THE HOBBYHORSE MATRIX AND MORAL VISION OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

By

VERNON POWELL WOODS

SIR GEORGE WILLIAMS UNIVERSITY

Master of Arts in English Literature

Spring, 1969

VERNON POWELL WOODS

THE HOBBYHORSE MATRIX AND MORAL VISION OF TRISTRAM SHANDY

The hobbyhorse is the most important structural and stylistic device in Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy. It is my contention that as Sterne compares the "hobbyhorses" of the various characters, moral ideals in the hobbyhorses are being tested and revealed. The major characters are evaluated by means of the theme of communication and its breakdown. Walter typically places all his faith in the efficacy of rational communication; Toby trusts only emotional communication; and Yorick relies upon truth and jest. The values of these hobbyhorses are compared through Tristram's hobbyhorse, which is synthetic of the other three, and is a rhetorical delineation of their positive moral values. Through this hobbyhorse, Sterne expresses his moral vision of sentiment balanced by understanding and control, and dedicated to truth, prudence, and humour.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Several critics have suggested that the hobbyhorse is the most important structural and stylistic device in Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy. Tristram himself informs us of its importance as a method of characterization:

> To avoid all and every one of these errors in giving you my uncle Toby's character, I am determined to draw it by no mechanical help whatever; . . . in a word, I will draw my uncle Toby's character from his Hobby-Horse.[1]

This function has been examined in detail by James A. Work, Joan Joffe Hall, and others.[2] Henri Fluchere, in Laurence Sterne: From Tristram To Yorick, has demonstrated the hobbyhorse's function in advancing the satiric themes which he considers central to the book.[3] Ernest H. Lockridge has investigated the function of the hobbyhorse in producing comic tone through the "divorce between humanity and mechanism"[4] -- his idea deriving from Bergson's theory of comedy as "automatic, mechanical action in contrast with the organic flexibility required by life."[5]

In the past decade there have been several important studies of Sterne's debt, in his creation of the hobbyhorse, to Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding.[6] Arthur H. Cash's "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy"[7] and John Traugott's Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric[8] are probably the best among these studies.

Much of the Sterne scholarship of recent years revolves around the theme that Sterne's primary purpose in Tristram Shandy was to delineate what Traugott terms a "Shandean comic vision of Locke."[9] There can be no doubt that Sterne -- like Locke -- was intensely interested in what appeared to be the unbridgeable gap between human perception and substantive reality. Sterne was especially interested in the errors of perception resulting from what Locke had described as the "custom association of ideas" in Book II, Chapter 33 of his Essay:

> That which thus captivates their reasons, and leads men of sincerity blindfold from common sense, will, when examined, be found to be what we are speaking of: some independent ideas, of no alliance to one another, are, by education, custom, and the constant din of their party, so coupled in their minds, that they always appear there together; and they can no more separate them in their thoughts than if they were but one idea, and they operate as if they were so.[10]

This passage is recognizably a description of an important element of the hobbyhorse as Sterne uses it. Moreover, Locke continues:

> This gives sense to jargon, demonstration to absurdities, and consistency to nonsense, and is the foundation of the greatest, I had almost said of all the errors in the world; or, if it does not reach so far, it is at least the most dangerous one, since, so far as it obtains, it hinders men from seeing and examining.[11]

These words can hardly fail to summon up a host of scenes from Tristram Shandy such as the one in which Walter tries to explain something about a "train of ideas" but before he can complete the phrase Toby interrupts with "a train of

artillery?" and immediately the conversation dissolves into "a train of fiddlestick!" (196) There is indeed a strong debt to Locke in Tristram Shandy.

But Sterne goes beyond Locke, to a study of the human moral implications of these "gaps"; that is, it is my contention that as the various hobbyhorses are compared, contrasted, and evaluated, moral ideals incarnate in the hobbyhorses are simultaneously being advanced, tested, and ultimately accepted or rejected. Of course Sterne rarely if ever goes about this business directly; how he does go about it is suggested by Traugott:

> To speak of "philosophy" in a resolutely non-logical work such as Tristram Shandy is of course a strain. Obviously every artist works on some hypothesis, if we consider a peculiar selection of phenomonal data as a hypothesis. But the artist "proves" nothing: he can only persuade by making his images descriptive of his peculiar selection of ordering. Thus he may by the "force and vivacity of the impression" induce a sort of belief (as Hume describes belief) in his system.[12]

Furthermore, as Traugott notes: "where there is order, morality must be."[13] It will be in the selective ordering of the data concerning the hobbyhorses, then, or, in other words, in the ways in which the hobbyhorses are implicitly and explicitly compared and contrasted that the moral vision of Tristram Shandy may be located and defined.

I shall attempt to demonstrate that the hobbyhorses -- and the moral values they symbolize -- are compared, contrasted, and evaluated along two principle lines. First, they are

evaluated by means of Sterne's treatment of the theme of communication. The various hobbyhorses lead in specific ways to characteristic kinds of communication breakdown. Walter, for example, is continually misunderstood and interrupted as a direct result of certain of his hobbyhorsical traits. Toby, on the other hand, continually interrups and misunderstands Walter (and whoever else happens to be around) -- again as a direct result of specific hobbyhorsical tendencies. Yorick is tragically misunderstood and consequently victimized by the world -- a fate which also directly results from his hobbyhorse. It will also appear that the various characters are to different degrees capable of maintaining a viable cognizance of the realities facing them -- and this too is a means of communication, or lack of it. Finally we shall see that the various characters, because of their respective hobbyhorses, employ three discrete and definitive methods of communication, each of which is clearly and powerfully suggestive of certain moral values. Walter typically places all his faith in the efficacy of intellectual communication; Toby trusts only emotional or sentimental communication; and Yorick relies completely upon a communication based upon humorous expression. Put simply, Walter trusts ratiocination; Toby trusts intuition (of an almost purely emotional sort); and Yorick trusts only a jest. Each by itself has certain values and limitations, as will become clear.

The values of the other hobbyhorses are also compared through the device of Tristram's own hobbyhorse. Tristram's hobbyhorse will be shown to be synthetic, composed of those elements drawn from Walter's, Toby's, and Yorick's hobbyhorses which Sterne conceives to be the most "viable" and morally valuable elements of these hobbyhorses. Tristram's hobbyhorse, which it shall be my final purpose to describe in detail, is itself a rhetorical delineation of the moral values suggested by the other hobbyhorses.

My procedure will be to consider the major characters' hobbyhorses, in the order of complexity: Walter's, Toby's, Yorick's, and finally Tristram's. In the conclusion I shall try to sum up and define as concisely as possible the moral vision offered by the hobbyhorsical rhetoric of Tristram Shandy.

WALTER'S HOBBYHORSE

". . . mount him not."

Walter Shandy's hobbyhorse rarely gets out of the stable and into the real world. Even when it does it usually encounters a horde of seemingly hostile forces which effectively drive it back to its hitching post -- inside Walter's head. Defined simply, Walter's hobbyhorse is his preoccupation with constructing philosophical systems which are supposed to explain existing phenomona and predict future events according to the patterns of their past behavior. By constructing such systems Walter fancies himself able to control future situations by aligning himself "with the right stars". Taken at face value such a description would ostensibly fit the new empirical methods of 18th-century science which had derived from Newton and Locke.

Walter fails, however, to play the game squarely. Instead of basing his theories and definitions upon random samples of "data" drawn from the real world he ferrets out particular facts or bits of odd lore which will substantiate theories he has already constructed. He believes, for example: "That there was a strange kind of magic bias, which good or bad names, as he called them, irresistibly impressed upon our

characters and conduct."(52) When called upon to substantiate such a theory he responds: "--Your Billy, Sir! --would you, for the world, have called him Judas?" (53) Most of these theories of Walter's, as it turns out, are derived less from observation than they are from his theoretical scholastic researches. He says that:

> There are a thousand unnoticed openings . . . which let a penetrating eye at once into a man's soul; and I maintain it, . . . that a man of sense does not lay down his hat in coming into a room, --or take it up in going out of it, but something escapes, which discovers him. (123)

But the truth is that Walter almost invariably prefers to get his knowledge of human nature from books first and observation (if at all) only later. The psychological rationale behind Walter's philosophical activities derives from Locke's definition of the custom association of ideas, as Cash has paraphrased it:

> When two contiguous ideas, originating in either the senses or in reflection, are repeatedly experienced together, they become firmly attached.[14]

Accordingly, Walter's theorizing typically takes the following form:

He considers that conditions or events which exist or occur simultaneously necessarily have a cause-and-effect relationship with each other. Choosing selective samples of such conditions or events, he constructs appropriate systems of human behavior designed to trigger events which will effect conditions desirable to him. Walter hypothetically

joins into cause-and-effect relationships such unlikely combinations as nose length and sexual prowess; specific method of childbirth and subsequent human worth; given names and the nobility of later accomplishments; and so forth.

These hypothetical relationships are a source of endless delight to Walter and the construction of them occupies a great part of his time and energy. This fact is symbolized by the association of images of sexual and creative energy with Walter's construction of hypotheses, as in the following passage:

> Analogy, replied my father, is the certain relation and agreement which different -- Here a devil of a rap at the door snapped my father's definition (like his tobacco-pipe) in two --and, at the same time, crushed the head of as notable and curious a dissertation as ever was engendered in the womb of speculation; --it was some months before my father could get an opportunity to be delivered of it. (104; italics mine)

The imagery of pregnancy or gestation here in fact emphasizes the use of Walter's sexual energy in his theorizing. Walter, in fact, finds the subject of sex itself distasteful as the following passage illustrates:

> --Brother Shandy, answered my uncle Toby, looking wistfully in his face, --you are much mistaken in this point: --for you do increase my pleasure very much, in begetting children for the Shandy family at your time of life. --But by that Sir, quoth Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy increases his own. --Not a jot, quoth my father . . . .
>
> My brother does it, quoth my uncle Toby, out of principle. --In a family way, I suppose, quoth Dr. Slop. --Pshaw! --said my father, --'tis not worth talking of. (117)

The point is that Walter's transference of sexual energy into his theorizing parallels his transference of all meanings and significations out of the living world and into his own world of abstract patterns and principles. Even with regard to his own son, as Ronald Paulson notes: "His desire is to mold the unborn Tristram into an abstract pattern of his own formulation."[15] And when things don't work out well: "Walter's own suffering, though hardly minimal, is . . . directed at his ruined theory rather than the ruined child."[16] Tristram's major significance to Walter, then, is not as a son but as a reason to write the Tristrapaedia. On a larger scale, life in general is meaningful to Walter primarily insofar as it provides him with the opportunity for creating theoretical constructs.

Unfortunately, however, the ebb and flow of human events pay little heed to Walter's theories. He never, however, feels called upon to revise his methods of thinking; instead he attributes his lack of success in predicting or controlling events to a hostile universe -- as in the case of the misnaming:

> I see it plainly, that either for my own sins, brother Toby, or the sins and follies of the Shandy family, Heaven has thought fit to draw forth the heaviest of its artillery against me; and that the prosperity of my child is the point upon which the whole force of it is directed to play. (306)

At another juncture in the narrative Walter is forced to conclude that a "retrograde planet" is marring the events of the

day. The point is that Walter could hardly view the universe as anything other than malign given his philosophical methods and the conclusions to which they lead him. The comedy is compounded by the fact that although Walter has little truck with the mundane aspects of existence (reserving his energy for cerebral affairs) it is precisely such mundane trifles which continually intrude upon all his plans. An excellent example is the scene in which Walter, trying to calculate the distance between Calais and Paris "and so on to Lyons" (362), is repeatedly interrupted by Obadiah, who is concerned with the comfort of the Shandy horse and the floods outside.

