1825), I 188.
- ²⁸ *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, ed. Marjorie David (Cheadle, 1973), p. 24.
- ²⁹ Arthur H. Cash, *Sterne's Comedy of Moral Sentiments: The Ethical Dimension of the Journey* (Pittsburgh PA, 1966).
- ³⁰ Herbert Read, *The Sense of Glory* (Freeport NY, 1930), p. 134.
- ³¹ Montaigne, *Essays*, I 7.
- ³² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739], ed. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1978), p. 269.
- ³³ *Letters*, p. 218.
- ³⁴ Hume, *Treatise*, p. 273.
- ³⁵ *Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig (Oxford, 1932), II 269.
- ³⁶ Henry Hammond, *Sermons* (London, 1675), p. 2.
- ³⁷ Anthony Blackwall, *The Sacred Classics Defended and Illustrated* [1725], 2nd ed. (1727), pp. 253, 259.
- ³⁸ George Berkeley, *Alciphron: Or, the Minute Philosopher. In Seven Dialogues. Containing an Apology for the Christian Religion, against those who are called Free-thinkers* [1732], in *The Works of George Berkeley, D.D.*, ed. George Sampson (London, 1898), II 377.
- ³⁹ Blackwall, *Sacred Classics*, pp. 86, 66.
- ⁴⁰ John Norris, *The Theory and Regulation of Love* (Oxford, 1688), p. 2.
- ⁴¹ *Letters*, p. 134.
- ⁴² Hume, *Treatise*, p. 256.
- ⁴³ New Testament: Acts ii.
- ⁴⁴ Montaigne, *Essays*, I 307.
- ⁴⁵ Chesterton, *Defendant*, pp. 69-70.
- ⁴⁶ *Letters*, p. 281.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 281-82.

Notes to II

- ¹ *Tristram Shandy*, ed. Gerald Weales [Detroit, 1960] (New York, 1962), p. 544.
- ² Arthur Cash, "Voices Sonorous and Cracked," in *Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Larry Champion (Athens GA, 1974), p. 203. Among capable critics, Fluchère and Battestin are particularly poor on latitudinarian thought.
- ³ A. De Froe, *Laurence Sterne and His Novels Studied in the Light of Modern Psychology* (Groningen, 1925), p. 119.

⁴ E. g. Arthur Cash, "The Sermon in *Tristram Shandy*," *ELH* 31 (1964): 395-417, and Byron Petrakis, "Jester in the Pulpit: Sterne and Pulpit Eloquence," *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972): 430-47.

⁵ For particularly good examples of misreading in this regard see H. D. Traill, *Sterne* (New York, 1882); Ernest Dilworth, *The Unsentimental Journey of Laurence Sterne* (New York, 1948); Paul Dumon McGlynn, "Laurence Sterne's Religion: the Sermons and Novels," (Ph.D. diss., Rice, 1967); Richard Lanham, *Tristram Shandy: the Games of Pleasure* (Berkeley, 1973); Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, "Hostage to Fortune: Time, Chance, and Laurence Sterne," *Modern Philology* 85 (1988): 499-513; Ronald Paulson, *The Beautiful, Novel, and Strange: Aesthetics and Heterodoxy* (Baltimore, 1996).

⁶ Harlan W. Hamilton, "Sterne's Sermon in Paris and its Background," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 128 (1984), p. 323.

⁷ L.V. Hammond, *Laurence Sterne's Sermons of Mr. Yorick* (New Haven CT, 1948).

⁸ James Downey, "The Sermons of Mr Yorick: A Reassessment of Hammond," *English Studies in Canada* 4 (1978): 193-211.

⁹ L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, pp. 92, 101.

¹⁰ Downey, "Sermons of Mr. Yorick," 193, 209.

¹¹ L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, p. 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 39, 40.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 39, 66, 85.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Melvyn New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist* (Gainesville FL, 1969), p. 1.

¹⁶ *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, V p. 4.

¹⁷ *Letters*, p. 84.

¹⁸ *The Whiteford Papers*, ed. W. A. S. Hewins (Oxford, 1898), p. 227.

¹⁹ *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, V pp. 2, 1. New's assumptions and conclusions regarding such details seem usually to be taken at face value, even by those otherwise critical. Thus Judith Hawley in her review of the fourth and fifth Florida volumes: "... Sterne elaborately puffed his sermons. When the first instalment of *Tristram Shandy* took London by storm in the spring of 1760, to capitalize on his success, Sterne hastily prepared two volumes of his sermons for publication in December [sic] of that year . . ." "Yorick in the Pulpit," *Essays in Criticism* 48 (1998): 80.

²⁰ New admits to "a certain predilection for this less likely alternative, he admired his sermons and thought they might do the world some good," *ibid.*, p. 1. The one seemingly obvious editorial slip, suggesting haste in preparation of Sterne's first volumes, is the near verbatim repetition of his reworking of a brief anecdotal passage from Wollaston in sermons 9 and 10 (89.25-30; 99.21-27 in *Florida Works*, IV. The passage in sermon 10 was deleted for the second and subsequent editions). However, given Sterne's tendency to borrow from himself, and the sermons' present order not necessarily being that in which they were prepared for publication, his scrap-book mind could without haste or carelessness have missed the indecorous duplication.

²¹ John Eachard, *The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy and Religion*

(London, 1670), pp. 38, 43.

²² Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [1783], 3rd ed. (New York, 1831), Lecture xxix: 'Eloquence of the Pulpit', p. 313.

²³ James Arderne, *Directions Concerning the Matter and Stile of Sermons* [1671], ed. John Mackay (Oxford, 1952), p. 5.

²⁴ Jonathan Swift, *Letter to a Young Gentleman, Lately enter'd into Holy Orders* [1721], in Jonathan Swift, *Irish Tracts and Sermons*, ed. Herbert Davis (Oxford, 1948), p. 77. In "Sermons on Sermonizing: The Pulpit Rhetoric of Swift and Sterne," *Philological Quarterly* 76 (1997): 413-436 Christopher Fanning is correct to see differences in sermon style between Swift and Sterne; his focus on "Sterne's Shandean self-presentation" points to the need for clarification I hope to offer here.

²⁵ John Conybeare, *Sermons* (London, 1757), I 500.

²⁶ Hugh Blair, *Lectures*, pp. 315, 317. W. Fraser Mitchell's classic *English Pulpit Oratory* (London, 1932) provides an introduction to Sterne's seventeenth century homiletic roots.

²⁷ Gilbert Burnet, *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care* (London, 1692), p. 223.

²⁸ See for example, Arthur Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Early & Middle Years* (London, 1975), pp. 126-27.

²⁹ John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes: or A Discourse concerning the gift of Preaching as it falls under the rules of Art* [1646], 2nd ed. (1647), p. 106.

³⁰ For example, Burnet, *A Discourse*, ch. ix; and Blair, *Lectures*, p. 322.

³¹ François Fénelon, *Dialogues Concerning Eloquence In General; And particularly that Kind which is fit for the Pulpit...*, trans. William Stevenson (London, 1722), pp. 111-12. Fenelon's *Dialogues* were still being recommended in 1800: Edward Williams, *The Christian Preacher: or, Discourses on Preaching by Several Eminent Divines, English and Foreign, Revised and Abridged* (Halifax, 1800), p. 486.

