

LAURENCE STERNE

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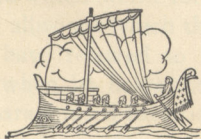
THE LIFE AND OPINIONS  
OF  
TRISTRAM SHANDY,  
GENTLEMAN

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THE ODYSSEY SERIES IN LITERATURE

ROBERT SHAFER, *General Editor*

TRISTRAM SHANDY

## PREFACE

When Sterne first offered the manuscript of *Tristram Shandy* to Dodsley he observed that his local readers wished him to send the work into the world "*cum Notis Variorum*," and added that "there is great Room for it." Today there is even greater room, for many of Sterne's allusions to men and books well known in his century are no longer recognized, and a considerable number of his words and even many of the ideas they express are no longer in general circulation.

In this edition I have attempted to place at the disposal of the modern reader some of the information which Sterne assumed his intelligent contemporaries to possess, that he may read it with the same understanding and therefore with the same relish as did they. In the Introduction I have discussed Sterne's life and art with a view to illuminating certain aspects of the novel which present difficulties to many readers, and in the notes I have translated all foreign words, defined unusual and obsolete words, identified as far as possible actual persons and books and events to which Sterne refers, and explained the more significant of the allusions which the passage of time has rendered obscure. I have referred to the vexed subject of Sterne's sources only when he has quoted (with or without quotation marks) or paraphrased material which he surely expected his well-read contemporaries to recognize as borrowed, and when a reference to his source would clarify his meaning for the reader.

It is with pleasure that I here record my debt to many friends who have graciously assisted me in my work. I am grateful to Professor Chauncey B. Tinker of Yale, who suggested and directed my initial study of Sterne and whose stimulating interest and wise counsel have contributed much

to this volume; to Professor Lewis P. Curtis of Yale, the editor of Sterne's letters, and to Professor Edward H. Weatherly of the University of Missouri, who have read the Introduction and have offered generous suggestions concerning the notes; and to Professor Edward Bensly of St. Albans, England, who in spite of illness came to my aid in explaining passages in *Shandy* which were dark to me. For assistance in divers notes I again thank Professor R. H. Griffith of the University of Texas, Professor H. V. Velten of the State College of Washington, Mr. John H. Jacobson of Yale; and Professor V. B. Heltzel, Professor W. C. Holbrook, Dr. Clark Kuebler, Professor M. E. Prior, Professor J. W. Spargo, Miss Viola Dunbar, and Miss Wilda Miessner, all of Northwestern. I am indebted to Professor Arthur E. Case of Northwestern for permission to reproduce the Hogarth engravings in his copy of *Tristram Shandy*, and to E. P. Dutton and Co. for permission to reproduce the text of "Lillibulero" from *A Book of Songs* by Ernest Macmillan. I gratefully acknowledge the generous assistance and endless patience of Professor Robert Shafer, the General Editor of this Series. Greatest of all, however, is my debt to my wife, without whose constant criticism my work would have been done in half the time and not half so well.

J. A. W.

Evanston  
Illinois

## INTRODUCTION

### I. THE RECEPTION OF *TRISTRAM SHANDY*

During the early days of January in 1760 David Garrick received from Miss Catherine Fourmantel, a professional singer who was spending the winter season at York, a sprightly letter bespeaking his countenance not of a new play nor of a new actor nor of herself, but of a new book.

There are two Volumes just published here which have made a great noise, and have had a prodigious Run; for in two Days after they came out, the Bookseller sold two hundred—and continues selling them very fast. It is *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* . . . If you have not seen it, pray get it and read it, because it has a great Character as a witty smart Book, and if You think it is so, your good word in Town will do the Author, I am sure, great Service . . . His name is Sterne, a gentleman of great Preferment and a Prebendary of the Church of York, [who] has a great Character in these Parts as a man of Learning and wit.—The Graver People, however, say 'tis not fit for young Ladies to read his Book, so perhaps you'll think it not fit for a young Lady to recommend it. However, the Nobility and great Folks stand up mightily for it, and say 'tis a good Book tho' a little tawdry in some places . . .

Had the great actor known that his correspondent was but transcribing the lines of another, and that the author of *Tristram Shandy* was himself the author of the note which the disingenuous singer copied and signed, he might have been tickled at the conceit or annoyed at the deception of the enterprising novelist. Ignorant of the ruse, however, when he received a copy of the work recommended, Garrick read it and at once advertised its merit among his friends. With the

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THE  
L I F E  
AND  
O P I N I O N S  
OF  
TRISTRAM SHANDY,  
GENTLEMAN.

