

THE HOBBY HORSE'S STUMBLING BLOCK

by

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B.A., Kansas State University, 1983

A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1986

Approved by:


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Sexuality in Tristram Shandy has always received critical attention, from the eighteenth century reviewers and nineteenth century readers who felt the novel was irresponsible and licentious¹ to modern critics who have found the novel ripe for psychoanalytic interpretation. We have turned from the issue of whether or not Tristram Shandy is a "dirty book" to analyses of the sexual comedy (A.R. Towers), explorations of the threat of impotence that hangs over the book (Melvyn New), explication of the linguistic double entendres (Robert Alter), interpretation of the relationship between sexuality and sensibility (Frank Brady), and discussion of the writer's sexual relationship with the text (Dennis Allen). The sexual concerns of A Sentimental Journey have also attracted attention, as critics debate what role lust plays in Yorick's sentimental affairs (Paul McGlynn).

But in spite of all the attention that sex has received, few critics have ever given women in the novels more than passing notice. Ruth Faurot notes this omission where Tristram's mother is concerned, and fully analyzes Mrs. Shandy's character. Leigh Ehlers also discusses Mrs. Shandy, and other critics singly treat dear Jenny (William Rivers) and Maria (McGlynn). Among book-length studies, those by James Swearingen and Henri Fluchere give women the most attention. However, no one has undertaken a broad study of the range of female characters, or of male-female relationships, in Sterne's novels.

The critics' negligence of female characters and concern

with sexuality reflects the biases of the novels' narrators, who are continually preoccupied with sexual issues while rarely, if ever, showing mature interest in a female character. The shadow of impotence that overhangs Tristram Shandy explains part of this tension in that novel, while the fear of involvement that characterizes the flighty Yorick emphasizes the essential selfishness of his sentimental journey.

However, we shouldn't dismiss or ignore the women in the novel simply because the narrators do so. Sterne's consistency in his treatment of women invites a broad study. Although never attaining the status of "main characters," women continually slip into the narratives, usually creating problems for the narrator or other male characters. To Sterne's narrators, the world is mocked when it is hostile, or idealized when its beauty may be safely enjoyed, and women are treated ways that correspond to these attitudes: they are satirized or sentimentalized. The satirized women are mocked for their lack of understanding or their licentiousness, and are unattractive, Catholic, married, or middle-aged. The sentimentalized women are exalted for their attractiveness or suffering, and are young and vulnerable. The satirized women are hostile because they threaten the male character, while the sentimentalized women are ideal as long as they are both vulnerable and transient objects of affection. Both the satirical and the sentimental treatments show the narrators' desire to distance themselves from threats by either elevating or denigrating the women. The apparent impossibility

of avoiding women, combined with this desire to hold them at a distance, reflects the relationship of man with world portrayed by the novels.

Each of the Shandy males in Sterne's Tristram Shandy struggles against a world he perceives as hostile, perhaps because it is uncomprehending, perhaps because it refuses to comprehend, the importance of the character's hobby horse. As Leigh Ehlers notes, women are part of this aggravating world: "The Shandy males, of course, consider themselves victimized by a world of frustrations, women being but one of many" (61). Moreover, each of the Shandy males is frustrated by a particular female antagonist who personifies the practical, non-Shandean world. Walter deals with a wife who refuses to encourage his theorizing, Toby contends with the Widow Wadman whose practical interest in where he received his wound explains her "humanity" and her professed fascination with sieges, and Tristram as narrator struggles with Madam the reader, who fails to read closely, or insists on misreading, his book.

Tristram means for us to side with the Shandy men against the hostile world, including its difficult women. Therefore, he treats each of the main female antagonists satirically, hoping that the reader will perceive Mrs. Shandy as insipid and frustrating, Widow Wadman as a lecherous threat to innocent Uncle Toby, and Madam, the reader, as a willful distorter of Tristram's meanings. Tristram would furthermore have us believe that the Shandys triumph over their female adversaries, controlling them

and blunting their threat to the Shandean world. However, the success of the Shandys is always questionable, as failure haunts the family like short noses.

As the "anti-Shandy women" are characterized, so, too, is the the hostile world, for women are satirized in some of the same ways that other unsympathetic elements of the world are. The women deal with language and the world on a literal, materialistic, and practical level; they are hard-headed and strong-minded in efforts to get what they want; and, they are curious about subjects the Shandy men don't wish to have explored, especially sexual ones, while being indifferent to issues of special Shandean concern.

Mrs. Shandy's character includes most of these elements. For example, her practical concern for finding herbs to treat the wound caused by Tristram's accidental circumcision conflicts with Walter's primary interest at the time, the great thinkers' ideas on the subject. Mrs. Shandy sees him reading a book, and assumes he is looking up a treatment for Tristram's wound: "--If it be but right done, quoth he:--Only tell us, cried my mother, interrupting him, what herbs.--For that, replied my father, you must send for Dr. Slop" (5.27.459). Elizabeth is also practical when discussing Toby and Widow Wadman with her husband; Mr. Shandy has noted that the Widow "is but tenant for life" in her home, and "That makes a great difference--said my mother-- --In a fool's head, replied my father-- Unless she should happen to have a child--said my mother" (9.11.759). For Walter, whether

Mrs. Wadman owns her premises or is only a tenant for life is inconsequential, but Mrs. Shandy realizes that if there were a child, the difference would be significant, because presumably on the Widow's death the child would be homeless. Mrs Shandy's interest in family matters reveals her to be more farsighted than Walter.

She associates words and ideas concretely, as they relate to her personal concerns, as several of her comments show. She blurts out the untimely question, "have you not forgot to wind up the clock?" at the moment Tristram is begotten (1.1.2), accuses Mr. Shandy of having one more child than she knew about (5.13.442), and asks the question that sets up the last line of the novel, "what is all this story about?" (9.33.809).

Mrs. Shandy never seems licentious, and even answers "Amen" to Mr. Shandy's concern about Toby and the Widow's begetting children, showing her own attitude toward sex by adding "such a sighing cadence of personal pity at the end of it [the Amen], as discomfited every fibre about my father" (9.11.760). Nevertheless, Walter treats her as though she were, or might become, too interested in sex. Tristram tells us that even though his father knows that "A temperate current of blood ran orderly through her veins in all months of the year, and in all critical moments both of the day and night alike," and furthermore, that "the least mote or speck of desire might have been seen at the bottom of [her eye], had it existed--it did not" (9.1.736), Mr. Shandy makes it "the whole business of his life

to keep all such fancies of that kind out of her head." So, although Mrs. Shandy doesn't have the licentiousness Tristram often satirizes in other women, Walter is afraid that she might, at one point nearly accusing her of it as he tells her to call her curiosity "by it's right name . . . and look through the keyhole as long as you will" (8.35.729). Mr. Shandy fears female sexuality even when it doesn't actually threaten him, and so mocks Mrs. Shandy unfairly, keeping the imaginary threat at a distance.