³² H. Blair, *Lectures*, p. 321.

³³ See L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, pp. 100-01, n. 5.

³⁴ Burnet, *A Discourse*, p. 222.

³⁵ Letter of James Heming published in the Annual Register for 1761, in Ralph S. Churchill, *The Story of the Coronation* (London, 1953), p. 124.

³⁶ *Letters*, p. 134.

³⁷ See notes 2 and 5 in *Ibid.*, pp. 134-35.

³⁸ Fénelon, *Dialogues*, p. 175.

³⁹ Elizabeth Kraft, *Laurence Sterne Revisited* (New York, 1996), p. 26. Again, as with Hawley in note 19 above, Christopher Fanning writes: "to begin, we should note that Sterne's sermons are works perhaps more notoriously plagiarized, yet less expected to be original than a 'work of art' such as *Tristram Shandy*. . . . Melvyn New's recent edition of the sermons has reconfirmed the massive extent of Sterne's indebtedness to Anglican writings of the Restoration and early eighteenth century. In the light of such extensive borrowing, the Florida edition of Sterne's sermons stresses the error of perceiving 'original' Sternean thought where there is none." " 'The Things Themselves': Origins and Originality in Sterne's Sermons," *Eighteenth Century Theory*

and *Interpretation* 40 (1999): 34.

⁴⁰ Thomas Sharp, *Three Discourses on Preaching* [1757-9] appended to *The Rubric in the Book of Common Prayer*.... [1753] (Oxford, 1834), pp. 3, 15, 323.

⁴¹ See especially *Florida Works* V pp. xiii-xvi and 33-35.

⁴² Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 12th ed. (London, 1791) II 253-54.

⁴³ *Florida Works*, V pp. xiii, 251, 262.

⁴⁴ Examples are legion; e.g. from the letters: "Jehu like," "hot as *Nebuchadnezzar's oven*," "set my face, not towards Jerusalem" (*Letters*, pp. 178, 180, 257); from *TS*: "he steps forth like a bridegroom," "O never may I lie down in their tents," "is a man to follow rules—or rules to follow him?" (*TS* 81.16, 261.2, 337.5); and from *ASJ*: "sojourn in a land of strangers," "thy hand is against every man, and every man's hand against thee—," "—Surely—surely man! it is not good for thee to sit alone—" (*ASJ* 14.21, 20.18, 73.9). The scullion's remark upon hearing of Bobby's death (*TS* 430.13) may come from the "so did not I" of Nehemiah v.15.

⁴⁵ See New's note to 325.3-16 in *Florida Works*, V pp. 359-60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ Blackwall, *Sacred Classics*, pp. 183, 207.

⁴⁸ Burnet, *A Discourse*, p. 253.

⁴⁹ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 319.

⁵⁰ *Florida Works*, V p. 10.

⁵¹ Hall's *Contemplations* were first issued 1612-26.

⁵² See notes to *S* 207.11-12, 299.31-300.1, 386.16-23, and 387.8-19 in *Florida Works*, V.

⁵³ *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be read in Churches* [1562] (London, 1864), pp. vii-ix.

⁵⁴ See for explicit reference Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, IV xxix 63, as noted in Samuel Johnson, *Sermons*, ed. Jean Hagstrum and James Gray (New Haven, 1978), pp. xxvii-xxviii.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Florida Works*, V p. xvi, see this for two other pertinent quotations.

⁵⁶ Samuel Johnson, *Sermons*, ed. Hagstrum and Gray (New Haven, 1978), pp. xxi-xxii.

⁵⁷ Ross, *Life*, pp. 198-200.

⁵⁸ William Wollaston, *The Religion of Nature Delineated* [1722] (London, 1725), p. 6.

⁵⁹ Philip Stevick, review of *The Florida Edition of the Works of Laurence Sterne*, Vols. IV and V, ed. Melvyn New, *Scriblerian* 30 (1998): 42. For similar complaints see Judith Hawley's review of the same Florida volumes in *Essays in Criticism* 48 (1998): 80-88, and John A. Dussinger's review of New's "Some Sterne Borrowings from Four Renaissance Authors," in *Scriblerian* 26 (1994): 191-92. On the commonplace nature of homiletic borrowing see James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit* (Oxford, 1969), and Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 513-14.

⁶⁰ *Florida Works*, V p. 166.

⁶¹ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, pp. 309-10.

⁶² Swift, *Letter to a Young Gentleman*, p. 75.

⁶³ H. Blair, *Lectures*, p. 325.

⁶⁴ *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Wilbur Cross (New York, 1904), V xlii.

⁶⁵ Compare, in *Florida Works*, IV and the corresponding notes to passages in V, Sterne's uses of: Clarke: 408.21-24 : 218.31-33 ; Norris: 279.1-10 : 222.12-18 ; Young: 269.27-270.3 : 222.2-8 ; Leightonhouse: 326.5-9 : 188.10-14 , and 329.14-330.3 : 223.26-224.15; Rogers: 294.11-295.7 : 240.5-28 ; Stillingfleet: 314.18-31 : 216.28- 217.1 ; Tillotson: 315.4-14 : 253.22-30. In every case the 'lifetime' borrowing is shorter and less verbatim.

⁶⁶ Joseph Hall, *Contemplations upon the Principal Passages in the Holy Story* [1612-34], in Vols. I and II of *The Works of Joseph Hall*, ed. Philip Wynter (Oxford, 1863). "The Righteous Mammon" is found there as sermon vii in Vol. V.

⁶⁷ Anon., *The European Magazine* XXI (1792), pp. 167-69; quoted in L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, p. 2.

⁶⁸ John Ferriar, *Illustrations of Sterne with other Essays and Verses* (London, 1798), pp. 94-5.

⁶⁹ Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason* (Philadelphia PA, 1985), p. 42. In *Advice to a Young Student with a Method of Study for the Four First Years* (Cambridge, 1730), pp.18-27 Waterland recommends exclusively the complete works of Tillotson for the second year of theological study. Locke praises his friend Tillotson in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, see John Marshall, "Locke and latitudinarianism," in *Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England 1640-1700*, ed. Richard Kroll, Richard Ashcraft, Perez Zagorin (Cambridge, 1992), esp. pp. 264-65.

⁷⁰ Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 41.

⁷¹ H. Blair, *Lectures*, p.324.

⁷² Anthony Ashley Cooper, 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* [1711], 2nd ed. (London, 1714), III 112. Shaftesbury encouraged, however, sermons offered in the style of "the Conversation of the fashionable World" in lieu of those laden with "School-Learning, and the Language of the University." See his edition of Benjamin Whichcote's *Select Sermons* (London, 1698), pp. 4-5.

⁷³ Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986), p. 46. Indeed Sharp, along with Calamy and Blackhall are recommended by Waterland as "the best Models for an easy, natural, and familiar way of writing": *Advice to a Young Student*, p. 22.

⁷⁴ W. A. Speck, *Stability and Strife in England, 1714-1760* (Cambridge MA, 1977), p. 105.