Ταράσσει τὰς Ἀνθρώπους ἡ τὰ Πράγματα,  
ἀλλὰ τὰ περὶ τῶν Πραγμάτων, Δοξμάτα.

V O L. I.  
The SECOND EDITION.

L O N D O N:  
Printed for R. and J. DODSLEY in Pall-Mall.  
M.DCC.LX.

Facsimile of the title page to the first London edition of Volumes I and II. The motto, from Chapter V of the *Encheiridion* of Epictetus (c.60–c.120), the Roman Stoic philosopher, may be translated: “It is not actions, but opinions concerning actions, which disturb men.”





# TRISTRAM SHANDY

## VOLUME I.

To the Right Honourable

Mr. PITT.<sup>1</sup>

SIR,

NEVER poor Wight of a Dedicator had less hopes from his Dedication, than I have from this of mine; for it is written in a bye corner of the kingdom, and in a retired thatch'd house, where I live in a constant endeavour 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, that it adds something to this Fragment of Life.

I humbly beg, Sir, that you will honour this book by taking it—(not under your Protection,—it must protect itself, but)—into the country with you; where, if I am ever told, it has made you smile, or can conceive it has beguiled you of one moment's pain—I shall think myself as happy as a minister of state;—perhaps much happier than any one (one only excepted) that I have ever read or heard of.

*I am, great Sir,  
(and what is more to your Honour,)*

*I am, good Sir,  
Your Well-wisher,  
and most humble Fellow-Subject,*

THE AUTHOR.

---

<sup>1</sup>According to his friend John Croft, Sterne wished when first writing *Tristram Shandy* to dedicate it to William Pitt (1708–1778), the great Whig statesman and orator who was then Secretary of State and for whom he had deep admiration. Fearing perhaps that a dedication from an unknown clergyman might seem presumptuous, Sterne published the first edition without it; on March 28, 1760, however, when the book and its author had taken London by storm, Sterne sent a note to Pitt half asking but more than half assuming his consent to this dedication, which first appeared in the second edition of volumes 1 and 2, on April 2.

CHAP. I.

I Wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were about when they begot me; had they duly consider'd how much depended upon what they were then doing;—that not only the production of a rational Being was concern'd in it, but that possibly the happy formation and temperature of his body, perhaps his genius and the very cast of his mind;—and, for aught they knew to the contrary, even the fortunes of his whole house might take their turn from the humours<sup>1</sup> and dispositions which were then uppermost:—Had they duly weighed and considered all this, and proceeded accordingly,——I am verily persuaded I should have made a quite different figure in the world, from that, in which the reader is likely to see me.—Believe me, good folks, this is not so inconsiderable a thing as many of you may think it;—you have all, I dare say, heard of the animal spirits,<sup>2</sup> as how they are transfused from father to son, &c. &c.—and a great deal to that purpose:—Well, you may take my word, that nine parts in ten of a man's sense or his nonsense, his successes and miscarriages in this world depend upon their motions and activity, and the different tracks and trains you put them into, so that when they are once set a-going, whether right or wrong, 'tis not a halfpenny matter,——away they go

<sup>1</sup>The bodily fluids (blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile), a proper balance of which was thought by ancient physicians to be requisite to health of body and mind. By extension, one's special condition of mind; disposition, mental state, mood.

<sup>2</sup>According to Descartes's modification of Galen's doctrine, the animal spirits were subtle and almost incorporeal particles of the living body which pass through the nerves (which were regarded as tubular vessels) between the brain and the periphery, acting as the agents of volition and sensation, and responsible, in Sterne's use of the term, for the nervous force, buoyancy, and animation of mind and body.

cluttering like hey-go-mad; and by treading the same steps over and over again, they presently make a road of it, as plain and as smooth as a garden-walk, which, when they are once used to, the Devil himself sometimes shall not be able to drive them off it.

*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?* Pray, what was your father saying?——Nothing.

## CHAP. II.

——Then, positively, there is nothing in the question, that I can see, either good or bad.——Then let me tell you, Sir, it was a very unseasonable question at least,——because it scattered and dispersed the animal spirits, whose business it was to have escorted and gone hand-in-hand with the *HOMUNCULUS*,<sup>1</sup> and conducted him safe to the place destined for his reception.