Tristram tells us that his mother is so impassive that she never refused "her assent and consent to any proposition my father laid before her, merely because she did not understand it" (9.11.758). But, as Faurot correctly points out, "Critics have concentrated on the one or two splenetic comments of Tristram in relation to his own persona and have neglected contrary impressions demonstrated by Mrs. Shandy's dramatic role and what others say about her" (580). Sterne provides substantial evidence that Tristram's opinion isn't always reliable. As shown in the the passages quoted above in which she interrupts and corrects Walter, Mrs. Shandy is not always temperate or impassive when her own interests are concerned, and Walter is not so successful in controlling her. For example, answering all of his arguments "only like a woman" (1.18.55), she insists on her prerogative in having the midwife deliver Tristram since Walter has refused to let her lie in in London. Mr. Shandy declares that she "fumed inwardly . . . and then! what battles did she fight with me, and

what perpetual storms about the midwife" (4.19.355). Furthermore, Elizabeth need only turn white as a sheet to make Mr. Shandy give up all ideas of a Caesarean delivery for Tristram. Her stubbornness is also shown by her passive refusal to enter into argument with Walter about (to her) unimportant things, such as which breeches Tristram should wear. Evidently, "Mrs. Shandy's obstinacy can counter that of her husband's" (Faurot 586).

Although she is described as not caring whether the world "turned round, or stood still," she is curious about issues that interest her, such as the conversation about "wives" (5.5.426-27), or the affair of Toby and Widow Wadman (8.35.729), two cases in which peering through key holes illustrates Mrs. Shandy's curiosity. Her interest in human relationships, curiosity that Tristram satirizes as "the weakest part of the sex," is also displayed when she initiates or actively participates in conversations. She makes a point of telling Walter that "My brother Toby . . . is going to be married to Mrs. Wadman" (6.39.568), and later almost discusses the nature of love with her husband:

To be sure, said my mother, love keeps peace in the world--

--In the house--my dear, I own----It replenishes the earth; said my mother.

But it keeps heaven empty--my dear; replied my father (8.34.721).

Although Mr. Shandy has the final word here, his wife has stated her opinion. James Swearingen has noted that,

Elizabeth's success in controlling Walter where she cares to is no less than a tradition among the Shandy women. In the Chapter Upon Noses where Tristram's great-grandmother and father haggle over the size of her jointure, Tristram stresses the consequences of the female victory over the impotent Shandy males: his great-grandmother outlives both his great-grandfather and grandfather to collect her jointure from Walter (223), (see 3.32.259).

In the jointure incident, the great-grandmother shows several of the traits of the satirized women: stubbornness, practicality, and disquieting interest in sexuality. Of his female relatives, Tristram admires only great aunt Dinah, "who, about sixty years ago, was married and got with child by the coachman" (1.21.73). Dinah is the only Shandy woman whom Tristram will allow to have any character, by which Swearingen assumes he means "an original constitution of mind." But whether she is original or not, stubbornness and sexuality are characteristic of Dinah.

The Widow's character is less complex than Mrs. Shandy's because, although Tristram often hints about her, he tells most of her story in one fairly continuous narrative in the final volumes. Also, her relationship to the Shandys is simple: she is Toby's neighbor, interested in adding him to her inventory of property, while Mrs. Shandy plays the roles of both wife and

mother, and appears in a variety of situations throughout the novel.

The Widow's practical, rational side and her interest in sex are illustrated by her desire to avoid making a mistake in marriage twice, as her first husband "was all his time afflicted with a Sciatica" (9.26.791). Her mind is so occupied with discovering whether Toby's wound has affected his ability to perform sexually that she completely misunderstands his promise to show her "where" he received his wound (9.20.722, 9.26.792-94). Like Mrs. Shandy, she understands language as it applies to her interests, unaware until her mistake is obvious that the male might be interpreting the same words differently. The Widow is stubborn and persistent in her pursuit of Toby, discovering ways around his defenses as effective as Mrs. Shandy's ways of dealing with Walter. She must wait until the peace of Utrecht to attract Toby's attention, but she is clever enough when the chance comes to pretend interest in his hobby horse while she manages to touch fingers with him or press her leg against his (8.16.676). Her overwhelming fascination with his wound, which Toby innocently interprets as "humanity" (9.31.802), combined with her own concupiscence (to which Toby is susceptible), cause Toby to "fall in love" with her. He doesn't have her practical approach to the world, and so his modesty suffers badly from the wound she inflicts "after the demolition of Dunkirk" (2.7.117).

Like Mrs. Shandy, she listens at doors (or at wicker gates and sentry boxes) when conversations interest her (8.19.695).

Rather than being carried away by Trim's love story as Toby is, the Widow quickly turns it to her own advantage: "O! let woman alone for this. Mrs. Wadman had scarce open'd the wicker-gate, when her genius sported with the change of circumstances. --She formed a new attack in a moment" (8.23.705). Thus, the Widow's relationship with Toby is similar to Elizabeth's with Walter in that neither woman is truly interested in the hobby-horse, but rather is determinedly protecting or pursuing her own interests. Both instinctively understand language only as it relates to their own interests, apparently unaware of other possible interpretations.

Treating Madam the reader as a character is more complicated than understanding Mrs. Shandy or Widow Wadman given the little help Tristram provides and the evidence that Sterne's views may differ from his narrator's, because her relationship is not to Tristram as character, but to Tristram as writer. Rather than meeting in the autobiographical/fictional world of the novel, Madam and Tristram meet in the nebulous world of writer and reader. The narrator attempts to engage the readers, and to virtually create and control the world where the reader confronts the text. Tristram dramatizes himself as writer in the "present" at the same time that he describes himself as homunculus, baby, child, or traveller in the "past." Madam is part of this "present" world, with Tristram the writer, and the actual readers, because they evaluate her as well as Tristram and his novel, can recognize that in the present world Tristram struggles

with the same problems that Toby and Walter do in the past world.

Madam is curious about the wrong things, usually sexual issues, and uncurious about things important to Tristram, and she occasionally misreads his language. Although male readers, especially the "critics," may sometimes frustrate Tristram in similar ways, Madam is much more persistently aggravating. John Preston notes that the lady reader "is a much more intrusive reader than the 'critic.' She is inquisitive and incautious, and her responses are entirely transparent" (203). Tristram divides his addresses along sexual lines. He often addresses Madam when private or sexual issues arise (Patricia Spacks has noted that "the lascivious readers whom Tristram imagines are predominantly female" [133]). Conversely, he addresses male readers about intellectual or hobby-horsical issues, thus characterizing in his readership the same gender distinctions that he characterizes in his novel. For example, before the beds of justice explanation, Tristram addresses first "Sir" and then "Madam": "There are a thousand resolutions, Sir, both in church and state, as well as in matters, Madam, of a more private concern" which were debated with more coolness than appeared to the outside world (6.16.522).