⁷⁵ Swift, *Letter to a Young Gentleman*, p. 67.

⁷⁶ Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes*, pp. 2, 4, 5-7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.105.

⁷⁸ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 322.

⁷⁹ *Florida Works*, V p. 152.

⁸⁰ John Tillotson, *The Works of the most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson* [1695-1704] (Edinburgh, 1748), (#42), III p. 1.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁸² T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 313.

⁸³ Tillotson's causes are quoted by New, *Florida Works*, V p. 155.

⁸⁴ Tillotson, *Works* (Edinburgh), p. 14.

⁸⁵ The third letter of *Spectator* 539, Nov. 18, 1712 (London, 1823), p. 774.

⁸⁶ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 317.

- ⁸⁷ *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, ed. G. B. Hill (London, 1897), II 305. Maurice Quinlan writes that Clarke appealed to Johnson for two reasons: “he had a kind of tranquillizing effect on Johnson’s scruples... [and] he made an important contribution to his understanding of the Atonement.” *Samuel Johnson: A Layman’s Religion* (Madison WI, 1962), p. 41. The quip regarding Clarke’s “heresy” refers to alleged Unitarian sympathies in his *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity* [1712].
- ⁸⁸ Sterne’s familiarity with Clarke’s charity sermon (#102) is established on the verbal echoes in Sterne’s two charity sermons in Vol. i (#s 3 and 5).
- ⁸⁹ *Florida Works*, V p. 102.
- ⁹⁰ Samuel Clarke, *Sermons on Several Subjects* [collected 1730], 8th ed. (Dublin, 1751), III 445-46, 447, 448.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 446.
- ⁹² *Florida Works*, V pp. 81-82, 106.
- ⁹³ Clarke, *Sermons*, III 444.
- ⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 443-44.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 448, 448-49. On ‘charity sermons’ in general, see Donna T. Andrew, “On Reading Charity Sermons: Eighteenth-Century Anglican Solicitation and Exhortation,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 43 (1992): 581-91.
- ⁹⁶ Clarke, *Sermons*, III 438.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 442-43.
- ⁹⁸ H. Blair, *Lectures*, p 324.
- ⁹⁹ James Arderne, *Directions Concerning the Matter and Stile of Sermons* [1671], p. 9.
- ¹⁰⁰ Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* [1762-1763], ed. J.C. Bryce (Oxford, 1983), p. 55.
- ¹⁰¹ For example, by George Lyon. See my pp. 213-14 above.
- ¹⁰² Fénelon, *Dialogues*, p.114.
- ¹⁰³ H. Blair, *Lectures*, Lecture xxxi, ‘Introduction of a Discourse,’ p. 348.
- ¹⁰⁴ H. Blair, *Lectures*, Lecture xxix, ‘Eloquence of the Pulpit,’ pp. 319, 325.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Florida Works*, V p. 93.
- ¹⁰⁶ John Sharp, sermon 15 in *Nineteen Sermons on Several Subjects* [c.1700], in Vol. VI of *Works*, 8th ed. (London, 1748).
- ¹⁰⁷ John Norris, *Practical Discourses upon the Beatitudes of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*, 4th ed. (London, 1699), p. 4.
- ¹⁰⁸ For the perseverance into the eighteenth century of sermons of length, learning and explicit division see, for example, Gerard Reedy, *Robert South 1634-1716* (Cambridge, 1992), chapter 3.
- ¹⁰⁹ There are very few instances where Sterne changes a source the other way. One is noted in this paper, p. 56 using Tillotson, another uses Charron at S 180.28-30.
- ¹¹⁰ Sermon 118, not 119 as has *Florida Works*, V.
- ¹¹¹ John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson. Two Hundred Sermons and Discourses, On Several Occasions* (London, 1712), I (in which this is sermon 65) p. 473.
- ¹¹² Clarke, *Sermons*, #95 III p. 351.
- ¹¹³ Walter Leightonhouse, *Twelve Sermons* (London, 1697), sermon xii, pp. 459-60.

- ¹¹⁴ Arderne, *Directions*, p. 18; see also Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 16.
- ¹¹⁵ "The Mercy of God" sermon 94 in *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson. Two Hundred Sermons* (London), I p. 708.
- ¹¹⁶ Clarke, *Sermons*, #98 III pp. 381, 382.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 387.
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 387-88.
- ¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 389.
- ¹²⁰ *Florida Works*, V p. 128.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128; and Sterne's *S* 76.24-32.
- ¹²³ See *Ibid.*, pp. 129-30; (note to *S* 77.10-78.2).
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264. Unlike Sterne, Hall did not suggest reciprocity between his (early) satirical works and his (later) specifically theological discourses. Presenting the first edition [c.1605] of Hall's utopian travel burlesque *Mundus Alter et Idem*, (in which Hall borrows from Erasmus' *Colloquies* and imitates Rabelais) William Knight clearly states that his unnamed friend did not want it published because its content was unworthy of a clergyman. Hall likewise renounced publication of his earlier *Virgidemiarum*. Such cautions did not prevent Milton from disliking him, accusing him of shoddy morals.
- ¹²⁵ Ferriar, *Illustrations*, p. 95.
- ¹²⁶ *Florida Works*, V pp. 313, 13.
- ¹²⁷ L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, p. 68.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*.
- ¹²⁹ Hall, *Contemplations* [1612-34], I 60, 61-62, 64.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, II 199.
- ¹³¹ *Ibid.*, I 49-51. Sterne uses but does not develop another of Hall's flips at *S* 161.8-24.
- ¹³² *Ibid.*, I 287-93; sermon 18 of Sterne.
- ¹³³ *Florida Works*, V p. 210.
- ¹³⁴ Hall, *Contemplations*, I 289, 289-90.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, I 290.
- ¹³⁶ References to Blair, Clarke and Norris in the preceding paragraph are from James Blair, *Our Saviour's Divine Sermon on the Mount* [1722], 2nd ed. (1740), I, sermon 8. From sermon 134 in Samuel Clarke, *Sermons*, IV. And John Norris *Practical Discourses*, "The Importance of a Religious Life, considered," pp. 110-11.
- ¹³⁷ Norris, *Practical Discourses*, p. 111. That Sterne's four 'sources' each called for and received different forms and amounts of reworking should be considered.
- ¹³⁸ L.V. Hammond, *Sterne's Sermons*, p. 127.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- ¹⁴⁰ Clarke, *Sermons*, #97, III 370.
- ¹⁴¹ The citation Sterne gives, though incorrect (2 Kings vi.7 should be vi.5) is of course closer to our editor's sense of literary property. "Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it."