All of this contributes to an image of Walter (as J.M. Stedmond has pointed out) as:

> . . . a burlesque of the decadent virtuoso; a philosopher of ultimate causes who does not deign to support his elaborate hypotheses with experimental proof.[17]

The real virtuoso, as Walter Houghton describes him "stops at the point where the genuine scientist really begins."[18] Walter refuses to stop at this point, however, and insists upon attempting to relate his highly eccentric and erratic researches to the everyday flow of events, thereby dooming himself to eternal frustration. Thus, Albert Cook sees Walter as a case of "the intellectual rationalist thinker as a standard comic butt"[19] and Paulson describes Walter as a parody of the "satanic villain" who "twists the world to shape his hypotheses."[20] Unfortunately for Walter, the world refuses to be twisted and it is he that suffers the

most. Thus, whether we view Walter satirically or comically, his image is colored by a distinct and pervasive pathos.

Just as Walter's attempts to cope with the realities of life are frustrated, his communications with the other members of the Shandy menage are normally unsuccessful. It is hardly overstating the point to say that for Walter communication is virtually impossible. A.R. Towers writes;

> Basically Walter Shandy's frustrations stem from a failure to communicate, to make the essential connections between himself and the world around him.[21]

Consequently (Towers adds):

> Walter is continually unseated by a nudge of common sense or by having another hobby-horse, especially Toby's, cross his path.[22]

Similarly, Joan Joffe Hall seems to be describing Walter in particular when she writes:

> In Tristram Shandy, however, few acts are ever completed, and almost none of them ever terminates in a way that is controlled by the commitment. In fact, Sterne's point is that the commitments of his characters are impotent.[23]

Miss Hall describes the chief structural characteristic of the book as "direction foiled by interruption."[24] Even Walter's attempted expressions of grief are rendered impotent as in the fishpool and bedroom scenes.[25] The point is that virtually all of Walter's attempts to communicate are doomed, whether in the sense of maintaining contact with the world through his theories or in the sense of communicating with the other members of the Shandy menage. A close look at

several samples drawn from the text will reveal the extent to which Walter is interrupted and misunderstood by his family, his friends, and the world at large!

Walter's first words, for example, refer to an interruption:

> "Pray, my Dear," quoth my mother, "have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" ---"Good G--!" cried my father, making an exclamation, but taking care to moderate his voice at the same time, --"Did ever woman, since the creation of the world, interrupt a man with such a silly question?" (4)

Mrs. Shandy's famous association of Walter's winding of the clock with their sex life (since the two events always fall on the first Sunday of each month) interrupts their copulation. When Walter is first introduced to the reader, he is outraged by an intrusive interruption coming from where (as we later find out) he least expects it: his wife, who normally agrees with everything he says or does whether she understands him or not. And ironically it is due to a Lockean custom association of ideas that Mrs. Shandy interrupts Walter -- an association of ideas similar in kind to the type operative in Walter's theorizing. As stated before, even Walter's attempted lamentations are not immune to interruption:

> When I reflect, brother Toby, upon Man; and take a view of that dark side of him which represents his life as open to so many causes of trouble -- when I consider, brother Toby, how oft we eat the bread of affliction, and that we are born to it, as to the portion of our inheritance --I was born to nothing, quoth my uncle Toby, interrupting my father, --but my commission. Zooks! said my father . . . . (287)

Even if he manages to complete his expression of grief he is confounded by being misinterpreted:

> --did ever a poor unfortunate man, brother Toby, cried my father, receive so many lashes? --The most I ever saw given, quoth my uncle Toby (ringing the bell at the bed's head for Trim) was to a grenadier, I think in Mackay's regiment.
>
> --Had my uncle Toby shot a bullet through my father's heart, he could not have fallen down with his nose upon the quilt more suddenly. (284)

It is especially when Walter is trying to explain one of his elaborate theories that he is interrupted:

> Now, whether we observe it or no, continued my father, in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or other, which follow each other in train just like --A train of artillery? said my uncle Toby --a train of fiddle-stick! quoth my father --which follow and succeed one another in our minds at certain distances, just like the images in the inside of a lanthorn turned round by the heat of a candle. --I declare, quoth my uncle Toby, mine are more like a smoke-jack. --Then, brother Toby, I have nothing more to say to you upon the subject, said my father. (196)

Although he manages to overcome Toby's initial interruption, Walter's disquisition is still doomed merely to provide Toby with yet another image reminiscent of military machinery. In another similar scene Walter is explaining his plans for educating Tristram by teaching him the art of building hypotheses upon the scaffolding of verb conjugations:

> The force of this engine, added my father, is incredible in opening a child's head. --'Tis enough, brother Shandy, cried my uncle Toby, to burst it into a thousand splinters.-- (426)

Toby's reactions are not always obtuse but they are almost always destructive of Walter's attempts to communicate his hobbyhorsical hypotheses. Even when Walter (or, for that matter, Toby) thinks he is being understood, Sterne informs the reader that this is not the case:

> What shall we say of the great Piereskius? --That's the very man, cried my uncle Toby, I once told you of, brother Shandy, who walked a matter of five hundred miles, reckoning from Paris to Shevling, and from Shevling back again, merely to see Stevinus's flying chariot. --He was a very great man! added my uncle Toby (meaning Stevinus) --He was so, brother Toby, said my father (meaning Piereskius). (426-427)

It is noticeable that in his expressions -- especially those of grief or despair -- Walter provokes misunderstanding by expanding his sentiments or ideas into metaphors for what he conceives as the general human condition. Upon the occasion of receiving the news of Bobby's death, he attempts to quote from Socrates:

> "I have friends --I have relations, --I have three desolate children," --says Socrates.-- --Then, cried my mother, opening the door, --you have one more, Mr. Shandy, than I know of. (385)

Just as "my Tristram" becomes "a child", Walter likens his own grief to Socrates' or to "the dark side of man's experience"; and at one point he explicitly considers his own concept of time to be necessarily operative "in every sound man's head". In fact, sometimes one suspects that Walter is more interested in the expression of his ideas and feelings than he is in their substance, especially if they furnish

him with a new metaphor. The irony is that a metaphor is supposed to render the abstract more apprehendable, but as Walter uses one it renders the commonplace incomprehensible -- and blocks communication. The reason for this is simply that Walter's cosmology itself -- like his vocabulary -- is really only definable in its own terms; it has little if anything to do with the real world.

Sometimes Walter is more or less ignored by the others -- especially by Mrs. Shandy, who frequently adopts the strategy of simply agreeing with whatever Walter says whether she understands him or not, which from Walter's point of view is the same thing as being ignored:

> --Cursed luck! said he . . . --for a man to be master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature, --and have a wife at the same time with such a headpiece, that he cannot hang up a single inference within side of it, to save his soul from destruction. (152)

The "beds of justice" scenes furnish examples of this; passages may be found on pages 457-458 and pages 491-492. In certain cases where he is, in effect, being ignored, Walter does not realize it. For example:

> He shall neither strike, or pinch, or tickle, --or bite, or cut his nails, or hawk, or spit, or sniff, or drum with his feet or fingers in company, nor (according to Erasmus) shall he speak to any one in making water, --nor shall he point to carrion or excrement, --Now this is all nonsense again, quoth my uncle Toby to himself. (431)

At other times he mistakes his listener's response for understanding or agreement when neither is the case:

> 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.
>
> My father placed the tears to a proper account, and went on with his harrangue with great spirit. (369)

Whether Walter is simply interrupted, misunderstood or effectively ignored, he is never allowed to complete a successful communication with anyone. But lest we develop too much sympathy for Walter as a result of his continual frustrations, certain examples of his behavior are given which make it difficult to feel much pity for him. For example, after Tristram's accident with the window, the collective guilty party (Toby, Trim, and Susannah) march to Shandy Hall to break the news as gently as possible to Walter and find him pouring over literature concerning various methods of circumcision. Upon their arriving, he immediately launches into a diatribe concerning [redacted] the methods by which the ritual may be performed: "--But is the child, cried my uncle Toby, the worse? --The Troglodites say not, replied my father." (402) When the comedy of Walter's reactions fails to divert our sympathy from him, the apparent coldness of his reactions succeeds. Consider the contrast between Toby's and Walter's responses to the news of Bobby's death:

> ___ ___ ___ ___ ___he's gone! said my uncle Toby. --Where --Who? cried my father. --My nephew, said my uncle Toby. --What--without leave--without money--without governor? cried my father in amazement. No: --he is dead, my dear brother, quoth my uncle Toby. --Without being ill? cried my

> father again. --I dare say not, said my uncle Toby, in a low voice, and fetching a deep sigh from the bottom of his heart, he has been ill enough, poor lad! I'll answer for him -- for he is dead. (364)

Toby's deeply sentimental response is contrasted to Walter's instinctive searching after causes and circumstances.

This humor of pathos sometimes becomes very nearly a humor of the macabre, as, for example, in the scene where Susannah brings the news to Walter that the infant Tristram is about to die of some kind of apoplexy:

> Then reach me my breeches off the chair, said my father to Susannah. --There is not a moment's time to dress you, Sir, cried Susannah --the child is as black as my --as your what? said my father, for like all orators, he was a dear searcher into comparisons. . . .
>
> Were one sure, said my father to himself, scratching his eye-brow, that the child was expiring, one might as well compliment my brother Toby as not --and it would be a pity, in such a case, to throw away so great a name as Trismegistus upon him --but he may recover. (297)

There can hardly be any doubt as to the coldness of Walter's response to the situation. Walter's emotions become meaningful to the reader only as they seem to be meaningful for Walter: as springboards for his rhetoric and metaphors. But his rhetoric keeps running into the flak of interruption and misunderstanding and his metaphors are brought to their knees by sash-weights, door-hinges, and jack-boots.

Bearing in mind Traugott's principle that any artist persuades by example, that is, "can only persuade by making his images descriptive of his peculiar selection of ordering [and thus] induce a sort of belief . . . in his system"

(see above p. 3), one can only conclude from the cumulative effect of Walter's hobbyhorsical failures -- either to cope with reality or to communicate with others -- that Sterne rejects the moral position of a man dedicated hobbyhorsically, like Walter, to intellectual abstraction. What remains positive in Walter's personality are only such things as his intellectual energy and endurance. It is clear, however, that Walter's hobbyhorsical personality lacks some essential quality which Sterne considers morally important; and as a result he is doomed to continual frustration.

The one sin which is either implicit or explicit in almost all of Walter's hobbyhorsical activities in his denial of emotions, his abrogation of humanity. Like Gulliver, Walter has chosen the ideals of the houyhnhnms over those of humanity. Even in the few instances when Walter seems to be genuinely moved to a more human response, he is quick to deny his own human responsibility:

> He rose up hastily from his chair, and seizing hold of both my uncle Toby's hands as he spoke: --Brother Toby, said he --I beg thy pardon; forgive, I pray thee, this rash humor which my mother gave me. (117)

Walter's delight in pursuing ultimate causes, of course, makes such a notion as "personal responsibility" repugnant to him. The result of Walter's denial of the value of emotional communication (and hence his abrogation of humanity) is that his hobbyhorse (which both produces and is nourished by these abrogations)loses its power of adaptability to the real

world (i.e. substantive reality) which any system -- philosophical, scientific, or whatever -- must possess in order to function efficaciously. Here again is the divorce between humanity and mechanisms of which Lockridge speaks. It is not, to be precise, systematic inquiry as such which is being satirized; it is systematic inquiry divorced from a meaningful human context. It is not the value of logic which is being attacked; it is the attempt to translate the process of life into empty syllogistic chains and definitions which ignore human reality. It is not reason which is being derided; it is ratiocination. It is not even abstract or metaphorical language which is coming under fire; it is the attempt to impose subjective, esoteric definitions upon words and then expect them to communicate meaningfully [redacted]; it is any vocabulary which has become self-sufficient through circularity. In short it is the attempt to separate the intellect from the emotions.