Like Mrs. Shandy, Madam asks problematic questions. She first appears in the novel in a section "wrote only for the curious and inquisitive" (1.4.5), when she asks Tristram "What was your father doing all December,--January, and February?" She is interested in why Tristram was necessarily begot in May, and Tristram answers her, "Why, Madam,--he was all that time

afflicted with a Sciatica" (1.4.7). Her curiosity about sexual matters, inspires both ridicule and discomfort in Tristram. He tries to convince her that "a great deal of very good chastity exists" which proceeds from "no bodily defect or cause whatsoever, but from the temperance and orderly current" of the blood (1.10.18), a comment which suggests Tristram's fear of sexuality as well as his conception of Madam as licentious. Tristram also argues with Madam reader about the status of his dear Jenny, for Madam is the one who assumes that Jenny must be either wife or mistress, but "Friend!--My friend.--Surely, Madam, a friendship between the two sexes may subsist, and be supported without-----Fy! Mr. Shandy:--Without any thing, Madam, but that tender and delicious sentiment, which ever mixes in friendship, where there is a difference of sex" (1.18.56-57). With Madam reader Tristram also discusses the "private" issues of Toby's modesty (6.29.550), Widow Wadman's eyes (8.25.708), and his mother's temperate nature (9.1.736).

Madam's personality again recalls Mrs. Shandy's during the keyhole incident when Elizabeth is caught hold of "by the weak part of the whole sex:---You shall not mistake me,--I mean her curiosity," and interprets every word she hears as referring "either to herself, or her family concerns." Tristram demands, "Pray, Madam, in what street does the lady live, who would not have done the same?" to which we hear no answer (5.12.439-40). Later, when Tristram discusses the beds of justice scene, Madam gets to step "behind the curtain" to listen, like a Mrs. Shandy

or a Widow Wadman, to a conversation not meant for her ears (6.16.523). As Robert Alter describes it, "Tristram carefully edges Madam over to the keyhole, then pulls her up abruptly as she assumes the position of prurient curiosity" (320).

Madam is probably most famous for being sent back to reread because she was "so inattentive in reading the last chapter" that she didn't notice that Tristram had told her "That my mother was not a papist." Tristram tells the rest of the readers that he wishes to "rebuke a vicious taste which has crept into thousands besides herself,--of reading straight forwards, more in quest of the adventures, than of the deep erudition and knowledge" that may be gained from a book. He hopes that "the male-reader" has not been guilty of the same transgression (1.20.64-66). Madam is again exposed as a hasty reader when she asks, at the end of Slawkenbergius' Tale, "was the stranger's nose a true nose--or was it a false one?" to which Tristram replies, "To tell that before-hand, madam, would be to do injury to one of the best tales in the christian world" (4.1.325).

Because of her regular appearances throughout the novel, Madam's personality is not much less developed than Widow Wadman's, and more developed than many minor characters; in fact, "the lady-reader is quite as much a character within the book as Jenny herself. In some ways, she is more of one" (Preston 203). She tends to appear when Tristram discusses private concerns, especially of romance and sex, much as Mrs. Shandy and the Widow Wadman appear at the keyhole and wicker

gate, and she is interested in straightforward explanations and adventures from Tristram, rather than in the digressive and circuitous writing he is so concerned with. Madam is indifferent to the hobby-horsical aspects of the book, and thus she continually frustrates and irritates Tristram.

The intimidating characteristics of the three primary female antagonists are shared by some minor characters. For example, Susannah is notable not only for being "a leaky vessel," but for associating the death of Bobby with her mistress's wardrobe, a practical and concrete connection which shows her tendency to interpret the world according to her self-interest. The chaise-vamper's wife Tristram meets in France has no better use for some of his "remarks" (the substance of Tristram's hobby horsical book) than to make them into curl-papers--a practical and feminine use. The female traits of licentiousness and self-centered misunderstanding of language are particularly evident in the story of La Fosseuse. The Chapter Upon Whiskers is about a community of women redefining the word "whiskers" to the fascination of the court, and to the embarrassment of one De Croix, who has to leave Navarre "for want of whiskers" (5.1.414). Again, woman's disquieting interest in a male's sexuality, combined with persistence and a stubborn use of language, has resulted in his humiliation.

The satire Tristram directs at all of these "anti-Shandy women" reveals his wish to distance himself and his threatened relatives from mature male-female relationships. The three

primary women in particular are stumbling blocks to the sincerest of writers, the most aspiring of thinkers, and the most innocent of old soldiers. They threaten because they don't recognize or appreciate the value of the book, the theories, or the sieges, and instead have expectations that the male Shandys seem fearful or incapable of fulfilling: a straightforward, adventurous narrative, practical household leadership, a marriage complete with sexual activity. Furthermore, the satirized women won't conveniently go away; they are persistent and perhaps inescapable elements of the male's life, as intrusive reader, lifetime partner, or inquisitive life-long neighbor. And although Tristram tries to imply that the Shandys can successfully deal with their women, more often they are frustrated, if not manipulated and controlled, by them.

When women in Sterne's novels aren't satirized, they are usually idealized. The sentimentalized women are stumbling blocks of a different kind than the satirized women, as they represent the elusive beauties of life that men can safely enjoy only from a distance. Even when every effort is made to control it, the beauty dissipates into age and ruin or into earthy, intrusive, and threatening sexuality. Sentimentalized women reflect the world as Tristram and Yorick wish it would be: soft, controllable, beautiful, unthreatening. The sentimental approach to male-female relationships, even while it appears to be in tension with the satirical approach, has the same effect in the novels: to distance relationships, and to simplify harsh

"reality" by rejecting the practical, realistic, uncompromising aspects of a world that ignores hobby horses, and allows beauty to age and die. The effort to control relationships by sentimentalizing them is, like the satirical effort, not as successful as the narrators wish it would be, and wish to convince the reader it is.

The sentimentalized women are young, sexually attractive, tractable, and essentially weak. Whereas satirized women are threatening because they are strong, practical, and usually inescapable, idealized women are non-threatening as long as their social position, youth, or even mental state prevents them from being able to make demands. Men patronize and flirt with them because they aren't actually involved in the male's world, and so have no consciousness of hobby-horses; therefore, they can't threaten the hobby-horsical world like satirized women do. The male can enjoy the woman's sexual attractiveness without feeling sexually challenged or threatened as long as the woman is, in spite of her vulnerability, unattainable. These qualities, combined with the transience that is inherent in or imposed upon the sentimental relationship, make it easy for Tristram and Yorick to maintain distance even while telling us how intensely personal and immediate their sensations are.

The portraits of women in the early volumes of Tristram Shandy are virtually all satirical. Only in the scanty, and ambiguous, references to Jenny do we see any propensity to sentimental treatment of women before the later volumes.

Tristram's flight from death in volume 7 finally inspires him to reveal more openly his tendency to sentimentalize sweet young women.

Janatone is the first idealized portrait of a French working class woman, and she foreshadows not only Nanette and the far more sentimentalized Maria, but the parade of girls that Yorick will meet in his sentimental journey. Janatone can be idealized because of her attractiveness, and Tristram vows to "draw her in all her proportions, and with as determin'd a pencil, as if I had her in the wettest drapery" (7.9.589). Tristram is tempted by Janatone, but avoids the possibility of a sexual relationship. This distance is imposed both by Tristram's situation (he cannot stop to visit with her because he is fleeing death) and by his language. First, "Janatone" is a "common type name for a pretty young girl" (Ian Watt, 373 n. 1), which reduces her individuality. Second, Tristram introduces her to contrast with "the great parish church" and "fascade of the abbey," mocking travel book writers who ignore transient and vibrant beauty to pay attention to details of buildings which "will be so these fifty years to come." This not only distances Janatone by comparing her with tourist attractions, but stresses the transience of sentiment and beauty, for "he who measures thee, Janatone, must do it now . . . considering the chances of a transitory life, I would not answer for thee a moment" (7.9.589). In addition to despairing of Janatone's maintaining her beauty, Tristram finally decides he cannot preserve it by drawing her

either, implying that the beauty will inevitably be lost.