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- ¹⁴² John Norris, discourse vi, in *Practical Discourses upon the Beatitudes*, p. 136.
- ¹⁴³ Of the many that could be stacked, New's note to 280.9-13 (*Florida Works*, V, pp. 319-20) quotes examples from Clarke and John Sharp.
- ¹⁴⁴ Melvyn New, "The Odd Couple: Laurence Sterne and John Norris of Bemerton," *Philological Quarterly* 75 (1996): 365, 362. New (and Day) again calls attention to Norris as the "very able divine" and Sterne's 'heavy leaning on Norris's discussion' in the note to *ASJ* 38.4-13; see *Florida Works*, VI pp. 273-75.
- ¹⁴⁵ New, "The Odd Couple," 363.
- ¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 367, 373, 373-74. Along with works of Clagget, Atterbury and Stillingfleet, the four parts of Norris' *Practical Discourses* are suggested by Waterland for the third year of theological study, *Advice to a Young Student*, pp. 18-25.
- ¹⁴⁷ Walter Leightonhouse is quoted in New's note to *S* 329.9-330.22, *Florida Works*, V pp. 363-64.
- ¹⁴⁸ Richard Bentley, *Works*, ed. Alexander Dyce (London, 1836, 1838), III 274.
- ¹⁴⁹ J. Blair, *Divine Sermons*, IV 200.
- ¹⁵⁰ John Tillotson, *The Works of the Most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson. Two Hundred Sermons* (London), sermon 72, I p. 534.
- ¹⁵¹ Clarke, *Sermons*, IV 159.
- ¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 154.
- ¹⁵³ *Florida Works*, V p. 264.
- ¹⁵⁴ See *Florida Works*, V p. 445, note to *S* 410.32-411.30.
- ¹⁵⁵ Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 14.
- ¹⁵⁶ William Spellman, "Archbishop John Tillotson and the Meaning of Moralism," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 56 (1987): 415.
- ¹⁵⁷ Jonathan Edwards "Sinners in the hands of an angry God" preached at Enfield, July 8, 1741 (Boston, 1741), pp. 14-15.
- ¹⁵⁸ Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes*, p. 16.
- ¹⁵⁹ Edward Stillingfleet, *Works* (London, 1709-10), I 216.
- ¹⁶⁰ Arderne, *Directions*, p. 13.
- ¹⁶¹ Titus ii.2. Thomas Secker, *Works* (London, 1811), sermon xii, I 204-05.
- ¹⁶² H. Blair, *Lectures*, "Eloquence of the Pulpit," p. 320.
- ¹⁶³ Arderne, *Directions*, p. 16.
- ¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ¹⁶⁵ James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit* (Oxford, 1969), pp. 15-16. See also Norman Sykes "The Sermons of a Country Parson," *Theology* 38 (1939): 97-106.
- ¹⁶⁶ Tillotson is quoted in *Florida Works*, V p. 376.
- ¹⁶⁷ Thomas Secker, *Works* (London, 1811), sermon xviii, I 289-90.
- ¹⁶⁸ For example at *S* 55.24, 94.13, 142.31, 181.2
- ¹⁶⁹ *Florida Works*, V p. 375.

¹⁷⁰ George Fothergill, in *Family Lectures; or Domestic Divinity, being a copious collection of Sermons, selected from the polite Writers and sound Divines....* (London, 1791), section vii, sermon iii, p. 492.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 492, 493.

¹⁷² Secker, *Works*, sermon iv, I 47.

¹⁷³ Fothergill, *Family Lectures*, p. 494.

¹⁷⁴ A few of many, *S* 155.15, 92.4, 197.22, 181.2.

¹⁷⁵ Likewise a few of many, *S* 68.22, 99.30, 187.11, 214.26.

¹⁷⁶ See Melvyn New, "Sterne, Warburton, and the Burden of Exuberant Wit," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1982): 245-74, Everett Zimmerman, "Tristram Shandy and Narrative Representation," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 28 (1987): 126-47, and Jonathan Lamb, "The Job Controversy, Sterne and the Question of Allegory," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 24 (1990): 1-19.

¹⁷⁷ James Swearingen, *Reflexivity in Tristram Shandy* (New Haven CT, 1977), p. 175.

Notes to III

¹ Ian Campbell Ross, *Laurence Sterne: A Life* (Oxford, 2001), p. 276.

² *Letters*, p. 166.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-55.

⁶ See David Morris, *The Religious Sublime* (Lexington KY, 1972), and Murray Roston, *Prophet and Poet* (Evanston IL, 1965).

⁷ Melvyn New, in the *Encyclopedia of Literature and Criticism* (Routledge, 1990), p. 506.

⁸ Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, ed. G.B. Hill, revised and enlarged by L. F. Powell, 6 vols. 1934-50, IV 105. Quoted in Samuel Johnson, *Sermons*, p. xli.

⁹ Donald Greene, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the 'Man Of Feeling' Reconsidered," *Modern Philology* 75 (1977): 181.

¹⁰ William Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford, 1988), p. 102.

¹¹ See *Letters*, pp. 134, 150, 157, 164, 196, 222, 229.

¹² Byron Petrakis uses this phrase with reference to Walter, "Jester in the Pulpit: Sterne and Pulpit Eloquence," *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972): 439. The *right* kind of fools will be given vent below.

¹³ For critical discussion of this shift see John Stedmond, *The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne* (Toronto, 1967), pp. 135-36, 143; Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 109-26; Charles Moran III, "An Analysis of Sterne's Intention: *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*," (Ph.D. diss., Brown, 1968), pp. 8-16; Margaret Shaw, *Laurence Sterne: The Making of a Humorist, 1713 – 1762* (London, 1957), pp. 112-13, 221; Wilfred Watson, "Sterne's Satire on Mechanism: A Study of *Tristram Shandy*," (Ph.D. diss., Toronto, 1951), ch. 1; Eve Tavor Bannet, *Scepticism, Society and the Eighteenth-Century Novel*

(New York, 1987), p. 206. The most consistent misreading of the shift is provided by Richard Lanham, *Tristram Shandy: the Games of Pleasure* (Berkeley, 1973).

¹⁴ Alan B. Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage* (London, 1974), pp. 390, 391. *Dictionnaire Philosophique* [1771], *Oeuvres Complètes de Voltaire*, ed. A.J.Q. Beuchot (Paris, 1877-83), XVIII 237-38.

¹⁵ Michael Rosenblum "The Sermon, the King of Bohemia, and the Art of Interpolation in *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in Philology* 75 (1978): 479.

¹⁶ *Letters*, pp. 239, 254.

¹⁷ For example, *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁸ See Joseph Butler's *Fifteen Sermons*, especially nos. 1-3, 7, 10; and Swift's "On the Testimony of Conscience" in *Irish Tracts and Sermons*, pp. 150-58. Locke says of conscience it "is nothing else, but our own Opinion or Judgment of the Moral Rectitude or Pravity of our own Actions. And if Conscience be a Proof of innate Principles, contraries may be innate Principles: Since some Men, with the same bent of Conscience, prosecute what others avoid." *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1689, 6th ed. 1710], ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1979), p. 70 (I iii 8).

¹⁹ John Balguy, in *Family Lectures: or Domestic Divinity, being a copious collection of Sermons, selected from the polite Writers and sound Divines...*, section vi, sermon 1, p. 424.

²⁰ Tillotson, *The Works of the most Reverend Dr. John Tillotson* (Edinburgh, 1748), II 334, 347.

²¹ Carol Kay, *Political Constructions Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke* (Ithaca NY, 1998), p. 211.

²² Morris Golden, "Periodical Context in the Imagined World of *Tristram Shandy*," *The Age of Johnson* 1 (1987): 258.