Just as Walter moves further and further away from human realities with his hypotheses and experiences less and less success in his attempts to communicate with others, the image he has of himself becomes more and more distant from the image he presents to the reader. He fancies himself a philosopher king and "master of one of the finest chains of reasoning in nature"[26] but as the narrative progresses the reader is forced to view him more and more as a foolish eccentric. Presumably, as the real scholar or virtuoso progressed in his studies he was able to make more and more

connections between the various branches of his inquiry. But Walter's researches simply take him further and further out of touch with reality. This reaches the point that when it appears upon one occasion that somebody actually does understand him, Walter can hardly believe it:

> --The Danes, an' please your honour, quoth the corporal, who were on the left at the siege of Limerick, were all auxiliaries. --And very good ones, said my uncle Toby. --But the auxiliaries, Trim, my brother is talking about, --I conceive to be different things.--
> --You do? said my father rising up. (422)

With the above exception, however, the only way in which Walter seems able to successfully communicate is by means of those non-verbal "humphs", "hems", and hand-squeezings which go on between him and Toby. These are, notably, times at which Walter is not astride his hobby-horse. This would suggest that emotion or sentiment is both an instrument of communication and a moral value. It should be added that many readers of Tristram Shandy have, in fact, concluded that sentiment is the basic theme which Sterne is suggesting; as for example, Traugott:

> The final doctrine of sympathy or sentimentalism which Sterne offers us depends upon our ability to understand the relations of ideas and words as they appear in human situations; he had always emphasized the pathetic proof in his sermons.[27]

There are serious flaws in this conclusion, however. As we shall see in the next chapter, pure sentiment or emotion presents its own pitfalls and limitations, just as pure ratiocination does.

Whether we view Walter as mechanism, Satanic villain, decadent virtuoso, foolish eccentric, or pathetic farce, he can hardly posit a tenable ideal in the moral vision of Tristram Shandy. For the present we may conclude with Tristram's advice to the reader concerning Walter's hobbyhorse:

> But as for my father's ass; mount him, --mount him, --mount him (that's three times is it not?) --mount him not: --'tis a beast concupiscent -- and foul befall the man, who does not hinder him from kicking. (609)

TOBY'S HOBBYHORSE

"--There is no cause but one . . . because . that God pleases to have it so"

Walter's hobbyhorse leads him to be concerned with the future; Toby's hobbyhorse is born in his attempt to fully understand the past. This difference is indicative of most of the differences between the two men. Walter firmly believes in his ability to intellectually understand and manipulate his own future and his son's destiny. Toby just as firmly believes that worldly realities are the direct result of God's will and that as such they exhibit a God-given order. Whereas Walter pursues theories which he thinks will enable him to act as a free agent in control of worldly realities, Toby seeks only facts about what has happened, for whatever has definitely come to pass has done so because it is not Toby's -- or Walter's -- universe, but God's universe. Thus, whereas Walter may be interested in:

> . . . the various accounts which learned men of different kinds of knowledge have given the world of the causes of the short and long noses. . . . (247)

Toby simply assumes that:

> --There is no cause but one . . . why one man's nose is longer than another's, . . . because that God pleases to have it so. (247)

Walter, then, attempts to create and to control; Toby is satisfied with trying to know that which he regards as immutable.

In addition to believing that reality is a God-given order Toby believes that this order is, for the most part, accessible to purely empirical study. Since Toby believes that thought should be as closely related to worldly realities as possible, and since those realities have been for Toby largely those of the professional soldier and of war, his thoughts (quite appropriately) are mainly composed of the concrete images of the machinery and paraphernalia of war. Furthermore, since Toby has suffered a painful wound due to his confrontation with God's universe at the Battle of Namur, he wishes to understand at least the "how" (since he would never presume to question the "why" beyond the fact that it was God's pleasure) which led to his wounding. This, in turn, leads him to his hobbyhorsical interest in siegecraft and fortifications.

Just as Walter's hobbyhorse absorbs almost all of his time and creative energy (which is suggested by Sterne's association of images of pregnancy and gestation with Walter's mental activities), Toby's interest in the bowling green is also described by Sterne in images charged with sexual overtones:

> Never did a lover post down to a beloved mistress with more heat and expectation, than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy this self-same thing in private. (99)

Furthermore, just as Walter's researches carry him further and further beyond the pale, Toby's enterprises on the bowling green occasionally -- and ironically -- carry him a bit out of touch with reality:

> We will begin with the outworks both towards the sea and the land, and particularly with fort Louis, the most distant of them all, and demolish it first, --and the rest, one by one, both on our right and left as we retreat towards the town, --then retire into the citadel, and blow it up into the air; and having done that, corporal, we'll embark for England. --We are there, quoth the corporal, recollecting himself. (485)

Both brothers are obsessed with their hobbyhorses;-both are beset with difficulties in their individual attempts to communicate -- especially with each other. But whereas Walter is continually interrupted and misunderstood, Toby is usually doing the interrupting and misunderstanding. There are, in fact, two almost diametrically opposed kinds of language being forced into proximity by the relationship between the two men.

Walter's attempts to relate disparate fields of knowledge to each other cause him to develop a broadly connotative and metaphorical use of language whereby whole concepts and even whole chains of hypotheses can be attached to the skeleton of, for example, the conjugation of a single verb. Toby's belief in reality as a moral order -- and in the accessibility of that order to empirical observation or to simple intuition -- combines with his knowledge of siegecraft and fortifications and causes him to develop a denotative vocabulary within which all words have as nearly concrete

a meaning as possible. Words, for example, like "tower", "engine", "train", and "bastion" can have but one meaning for Toby. Just as Walter becomes, through his use of language as much as anything else, a parody of the decadent virtuoso who tries to relate all fields of study to each other, Toby becomes almost a parody of the epistemological and philological credos of the new empiricists -- the Royal Society for example. In other words, if Walter has stretched the meanings of words beyond all hope of coherent definition, Toby, like the mad scientists of Swift's Lagado, figuratively carries around in his head a thing for each word.

Both his interest in siegecraft and his compulsive commitment to a simplified and concrete kind of language grow out of Toby's belief in substantive reality as a God-given order. Both of these compulsive hobbyhorsical preoccupations incline Toby to continually interrupt others, especially Walter. In doing this, Toby's hobbyhorse serves to undermine Walter's hobbyhorsical attempts to communicate. Even when Toby's verbal responses seem plainly obtuse and demonstrate nothing but his hobbyhorsical preoccupation, they subvert Walter's rhetoric. Then, whether intended by Toby or not, they sometimes point out the absurdity of Walter's disquisitions. Finally, they sometimes serve to complement the rhetorical background which Sterne has provided for Walter's responses, and thus heighten their sense of absurdity.

There are scenes such as the following in which Toby's responses demonstrate only his hobbyhorsical preoccupation with siegecraft and fortifications:

> Now whether we observe it or no, continued my father, in every sound man's head, there is a regular succession of ideas of one sort or another, which follow each other in train just like --A train of artillery? said my uncle Toby --a train of fiddle-stick! quoth my father. (196)

Sometimes a mere gesture prompts Toby to respond hobbyhorsically. At one juncture, for example, the "transverse zig-zaggery" of Walter's hand across his chest as he is reaching for his handkerchief reminds Toby of the ditches "he had done duty in, before the gate of St. Nicholas" and he raises his hand to ring the bell for Trim; Walter, however, recognizes the hobbyhorse: "My father knit his brows, and as he knit them, all the blood in his body seemed to rush up into his face --my uncle Toby dismounted immediately." (164) Even when Toby is not particularly thinking of siegecraft or fortifications, his propensity for concrete meanings for all words prompts him to interrupt Walter:

> 'Tis a pity, said my father, that truth can only be on one side, brother Toby --considering what ingenuity these learned men have all shewn in their solutions of noses. --Can noses be dissolved? replied my uncle Toby. (246)

None of these responses seems to demonstrate much perception on Toby's part of what is going on around him. Sometimes, however, Toby's hobbyhorsical responses have an ambiguous implication -- either naive obtuseness or an

awareness of his companion's absurdity. For example:

> Sir, replied Dr. Slop, it would astonish you to know what improvements we have made of late years in all branches of obstetrical knowledge, but particularly in that one single point of safe and expeditious extraction of the foetus, --which has received such lights, that, for my part, (holding up his hands) I declare I wonder how the world has --I wish, quoth my uncle Toby, you had seen what prodigious armies we had in Flanders. (149)

This seeming non-sequitur could indicate Toby's awareness of the absurd conclusion towards which Slop's logic is proceeding. It unmistakably demonstrates Toby's insistence upon forcing concrete reality upon a process of disoriented theorizing which has been steadily moving further and further away from reality. Furthermore, the demonstration continues; in response to Toby's interruption, Walter replies:

> --but the dangers and difficulties our children are beset with, after they are got forth into the world . . . --Are these dangers, quoth my uncle Toby, laying his hand upon my father's knee, and looking up seriously into his face for an answer, --are these dangers greater now o' days, brother, than in times past? Brother Toby, answered my father, if a child was but fairly begot, and born alive, and healthy, and the mother did well after it, our forefathers never looked farther. (168-169)

In the face of Walter's unflinching and unmitigated hobby-horsicalness, Toby can only resort to his last recourse: he whistles Lillabullero.

There are many such examples of Toby's responses which indicate obtuseness or perception. For another example:

> Others were masters of fourteen languages at ten, --finished the course of their rhetoric, poetry, logic, and ethics at eleven, --put forth their commentaries upon Servius and Martianus Capella at twelve, --and at thirteen received their degrees in philosophy, laws, and divinity: --But you forget the great Lipsius, quoth Yorick, who composed a work the day he was born; They should have wiped it up, said my uncle Toby, and said no more about it. (428)

Again:

> --The force of this engine, added my father, is incredible in opening a child's head. --'Tis enough, brother Shandy, cried my uncle Toby, to burst it into a thousand splinters. (426)

Sometimes more than two possibilities exist, as in the following passage:

> As she continued rub-rub-rubbing --I felt it spread from under her hand, an' please your honour, to every part of my frame --
> The more she rubbed, and the longer strokes she took --the more the fire kindled in my veins -- till at length, by two or three strokes longer than the rest -- my passion rose to the highest pitch --I seized her hand --
> --And then thou clappd'st it to thy lips, Trim, said my uncle Toby, --and madest a speech. (598)

Toby's response here might simply be another obtuse interruption. On the other hand, it could be indicative of his sense of propriety (hence the interruption), a knowledge of Trim's hobbyhorsical propensity for speech-making, or Toby's ideals regarding the treatment of women. Similarly, in the following passage a rich set of possibilities exists:

> --'Tis owing entirely, quoth my uncle Toby, to the succession of our ideas.
>
> ---
>
> Do you understand the theory of that affair? replied my father.