Tristram's acquaintance with Nanette, "a sunburnt daughter of Labour" (7.43.649), is more developed. He is tempted but threatened by "that cursed slit" in Nanette's petticoat, and his idealization of a relationship with her has a sentimental rather than a sexual overtone: "Why could not a man sit down in the lap of content here--and dance, and sing, and say his prayers, and go to heaven with this nut brown maid?" Furthermore, when Nanette "capriciously did . . . dance up insidious" Tristram decides "tis time to dance off," and away he goes, avoiding a closer relationship of any kind (7.43.651). The transience of beauty and sentiment is here merged with the transience of life itself, as Tristram flees from both death and romance.

Tristram can get most emotional over a relationship he has nothing to do with it himself, as his ill-fated pilgrimage to the Tomb of the Two Lovers illustrates. He tells us that there is "a soft aera in every gentle mortal's life, where such a story affords more pabulum to the brain, than all the Frusts, and Crusts, and Rusts of antiquity, which travellers can cook up for it" (7.31.628). The story of Amanda and Amandus suits Tristram's conception of a sentimental relationship, for the couple is separated from each other by "cruel parents, and by still more cruel destiny" until chance brings them together at the gate of Lyons, where "both drop down dead for joy" (7.31.628). Thus, closeness, age, sexuality, and presumably marriage never have a chance to spoil the relationship. Furthermore, not only can

Amanda and Amandus's sentimental relationship not endure the real world, but even the Tomb proves unable to withstand time, for when Tristram comes "to drop this tear upon your tomb . . . there was no tomb to drop it upon" (7.40.643). Erecting a tomb cannot preserve beauty and sentimental love any more than Tristram could have drawn a picture of Janatone to preserve her youth. Tristram implies that even art cannot preserve beauty against time and death.

By far the most sentimental portrait of a woman is Maria's, and she provides a link between Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey. Paul McGlynn believes that as Maria "is sexually attractive, unattainable, and removed from communication," she is "therefore thematically central to both novels" (43). Tristram and Yorick can find sentimental delight in her story in part because it is, like the story of the Two Lovers, distanced in time and place. The tragic story told by the postillion prepares Tristram to sympathize with Maria, but her attractiveness intensifies the impact, for when he sees her "she was beautiful; and if ever I felt the force of an honest heart-ache, it was the moment I saw her." Her beauty and vulnerability appeal to his sensibilities, but he determinedly resists getting too close to her. He gets so carried away as to jump from his chaise and sit beside her before he "relapsed from my enthusiasm." He then breaks his mood by making a joke about what resemblance Maria finds between him and her goat, before drawing back with these words:

some time, but not now, I may hear thy sorrows from thy own lips---but I was deceived; for that moment she took her pipe and told me such a tale of woe with it, that I rose up, and with broken and irregular steps walk'd softly to my chaise.

Tristram has again been affected by Maria, but even as he enjoys the sensation, he pulls away from further involvement, finishing the chapter with the lively and apparently irrelevant comment: "--What an excellent inn at Moulins!" (9.25.783-84). From this story, Tristram returns to his tale of Toby and the Widow, underlining the sharp contrast between the sentimentalized woman and the satirized woman. Maria is left safely in her pastoral setting, as was Nanette, until another traveller might discover her.

The scene with Maria in A Sentimental Journey is even more sentimental than the companion scene in Tristram Shandy. Yorick allows himself to be more affected by Maria's sad story than did Tristram, crying with Maria, allowing her to wash his handkerchief in the stream and dry it in her bosom, and going with her to Moulins. He even declares that "wast thou in my own land" he would care for her and protect her, but of course, she isn't in his own land, so the relationship is impossible. He is also affected by Maria's beauty, for "so much was there about her of all that the heart wishes, or the eye looks for in woman, that could the traces be ever worn out of her brain, and those of Eliza's out of mine . . . Maria should lay in my bosom, and be

unto me as a daughter" (273). Again, of course, whether we accept the paternal nature of Yorick's attraction to Maria or not, the thing is impossible. Thus the traits of the sentimental relationship reappear, not only the youth and beauty we expect of idealized female portraits, but the inaccessibility and transience needed to render the man "safe" from an enduring relationship with the woman, romantic or paternal. As McGlynn says, "A sexually insecure man is perhaps ideally suited to a mute, unattainable woman" (43).

Yorick's other sentimental encounters include elements of the same pattern. As soon as he arrives in France he is attracted by the young and "if not critically handsome" then "interesting" Madame de L. She is interesting because she appears to be sorrowful, and Yorick "felt benevolence for her" (95). However, he is kept from sharing his chaise with her by the arrival of her brother, and when she attempts to renew their acquaintance in Amiens, Yorick finds himself unable to pursue the relationship, or even to compose a letter to her. Although he can find "nothing wrong in the sentiment" that he would like to wipe tears "from off the cheeks of the first and fairest of women," still it is impossible, because of his allegiance to Eliza. He vows that "I would not travel to Brussels, unless Eliza went along with me, did the road lead me towards heaven" (146-48). Therefore, he sends a letter borrowed from La Fleur to Madame de L. one day, and without waiting for any more complications (such as an answer) to arise, "the next morning we pursued our journey

to Paris" (154). Yorick has successfully avoided letting a sentimental relationship develop into something potentially more lasting and more sexual.

It is simpler to idealize relationships with women of the working class, because they don't have the social status necessary to provide the kind of threat Madame de L. does. Yorick flirts with several pretty young women reminiscent of Janatone and Nanette. He feels the pulse of one beautiful grisette, and buys gloves (that don't fit) from her, disturbed only when "her husband coming unexpected from a back parlour into the shop, put me a little out in my reckoning" (166). He meets Madame de R.'s fille de chambre several times, and finds a "consanguinity" so strong, he looks in her face to "see if I could trace out anything in it of a family likeness" (190-91). Filial feelings are again challenged, however, when the fair fille de chambre visits him in his room, and he finds that "nature has so wove her web of kindness, that some threads of love and desire are entangled with the piece." Virtue enables him to withstand temptation, however, and lead the girl "safe to the gate of the hotel" (238).

He must resist temptation again in the final scene of the novel, when circumstances force him to share his hotel room with a lady and her fille de chambre. The image of the two travellers sleeping, unspeaking, with curtains drawn between them, is a nice metaphor for the kinds of relationships Yorick has had throughout the novel. The problem of keeping such relationships within

bounds is also demonstrated in the scene, as he is unable to resist the exclamation "O my God!" which upsets the lady and starts such a disagreement that "in the warmth of the dispute, I could hear two or three corking pins fall out of the curtain to the ground" which "weakened her barrier." The noise brings the fille de chambre out of her closet and in between the beds, so that when Yorick stretches out his hand "by way of asseveration" he innocently catches hold of the fille de chambre's something (290-91).