²³ Max Byrd, *Tristram Shandy* (London, 1985), p. 101. In *Letters*, p. 401, Sterne refers to *ASJ* saying "I told you my design in it was to teach us to love the world and our fellow creatures better than we do".

²⁴ Melvyn New refers to "Sterne's system of belief" and "Sterne's moral system" in *Florida Works*, V pp. 27, 32.

²⁵ Matthew Hutton, *Sermons preached before the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London, 1728-1751), II 11.

²⁶ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, X. 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, X. 9.

²⁸ Jonathan Swift, "A Sermon upon the Excellency of Christianity," in *Irish Tracts and Sermons*, pp. 243-44.

²⁹ John Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric* (Berkeley, 1954), p. 80.

³⁰ Francis Doherty, "Sterne and Hume: A Bicentenary Essay," *Essays and Studies* new series 22 (1969): 79.

³¹ Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, "Hostage to Fortune: Time, Chance, and Laurence Sterne," *Modern Philology* 85 (1988): 501.

³² *Letters*, p. 301.

- ³³ Arthur H. Cash, "Some New Sterne Letters," *Times Literary Supplement* (April 8, 1965), p. 284.
- ³⁴ *Letters*, p. 301.
- ³⁵ Harry M. Solomon, *The Rape of the Text* (Tuscaloosa AL, 1993), p. 101.
- ³⁶ For similar focus in Joseph Butler see Downey, *Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, pp. 48-49.
- ³⁷ William Dodd, *Reflections on Death* [1763], 5th ed. (London, 1773), p. 19.
- ³⁸ Conybeare, *Sermons*, I 361. Conybeare footnotes this passage: "See Mr. Locke's Essay. Lib. I. chap. 2. §. 31."
- ³⁹ Johnson, *Sermons*, p. 53.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 130, 130, 149.
- ⁴¹ Robert Alter, "Tristram Shandy and the Game of Love," *The American Scholar* 37 (1968): 323.
- ⁴² James Cruise, "Reinvesting the Novel: *Tristram Shandy* and Authority," *The Age of Johnson* 1 (1987): 218.
- ⁴³ See for example, Henri Fluchère, *Laurence Sterne: de l'homme à l'œuvre* (Paris, 1961), translated and abridged by Barbara Bray as *Laurence Sterne, From Tristram to Yorick* (London, 1965), p. 354; Lanham, *Games*, pp. 129-37, 163-64.
- ⁴⁴ New, *Laurence Sterne as Satirist*, p. 76.
- ⁴⁵ James Swearingen, *Reflexivity*, p. 125.
- ⁴⁶ See also *S* pp. 102.6-11 and 212.14-19.
- ⁴⁷ See Melvyn New, "Some Sterne Borrowings from Four Renaissance Authors," *Philological Quarterly* 71 (1992): 302-03.
- ⁴⁸ Arthur Cash, "The Sermon in *Tristram Shandy*," *ELH* 31 (1964): 414.
- ⁴⁹ See Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason* (Philadelphia, 1985), and Roland Stromberg, *Religious Liberalism in Eighteenth-Century England* (London, 1954), for reason's insufficiency amongst such of Sterne's contemporary churchmen as Butler, Law, Berkeley and Wesley.
- ⁵⁰ On this see Robert A. Greene, "Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52 (1991): 617-44.
- ⁵¹ On the nature of the Fall, in this respect, see Donald Greene "Augustinianism and Empiricism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 (1967): 33-68, "Latitudinarianism and Sensibility: The Genealogy of the 'Man Of Feeling' Reconsidered," *Modern Philology* 75 (1977): 159-83; William Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity* (Oxford, 1988), "Archbishop John Tillotson and the Meaning of Moralism," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 56 (1987): 404-22; and John Spurr, " "Latitudinarianism" and the Restoration Church," *The Historical Journal* 31 (1988): 61-82.
- ⁵² Montaigne, *Essays*, II 2, 9.
- ⁵³ James Foster, *Sermons*, 3rd ed. (London, 1736), pp. 77, 87-88.
- ⁵⁴ Jonathan Swift, "Doing Good: A Sermon" [preached 1724], in *Irish Tracts*, p. 232.
- ⁵⁵ Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons* [1726, Preface expanded 1730], pp. vxi, xvii.
- ⁵⁶ Conybeare, *Sermons*, sermon viii, pp. 226, 232.
- ⁵⁷ The jury is still out on who wrote "The Difficulty of Knowing One's Self," published

as Swift's in 1744-45. See New's headnote to sermon 4, *Florida Works*, V pp. 83-84, and Louis Landa's introduction to Swift's sermons in *Irish Tracts*, 103-06.

⁵⁸ *Florida Works*, V p. 138. On the other hand, "inconsistencies, answered Imlac, cannot be right, but, imputed to man, they may both be true." Samuel Johnson, *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abissinia* [1759], ch. viii. *Rasselas and Other Tales*, ed. Gwin J. Kolb (New Haven and London, 1990), p. 33.

⁵⁹ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, sermon x, "Upon Self-Deceit," p. 93.

⁶⁰ George Rust, friend of Benjamin Whichcote, *Discourse* 37, quoted by Robert A. Greene, "Whichcote, Wilkins, 'Ingenuity,' and the Reasonableness of Christianity," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981): 250.

⁶¹ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 320.

⁶² Ross, *Life*, pp. 232, 233.

⁶³ Jonathan Swift, "Upon Sleeping in Church," in *Irish Tracts*, p. 210.

⁶⁴ George Horne [1730-1792], *Discourses*, later ed. (London, 1824), II 74, 156.

⁶⁵ John Sharp, *Eighteen Sermons Preached on Several Occasions*, 4th ed. (London, 1748), p. 20.

⁶⁶ Thomas Secker is typical in disregarding the 'spiritual' sword, and in his sermon on this text [Matt.x.34] claims Jesus is simply anticipating the unfortunate elements of violent opposition to his ministry – thus of course regretting that the sword will be brought against his followers. Sermon xxiii, *Works*, I 355.

⁶⁷ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [1689, 6th ed. 1710], ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1979), p. 698 (IV xix 3).

⁶⁸ Henry More, *Enthusiasmus Triumphatus* [London, 1656, 1662] (Los Angeles CA, 1966), pp. 9-10. On selective madness in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Michael DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses: Swift, Sterne, and Augustan ideas of madness* (San Marino CA, 1974), pp. 115-16.

⁶⁹ *Letters*, p. 74.

⁷⁰ Wilfred Watson, "Sterne's Satire on Mechanism: A Study of *Tristram Shandy*," (Ph.D. diss., Toronto, 1951)

⁷¹ Jonathan Lamb, "Sterne's System of Imitation," *Modern Language Review* 76 (1981): 794.

⁷² DePorte, *Nightmares and Hobbyhorses*, pp. 122, 126.

⁷³ Stillingfleet, *Works*, I 217.

⁷⁴ Joseph Glanvill, *Lux Orientalis* [1662], in *Collected Works* (Hildesheim, 1978), II 1, 32, 51.