The *HOMUNCULUS*, Sir, in how-ever low and ludicrous a light he may appear, in this age of levity, to the eye of folly or prejudice:——to the eye of reason in scientifick research, he stands confess'd——a *BEING* guarded and circumscribed with rights:——The minutest philosophers, who, by the bye, have the most enlarged understandings, (their souls being inversely as their enquiries) shew us incontestably, That the *HOMUNCULUS* is created by the same hand,——engender'd in the same course of nature,——endowed with the same loco-motive powers and faculties with us:——That he consists, as we do, of skin, hair, fat, flesh, veins, arteries, ligaments, nerves, cartilages, bones, marrow, brains, glands, genitals, humours, and articulations;——is a Being of as much activity,——and, in all senses of the word, as much and as truly our fellow-creature as my Lord Chancellor of England.——He may be benefited,

<sup>1</sup>Little man; in this instance, spermatazoön.

he may be injured,—he may obtain redress;—in a word, he has all the claims and rights of humanity, which *Tully*,<sup>2</sup> *Puffendorff*, or the best ethick writers allow to arise out of that state and relation.

Now, dear Sir, what if any accident had befallen him in his way alone?—or that, thro' terror of it, natural to so young a traveller, my little gentleman had got to his journey's end miserably spent;—his muscular strength and virility worn down to a thread;—his own animal spirits ruffled beyond description,—and that in this sad disorder'd state of nerves, he had laid down a prey to sudden starts, or a series of melancholy dreams and fancies for nine long, long months together. —I tremble to think what a foundation had been laid for a thousand weaknesses both of body and mind, which no skill of the physician or the philosopher could ever afterwards have set thoroughly to rights.

### CHAP. III.

TO my uncle Mr. *Toby Shandy* do I stand indebted for the preceding anecdote, to whom my father, who was an excellent natural philosopher, and much given to close reasoning upon the smallest matters, had oft, and heavily, complain'd of the injury; but once more particularly, as my uncle *Toby* well remember'd, upon his observing a most unaccountable obliquity, (as he call'd it) in my manner of setting up my top, and justifying the principles upon which I had done it,—the old gentleman shook his head, and in a tone more expressive by half of sorrow than reproach,—he said his heart all along foreboded, and he saw it verified in this, and from a thousand other observations he had made upon me, That I should neither think nor act like any other man's child:—*But alas!* continued he, shaking his head a second time, and wiping away a tear which was trickling down his cheeks, *My Tris-*

<sup>2</sup>Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 B.C.), the Roman orator and statesman; the allusion here is to his *De Legibus*. Samuel Pufendorf (1632–1694), a German jurist, historian, and philosopher, whose chief work, alluded to here, is *De Jure Naturae et Gentium*.

*tram's misfortunes began nine months before ever he came into the world.*

—My mother, who was sitting by, look'd up,—but she knew no more than her backside what my father meant, —but my uncle, Mr. *Toby Shandy*, who had been often informed of the affair,—understood him very well.

## CHAP. IV.

I Know there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all,—who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last, of every thing which concerns you.

It is in pure compliance with this humour of theirs, and from a backwardness in my nature to disappoint any one soul living, that I have been so very particular already. As my life and opinions are likely to make some noise in the world, and, if I conjecture right, will take in all ranks, professions, and denominations of men whatever,—be no less read than the *Pilgrim's Progress* itself—and, in the end, prove the very thing which *Montaigne* dreaded his essays should turn out, that is, a book for a parlour-window;<sup>1</sup> I find it necessary to consult every one a little in his turn; and therefore must beg pardon for going on a little further in the same way: For which cause, right glad I am, that I have begun the history of myself in the way I have done; and that I am able to go on tracing every thing in it, as *Horace* says, *ab Ovo*.<sup>2</sup>

*Horace*, I know, does not recommend this fashion alto-

<sup>1</sup>"I am vex'd that my *Essays* only serve the *Ladies* for a common moveable, a Book to lye in the Parlour Window; this Chapter shall prefer me to the Closet . . ."—"Upon Some Verses of Virgil" (Cotton's translation), by Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592), the French essayist, who was one of Sterne's favourite authors and an important source of ideas in *Tristram Shandy*.

<sup>2</sup>From the egg; i.e., from the beginning. In his *Ars Poetica*, 146 ff., Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65–8 B.C.), the Roman poet and critic, commends Homer for not tracing the rise of the Trojan war from the egg of Leda (i.e., from the birth of Helen), but rushing his reader into the midst of his story.

gether: But that gentleman is speaking only of an epic poem or a tragedy;—(I forget which)—besides, if it was not so, 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.

To such, however, as do not choose to go so far back into these things, I can give no better advice, than that they skip over the remaining part of this Chapter; for I declare before hand, 'tis wrote only for the curious and inquisitive.