Sentimental relationships, then, though never persistently frustrating like the satirized relationships of Tristram Shandy, are hard to control even within the very limited bounds allowed to them by Tristram and Yorick. Certainly they can't be maintained there, and if they aren't temporary enough of themselves, because of the social or marital position of the woman, then transience is imposed on them by the flighty narrator, perhaps with a recollection of the transience that death itself imposes on life. Sexuality is apt to threaten the purer sentiments, but by appealing to virtue or propriety, Yorick and Tristram try to escape without compromising their virility. This evasive approach is best characterized by Yorick when, after asserting that "A man who has not a sort of an affection for the whole sex, is incapable of ever loving a single one as he ought," he implies that he doesn't wish to love "a single one." Yorick tells us that, for fear of being suspected of "the least indecent insinuation," he "with infinite pain" has "hazarded a thousand

things to a dozen of the sex together--the least of which I could not venture to a single one, to gain heaven" (216-17). Sentimental relationships are ephemeral: they must either evaporate like youth and beauty or degenerate into problematic sexuality. The narrators' efforts to control them by either preserving beauty and youth or by preventing its decay into earthly sexuality eventually fail. Their awareness of these problems makes them keep their distance as best they can, avoiding serious emotional involvement or fleeing when they can no longer manage the relationship.

Only two relationships with sentimental characteristics seem to have any claim to be "lasting": Tristram's with his dear Jenny and Yorick's with Eliza. Jenny and Eliza are invoked by the narrators in similar ways, and may impress the reader as ideal mistresses hovering behind the scenes with the narrators. In fact, Eliza never does become a real character in the pages of A Sentimental Journey. Jenny, however, makes a few brief appearances in Tristram Shandy, rather like Tristram's appearances as an author, which allow us to glimpse her personality. Because Eliza can't become anything more than a name, Jenny's character has more critical interest.

Eliza comes and goes as a prop for Yorick's sentimental feelings. Because she's never actually present as a character, she's easy to control. Yorick recalls her to conveniently distance himself from potential relationships, and forgets her to conveniently pursue sentimental enjoyments. She is introduced in

the first scene as the object of "the little picture which I have so long worn, and . . . would carry with me into my grave" (67) in order to make the cruelties of the French law appear more inhumane and Yorick's situation more pathetic. Yorick also recalls her when he is struggling with his passport problem, contrasting the controlled way he walks up the steps to see the Duke with two potential extremes: a condemned man's walking up to the gallows (the extreme of despair), or Yorick's ascending stairs (the extreme of joy) "with a skip and a couple of strides, as I do when I fly up, Eliza! to thee" (208). Later he writes a letter to Eliza to "cure" his embroiled patience when he is unable to find the conclusion to a story fragment (251). Presumably, this testifies that recalling love helps him forget other difficulties, and embrace virtues. On each of these brief occasions, invoking Eliza's name adds an extra touch of sentiment.

Fidelity to Eliza keeps Yorick from becoming a father to Maria, and Yorick uses Eliza to resist the temptation to go to Brussels to hear the unfortunate Madame de L.'s story. His words clarify the transient nature of such "eternal" commitments as his to Eliza. One of the "singular blessings" of Yorick's life, he tells us, is to be "almost every hour of it miserably in love with some one." These love affairs are as lasting as a candle flame, for

my last flame happening to be blown out by a whiff of jealousy on the sudden turn of a corner, I had lighted

it up afresh at the pure taper of Eliza but about three months before--swearing as I did it, that it should last me through the whole journey--Why should I dissemble the matter? I had sworn to her eternal fidelity--she had a right to my whole heart--to divide my affections was to lessen them--to expose them, was to risk them: where there is risk, there may be loss:--and what wilt thou have, Yorick! to answer to a heart so full of trust and confidence--so good, so gentle and unrepublishing? (146-47)

Thus we move easily from "the whole journey" to "eternal fidelity," find the picture he had "so long worn" had been his for no longer than three months, and see how easily Yorick thinks he might lose his "affections" (as with a "whiff of jealousy") if they were to be divided or exposed. Yorick's relationship with Eliza seems as transitory and ephemeral as her shadowy character. As Fluchere notes: "these transports and this fidelity itself run the risk of turning out illusory, in that they seem directed at an imaginary object [Eliza]" (146-47).

With dear Jenny, we confront a relationship somewhat more complex. Most critics have assumed that she appears in Tristram Shandy only as an idealization: Fluchere describes her as "a romantic figure, feminine but unsubstantial" (382), and Jenny has even been called an "archetypal mistress" (Ehlers 71). However, as William Rivers points out, this oversimplifies the issue considerably. I don't believe that Tristram's relationship with

Jenny is as mature and positive as Rivers describes it, but it is more complicated than most critics have noticed. Jenny has several lines to speak, and seems to have opinions and a personality. She "easily emerges from these passages as a real woman . . . with whom Tristram has built a strong, complex, and lasting relationship" (Rivers 2). She is the most difficult of the female characters to classify as "sentimentalized" or "satirized," for she shares characteristics with both groups.

The most sentimental reference to Jenny is the final one in the last volume, and it stresses, like the sentimental relationships discussed above, the transience of life. Tristram slips from his portrayal of Trim and Toby approaching the Widow's house to exclaim:

Time wastes too fast: every letter I trace tells me with what rapidity Life follows my pen; the days and hours of it, more precious, my dear Jenny! than the rubies about thy neck, are flying over our heads like clouds of a windy day, never to return more---every thing presses on---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" (9.8.469).

This sentimental outburst is followed by a quick return to the humorous story in progress, as though Tristram has had again, as in the case of Maria, to pull himself up short as he becomes too

emotional.

In the sentimental speech we can just visualize Jenny wearing rubies and twisting a lock about her finger. In two other scenes she both appears on stage and speaks lines. In the first such scene, Tristram is comparing her to his mother, who is frustrated when she cannot deliver her child in London, as she wanted to. Tristram observes, "Now this I like;--when we cannot get at the very thing we wish,---never to take up with the next best in degree to it;--no; that's pitiful beyond description." Just as Mrs. Shandy chooses the midwife (presumably the worst alternative) when Walter will not let her go to London, so Jenny, "observing I look'd a little grave, as she stood cheapening a silk of five-and-twenty shillings a yard,--told the mercer, she was sorry she had given him so much trouble;--and immediately went and bought herself a yard-wide stuff of ten-pence a yard" (1.18.51). Jenny responds to Tristram's apparent disapproval rather as Elizabeth had responded to Walter's, by taking something far inferior to her first desire rather than accepting a close second. Tristram tells us that this "'Tis the duplication of one and the same greatness of soul" (1.18.51). The degree of irony in this remark is implied by the comment that Mrs. Shandy could not "heroine it into so violent and hazardous an extream, as one in her situation might have wish'd," which shows Tristram's derision of both cases of self-dramatization.