⁷⁵ On Providence in this context see Derek Hughes, "Providential Justice and English Comedy 1660-1700: A Review of the External Evidence," *Modern Language Review* 81 (1986): 273-92.

⁷⁶ Sigurd Burckhardt, "Tristram Shandy's Law of Gravity," *ELH* 28 (1961): 71.

⁷⁷ Edward A. Bloom and Lillian D. Bloom, "Hostage to Fortune: Time, Chance, and Laurence Sterne," *Modern Philology* 85 (1988): 506.

⁷⁸ When celebrating political events, Sterne was fond of reminding his congregation of what could be said to be the lesson of Old Testament history: "a long and undisturbed possession of their liberties, might blunt the sense of those providences of God, which had procured them." *S* 196.1. Cf. *S* 377.19-378.6, and George Horne, *Discourses*, II 30-31, who writes: "a long and uninterrupted

enjoyment of blessings is apt to extinguish in us that gratitude towards the Author of them which it ought to cherish and invigorate.”

⁷⁹ *Letters*, p. 134.

⁸⁰ William Spellman, “Archbishop John Tillotson and the Meaning of Moralism,” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 56 (1987): 412.

⁸¹ Swift, *Letter to a Young Gentleman*, p. 78.

⁸² Quoted in Robert Walker, “Johnson in the ‘Age of Evidences’,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 44 (1980): 37. Vicesimus Knox, *Winter Evenings: or, Lucubrations on Life and Letters* [1787], in *The British Essayists*, ed. James Ferguson, 2nd ed. (London, 1823), XXXVII 58.

⁸³ This comment forms part of Sterne’s dedication of his sermon “The Case of Elijah and the Widow of Zerephath considered” to Richard Osbaldeston, Dean of York, first printed in 1747.

⁸⁴ *The Works of Laurence Sterne*, ed. Wilbur Cross (New York, 1904), V xlii.

⁸⁵ On trends towards the psychology of Biblical characters see Thomas R. Preston, “From Typology to Literature: Hermeneutics and Historical Narrative in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth Century* 23 (1982): 181-96.

⁸⁶ H. Blair, *Lectures*, “Eloquence of the Pulpit,” pp. 318-19.

⁸⁷ Secker, *Works*, sermon xxv, p. 387. John Conybeare likewise reminds his congregation that wayward characters in scripture are presented for our instruction, *Sermons*, sermon viii, pp. 225-26.

⁸⁸ Spellman, *John Locke and the Problem of Depravity*, p. 121.

⁸⁹ New, *Free Spirits*, p. 10, and *Critical Essays*, p. 9.

⁹⁰ See Richard Steele, *The Christian Hero* [1701], ed. Rae Blanchard (Oxford, 1932), pp. 80-81.

⁹¹ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, II 188, 187.

⁹² Bernard De Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees*, 2nd ed. (London, 1723), p. vii.

⁹³ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, I 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 193-94.

⁹⁶ H. Blair, *Lectures*, “The Pathetic Part of a Discourse,” p. 359.

⁹⁷ Arthur Cash, “The Sermon in *Tristram Shandy*,” p. 414, “Voices Sonorous and Cracked,” in *Quick Springs of Sense: Studies in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Larry Champion (Athens GA, 1974), p. 203; Byron Petrakis, “Jester in the Pulpit: Sterne and Pulpit Eloquence,” *Philological Quarterly* 51 (1972): 434; Helene Moglen, *The Philosophical Irony of Laurence Sterne* (Gainesville FL, 1975), p. 36; James Downey, *The Eighteenth Century Pulpit*, pp. 153-54.

⁹⁸ Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome* [1601] trans. Samson Lennard [1st Lennard ed. was published prior to 1612, Sterne used a later edition of Lennard’s translation] facsimile rpt. (Amsterdam, 1971), p. 550.

⁹⁹ Noted in *Florida Works*, V p. 420.

¹⁰⁰ Phillip Doddridge, *The Scripture Doctrine of Salvation by Grace through Faith*, later ed. (Boston, 1803), p. 22.

¹⁰¹ Josiah Tucker, *Seventeen Sermons....* (Gloicester, 1776), pp. 30-32.

¹⁰² Gerard Reedy, “Interpreting Tillotson,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 99.

- ¹⁰³ Wilbur Cross, *The Life and Times of Laurence Sterne* (New York, 1909), p. 231.
- ¹⁰⁴ Fénelon, *Dialogues*, pp. 70, 73-77.
- ¹⁰⁵ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, sermon vi, "Upon Compassion," p. 57.
- ¹⁰⁶ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* [1751], 1777 edition, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford 1975), pp. 223-24.
- ¹⁰⁷ See J.T. Parnell, "Swift, Sterne, and the Skeptical Tradition," *Eighteenth-Century Culture* 23 (1994): 220-42.
- ¹⁰⁸ Tim Parnell, "A Story Painted to the Heart? *Tristram Shandy* and Sentimentalism Reconsidered," *Shandean* 9 (1997): 123-24, 126.
- ¹⁰⁹ Quoted in Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, p. 384; for the German translation see p. 427. Duncan Large in 'Nietzsche on Sterne' writes, "in [Nietzsche's] lecture notes for a course on ancient rhetoric which he gave at Basel University in the 1871-72 session, we find a reference to the German translation of *A Sentimental Journey* as having popularized the term 'sentimental' ('empfindsam')." *Shandean* 7 (1995): 11.
- ¹¹⁰ Arthur Cash, *Sterne's Comedy*, p. 33.
- ¹¹¹ Helen Moglen, *Philosophical Irony*, p. 100.
- ¹¹² Wilfred Watson, "Sterne's Satire," 15.
- ¹¹³ *Letters*, p. 405.
- ¹¹⁴ John Conybeare is one of very few near contemporaries to use punctuation (particularly dashes) to effect.
- ¹¹⁵ T. Sharp, *Three Discourses*, p. 333.
- ¹¹⁶ Jonathan Lamb, "Sterne's System," 805. On the use of dashes typographically to dramatize, see also Tim Parnell, "A Story Painted to the Heart?": 129.
- ¹¹⁷ Paul McGlynn, "Orthodoxy versus Anarchy in Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*," *Papers on Language and Literature* 7 (1971): 245.
- ¹¹⁸ Charles Moran III, "An Analysis of Sterne's intention: *Tristram Shandy* and *A Sentimental Journey*," (Ph.D. diss., Brown, 1968): 85, see also p. 74.
- ¹¹⁹ W. B. C. Watkins, *Perilous Balance: The Tragic Genius of Swift, Johnson & Sterne* (Princeton, 1939), p. 123.
- ¹²⁰ For example Virginia Woolf, Cash, Petrakis, Schuda, and McGlynn.
- ¹²¹ Watkins, *Perilous*, pp. 124, 125.
- ¹²² *Letters*, p. 88.
- ¹²³ New, *Sterne as Satirist*, p. 203.
- ¹²⁴ Henry More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, trans. Edward Southwell [London, 1690] facsimile rpt. (New York, 1930), p. 9.
- ¹²⁵ D. W. Jefferson, "*Tristram Shandy* and the Tradition of Learned Wit," *Essays In Criticism* 1 (1951): 248.
- ¹²⁶ *Letters*, p. 399, n. 3.
- ¹²⁷ Peter Briggs, "Locke's *Essay* and the Tentativeness of *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985): 517-18.