> Not I, quoth my uncle.
> --But you have some ideas, said my father, of what you talk about?--
> No more than my horse, replied my uncle Toby. (195)

For me, this passage clearly demonstrates Toby's belief that understanding does not depend necessarily upon theorizing or even upon ideas per se. For Toby, understanding is largely an intuitive and immediate process. Furthermore, he is doubtless unwilling to pursue the topic into one of Walter's disquisitions. In any event, the distinct possibility of awareness and perception exists.

In certain cases Toby's interruptions serve as rhetorical foils to undermine Walter's attempts at expressing himself -- often complementing the ironic context Sterne has provided for Walter's ego-centrism. Consider, for example, the case of Walter's bedroom lament:

> . . . did ever a poor unfortunate man, brother Toby, cried my father, receive so many lashes?
> --The most I ever saw given . . . was to a grenadier, I think in Mackay's regiment. (284)

Besides the humor which results from Toby's hobbyhorsically obtuse reply, one can hardly fail to notice a kind of justice in the effect it has: Walter deserves to be flattened on the quilt as punishment for having been engaging in pompous and slightly histrionic self pity when he should be concerned with the welfare of his injured child. In addition, Toby's response neatly parallels what Sterne has already been leading up to; it follows an ornate and lengthy description of Walter's position on the bed -- all of which adds up to the fact that his

foot is dangling in the chamber pot. In other words, the bathos produced by Toby's reply complements the bathos resulting from the contrast between the ornate style Sterne uses to describe Walter's position and the fact that the description is getting at: that his foot is dangling in the chamberpot.

In summary: whether Toby's interruptions demonstrate hobbyhorsical preoccupation, or perception, or whether they combine with other rhetorical elements of the narrative toward a common goal, they serve in any case to subvert a large number of attempts at communication in the narrative.

There is another hobbyhorsical part of Toby's character growing out of his belief (see above, pp. 21 ff.) that reality reflects God's ordering intelligence: this is his compulsive sentiment. . . . Just as Walter views the universe as chaotic or hostile and attempts to respond as an ordering intelligence, Toby views the universe as ordered by God and therefore necessarily benign, and responds -- quite properly -- out of gratitude with instinctive sympathy and empathy for all of God's creatures. For <u>order</u> necessarily means <u>harmony</u> for Toby; "--Go," he says to the fly whose life he has apared, "I'll not hurt a hair of thy head. . . . --This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me." (115) If Walter sees man's proper activity as speculation, Toby conceives of man's proper activity as <u>sympathetic response</u> -- i.e., sentiment.

This sentiment is itself a powerful means of communication. This is made manifest upon a number of occasions. For example:

> For as soon as my father had done insulting his Hobby-Horse, --he turned his head without the least emotion, from Dr. Slop, to whom he was addressing his discourse, and 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. (116-117)

It is, of course, Walter who is forced to apologize.

Toby is quite willing to take action based upon his sentiment; the case of Le Fever demonstrates this:

> He'll drop at last, said the corporal, and what will become of his boy? --He shall not drop, said my uncle Toby, firmly. --A-well-o'-day, --do what we can for him, said Trim, maintaining his point, --the poor soul will die: --He shall not die, by G--, cried my uncle Toby. (442)

When, despite Toby's efforts, Le Fever does die, Toby takes every precaution to insure his son's security and future opportunity. Finally, the reader's respect for Toby's sentimental responses is heightened by the knowledge that Toby, tender-hearted as he is, is by no means short on courage; Trim reports to the kitchen staff that Toby: "would march up to the mouth of a cannon, though he saw the lighted match at the very touch-hole." (381) In addition, Tristram informs us that: "where just occasions presented, or called it forth, --I know of no man under whose arm I would have sooner taken shelter." (114)

But while there is both power and appeal in Toby's sentiment and resultant humanitarianism, the other face of his hobbyhorse all too often gets in the way. Consider, for example, the case in which Walter's son has been named Tristram rather than Trismegistus, badly upsetting Walter. Toby says to Trim:

> --For my own part, Trim, though I can see little or no difference between my nephew's being called Tristram or Trismegistus --yet as the thing sits so near my brother's heart, Trim, --I would freely have given a hundred pounds rather than it should have happened. (304)

This is clear and straighforward statement of the affection and sympathy which Toby has for Walter. Unfortunately, it leads to the other hobbyhorsical pole:

> Bless your honour! cried Trim, advancing three steps as he spoke, dos a man think of his Christian-name when he goes upon the attack? --Or when he stands in the trench, Trim? cried my uncle Toby, looking firm. --Or when he enters a breach? cried Trim, pushing in between two chairs. --Or forces the lines? cried my uncle, rising up, and pushing his crutch like a pike. --Or facing a platoon? cried Trim, presenting his stick like a firelock. --Or when he marches up the glacis? cried my uncle Toby, looking warm and setting his foot upon his stool. (304-305)

At this moment Walter enters the room. Toby's enthusiasm for military affairs sabatoges his desire to comfort Walter. Either side of his hobbyhorsical interest (when being indulged) virtually eclipses the expression of the other side. This incompatibility is unmistakably described just before the march on the Widow Wadman's house:

> --Why, therefore, may not battles, an' please your honour, as well as marriages, be made in heaven? --My uncle Toby mused--
>
> Religion inclined him to say one thing, and his high idea of military skill tempted him to say another; so not being able to frame a reply exactly to his

> mind -- my uncle Toby said nothing at all; and the corporal finished his story. (633)

The above passage explicitly describes the fundamental problem about Toby which arises in the reader's mind: how can a professional soldier -- whose sworn duty has necessarily involved killing other men -- be incapable of hurting even a fly? How can the values of a sentimentalist and humanitarian be reconciled in one personality with the values of a professional soldier? Toby is to some degree aware of the incompatibility of these sets of values; at one point he admonishes Trim for the way in which he conducted the affair with Le Fever:

> Your honour knows, said the corporal, I had no orders; --True, quoth my uncle Toby, --thou didst very right, Trim, as a soldier, --but certainly very wrong as a man. (442)

Moreover, Toby is well aware the effects of war; he knows of its effect on Le Fever, ". . . whose wife was most unfortunately killed with a musket-shot, as she lay in my arms in the tent . . . ." (439-440) Nevertheless Toby is able to maintain his enthusiasm for soldiering.

The tension between these two value sets is epitomized in Toby's epistolary apology to Walter. (pp. 479-482) Significantly, critics have by and large refused to deal with the problem of whether the letter is intended by Sterne as an exoneration of Toby's hobbyhorsical interest in warfare or as a satirical criticism of Toby for indulging that hobbyhorsical interest. In some respects the letter demonstrates a rather remarkable self-knowledge. In other respects it

displays a reprehensible unwillingness to assume responsibility for the actual nature of the activity (war) which it glamorizes, and a rather deluded (to say the least) idea of war's realities. Toby exalts the emblems and symbols of military life: the drums, flags, uniforms, parades, esprit de corps and so forth. But he somehow avoids making the connection between this side of military life and the other, more sordid side of it:

> If, when I was a school-boy, I could not hear a drum beat, but my heart beat with it --was it my fault? --Did I plant the propensity? --Did I sound the alarm within, or Nature? (480)

In this statement we have the most concise definition of Toby's essential hobbyhorse in the book: his belief in the justifiability of all human attitude and action upon the sole criterion of heart-response. As one of God's creatures, if he feels that something is good, how can it help but be good? Given Toby's great heart and sentimental, humanitarian propensities, one is tempted to accept such a criterion. He continues, however, and the flaws begin to appear:

> For what is war? what is it, Yorick, when fought as ours has been, upon principles of liberty, and upon principles of honour, -- what is it, but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds? (482)

It is not only the romantic side of soldiering that Toby is trying to justify in this letter; it is war itself. He describes the process of war as merely the "getting together of quiet and harmless people with swords in their hands" and

justifies this activity by assigning to it the function of keeping the "ambitious and the turbulent within bounds". There are two implications of this distortion of war's reality: Toby is deliberately choosing his words to construct a persuasive rhetoric towards the justification of war and he is refusing to face up to the realistic implications (i.e., death, suffering, destruction, etc.) of war (remembering that as a professional soldier he experienced them directly). Both implications detract substantially from an image of Toby as an untarnished ideal.

There seems, in fact, to be both vindication and satire in the letter. Toby's forthright attempt to justify both the innocence and the virtue of basing an attitude or action upon emotional response (given his sentimental and humanitarian heart) to some degree vindicates his harmless fascination with his miniature, toy war games. And, as was said before, given Toby's thoroughly generous, compassionate, humble, and sentimental nature, such a basis for moral action seems acceptable. However, the letter also poses a satirical criticism of Toby. It is worth asking why Sterne causes war in particular to become the principle object of Toby's fascination. It is true that nationalism and chauvinism were strong forces in 18th-century England. One cannot help but feel, however, that Sterne's attitudes -- about war in particular -- tended to be more Augustan, in the tradition of Swift, for example, as expressed by the Brobdingnag episode of Gulliver's Travels, than chauvinistic. The question can be posed, for example: if Sterne's attitudes

toward war were to any degree chauvinistic, why would he include in his narrative the story of Le Fever -- a story designed to arouse anti-war feelings? There is no satisfactory answer, and we are forced to conclude that in the context of Tristram Shandy at any rate, war is intended to arouse negative feelings. Herein lies the key to why Sterne causes war in particular to become the object of Toby's fascination. What other human activity could so convincingly demonstrate the danger inherent in Toby's moral credo! The fact that the other face of his hobbyhorse is his sentimental humanitarianism only serves to dramatically emphasize that danger.

The question, then, is: what is this danger? To rephrase the question: what is the flaw, the limitation inherent in Toby's hobbyhorse? The answer is that just as Walter has abrogated his humanity by denying the value of his own emotions, and of emotional communication, Toby has abrogated the power of judgement, of rational thought. To enlarge this point, Toby's hobbyhorse, growing out of his belief only in the value of intuition and empirical observation, is a categorical denial of man's ability to improve either his moral nature or actions by means of conceptually or logically analyzing his experience. In short, it is a denial of the moral role of the intellect. This attitude allows this "first . . . foremost . . . of created beings" (as Tristram describes Toby), this man of "a most extreme and unparalleled modesty of nature" to become fascinated and idealistically devoted to the most destructive of human activities.

Toby's hobbyhorse also proves to be as untenable a method of coping with reality as Walter's is. Walter's hobbyhorse leads him to become too intellectually abstract, too far separated from a meaningful human context in order to maintain a dynamic and flexible relationship with the realities he is trying to understand and control. Toby's hobbyhorse, on the other hand, leads him to become too emotionally flexible, too passive to stimuli, [redacted] to gain any definitive ability to morally evaluate or control these various realities. Accordingly, he is unable to keep from causing pain and vexation to Walter -- the one person for whom he quite possibly feels more affection than anyone else. And there are further flaws in Toby's character. For one thing, serious questions can be raised regarding Toby's ability to survive (in his hobbyhorsical condition) outside the aegis of understanding provided by Shandean society. Also he lacks Walter's energetic and creative mind. This is symbolized by the fact that it is, after all, Walter who begets children for the Shandy family.