The second scene where Jenny appears on stage doesn't portray an idealized relationship either. In this instance she

also appears as an example of a proposition, this time, of Tristram's "usual method of book-keeping, at least with the disasters of life--making a penny of every one of 'em as they happen to me" (7.29.624). Jenny has been a witness of a disaster "the most oppressive of its kind which could befall me as a man, proud, as he ought to be, of his manhood," and she tries to comfort him as he stands "with my garters in my hand, reflecting upon what had not passed---'Tis enough, Tristram, and I am satisfied, said'st thou, whispering these words in my ear . . . any other man would have sunk down to the center." We don't know what Jenny whispers, but it causes Tristram to respond, "Every thing is good for something" (7.29.624). Whatever satisfied Jenny did not, at least initially, do much for Tristram, and the whole passage is ironic. After all, he is comparing this situation with the wreck of his chaise, which he has decided to sell. Metaphorically, the money he receives after the chaise disaster is equated with the words Jenny whispers to express her satisfaction after the bedroom disaster.

The briefer references to Jenny also contribute to show the non-idealized side of her characterization. For example, as he is explaining to us how differently his father looks at the world from other people, and so how difficult it would be for a reader to know how Walter would react to any particular event, Tristram again brings in his dear Jenny to illustrate that this is a general proposition: "This is the true reason, that my dear Jenny and I, as well as all the world besides us, have such

eternal squabbles about nothing.--She looks at her outside,--I, at her in--. How is it possible we should agree about her value?" (5.24.456-57). However romantic may seem the subject of the "eternal squabbles," Tristram is telling us that his relationship with Jenny is no safer from the problems of communication than those of "all the world besides us."

Another reference to Jenny makes her appear as mischievous as Tristram himself, for he tells his readers "the thing I hope is, that your worships and reverences are not offended--if you are, depend upon't I'll give you something, my good gentry, next year, to be offended at---that's my dear Jenny's way" (4.32.401). Later, Tristram testifies again to Jenny's strong character as he says "I love the Pythagoreans (much more than I ever dare tell my dear Jenny) for their . . . 'getting out of the body, in order to think well.' No man thinks right whilst he is in it" (7.13.593). The reference to Jenny gives a sexual meaning to Tristram's words which Jenny would apparently dislike hearing, presumably because she likes sex.² At this point, Jenny is shown to be more interested in sex than Tristram is, another similarity between her and the satirized women.

Tristram also refers to Jenny's sexuality when he is discussing "Why weavers, gardeners, and gladiators--or a man with a pined leg . . . should ever have had some tender nymph breaking her heart in secret for them" (8.5.660). Like the weavers and so on, a water-drinker is sexually attractive to women, although there doesn't seem to be "any consequence, or shew of logic in

it, 'That a rill of cold water dribbling through my inward parts, should light up a torch in my Jenny's--'" (8.5.660). However, drinking water makes the brain susceptible to curiosity, fancy, and desire, which apparently makes the drinker more attractive to women. The discussion of Toby and the Widow Wadman in the following chapter implies a connection between Jenny's attraction to Tristram and the Widow's attraction to Toby--both women are interested in sex. Tristram wishes Toby had been a water drinker, in which case "the thing had been accounted for, That the first moment Widow Wadman saw him, she felt something stirring within her in his favour--Something!--something" (8.6.661). This "something" is comparable to the torch that is lit up in Jenny's inward parts, or wherever.³

During Tristram's discussion of the Widow and Toby, and the problems of being in love, he compares his own reaction to being in love with the Widow's, who refused to either "go on and love my uncle Toby---or let it alone" (8.11.669), although these were her only choices. Tristram gallops off on several metaphors about the frustrations "an earthly goddess" is likely to put him to, and winds up declaring "by the great arch cook of cooks, who does nothing, I think, from morning to night, but sit down by the fire-side and invent inflammatory dishes for us, I would not touch it for the world," and here he is interrupted with:

---O Tristram! Tristram! cried Jenny.

O Jenny! Jenny! replied I, and so went on
with the twelfth chapter (8.11.670-71).

Jenny seems to bring him to his senses, for

--"Not touch it for the world" did I say--

Lord, how I have heated my imagination with this
metaphor! (8.12.671).

Jenny's interruption reminds him of the absurdity of his remark and reinforces her sexuality, for she breaks in as Tristram is swearing to forego the "inflammatory dishes" of love and causes him to rethink his statement.⁴

All readers notice that Tristram refuses to tell for sure what sort of relationship he has with Jenny. Early in the novel he asks the reader "Not to take it absolutely for granted . . . 'That I am a married man,'" and he goes on to tease readers with the suggestions that Jenny might be wife, mistress, child, or friend (1.18.56). He proclaims the "utter impossibility for some volumes, that you, or the most penetrating spirit upon earth, should know how this matter really stands" (1.18.56). In his next reference to Jenny, over 200 pages later, Tristram reiterates his desire to conceal "who my Jenny is" (4.32.401), and he never does explain her clearly. We have to make our guesses based on the passages discussed above, most of which cluster in the second half of the novel.

Jenny, then, appears to be an anomaly. She is sentimentalized as she is portrayed with rubies about her neck, but she has affinities with the satirized women as well, as she interrupts Tristram, squabbles with him, and seems interested in sex for all her patience on the famous disastrous occasion.

Whatever the implied complexities of the relationship, Tristram holds Jenny at a careful distance from the readers. We can judge from Tristram's usual treatment of romantic relationships that he generally distrusts them, holding himself as emotionally distant as he can.

However, it is impossible for him to control or conceal the relationship completely. Unlike Yorick's Eliza, who appears and disappears at the narrator's whim and convenience, Jenny's character has the power to break into Tristram's world as author, interrupting and surprising him. Preston has called Jenny "a point of contact with the world that does not obey Tristram's imagination" (203). Tristram, in other words, controls the past world, the world of Walter and Elizabeth, Uncle Toby and Widow Wadman, while Jenny exists in his uncontrollable present world, the world of Tristram as author, the world of Tristram as aging and ill man. Tristram knows how to treat the women of the past world, whose stories are over long before he begins writing. Jenny, however, is on the "inside" of the present world, and has a life independent of the book, perhaps advancing "the meaning of the book really by her ignorance of it: she stands for the life that is going on all around the book" (Preston 203). Perhaps this is why Tristram reveals anxiety that the relationship may go the way of other Shandean relationships, and threaten him with sexuality and practicality, even though he expresses the hope that the ideal elements of the relationship may be preserved for a little while. His last reference to Jenny ends on this note,

with Tristram contemplating death and eternal separation while Jenny twists a lock of greying hair about her finger. This final vision emphasizes characteristics of the sentimental relationship: an emotional but not sexual interaction, and the encroachment of age and death. In any case, because Tristram cannot be sure of controlling Jenny, he keeps her distant, at times satirizing and others idealizing her, from his readers and from the hobby-horsical world of his novel which is, hopefully, his to direct.