- ¹²⁸ Howard Anderson, "Associationism and Wit in *Tristram Shandy*," *Philological Quarterly* 48 (1969): 32.
- ¹²⁹ See for example *TS* pp. 244-5, 407, 491, 572.
- ¹³⁰ Wayne Booth, "The Self-Conscious Narrator in Comic Fiction Before *Tristram Shandy*," *PMLA* 67 (1952): 167.
- ¹³¹ Howard Anderson, "*Tristram Shandy* and the Reader's Imagination," *PMLA* 86 (1971): 967, 970.
- ¹³² Moglen, *Philosophical Irony*, p. 158.
- ¹³³ Howes, *Critical Heritage*, p. 219.
- ¹³⁴ Lanham, *Games*, p. 156.
- ¹³⁵ D. W. Jefferson, *Laurence Sterne* (London, 1954), p. 26.
- ¹³⁶ Montaigne, *Essays*, I 157.
- ¹³⁷ *Tristram Shandy*, ed. J. A. Work (New York, 1940), p. 342, n. 1.
- ¹³⁸ Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621], Everyman ed. (London, 1932), I 23.
- ¹³⁹ On "stock" see also *Letters*, p. 93, and Locke, *Essay*, p. 561 (IV iii 30).
- ¹⁴⁰ *Tristram Shandy*, ed. J.A. Work, p. 342.
- ¹⁴¹ Robert Burton, *Anatomy*, p. 24.
- ¹⁴² H. J. Jackson, "Sterne, Burton, and Ferriar: Allusions to the *Anatomy of Melancholy* in Volumes Five to Nine of *Tristram Shandy*," *Philological Quarterly* 54 (1975): 461. This article provides an accurate perspective on Sterne's imprint upon his borrowings of Burton.
- ¹⁴³ Fluchère, *From Tristram to Yorick*, p. 35.

Notes to IV

- ¹ *Monthly Review*, xxii, (May, 1760), quoted in Alan B. Howes, *Sterne: The Critical Heritage*, p. 77.
- ² *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- ³ Of the earlier set, Ross, *Life*, p. 244 and the note to that, p. 456, notes they were published by Sterne's new publishers Becket and Dehondt. *The English Preacher* to which Ross does not refer was printed for J. Johnson [1773/4] with another edition in 1779 and a "new edition" in 1781.
- ⁴ New, *Free Spirits*, p. 12.
- ⁵ William Makepeace Thackeray, *The English Humorists of the Eighteenth Century: a series of lectures delivered in England, Scotland, and the United States of America* (1853).
- ⁶ Carol Kay, *Political Constructions Defoe, Richardson, and Sterne in Relation to Hobbes, Hume, and Burke* (Ithaca NY, 1998), p. 211.
- ⁷ Howes, *Critical Heritage*, p. 77.
- ⁸ Thomas Gray in a letter to Thomas Warton the Younger, *Ibid.*, p. 89. *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley (Oxford, 1935), II 681.
- ⁹ Howes, *Critical Heritage*, p. 89.
- ¹⁰ Shaw, *Making of a Humorist*, p. 224.
- ¹¹ *The Sermons of Mr. Yorick*, ed. Marjorie David (Cheadle, 1973), p. 20

¹² Vicesimus Knox, *Essays Moral and Literary*, 12th ed. (London, 1791), II 253-54.

¹³ *Letters*, p. 411.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 402-03.

¹⁵ John Norris, *Practical Discourses upon Several Divine Subjects, Volume Two* [1691], 5th ed. (London, 1707), pp. A6-7.

¹⁶ Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, I 32.

¹⁷ John Sharp, *Fifteen Sermons preached on Several Occasions* [1698], 8th ed. (London, 1748), in *Works*, I 418.

¹⁸ From *Several Sermons against Evil Speaking* [1678], quoted by Raymond A. Anselment, 'Betwixt Jest and Earnest': Marprelate, Milton, Marvell, Swift: *The Decorum of Religious Ridicule* (Toronto, 1979), p. 50. Wit is of course to be distinguished from ridicule, for which see Roger D. Lund, "Irony as Subversion: Thomas Woolston and the Crime of Wit," in *The Margins of Orthodoxy: Heterodox Writing and Cultural Response, 1660-1750*, ed. Roger D. Lund (Cambridge, 1995): 170-94. On "raillery" vs. "the Wit that may be borrow'd from the Bible" which is "magnificent" and "inexhaustible" see Sprat's *History of the Royal Society* [1667], ed. J. I. Cope and H. W. Jones (St. Louis MO and London, 1959), pp. 413-19. A background to wit in preaching, using John Sharp, is given by Mitchell in *English Pulpit Oratory* (London, 1932), pp. 313-21.

¹⁹ Note to S 150.5, *Florida Works*, V p. 188.

²⁰ Jeremiah Seed, *Discourses on Several Important Subjects*, 3rd ed. (London, 1748), I 142-43, and *The Posthumous Works* (London, 1750), I 195.

²¹ Horace, *Satires*, I 10. Quoted by New in *Free Spirits*, p. 32.

²² Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, III 122-23.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁴ Thomas Weales, *The Christian Orator Delineated* [1778], p. 101. Quoted by Paul Goring, "Thomas Weales's *The Christian Orator Delineated* (1778) and the Early Reception of Sterne's Sermons," *Shandean* 13 (2002): 92-93. For other suggestions that further study of Sterne's sermons will reveal "Shandean" underpinnings see: Christopher Fanning, "Sermons on Sermonizing: The Pulpit Rhetoric of Swift and Sterne," *Philological Quarterly* 76 (1997): esp. 425-28; and Judith Hawley, "Yorick in the Pulpit," *Essays in Criticism* 48 (1998): 86, 88.

²⁵ *The English Preacher: or, Sermons on the Principal Subjects of Religion and Morality, selected, revised, and abridged from Various Authors* [1773/4] (London, 1779), pp. vi-xv.

²⁶ Elizabeth Kraft, *Character & Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Comic Fiction* (Athens GA, 1992), pp. 117-18.

²⁷ The translation of Sterne's motto is that of J.A. Work in his edition of *TS*, p. 156 n.

²⁸ *Letters*, p. 403.

²⁹ For example at S 148.10-1, 207.1-6.

³⁰ Burton, *Anatomy*, I 24.

³¹ Jonathan Swift, "Thoughts on Religion," in *Irish Tracts*, p. 263.

³² Desiderius Erasmus, *Familiar Colloquies* [1524], trans. N. Bailey [1725], ed. E. Johnson (London, 1878), II 358, 363, 370, 373.