The only communication which is successfully established between Walter and Toby is by means of emotion or sentiment -- which is the expression of Toby's hobbyhorse. Accordingly, sentiment is a germane and powerful moral value in the vision of Tristram Shandy. It is important enough for Tristram to describe Toby as "the first -- the foremost of created beings" and for him to find the idea of Toby's future death unbearable --

while he never once so much as refers to his own father in strongly emotional terms. But Tristram clearly sees the danger of separating intellect and emotion from one another. Having completely denied the value of conceptual thinking, and depending upon emotion and intuition only, Toby's life itself (as Tristram informs us) is put in danger by words alone. (88) There is more to Sterne's moral doctrine than sentimentalism alone, and to find the other values it involves (including that of intellect), it is necessary to examine the hobbyhorses of Yorick and Tristram.

YORICK'S HOBBYHORSE

". . . he would usually translate into plain English"

Yorick's hobbyhorse essentially is his compulsion to tell the objective truth without regard for the consequences. He is also compulsively prone to make jests which normally (and unfortunately) sharpen the "point" of the truth he tells. His tragic mistake is his assumption that the world will accept the truth about itself in the same spirit in which he is willing to accept the truth about himself: ". . . and as he saw himself in the true point of ridicule, he would say he could not be angry with others for seeing him in a light, in which he so strongly saw himself." (20)

Tristram describes Yorick's compulsion to tell the truth -- typically in the form of a gibe:

> But, in plain truth, he was a man unhackneyed and unpractised in the world, and was altogether as indiscreet and foolish on every other subject of discourse where policy is wont to impress restraint. Yorick had no impression but one, and that was what arose from the nature of the deed spoken of; which impression he would usually translate into plain English without any periphrasis; --and too oft without much distinction of either person, time or place; --so that when mention was made of a pitiful or an ungenerous proceeding --he never gave himself a moment's time to reflect who was the hero of the

> piece, --what his station, --or how far he had power to hurt him hereafter; --but if it was a dirty action, --without more ado, --The man was a dirty fellow, --and so on. (28-29)

He summarizes all this:

> In a word, tho' he never sought, yet, at the same time, as he seldom shunned occasions of saying what came uppermost, and without much ceremony: --he had but too many temptations in life, of scattering his wit and his humour, --his gibes and his jests about him. (29)

For example, after the window falls and Tristram is injured, Trim defends Susannah's role in the incident to Toby which, in turn, reminds Toby of the Battle of Steenkirk. This reminds Trim that he could just as easily have used the toy church spout as the window sash-weights for the material to cast the cannon:

> --I wish, said Trim, as they entered the door, --instead of the sash weights, I had cut off the church spout as I once thought to have done. --You have cut off spouts enow, replied Yorick. (397)

Like the traditional figure of the fool or court jester whose name he bears, Yorick attempts to tell the truth in terms of wit or humour. He makes the fatal mistake, however, of emphasizing the truth of his remarks over their humor. As a result, the humor serves only to sharpen the edge of the truth rather than conceal it:

> And as his comments had usually the ill fate to be terminated either in a bon mot, or to be enlivened throughout with some drollery or humour of expression, it gave wings to Yorick's indescretion . . . . (29)

The court jester or fool was allowed his freedom subject to two conditions. First, he always cloaked his truths in the garb of a humorous rhetoric; thus the censor was bypassed. Yorick gets the emphasis reversed. Second, the fool or jester paid a price for his freedom of expression. In Towers' words:

> . . . the fool or jester, like the related figure of the holy simpleton, so often pays for his freedom by some signal weakness.[28]

Yorick has just such a weakness: his hypersensitive heart. He cares very deeply about what the world thinks of him; he gives up his annual purchasing of a new horse (and all the pleasure the habit afforded him) precisely for that reason. Nevertheless, since, like Toby, he believes his heart to be in tune with God's harmonious order and since "he loved a jest in his heart" (20) he assumes that the world shares this feeling. Of course the world is not willing to face up to the truth about itself in the same spirit as Yorick will about himself; furthermore it can do very well without his jests. Consequently, when the world unites against Yorick to revenge itself for the gibes and jests he has leveled in its direction, Yorick's heart is broken and he dies.

We can accept Tristram's explanation of Yorick's fate as a satiric criticism of the world: "The thing I had in view was to show the temper of the world in the whole of this affair." (23) On the other hand we can go further and assume that Yorick -- because of his hobbyhorse -- lacks some

quality which might have aided in his survival. The first explanation pits Yorick as an ideal against the world as reality. The second assumes a philosophical concern with -- and a rhetorical technique of -- characterization through the individual's hobbyhorse which parallels the concern and technique we have seen in the cases of both Walter and Toby. The world is clearly being criticized for its murderous and vindictive persecution of one whose only sin was telling the truth in humorous terms. Nevertheless, the "idealized" Yorick -- like Walter and Toby -- lacks the ability to survive, based upon maintaining a flexible and dynamic relationship with worldly, social realities. Such an ability demands both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world, and while Yorick may possess a reasonable amount of the first kind of knowledge, he completely lacks the second kind. Like Don Quixote, Clarissa Harlowe, Parson Adams, and a host of other literary characters, Yorick's inability to understand or accomodate the worldly constitutes both a prime virtue and a prime fault -- as Tristram understands:

> All I blame him for -- or rather, all I blame and alternately like him for, was that singularity of his temper, which would never suffer him to take pains to set a story right with the world, however in his power. (335)

As a consequence, Tristram tells us, Yorick was: ". . . altogether. . . indiscreet and foolish on every . . . subject of discourse where policy is wont to impress restraint." (28) As a result, then:

> With all this sail, poor Yorick carried not one ounce of ballast; he was utterly unpractised in the world; and, at the age of twenty-six, knew just about as well how to steer his course in it, as a romping, unsuspicious girl of thirteen. (27)

Yorick also, then, is in a very important way "unable to make the essential connections between himself and the world around him."[29] While his truths are understood all too well, his hyper-sensitive and humble heart, unfortunately, is not. In order to understand how this happens we must again consider language itself.

Yorick achieves a mastery of language and rhetoric which neither Walter nor Toby can manage. As we have seen, Walter's cosmology (or epistemology) and his vocabulary are inextricably interwoven. In other words, not only Walter's attempts to express his theories but also the substance of his theories consist of a very specialized kind of language; i.e., one which is broadly connotative and metaphorical. Thus, such a phrase as "solutions of noses" (246), for example, can only be meaningful in the very highly specialized relationship between cosmology and vocabulary with which Walter works. Toby also uses language in a highly specialized and inflexible way: a word usually can have, for Toby, only one concrete referent. In either case, the hobbyhorse leads to a specialized, esoteric, and inflexible use of language. As a consequence, both hobbyhorses lead to failures in communication just as they lead to failures in understanding or coping

with worldly and social realities. Paulson describes the relationship between communication and action in the novel:

> Words never mean the same thing to one person as to another, to Walter as to Toby, or to Tristram as to the reader; each goes his separate way, contributing to the general meaning of the novel. In Tristram Shandy words are part of man's original dislocation . . . appropriately, words keep slipping into their sexual meanings, and verbal misunderstandings lead to the malfunctioning of objects which, in turn, leads to the literal or figurative emasculations of the characters.[30]

Put simply, Walter and Toby are continually victimized by the equivocal properties of words. Yorick, however, uses these equivocal properties of words, specifically in framing his jests, bon mots, and double entendres. Thus he maintains a mastery over language by using it as a plastic and malleable material to serve his own communicative purposes. Moreover, he succeeds all too well in these purposes -- his jests and gibes are far too clearly understood. As a result of his facility of communicating truth, the world turns on him and destroys him. Thus Yorick indirectly becomes another victim of language. Once the world begins to regard him as a critic and jester, everything he does is interpreted that way whether or not Yorick intends it as such. A good example of such a misinterpretation being placed on one of Yorick's actions is the scene in which Phutatorius, knowing very well of Yorick's propensity for practical jokes, mistakes his gesture of picking up the hot chestnut as a signal of guilt and directs a threat at Yorick. (pp. 334-335)

We have seen in the cases of Walter and Toby that communication is an extremely difficult thing to achieve in the Shandy universe. A study of Yorick suggests that communication may not even be a desirable thing -- as an instrument of survival -- in the Shandy universe, unless it is complete; unless both action and motivè are fully understood. In Yorick's case, lack of communication of his good motives leads to catastrophe.

For Tristram, whom we shall be considering in the next chapter, Yorick's experience provides two lessons. On the one hand, he learns that language can be mastered by maintaining control over its equivocal properties. On the other hand, he learns that in order to play the fool or jester (i.e., in order to enjoy the freedom of expression which attends such a role) one must in some way pay his dues, either by signaling or exaggerating a weakness, or by concealing truth in a humorous rhetoric which the world finds acceptable. Accordingly, when he tells us: "Thus I triumphed over Eugenius; but I triumphed over him as I always do, like a fool." (255) or when he deprecates himself by professing to be simple-minded and without design in constructing his narrative (i.e., his assurance that he set down the first sentence and "trusted to Almighty God for the second" (xi)) he is, perhaps, buying the reader off for a while, indulging him:

> --So that betwixt both, I write a careless kind of civil, nonsensical, good-humoured Shandean book, which will do all your hearts good --
> --And all your heads too, --provided you understand it. (455)

As we shall see, the last sentence can hardly be over-emphasized.

TRISTRAM'S HOBBYHORSE

"All the dexterity is in the good cookery and management."

Sterne has created certain realities for Tristram to face, just as he has for the other Shandys. In Tristram's case these realities are the curious and at times bizarre facts which relate to his past ("Sport of small accidents, Tristram Shandy!") (170), and his present condition of probable impotence and imminent death. These realities, then, are the basic structural materials of the narrative and Tristram is extremely skillful in his "selective ordering" or assembling of these materials to form the narrative. This is to say that he is a highly skilled rhetorician -- for which there is much evidence. For example, one has only to compare these central realities of the narrative (most especially Tristram's impotence and imminent death) with the pervasive mood and tone of the novel (which is explicitly and energetically comic) to conclude that a major transformation of mood has been effected. Such a transformation presumes a conscious, rhetorical effort on the part of the narrator, who is identified by the ways in which

these materials have been integrated. This transforming process itself is the key to defining Tristram's hobbyhorse. It consists of the particular structural and rhetorical techniques he employs in telling his story. Therefore, if we can identify and define the techniques Tristram uses to tell his story, we shall have constructed a definition of his hobbyhorse. Furthermore, in the process we shall locate the values which provide the ultimate moral vision of Tristram Shandy -- for Sterne uses Tristram's hobbyhorse more or less as a sieve through which the other characters' hobbyhorses are passed in order to test the values they embody. Those which are acceptable are integrated into Tristram's hobbyhorse as methods used by him to order his narrative. In addition, Tristram is provided with his own hobbyhorsical compulsions. First, however, let us consider the similarities between Tristram and the other characters.

To begin with Tristram is, after all, Walter's son; and there is a strong element of Walter in Tristram. Despite his observations of the chaos perpetrated by Walter in his attempts to speculate and philosophize about first causes, Tristram himself is driven to seek after first causes. Much of the narrative is taken up by precisely this enterprise, as we shall soon see. Furthermore, like Walter, Tristram manifests a strong reticence to face up to certain worldly realities. Walter avoids the emotional impact of Tristram's injury by reading the Troglodites and avoids

the emotional impact of Bobby's death by sticking his compasses "so much the faster" into Nevers. (364) Tristram tries to avoid thinking about his own imminent death by engaging in mathematical calculations (p. 566) or by chasing off across France. Walter, undaunted by repeated failures, keeps on looking for his Northwest Passage of the mind, and Tristram, faced with imminent death, looks to the ritual magic of his writing to somehow postpone the event, "as long as I live or write (which in my case means the same thing) . . . ." (166) This will be considered in more detail shortly.