Thus, Tristram's ability to control a relationship (in the case of Madam or Jenny), or his perception of control within the relationship (as in the case of Walter's and Toby's relationships) determines his treatment of that relationship (whether to distance by satirizing or sentimentalizing) in his book. The same is true of Yorick as narrator, although he doesn't attempt to deal with the range of relationships that Tristram takes on. The fear of being out of control of a relationship affects all the Shandys. Walter phrases this fear for his whole class and sex when he discusses his anxiety that something might happen to Mrs. Shandy during her lying in at Shandy Hall: "any such instance would infallibly throw the balance of power, too great already, into the weaker vessels of the gentry, in his own, or higher stations" (1.18.54).

Much of the Shandys' fear, as has been made clear by critics, is sexual. "The principal sexual emotion depicted by Tristram Shandy is not lust but fear: of the sexual imagination,

of passion, of castration and impotence" (Spacks 130). As we have seen, the sexual imagination, real or potential, causes much of the Shandys' frustration. We see them trying to deal with this fear by distancing relationships; when the threat is too close, the relationship is satirized, but when the threat is transient, so that the sexuality can be enjoyed and avoided simultaneously, the relationship is sentimentalized.

The problem of control goes beyond the sexual, however. "The drama of Tristram Shandy plays itself out as a series of conflicts over control: between fictive author and reader, between fictive author and characters, between characters and their environment, animate and inanimate" (Spacks 129). This must be why we see male-female relationships at many levels of the fiction, for in several ways, including the sexual, they demonstrate these conflicts over control. As the sexual theme makes clear, the conflicts are personal as well as interpersonal. The individual is so little in control of himself that a relationship, especially a potentially sexual one, is especially threatening.

Thus far I have concentrated on Tristram's and Yorick's narrative points of view, ignoring the real author of the novels. The relationship between Sterne's life and his works has always been a puzzling one. Sterne enjoyed role-playing in his relationships with his family, friends, and reading public; and he put many autobiographical elements into his books.⁵ Obviously, "the line between the inside and the outside of the fiction has

been deliberately blurred" (Swearingen 5). The separation of his life and his art is virtually impossible, but while some readers feel that Tristram and Yorick are primarily fictional representatives of Sterne, more recent criticism, even while questioning Sterne's distance from his narrators, has been inclined to accept his artistic control.⁶ For example, Spacks believes that, while Sterne may have shared the hobby-horsical madness of the Shandy males, his imagination is "large enough to contain his characters," and he leads the reader to see Tristram's "limitations more specifically than he [Tristram] can" (156).

Although much of Sterne's artistry is conscious, it is true that, as Jean Hagstrum says, he "cannot be said to have carefully or penetratingly portrayed any woman in his fictions" (256), even though the number of women and of male-female relationships in the novel is significant. Part of the reason for this may be biographical. Critics have frequently, in their hasty dismissal of female characters, pointed out historical counterparts for some of them. For example, Walter's frustrations with Elizabeth might well reflect Sterne's own difficult marriage with a woman of the same name. Readers have also tried to connect Jenny with an actual amour of Sterne's (see Rivers for a summary, 1, 9 n. 1), and Eliza is almost certainly modeled on Eliza Draper, one object of Sterne's sentimental affection.

Sterne's actual relationships with women almost certainly influenced his fictionalized male-female relationships: he had

sentimental attachments to young women, and a frustrating relationship with his wife. His marriage, never notably compatible, grew worse as time went on. Mrs. Sterne suffered from mental problems, and the couple was separated for many of Sterne's last years (Arthur Cash 135-36, 285-87). Furthermore, Sterne's own sexual potency, like that of the Shandys, was in question (Hagstrum 250), and his sentimental ties to young women such as Catherine Fourmantelle (Cash 291-296) and Eliza Draper (Lodwick Hartley 221-26) were apparently emotional, not physical. Both young women were unattainable because of prior commitments. The extremes to which his sentimental emotions could go are illustrated in the Journal to Eliza, written late in his life. Wilbur Cross notes that (with the possible exception of Eliza) Sterne's infatuation "was never a deep passion," and remained "a transient emotional state, which quickly passed unless renewed by another sight of the charming face and figure" (520). A quick survey of Sterne's own relationships, then, leads us to believe that the satirical/sentimental roles of female characters in his novels simply reflect the way his own experiences encouraged him to view women. The Shandean relationships in the novels reveal Sterne's own fears and frustrations, as the sentimental relationships express his own futile dreams.

Sterne does, however, portray a few relationships that differ from the Shandean norm in one notable particular: they are sexually successful. Corporal Trim openly defines "being in

love" sexually, in contrast to Toby's sentimental definition, when he discusses his relationship with the Beguine who cared for his wound: "It was not love--for during the three weeks she was almost constantly with me, fomenting my knee with her hand, night and day--I can honestly say, an' please your honour--that ***** once" (8.20.699-700). Trim pursues relationships with women much more successfully and much less self-consciously than do the Shandys. Sterne specifically contrasts him with Toby in volume 9, as critics have noticed: "Toby's modest proposal to Mrs. Wadman is followed by Trim's forthright love-making to Bridget, the total lack of intellectual and emotional compatibility of the former couple exactly reversed in the latter" (Swearingen 217). We also note Trim's ability to control women in the kitchen scene, after Bobby's death, when the Corporal succeeds in making Susannah cry and then flirt with him (5.9.435). Furthermore, we know that his relationship with Bridget continues after Toby and the Widow break off, for although Toby was fixed "in a resolution, never to think more of the sex," Trim "had made no such bargain" with himself, and he loses no opportunity of flirting with Bridget (3.24.246-47).

Yorick's La Fleur has much of Trim's sort of success with women, for when he leaves his home to go with Yorick, there are "half a dozen wenches who had got around La Fleur" and the young man "kissed all their hands round and round again" (128). Later, Yorick is surprised at La Fleur's speed in picking up a mistress "in so little time at Paris" (248). Also, La Fleur's confidence

in dealing with women enables him to help Yorick through the difficult problem of Madame de L., discussed above, when he provides a letter for Yorick to send to her (152).

But although Sterne portrays sexually successful men, none of their relationships have anything mature or lasting about them. Trim's and La Fleur's sexual confidence contrasts with the sexual anxiety of the Shandys, so that readers recognize the possibility of successful sexual conquest. The general view of women as objects to be controlled does not change; we just discover that some men control them more successfully than others.

What, then, does this survey of the women in Sterne add to our understanding of his artistic vision? As I suggested earlier, the women reflect a part of the hostile or transient world the Shandys struggle with, while being less significant as individual characters than the men. The men are always in contention with the women, as they are with the world that threatens them by undermining their hobby horses, and teases them with transient and uncontrollable beauty contrasted with the reality of death.

Through the laughter in his satire and the tears in his sentiment, Sterne wants to show that the world is impossible to control. He is aware that the hostile world, with its insistence on practicality, sexuality, and literal or conflicting uses of language, is not as easily managed as the Shandys and Yorick hope. Furthermore, he shows the reader that the tempting

beauties of the world, including life itself, are even more transitory and ephemeral than Tristram and Yorick realize. Even when the world and its women seem most cooperative and vulnerable, complications may quickly arise, and even if nothing else intervenes to break the illusion of enjoyment and control, death eventually will.