—————Shut the door.—————

I was begot in the night, betwixt the first *Sunday* and the first *Monday* in the month of *March*, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighteen. I am positive I was. —But how I came to be so very particular in my account of a thing which happened before I was born, is owing to another small anecdote known only in our own family, but now made publick for the better clearing up this point.

My father, you must know, who was originally a *Turkey* merchant, but had left off business for some years, in order to retire to, and die upon, his paternal estate in the county of —, was, I believe, one of the most regular men in every thing he did, whether 'twas matter of business, or matter of amusement, that ever lived. As a small specimen of this extreme exactness of his, to which he was in truth a slave,—he had made it a rule for many years of his life,—on the first *Sunday night* of every month throughout the whole year,—as certain as ever the *Sunday night* came,—to wind up a large house-clock which we had standing upon the back-stairs head, with his own hands:—And being somewhere between fifty and sixty years of age, at the time I have been speaking of,—he had likewise gradually brought some other little family concernments to the same period, in order, as he would often say to my uncle *Toby*, to get them all out of the way at one time, and be no more plagued and pester'd with them the rest of the month.

It was attended but with one misfortune, which, in a great measure, fell upon myself, and the effects of which I fear I



shall carry with me to my grave; namely, that, from an unhappy association of ideas which have no connection in nature, it so fell out at length, that my poor mother could never hear the said clock wound up,—but the thoughts of some other things unavoidably popp'd into her head,—& *vice versâ*:—which strange combination of ideas, the sagacious *Locke*,<sup>3</sup> who certainly understood the nature of these things better than most men, affirms to have produced more wry actions than all other sources of prejudice whatsoever.

But this by the bye.

Now it appears, by a memorandum in my father's pocket-book, which now lies upon the table, "That on *Lady-Day*, which was on the 25th of the same month in which I date my geniture,—my father set out upon his journey to *London* with my eldest brother *Bobby*, to fix him at *Westminster* school;" and, as it appears from the same authority, "That he did not get down to his wife and family till the *second week* in *May* following,"—it brings the thing almost to a certainty. However, what follows in the beginning of the next chapter puts it beyond all possibility of doubt.

——But pray, Sir, What was your father doing all *December*,—*January*, and *February*?—Why, Madam,—he was all that time afflicted with a *Sciatica*.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAP. V.

ON the fifth day of *November*, 1718, which to the æra fixed on, was as near nine kalendar months as any husband could in reason have expected,—was I *Tristram Shandy*,

<sup>3</sup>In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* John Locke (1632–1704), the English philosopher, who profoundly influenced all Sterne's thinking and writing, observed: "This wrong connexion in our minds of ideas, in themselves loose and independent of one another, has such an influence, and is of so great force to set us awry in our actions, as well moral as natural, passions, reasonings, and notions themselves, that perhaps there is not any one thing that deserves more to be looked after" (2.33.9). See the Introduction, pp. xlix–l.

<sup>4</sup>Neuralgia of hip and thigh.

Gentleman, brought forth into this scurvy and disasterous world of ours.—I wish I had been born in the Moon, or in any of the planets, (except *Jupiter* or *Saturn*, because I never could bear cold weather) for it could not well have fared worse with me in any of them (tho' I will not answer for *Venus*) than it has in this vile, dirty planet of ours,—which o' my conscience, with reverence be it spoken, I take to be made up of the shreds and clippings of the rest;—not but the planet is well enough, provided a man could be born in it to a great title or to a great estate; or could any how contrive to be called up to publick charges, and employments of dignity or power;—but that is not my case;—and therefore every man will speak of the fair as his own market has gone in it;—for which cause I affirm it over again to be one of the vilest worlds that ever was made;—for I can truly say, that from the first hour I drew my breath in it, to this, that I can now scarce draw it at all, for an asthma I got in scating against the wind in *Flanders*;—I have been the continual sport of what the world calls fortune; and though I will not wrong her by saying, She has ever made me feel the weight of any great or signal evil;—yet with all the good temper in the world, I affirm it of her, that in every stage of my life, and at every turn and corner where she could get fairly at me, the ungracious Duchess has pelted me with a set of as pitiful misadventures and cross accidents as ever small *HERO* sustained.

## CHAP. VI.

**I**N the beginning of the last chapter, I inform'd you exactly *when* I was born;—but I did not inform you, *how*. *No*; that particular was reserved entirely for a chapter by itself;—besides, Sir, as you and I are in a manner perfect strangers to each other, it would not have been proper to have let you into too many circumstances relating to myself all at once.—You must have a little patience. I have undertaken, you see, to write not only my life, but my opinions also; hoping and