Probably the chief single manifestation of Toby's influence upon Tristram is Tristram's Toby-like tendency to interrupt (usually himself) -- typically by misinterpreting the meanings of his own words. His chapter on noses (227-229) furnishes a good example of this. Furthermore, Tristram, like Toby, is intensely interested in investigating the facts which have led to his past woundings, as Paulson has noted:

> At the beginning of the volume [2] he [Toby] offers a close parallel to Tristram's hobbyhorse: both are searches into the past to determine and communicate the exact nature and causes of their woundings. Toby traces the trajectories and plots exact coordinates of his position at the crucial moment, and this leads him to other woundings, other battles, and even whole wars. Tristram begins the same way, branches out to other "small heroes" who, like himself, are crushed by the world -- the Le Fevers, Marias, Tobys, Yoricks, and Walters.31

Finally, we have Tristram's own word on the subject: Toby is for Tristram ". . . the first --the foremost of created beings." (471)

Like Yorick, Tristram uses language as a plastic and malleable material to be equivocally interpreted as he sees fit: moreover he normally uses it for the same comic purposes. Nor does he stop there; he uses closely related techniques to maintain control over all his story materials. He refuses to be a slave to anyone's rules in telling his story, as he repeatedly tells us:

> Horace, I know, does not recommend this fashion altogether . . . I should beg Mr. Horace's pardon; --for in writing what I have set about, I shall confine myself neither to his rules, nor to any man's rules that ever lived. (7)

He will have it his way, then. If his investigations into the past discover only chaos (mostly perpetrated by Walter) then he will re-order the chaos (like Walter) by telling the story his own way. This insistence of Tristram's indicates a moral attitude; it only remains to define its order.

First we must review the central realities which compose the skeletal grid of the narrative; the major events or circumstances, in other words, which serve as focal points to which the narrative returns again and again, and which repeatedly stimulate the recurrent digressions of the book. I suggest the following list:

1. Tristram's unfortunate conception.
2. The mangling of his nose.
3. His having been misnamed.

4. His brother Bobby's death.
5. His accident with the window and probable impotence.
6. His chronic lung ailment and fear of death.
7. Toby's courtship of the Widow Wadman.

In addition to this list are such things as: Tristram's being put into knickers, his journey through France, Slawkenbergius' tale, the story of Le Fever, Parson Yorick's sermon, the marriage articles, and so forth. All of these derive from one or more of the central events or conditions listed above. His being put into knickers derives from the accident with the window; his journey through France derives from his fear of death; Slawkenbergius' tale derives from Walter's theory of noses, which in turn derives from the crushing of Tristram's nose; and so forth. One thing reminds Tristram of another and sooner or later the whole story gets told. The events or conditions listed above seem to be the central realities to which Tristram returns again and again in the narrative; as such they comprise the basic structural units of the story.

The problem to consider is how Tristram uses (or responds to) these central realities in terms of his rhetoric. In other words, how does he order these central events and conditions, or, perhaps more to the point, how do his reactions to these central events and conditions serve to structure, order, and define the rhetoric of Tristram Shandy?

I suggest that he reacts to these central realities in three major ways which, operating together, control both the structure and the rhetoric of the narrative.

First, he attempts in his own fashion to trace back along cause-and-effect chains in order to determine the first causes of each of these central realities. Second, he attempts to transform the sense of pathos generated by these realities into a spirit of comedy, through comic equivocation and through shifting the reader's attention from one point to another by means of transitional digressions. Third, he prevents the completion of acts, conversations, situations -- almost everything in the narrative -- by means of continual interruptions, thus insuring the need for his continued writing (see text p. 37) and establishing his writing as a magic ritual to propitiate death. I shall consider these three types of reactions separately.

The cause-and-effect chains in Tristram Shandy are exceedingly complex and interwoven. The mangling of Tristram's nose, for example, can be traced back along several tracks. One begins with the fact of Dr. Slop's incompetence which results partly from his lack of surgical ability and partly from his cut thumb; the latter is the result of trying to disengage the knots which Obadiah tied in the string around his instrument bag so that the instruments would not jingle and he could hear himself whistle. Another track begins with the

fact that Dr. Slop is only hired in the first place because he agrees with Walter's theory of child-delivery which rests upon his theory that the resting place of the soul in the body is the pineal gland. Still another track derives from Walter's displeasure about the "current of men and money towards the metropolis" which, he says, had set in "from the beginning of Queen Elizabeth's reign down to his own time" (47) which, in turn, prompts his stipulations about child-birth which are written into the marriage contract. Mrs. Shandy's "false alarm" gives Walter the right to insist upon the country home as a site for the delivery of Tristram (according to the marriage articles), and so Dr. Slop is brought in instead of a competent London surgeon. Tristram comments:

> . . . I was doomed, by marriage-articles, to have my nose squeezed as flat to my face, as if the destinies had actually spun me without one. (42)

Another example is provided by the accident with the window. We do ultimately find out that the window falls because the sash-weights have been removed by Trim for casting model cannon for Toby's toy fortifications. To carry the causes even further, Toby has these toy fortifications only because he cannot perform the real job of a soldier any more due to the wound he received at Namur. To follow causes forward from the accident, there is the strong implication that the accident is accountable for Tristram's later impotence so

that, in a manner of speaking , the piece of parapet that flew off and struck Toby in the groin is ultimately responsible for Tristram's impotence as well. It furnishes an appropriate symbol for the Shandy universe wherein nothing ever really stops being felt, and the repercussions, like ripples issuing from a stone dropped into a pond, go on and on.

The point is clear and becomes even clearer throughout the rest of the narrative. Ultimately there is no defining of first causes; the error lies in assuming that such things even exist. This does not prevent Tristram from looking for them, however, or from taking pains to explain them to us (scrambled though his explanations may be). In fact, the whole process of Tristram painstakingly seeking out all this data about his past and attempting to explain it to the reader becomes one of the chief sources of comedy in the book. William J. Farrell writes:

> However much we may laugh at Tristram the frustrated artist, we laugh more at Tristram the scrupulous historian.[32]

To explicate all of the convolutions and inter-relationships of cause-and-effect chains in the narrative would necessarily entail reproducing most of the narrative itself. The point is that a large part of the narrative is devoted to seeking out these first causes. There is indeed a lot of Walter in Tristram.

Tristram's second reaction is the effort to transform the sense of pathos generated by these central realities into a spirit of comedy. He employs two techniques toward this end: he equivocates the meanings of words for comic effect, and he constantly changes the direction of thought in mid-stream. The result is to shift the reader's attention -- and the tone and emphasis of the narrative -- from the pathetic to the comic. These effects are achieved by his control of words, of syntax, of rhetoric, and of the movement of chapters.

On the word level, Tristram frequently employs the pun or <u>double entendre</u>. Examples abound:

> --But with an ass, I can commune for ever. (542)

> --the last word of that opinion, --(for it was all my mother heard of it) caught hold of her by the weak part of the whole sex: --You shall not mistake me, --I mean her curiosity. (383)

And again:

> But it was according to a neat Formula of Didius his own devising, who . . . coaxed many of the old licensed matrons in the neighborhood, to open their faculties afresh, in order to have this wham-wham of his inserted. (12-13)

These should serve to make the point. Often Tristram uses broadly connotative words such as "part" and "faculty" which, as Paulson says, easily slip into sexual meanings and are thus ideal for his purpose of restoring comedy. (see above p. 43) He can, however, use what would appear to be strictly denotative words to the same purpose. The whole of Slawkenbergius' tale, for example, depends for its comic effect upon

the alternative meanings which develop for the word "nose". The effect of the whole tale, moreover, is to invest both the incident which triggers its telling (the nose crushing) and the incident which immediately follows its conclusion (the misnaming) with comic tone. And the major structurally unifying device of the whole story is the ambivalent meaning of a single word: nose.

Perhaps the best single example of the reversal of syntactical direction for the purpose of comic equivocation is the following:

> To this hour art thou not tormented with the vile asthma that thou gattest in skating against the wind in Flanders? and is it but two months ago, that in a fit of laughter, on seeing a cardinal make water like a quirister (with both hands) thou brakest a vessel in thy lungs, whereby, in two hours, thou lost as many quarts of blood; and hadst thou lost as much more, did not the faculty tell thee --it would have amounted to a gallon? (566)

The obvious and somber conclusion toward which the last sentence is proceeding is avoided by Tristram's mathematical calculation. Structurally the sentence constitutes a parody of periodic suspension of meaning. Theoretically, the purpose of periodic suspension is to give greater force to the central point of the sentence by delaying and building up to it. But Tristram sabatoges the function by first suspending and then completely changing the meaning to which the sentence has clearly been leading. On another occasion he does this merely by inserting a negative adverb at the end:

> --But for my father's ass --oh! mount him --mount him --mount him -- (that's three times, is it not?) -- mount him not. (609)

In this way Tristram maintains complete control of the direction of thought and of the use of language by never allowing himself to become enslaved by any traditional concepts either of composition or of style. Although he may set down the first sentence and trust "to Almighty God for the second" (xi) he retains the prerogative of changing the direction of thought in that second sentence, or of interpreting one of its words as equivocally as he pleases. Thus he retains his control over both language and syntax.

Probably the best example of rhetorical equivocation and manipulating the readers' attention is the famous kitchen scene (Volume V, Chapter 7). As Berger Evans has pointed out, this scene furnishes a microcosm of the way in which the book is ordered.[33] Obadiah announces the news of Bobby's death to the people in the kitchen. The news acts as a stimulus for several disparate reactions. Susannah, anticipating a period of mourning, speculates as to the possibility of inheriting Mrs. Shandy's wardrobe:

> --My young master in London is dead! said Obadiah.--
> --A green satin night-gown of my mother's, which had been twice scoured, was the first idea which Obadiah's exclamation brought into Susannah's head . . .
> --O! 'twill be the death of my poor mistress, cried Susannah. --My mother's whole wardrobe followed. --What a procession! her red damask, --her orange tawney, her white and yellow lusterings. --her grown taffeta, --her bone-laced caps, her bed-gowns, and comfortable under-petticoats. --Not a rag was left behind. --"No, --she will never look up again," said Susannah. (374)

Trim instinctively (and hobbyhorsically) springs into oratorical pose. Obadiah immediately bemoans that he will have a "terrible piece of work of it in stubbing the Ox-moor". The coachman Jonathan can only remember that Bobby was alive last Whitsuntide, and the fat foolish scullion exults in the fact that she still lives. The effect is to convert the pathos and tragedy of Bobby's death into comic irony. The technique is reminiscent of Swift's Verses Upon the Death of Dr. Swift, where in a very similar way death furnishes the stimulus for various considerations of personal gain or loss. Lest things get too far out of hand, however, Trim's dropping of the hat serves to unify the responses by bringing everyone back to the pathetic reality:

> Are we not here now, continued the corporal . . . and are we not --(dropping his hat upon the ground) gone! in a moment! --'Twas infinitely striking! Susannah burst into a flood of tears. --We are not stocks and stones. --Jonathan, Obadiah, the cookmaid, all melted. --The foolish fat scullion herself, who was scouring a fish-kettle upon her knees, was roused with it. --The whole kitchen crowded about the corporal. (375)

The narrator has used a beautiful rhetorical trick since we can hardly fail to see the point: language is hopelessly inadequate ("--Well might Locke write a chapter upon the imperfections of words.") (374) and a simple visual symbol accomplishes what language cannot. Just as quickly, though, the "inherently painful situation"[34] is converted back into comedy:

> --Are we not, continued Trim, looking still at Susannah --are we not like a flower of the field --a tear of pride stole in betwixt every two tears of humiliation --else no tongue could have described Susannah's affliction --is not all flesh grass? --'Tis clay, --'tis dirt --They all looked directly at the scullion, --the scullion had just been scouring a fish kettle. --It was not fair. -- (379)

In another part of the house the same news is producing similar results: Walter is quoting Socrates:

> "I have friends -- I have relations -- I have three desolate children," says Socrates. --
> --Then, cried my mother, opening the door, --you have one more, Mr. Shandy, than I know of. (385)

The pathos of Walter's attempted lament is sabotaged by Mrs. Shandy's misunderstanding of the origin of the words she has heard, and the scene dissolves into comic irony. Tristram will have it his way; the spirit of pathos or tragedy simply cannot survive for long in the Shandy household.