In this way, Sterne has authorial perspective on Tristram and Yorick, but yet there is no recognition in the novels that women may suffer from the same hopes and fears that the Shandys do, nor is there any solid hint that a male-female relationship might enable a man to better deal with the difficult world. The relationships that provide solace or delight in the novel are all between males: Walter and Toby, Toby and Trim, Tristram and Eugenius (of his "present" world), and possibly Yorick and La Fleur. As difficult as communication is even in these relationships, sympathy is occasionally achieved. In contrast, mature understanding or support is never even a goal of any male-female relationship. Even if Tristram and Jenny are a potential exception to this, the very hesitancy with which that relationship is treated reinforces this rule.

The Shandys, then, seek for understanding from other men, but not from other women. Trim and La Fleur may be better equipped to enjoy sex than the Shandys, but they are no exception to this generalization. Women, whether satirized or sentimentalized, are only more or less successfully controlled. Visions of potentially positive male-female relationships don't

exist in the novels, only faint hopes for less negative ones.

Sterne's consistent objectifying of women denies that they may suffer as men do from the problematic human condition he portrays. The male characters are defined and developed to a great extent by their hobby-horses, which may make them ridiculous, but also make them human. Women, however, don't have hobby-horses, and their interests, even when appearing less selfish or narrow to the reader than to the narrator, always reflect the interests of the world that frustrates the male characters. Women are part of the problematic world, not sufferers from it.

Sterne's vision of the world simply doesn't recognize the common humanity of men and women. Although his views aren't duplicated by the voices of Tristram and Yorick, and his authorial distance from them must have allowed him to see, and to expect a reader to see, the inconsistencies and contradictions of their portrayals of women, the thrust of the irony is not to make a reader more aware than the narrator of the women's humanity, but just to make him conscious that the narrators' efforts to control the world, including the women, are weak and illusory.

Sterne is as unaware as his narrators that women might experience the world as men do. For Sterne women create problems, not tangle with them. In fact, women are problems, and the effort to manage those problems occupies much of the writer's, and the narrators', energies. This is why sexuality becomes such a critical issue for Tristram and Yorick, and for

readers and critics. Sexuality doesn't grow from human relationships, because serious male-female relationships don't exist in this vision of humanity. Instead, sexuality is Sterne's primary metaphor for the ongoing struggle between men and their uncontrollable world.

Notes

¹For example, in 1760 one reviewer wished that "the wantonness of the author's wit had been tempered with a little more regard to delicacy" (Alan Howes, ed., Critical Heritage 53), while another notes that "it were greatly to be wished, he had been more sparing in the use of indecent expressions . . . even downright gross and obscene expressions" (63). In the next century, Coleridge noted that "Sterne's morals are bad" and that "the book is scarcely readable by women" (358), and Scott says that Sterne "must be regarded as liable to two severe charges;-- those, namely, of indecency, and of affectation" (371).

²Ehlers' interpretation of this passage, while differing from my own, also implies that Tristram and Jenny are not an ideal couple. She sees Tristram as retreating "from the prospect of physical decline and death," with the consequence being "alienation from Jenny, from love, procreativity, and life" (69).

³Rivers' virtually comprehensive treatment of the dear Jenny passages offers no interpretation of this puzzling passage, and I've found no discussion of the implication of this reference to Jenny.

⁴Although, as Rivers points out, we can "only guess about Jenny's tone of voice" in this passage (7), the cooling reaction she gets from Tristram makes my interpretation plausible. Ehlers' interpretation conflicts with mine by implying that Jenny is correcting Tristram's lewd excesses when she "interrupts,

though only briefly, his heated and lewd diatribe against love with a simple reprimand," an example of "Jenny's positive effect on Tristram" (71).

⁵As Arthur H. Cash points out, Sterne "openly identified himself with his narrator-protagonist, Tristram" (22), and published his Sermons under the name of Mr. Yorick (220), which he also used in some of his correspondence. Cash's biography carefully notes the possible autobiographical elements in Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, discussing, for example, the character Maria's possible connection with Sterne's sister Mary (22), and dear Jenny's unlikely connection with Catherine Fourmantel (292).

Cash's biography of Sterne will be by far the most helpful and accurate when the second volume is published; in the meantime, Lodwick Hartley's This is Lorence is an entertaining account of Sterne's life, while Wilbur Cross's 1909 work probably remains the standard biography.

⁶The variation of critical attitudes toward Sterne's narrative voice may be illustrated by these examples. In 1965, Ian Watt wrote that "the whole fictional narrative, which is supposed to proceed from the voice of Tristram, is, inevitably and very recognizably, the comprehensive expression of the distinctive interests and attitudes of Sterne's own personality" (xii). About ten years later, Swearingen was allowing Sterne a little more distance from Tristram: "Sterne only thinly disguises his own voice which at times speaks through Tristram's,

though the voices are neither equivalent nor clearly discriminated" (4). The critics mentioned in the introduction to this paper assume varying degrees in Sterne's narrative control, with Melvyn New perhaps going the farthest in separating Sterne and his narrator. He argues that the narrator is himself an object of satire, and that Sterne actually "condemns Tristram's aesthetic and moral codes" (2).

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THE HOBBY HORSE'S STUMBLING BLOCK

by

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B.A., Kansas State University, 1983

AN ABSTRACT OF A MASTER'S REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas

1986

Abstract. Sexuality has always been recognized as an important concern in Tristram Shandy and A Sentimental Journey, but the women characters themselves have received little attention from critics. The novels' narrators try to distance women by treating them either satirically for their lack of understanding or licentiousness, or sentimentally for their youth, beauty, and suffering. Tristram satirizes three women in particular who are hostile to the interests of the male Shandys: Elizabeth Shandy, Widow Wadman, and Madam Reader. Each of these women are attacked for being literal, practical, hard-minded, self-centered, inappropriately curious, and unsympathetic to hobby horses. In spite of Tristram's desire that we side with the men and believe they can manage the women, Sterne hints that Walter cannot really manage a determined Mrs. Shandy, that Uncle Toby has been injured by Widow Wadman even though he avoids marrying her, and that Tristram himself cannot control Madam Reader. All the Shandys are eventually frustrated by the women, as they are by the world itself. The sentimentalized women frustrate the narrators because even though they seem controllable and unthreatening, relationships with them continually slide from sentiment into sexuality or from sentiment into nothingness, perhaps into death. Tristram sentimentalizes Janatone, Nanette, the Tomb of the Two Lovers, and Maria, while Yorick sentimentalizes Maria, Madame de L., several grisettes and filles de chambre, and Eliza. These women are generally young, vulnerable, attractive, and distanced by social class or national distinctions. The narrators' efforts

to control the relationships at a sentimental level are, Sterne hints, frustrating and eventually futile. Tristram's dear Jenny is sometimes satirized and sometimes sentimentalized, and perhaps because of the difficulty of managing her, he keeps her distant from the readers. None of Sterne's women characters are carefully developed. Even though critical evidence shows that he was a conscious artist, biographical evidence suggests that Sterne's representations of women reflect his own frustrating or idealized relationships. And, even though Sterne portrays several sexually successful relationships, he shows no emotionally successful ones. Women are only seen as objects to be more or less successfully distanced and controlled. There is no evidence that Sterne recognized the common humanity of men and women.