- ³³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* [1511], trans. Betty Radice (London, 1971), pp. 57-59.
- ³⁴ Erasmus, *Folly*, p. 188.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 104.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 67, 114.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 206.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-99.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.
- ⁴² *The Vanity of Arts and Sciences* had three late seventeenth century editions in English translation; faithful Sterneans will relish the "Digression in praise of the Ass".
- ⁴³ Walter Kaiser, *Praisers of Folly: Erasmus, Rabelais, Shakespeare* (Cambridge MA, 1963), pp. 147-48.
- ⁴⁴ Juliet McMaster, "'Uncrystalized Flesh and Blood': The Body in *Tristram Shandy*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 2 (1990): 209. Erasmus, by the way, in his treatise on preaching, *De Ratione Concionandi*, when defending gentle jesting and a happy style for homilies lauds Hilarion for being sustainedly jolly. See M.A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy & the Praise of Folly* [1980] (London, 1988), p. 132. New and Day comment "Sterne had introduced an ass in TS, VII.32 . . . , and here [ASJ 53.2] goes further in what seems to have been a challenge he set for himself: could he wax sentimental about an ass, while simultaneously keeping alert to the ludicrousness of doing so?" *Florida Works*, VI p. 288.
- ⁴⁵ Elizabeth Kraft, *Laurence Sterne Revisited* (New York, 1996), p. 91.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.
- ⁴⁷ Solomon, *Rape of the Text*, pp. 40-41.
- ⁴⁸ Quoted by Alan Howes, *Yorick and the Critics: Sterne's Reputation in England, 1760-1868* (New Haven CT, 1958), p. 142.
- ⁴⁹ George Fothergill, in *Family Lectures*, sermon iii, p. 492.
- ⁵⁰ Phillip Doddridge, *Practical Discourses on Regeneration*, 3rd American ed. (Boston, 1803), sermon v, p. 100.
- ⁵¹ More, *Enchiridion Ethicum*, trans. Edward Southwell [London, 1690], facsimile rpt. (New York, 1930), pp. 37, 83.
- ⁵² Conybeare, *Sermons*, sermon xv, p. 485.
- ⁵³ Montaigne, *Essays*, II 120.
- ⁵⁴ T. W. Manson, *The Sayings of Jesus* [1937] (London, 1949), p. 73.
- ⁵⁵ M.A. Screech, *Erasmus: Ecstasy & the Praise of Folly* [1980] (London, 1988), p. 233.
- ⁵⁶ For the echo see Locke, *Essay*, pp. 181-82 (I xiv 3).
- ⁵⁷ Berkeley, in *Works*, II 145.
- ⁵⁸ Butler, *Fifteen Sermons*, sermon xv, "Upon the Ignorance of Man," pp. 157-58.
- ⁵⁹ Traugott, *Tristram Shandy's World*, p. 47.
- ⁶⁰ Jean Claude Sallé, "A State of Warfare," in *Quick Springs of Sense*, ed. Champion, p. 215.
- ⁶¹ Maurice Golden, "Sterne's Journies," p. 59.

⁶² Perhaps "wistfully" was intended; see Melvyn New, "A Manuscript of the Le Fever Episode in *Tristram Shandy*," *Scriblerian* 23 (1991): 174.

⁶³ New, *Free Spirits*, pp. 83-88.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 85.

⁶⁵ Ross, *Life*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁸ New, *Free Spirits*, pp. 86-87.

⁶⁹ Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote* I [1605], trans. Motteux, rev. Ozell (New York, 1930), pp. 437-38.

⁷⁰ Jonathan Lamb, "The Comic Sublime and Sterne's Fiction," *ELH* 48 (1981): 133.

⁷¹ New, *Free Spirits*, p. 73.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

⁷⁵ Fred Pinnegar, "The Groin Wounds of Tristram and Uncle Toby," *Shandean* 7 (1995): 99.

⁷⁶ "choisest morsel" and "earnestly desire" for example.

⁷⁷ Martin Battestin, "Sterne Among the Philosophes: Body and Soul in *A Sentimental Journey*," *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 7 (1994): 34.

⁷⁸ Joseph Addison, *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy, &c. In the years 1701, 1702, 1703* [1705], 3rd ed. (London, 1726), pp. 13-14.

⁷⁹ Melvyn New, "Job's Wife and Sterne's Other Women," in *Out of Bounds*, ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Amherst MA, 1990), p. 69.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Harries, "Sterne's Novels: Gathering Up the Fragments," *ELH* 49 (1982): 42, 44-45, 47.

⁸¹ Kraft, *Character & Consciousness*, p. 110.

Notes to V

¹ Locke, *Essay*, p. 444 (III vi 9).

² Jonathan Swift, "On the Trinity," in *Irish Tracts*, p. 166.

³ Locke, *Essay*, p. 553 (IV iii 22). See also 415.2-14 and TS 350. Sterne conflates passages from John Norris' "A Discourse concerning the Folly of Covetousness," in *Practical Discourses upon Several Divine Subjects*, 5th ed. (London, 1707), II 186-87, and from this section of Locke's *Essay*, p. 553. Neither was being original, see the middle quotation of Glanvill, p. 157 above.

⁴ Donald Wehrs, "Sterne, Cervantes, Montaigne: Fideistic Skepticism and the Rhetoric of Desire," *Comparative Literature Studies* 25 (1988): 131.

⁵ Peter Briggs, "Locke's *Essay* and the Tentativeness of *Tristram Shandy*," *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985): 502-03.

⁶ David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [1779], ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York, [1947] 1986), p. 228.

⁷ Locke, *Essay*, p. 636 (IV xi 10), etc.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 643 (IV xii 7).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 156 (II xi 2).

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 515, 550 (III xi 13, IV iii 19).

¹¹ Eve Tavor Bannet, *Scepticism, Society*, p. 167.

¹² Shaftesbury, *Characteristicks*, 'Advice to an Author,' I 290.

¹³ Thomas Sprat, *History of the Royal Society* [1667], ed. J. I. Cope and H. W. Jones (St. Louis MO and London, 1959), pp. 342-43.

¹⁴ Sprat, *History*, pp. 354-55.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 353.

¹⁷ W. Fraser Mitchell, *English Pulpit Oratory* [1932] (New York, 1962), pp. 284-85.

¹⁸ A.H.T. Levi notes this in the introduction to the Penguin *Praise of Folly*, trans. Betty Radice, p. 25.

¹⁹ Peter de Voogd, "The Oswald Papers," *Shandean* 10 (1998): 88.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²² Arthur H. Cash, *Laurence Sterne: The Later Years* (London, 1986), p. 237.

²³ Desiderius Erasmus, *Familiar Colloquies*, I 220-21.

²⁴ The Spectator for April 11, 1711, includes a long advertisement: "A widow gentlewoman, well born both by father and mother's side... giveth notice to the public, that she has lately taken a house... where she teaches all sorts of birds of the loquacious kind, as parrots, starlings, magpies, and others, to imitate human voices in greater perfection than was ever yet practiced. They are not only instructed to pronounce words distinctly, and in a proper tone and accent, but to speak the language with great purity and volubility of tongue, together with all the fashionable phrases and compliments now in use, either at tea-tables or visiting-days. ... In short, if they are birds of any parts or capacity, she will undertake to render them so accomplished in the compass of a twelve-month, that they shall be fit conversation for such ladies as love to choose their friends and companions out of this species."

²⁵ Anon., edition of Sterne's Works [1780] in *The Works of Laurence Sterne* (London, 1823), I pp. vii-viii.

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