The movement of chapters often parallels the reversals of direction and transformation of tone accomplished on the verbal, syntactical, and rhetorical levels. One example has already been pointed out: Slawkenbergius' tale effectively transforms whatever pathos Walter brings to the nose-mangling and misnaming into comedy. An examination of Charles Parish's "A Table of Contents for Tristram Shandy"[35] provides many examples of the way in which the development of one topic or event out of another erratically shifts this way and that, and usually culminates in comedy. For example, consider the movement of chapters immediately following the accident with the window:

> (17) Tristram has an accident, aetat 5. (18) Susannah confides in Trim. (Digression: Uncle Toby wishes for more cannon; Trim removes the window sashes. (20) Trim champions Susannah. (21) How Trim's succoring Susannah suggests the Battle of Steenkirk to Uncle Toby. (22) The Battle of Steenkirk, cont'd. (23) Susannah, Trim, Uncle Toby, and Yorick advance on Shandy Hall. (24) The author on his father's variousness. (25) The author mentions his right to go backwards. (26) Walter is informed of the accident. (27) Walter finds a certain good in the accident: on circumcision. (28) Walter Shandy: On the Good.[36]

Even on the chapter level, then, equivocal responses dictate Tristram's order of presentation. Trim's defense of Susannah reminds Toby of the Battle of Steenkirk. Tristram's digression upon Walter's "variousness" reminds him of his own right as author to go backwards; meanwhile Walter has been reading the Troglodites and so forth. In the process the pathos of Tristram's injury has been forgotten until it is brought up again in terms of Walter's farcical disquisition on various methods of circumcision and historical precedents for Tristram's "initiation". But by then the pathos has been converted to comedy.

It is not really accurate, then, to call the progress of the narrative "digressive": perhaps all of it is controlled and germane according to the narrator's purposes. As Tristram informs us early in the book:

> 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 I sometimes put on 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. (10-11)

It all depends upon whether one is considering form or function. Formally, perhaps, much of the narrative must be termed digressive, at least in terms of traditional concepts of linear plot development. Functionally, however, there is little if any digression (if "digression" means to stray from one's central artistic purpose) since the various elements in the narrative can be shown, in terms of their relationships, to perform the definite functions of fulfilling the central purpose of Sterne's comedy: ". . . to fence against the infirmities of life, by mirth" (Dedication) and of advancing a moral vision connected with that comedy.

The third characteristic of Tristram's ordering of his story materials can best be described as the art of interruption. He keeps promising the reader a plot which can be described with a straight line (493-494) but the fact that his plot must be described by contorted lines (p. 493) is no accident. He suggests the motive [redacted] early in the narrative. On page 37 he makes an important discovery:

> --for my own part, I declare I have been at it these six weeks, making all the speed I possibly could, --and am not yet born: --I have just been able, and that's all, to tell you when it happened, but not how; --so that you see the thing is yet far from being accomplished. (37)

This observation gives him an idea:

> These unforseen stoppages, which I own I had no conception of when I first set out; but which, I am convinced now, will rather increase than diminish as I advance, --have struck out a hint which I am resolved to follow; --and that is, --not to hurry; but to go on leisurely, writing and publishing two volumes of my life every year: (38)

It seems to me that what is being suggested here is the idea of writing as a kind of magic ritual (i.e., the literary re-creation of his life which can never catch up to his real life) by means of which Tristram hopes to confuse or propitiate Death. Put simply, he seems to believe that as long as he goes on writing he can go on living. (C.f. Walter on magic, above pp. 6-7.)

The crucial thing, then, is that he always continue, and never complete his story. Accordingly, as he senses Death approaching he becomes more and more eager to forestall it through his writing:

> No -- I think I said, I would write two volumes every year, provided the vile cough which then tormented me, and which to this hour I dread worse than the devil would but give me leave -- (495)

until finally he senses his life ebbing with his pen:

> I will not argue the matter: Time wastes too fast. Every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it, (636)

and he tells Jenny:

> --whilst thou art twisting that lock, --see! it grows grey; and every time I kiss thy hand to bid adieu, and every absence which follows it, are preludes to that eternal separation which we are shortly to make.--
> --Heaven have mercy upon us both! (636)

For me there can be no doubt about the equations in Tristram's mind between life and writing, and between the completion of his writing (i.e., its cessation) and death. Accordingly, just as he wishes to avoid completing his narrative as a whole, he avoids completing integral parts of it -- i.e.,

communication between characters, individual commitments, sub-plots when they begin to develop, and so forth. These completions can be avoided in several ways; one way is through interruption. We have already seen two kinds of interruption: communication between the Shandys is almost invariably interrupted in one way or another, and Tristram continually interrupts the development of a sense of pathos or tragedy by converting it to comic irony. Even the feeling of pathos and apprehension which is built in the passage quoted above is immediately converted to humor by the line which follows it:

> Now, for what the world thinks of that ejaculation -- I would not give a groat. (636)

Another kind of interruption consists of his refusal to allow his characters' commitments to reach fulfillment. It is virtually impossible to find fulfilled commitments in Tristram Shandy -- as we have seen in the cases of Walter and Toby especially. It is interesting and illuminating to observe what results from the few cases where commitments seem to reach fulfillment. For example, although Walter is almost never able to complete his explanations of his theories to anyone without being interrupted or misunderstood or both, there is one time when it seems that somebody actually does understand him:

> But the auxiliaries, Trim, my brother is talking about, --I conceive to be different things. --
> --You do? said my father, rising up. (422)

The result is the almost immediate end of Volume V. Thus writing -- a magic ritual symbolic of life -- is temporarily stopped by the completion of Walter's communication. Another kind of fulfilled commitment occurs in Volume VI, Chapter 25. Trim finally gets the toy cannon to smoke and starts the only battle of the book. This, quite naturally, furnishes a great deal of pleasure to Toby, but Tristram's reaction is markedly different. It leads him immediately to a sombre speculation about Toby's future death:

> --But what --what is this, to that future and dreaded page, where I look towards the velvet pall, decorated with the military ensigns of thy master -- the first --the foremost of created beings; --where I shall see thee, faithful servant! laying his sword and scabbard with a trembling hand across his coffin, and then returning pale as ashes to the door, to take his mourning horse by the bridle, to follow his hearse, as he directed thee; --where --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 lacquered plate, twice taking his spectacles from off his nose to wipe away the dew which nature has shed upon them --when I see him cast in the rosemary with an air of disconsolation, which cried through my ears, --O Toby! in what corner of the world shall I seek thy fellow?
>
> --Gracious powers! which erst have opened the lips of the dumb in his distress, and have made the tongue of the stammerer speak plain --when I shall arrive at this dreaded page, deal not with me, then, with a stinted hand. (471-472, italics mine)

There is no seeking after first causes or comic equivocation in this passage. This is the real, the essential Tristram speaking ("Gracious powers! which have . . . made the tongue of the stammerer speak plain") and his tone is sober indeed.

The point is that it is stimulated by a toy gun-battle which happens to be one of the few things that "goes off" in the narrative. It is also worth pointing out that he refers to the time of Toby's death as a "dreaded page".

Another kind of interruption is Tristram's occasional denial of whatever expectations the reader may be developing about the progress of the narrative:

> What these perplexities of my uncle Toby were, --'tis impossible for you to guess; --if you could, --I should blush; not as a relation, --not as a man, --nor even as a woman, --but I should blush as an author; 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 . . . that if I thought you was able to form the least judgement or probable conjecture to yourself, of what was to come in the next page, --I would tear it out of my book. (80)

Still another kind of incompleted commitment is manifest in Tristram's impotence. Sex is, perhaps, the most elemental human commitment, yet Tristram appears to be unable to fulfill even that:

> --Do, my dear Jenny, tell the world for me, how I behaved under one, the most oppressive of its kind, which could befall me as a man, proud as he ought to be of his manhood.--
> 'Tis enough, saidst thou, coming close up to me, as I stood with my garters in my hand, reflecting upon what had not passed -- (536)

Accordingly, (or, perhaps, fittingly) whenever sex comes up in the narrative (which it frequently does) it is converted into a joke rather than treated or considered seriously; thus it is thematically treated like the other aspects of life subject to continual interruption.

These three types of reactions to the central realities facing Tristram are his three techniques of ordering his story materials, and as such constitute the three primary aspects of his hobbyhorse. Tristram is an historian in his efforts to unravel his past and relate its central realities to their proper first causes. He is an artist in his efforts to tell his story while maintaining control over his artistic materials (i.e., words, syntax, symbols, rhetoric, etc.) and while transforming the pathos generated by the realities of his past and his present condition into comedy. Finally, he plays a role in his own story through his efforts to forestall death by performing the magic ritual of writing; and through his efforts to avoid even the thought of death (and any acts of completion which precipitate that thought) by repeated and continual interruption. As Miss Hall has described his hobbyhorse:

> The deliberate suspension [of the plot movement of the novel, through interruptive digression] is part of Tristram's hobbyhorsical dallying, and it is part of a conscientious juxtaposition of sensible and nonsensical story materials.[37]

These three hobbyhorsical roles of Tristram's (i.e., as historian, artist, and literary character) result in three motifs of time-sense in the narrative. As historian he is chiefly interested in the past, and as a result there is a continual sense in the narrative of the past intruding upon the present; Theodore Baird has noted:

> His [Sterne's] characters, instead of living in a present which has reference to the past only as the plot requires it, live in a present which derives its character and manifestations entirely from the past.[38]

On the other hand, as a character in his own narrative, Tristram constantly keeps his eye fixed upon the future, with the idea of cheating it out of the one certainty it holds for him: death. However, death (like any experience) has concrete meaning only in terms of the present. Therefore, in Tristram's artistic attempts to continually transform the spirit of the present and past, and in his continual interruptions of developments on all levels, he so scrambles any sense of unity of time, place, or action, that time-present is prevented from gaining precise logical definition. As a consequence, at one point in the narrative he finds himself in three different places doing three different things at three different times. On the other hand, both the sentiment of the novel (in the sense that Lockridge defines it, i.e., "an intense feeling for everything one can encompass" [39]) and the fear of death (the two of which are probably intimately psychologically related) combine to produce a very intense and highly charged emotional sense of time-present. A good example of this is: "Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it" (636).

This is quite possibly the most masterful irony of the book: past and future are used as strategies for preventing the sense of time-present from gaining definition --

and at the same time are used to concentrate and intensify the sense of time-present. Here ambiguity subverts any attempt to define the book in any complete sense. The narrative ends on Yorick's words; Yorick's death is nearly the first story that gets told. We already know things which will happen after the narrative closes; it is impossible to pinpoint the exact moment when it begins. Nevertheless -- and perhaps as a final irony -- the story does get told, the comic transformation is completed, and the ritual is finished:

> --And here am I sitting, this 12th day of August 1766, in a purple jerkin and yellow pair of slippers, without either wig or cap on, a most tragicomical completion of his prediction . . . (624)

The comic transformation is, in fact, effected not in spite of but primarily by means of the constant juggling of time-senses and juxtaposition of story materials.

The whole rhetorical machine (Tristram's hobbyhorse) is described by Tristram:

> All the dexterity is in the good cookery and the management of them, so as to be not only for the advantage of the reader, but also of the author, whose distress, in this matter, is truly pitiable: For, if he begins a digression, --from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock still; --and if he goes on with his main work, --then there is an end of his digression.
>
> --This is a vile work. --For which reason, from the beginning of this, you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going; and, what's more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits. (74)

Here it is then. One can regard Tristram metaphorically as being simultaneously astrologer, geologist, and alchemist, with the universe representing the context of Shandean experience and Shandean realities. He is Walter the astrologer insofar as he is concerned with the character and predictability (hence, control) of his destiny; he is Toby the geologist insofar as he is interested in the developments of the past which have combined to produce his present condition; and he is Tristram the alchemist, a more worldly-wise and sophisticated Yorick, in his desire and ability to forestall Death through magic and to transmute the leaden realities of his existence into gold -- if only fool's gold.

THE MORAL VISION

". . . and all your heads too."

The realities of the world of Tristram Shandy are not im themselves chaotic or even pathetic. They are, for the most part, the realities of a settled Augustan squire's household. It is the characters of Tristram Shandy who precipitate the chaos which Tristram is so concerned with understanding and reordering. As Traugott has proposed, there is almost a sense of experimental theater about Tristram Shandy: Sterne furnishes both stage (the realities of Shandy Hall) and actors (characters heteroclite in all their declensions) and then runs the play through to discover whatever dramatic and philosophical conclusions are possible; Traugott writes:

> Tristram Shandy uses philosophical snarls for more than a satire on systems; it uses them as a dramatic device displaying human motives and for creating a world of human relations. And satire verges into comedy when it begins to consider the inescapable human situation.[40]

If there is a single and pervasive rationale behind this study it is the belief that Tristram Shandy is more than topical satire, more than comedy alone, more than a complex and sophisticated study of Theophrastian characters. It is,

of course, all these things. It is also a Rabelaisian encyclopedia, a Burtonian anatomy, and a Cervantic picaresque of the mind. It may also be as Traugott says, a "comic vision of Locke". (see above p. 1) But it is also a philosophical rhetoric, the basis of which is the construct or device of the hobbyhorse, which serves for testing the moral ideals with which it is concerned.

As I have tried to demonstrate, these fictional empirical tests demonstrate that certain of these hobbyhorses manifest serious defects both as instruments of communication and as methods of coping with reality. Walter's syllogisms and hypotheses are so removed from any meaningful human context that his search for a Northwest Passage of the mind is continually shipwrecked by door-hinges and jack-boots. Toby's compulsive dependence upon intuition and emotion as bases for moral action help him to develop a profoundly sentimental and compassionate heart, but also cause him to glamorize the process by which men methodically and self-righteously exterminate the rest of the human race. One is reminded of another Augustan author -- from whom Sterne borrowed a great deal -- who wrote the following about the profession of soldiering:

> For these reasons, the trade of a soldier is held the most honourable of all others; because a soldier is a Yahoo hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him, as possibly he can.[41]

Yorick, while doubtlessly an ideal in his love of the truth and compulsion to tell it without regard to circumstances or consequences, proves to be an untenable ideal both because of his naiveté about the world, and because of his unwillingness to act upon what knowledge he may have of the world's temper. Like Walter, this too becomes a form of inflexibility.

Walter's, Toby's, and Yorick's hobbyhorses are all found wanting. Just as their riders fail to cope with the realities of the Shandy universe, they also fail in their attempts to communicate with others because their hobbyhorses prevent them from maintaining a consistent control of language and meaning. Nevertheless, each of these characters suggests positive moral values which Tristram very definitely makes it his business to adopt for his own. Walter's intellectual energy and willingness to subject everything to intellectual scrutiny (however abortive his particular methods of scrutiny may be), not to mention his sheer endurance, are valuable parts of Tristram's vision: the book itself is proof of that. Toby's sentiment and humanitarianism both strike strong notes of response in Tristram and become perhaps the most necessary or germane values in his vision; it is through sentiment that his characters communicate. Yorick represents an ideal love of the truth and an ideal willingness to tell it which Tristram deeply admires. Tristram, however, recognizes the dangers of openly telling the world the truth about itself and avoids these dangers

by cloaking his truths in the fool's traditional rhetoric: comedy and wit mixed with self-deprecation. Finally, Tristram realizes that the most efficient and attractive method of infusing any hobbyhorse with flexibility is by informing it with a sense of humor. For just as a comic attitude keeps Tristram in control of his story materials, it keeps his hobbyhorse viable as a method of coping with reality and as a method of communication.

Finally, we must remember that a hobbyhorse is, among other things, an attempt to order experience. As Stanley G. Eskin writes:

> The most memorable parts of Tristram Shandy are those valiant, single-minded and purposeful attempts to clarify the muddle and impose order which Sterne has labelled "hobby-horses".[42]

The process which "produces" the order is a moral process by definition, re-evaluation, and reconstruction of the various relationships between the elements of experience. Such a process must to some extent create new hierarchies of values -- however subjectively defined these values may be. And what is a hierarchy of values, other than the infrastructure of a moral vision?

Tristram Shandy, in its insistence upon such a reordering of experience and realities, and in its insistence upon transforming pathos into comedy, generates such a moral vision. Sterne has substituted, for Locke's 18th century rational vision which had alienated reality from the sub-

jective, a human-based moral vision, in which subjective and objective are reconciled by instinctive and emotional communication. The vision consists of sentiment and humanitarianism balanced by intellectual understanding and control -- both dedicated to a love of the truth and a willingness to tell it; all of this informed with a sense of humor to make it flexible and human. In Tristram's words:

> . . . I live in a constant endeavor to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth; being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles, --but much more so, when he laughs, it adds something to this Fragment of Life. (Dedication)

Sterne's morality is just this, the expansion of human life by its understanding and acceptance.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Laurence Sterne, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Berger Evans, Modern Library, (New York, 1950) p. 77. Subsequent references to this text will be identified by the page number placed in parentheses after the quoted passage.

[2]James Aiken Work, editor, Introduction, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, (New York, 1940); and Joan Joffe Hall, "The Hobbyhorsical World of Tristram Shandy" M.L.Q., XXIV, 131-143.

[3]Henri Fluchere, Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick, Translated and Abridged by B. Bray, (London, 1965).

[4]Ernest H. Lockridge, "A Vision of the Sentimental Absurd: Sterne and Camus" Sewanee Review, LXXII, p. 655.

[5]Stanley G. Eskin, "Tristram Shandy and Oedipus Rex" College English, XXIV, p. 275.

[6]John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, Collated and Annotated by Alexander Campbell Fraser, 2 Volumes, (New York, 1959).

[7]Arthur H. Cash, "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy" English Literary History, XXII, pp. 125-135.

[8]John Traugott, Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric, (Berkeley, 1954).

[9]Ibid., p. 1.

[10]Locke, Volume I, p. 534.

[11]Ibid., pp. 534-535.

[12]Traugott, p. 4.

[13]Ibid., p. 5.

[14]Cash, p. 130.

[15]Ronald Paulson, Satire and the Novel in 18th Century England, (London, New Haven, 1967) p. 254.

[16]Ibid., p. 254.

[17]J. M. Stedmond, "Genre and Tristram Shandy" Philological Quarterly, XXXVIII, p. 49.

[18]Walter Houghton, "The English Virtuoso in the 17th Century" J. H. I., III, p. 211.

[19]Albert Cook, The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean, (Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1949), p. 38.

[20]Paulson, p. 53.

[21]A. R. Towers, "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story" E. L. H., XXXIV, p. 26.

[22]Ibid., p. 25.

[23]Hall, p. 132.

[24]Ibid., p. 132.

[25]Tristram Shandy, p. 284 and p. 305.

[26]Ibid., p. 53.

[27]Traugott, p. 7.

[28]Towers, p. 18.

[29]See above, p. 11, quote 21.

[30]Paulson, p. 260.

[31]Ibid., p. 258.

[32]William J. Farrell, "Nature Versus Art as a Comic Pattern in Tristram Shandy" E. L. H., XXX, pp. 16-35.

[33]Berger Evans, Introduction, Tristram Shandy, p. x.

[34]See below p. 67, quote 38.

[35]Charles Parish, "A Table of Contents for Tristram Shandy" College English, XXII, pp. 143-150.

[36]Ibid., p. 147.

[37]Hall, p. 143.

[38]Theodore Baird, "The Time-Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source" P.M.L.A., LI, p. 803.

[39]Lockridge, p. 666.

[40]Traugott, p. 5.

[41]Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels, ed. G. Ravenscroft Dennis, (London, 1922), p. 255.

[42]Eskin, p. 274.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Baird, Theodore. "The Time-Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source" P.M.L.A. LI, pp. 803-820.

Cash, Arthur H. "The Lockean Psychology of Tristram Shandy" English Literary History, XXII, pp. 125-135.

Cook, Albert. The Dark Voyage and the Golden Mean (Cambridge, Massachussetts, 1949).

Eskin, Stanley G. "Tristram Shandy and Oedipus Rex" College English, XXIV, pp. 271-277.

Farrell, William J. "Nature Versus Art as a Comic Pattern in Tristram Shandy" English Literary History, XXX, pp. 16-35.

Fluchere, Henri. Laurence Sterne: From Tristram to Yorick, Translated and Abridged by B. Bray, (London, 1965).

Hall, Joan Joffe. "The Hobbyhorsical World of Tristram Shandy" M.L.Q., XXIV, pp. 131-143.

Locke, John. An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, (2 Volumes) Collated and Annotated by Alexander Campbell Fraser, (New York, 1959).

Lockridge, Ernest H. "A Vision of the Sentimental Absurd: Sterne and Camus" Sewanee Review, LXXII, pp. 652-657.

Parish, Charles. "A Table of Contents for Tristram Shandy" College English, XXII, pp. 143-150.

Paulson, Ronald. Satire and the Novel in 18th Century England, (London, New Haven, 1967).

Stedmond, J. M. "Genre and Tristram Shandy" Philological Quarterly, XXXVIII, pp. 37-51.

_____. "Style and Tristram Shandy" M.L.Q., XX, pp. 243-251.

Sterne, Laurence. The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, ed. Berger Evans, Modern Library, (New York, 1950).

Swift, Jonathan. Gulliver's Travels, ed. G. Ravenscroft Dennis, (London, 1922).

Towers, A. R. "Sterne's Cock and Bull Story" E.L.H., XXIV, pp. 12-29.

Traugott, John. Tristram Shandy's World: Sterne's Philosophical Rhetoric (Berkeley, 1954).

Work, James Aiken. Introduction, Tristram Shandy, (New York, 1940).